Vocational Trainers’ perspectives of their continuing professional learning

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Statement of Originality

This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my dissertation, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.
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Thank you Christiaan McComb, my UofN supervisor, for your academic advice and support over the last year.

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Thank you VET trainers for volunteering to participate in this research study; it wouldn’t have happened without you.
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Synopsis

Since the Australian government depends on vocational education and training (VET) trainers to deliver competency based training qualifications in an effort to develop and maintain a skilled Australian workforce, the increasing amount of research indicating that VET trainers are under-qualified and/or under-skilled for their training roles and responsibilities is troubling. More troubling however is the lack of information available on the VET workforce, particularly the workforce in the private VET sector. This is a problem because little is known about which skills or capabilities experienced trainers in the private sector perceive they lack, and what types of learning and development activities they believe would strengthen their workplace capabilities.

The purpose of this research is to address this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of a sample of eleven trainers employed in the private VET sector. It is anticipated these trainers’ perceptions of the qualifications and skills they need and of their CPD experiences will shed light on the problems they face in acquiring new skills and updating or enhancing those they already have. Furthermore, this study seeks to shed light on how the VET community can support trainers in their efforts to acquire necessary capabilities through appropriate CPD activities.

Because this study concerns phenomena about which little prior information is available, it is based on a constructivist inquiry paradigm, and was conducted using an exploratory qualitative approach, with the aim of arriving at a collective reconstructions of
trainers CPD experiences. Volunteers were selected on a first response basis and participated in semi-structured face to face interviews.

Findings of this study were derived from patterns and relationships in the data collected, which was then considered in view of previous research and existing theory. The findings of the study fall under two main themes: 1) VET trainers’ role, qualifications and skills, and 2) VET trainers’ continuing learning.

This study provides a perspective that is not readily accessible in current literature, and offers theoretical contributions as well as practical implications for improving the CPD experiences of VET trainers in the private sector. It is also anticipated this research study can be replicated in order to further study the phenomenon of VET trainers CPD, or to provide comparative analysis of findings across geographical areas and/or VET sectors.
Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Recent literature has increasingly indicated that Australian vocational education and training (VET) trainers are under-qualified and under-skilled for their training roles and responsibilities (Clayton, Harding, Toze, & Harris, 2011; Guthrie, 2010a; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, 2006; Smith & Grace, 2011; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the continuing professional development (CPD) experiences of trainers in the private VET sector with a particular focus on the factors that affect their participation. It is anticipated that the information gained from this study will provide the wider VET community with new insights concerning the workplace capabilities these trainers need and how they might be better supported in gaining these capabilities through appropriate CPD activities.

Research into the development of professionals draws from a number of scholarly areas, including human resource development (HRD), adult learning, and CPD. Of particular relevance to this study is the psychological foundation of HRD. Cognitive psychology considers the mental processes essential to learning and development. Cognitive psychology is important to this study because it explores the ability of
individuals to process information (Kuchinke, 2001), and to gain situational expertise, and solve problems (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993).

Theories of adult learning have also been selected as a foundation of this study because those theories have been shown to support teacher development (Zepeda, 2011). Adult learning has been identified as having common roots with HRD through psychological theories such as Bandura’s (1977, 1991, 2001) cognitive social leaning theory. Since the literature shows learning to be a core element of HRD (Ruona, 2000, 2002; Swanson & Torraco, 1995; Woodall, 2003), it is important to understand the learning and development processes of adults.

It can be inferred from the literature that adult learning theories and HRD processes such as CPD are interrelated, and CPD is considered to be important for workers in their efforts to maintain sustainable employment. Even though a significant body of literature supports the notion of CPD as an essential humanistic endeavour (Desimone, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2010), CPD research is relatively new, and the literature shows little agreement on important issues. Despite the general acceptance of CPD activities as a means for continuing development, there are issues cited in the CPD literature concerning the absence of an established CPD framework, the measurement of what is learned through participation in CPD activities, and that some forms of CPD activities do not observe adult learning principles.
Since it is anticipated that the barriers faced by educators will have a significant impact on their participation in CPD activities, identifying barriers to CPD participation is also a focus of this study. Barriers to CPD participation are discussed across disciplines throughout the literature on CPD, but there are few empirical studies of these barriers (Stenfors-Hayes, Weurlander, Dahlgren, & Hult, 2010). The literature shows a majority of participation barriers are related to the organisation (Fanghanel, 2004; MacDougall & Drummond, 2005; McInnins, 2000; Palmer & Collins, 2006; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2010; Zibrowski, Weston, & Goldszmidt, 2008), and have been identified to include: workload, scheduled participation time, lack of resources, poorly coordinated/structured opportunities, few opportunities available, and workplace climates that encourage infighting and only recognises formal CPD activities (see: Braden, Huai, White, & Elliott, 2005; Day, Sammons, Stobart, & Gu, 2007; Devereaux, Prater, Jackson, Heath, & Carter, 2010; Gallagher, Clifford, & Maxwell, 2004; Hanson, Bruskiewitz, & DeMuth, 2007; L. C. Lee, 2002; Lobman & Ryan, 2008; Margolis & Doring, 2012; Opfer & Pedder, 2010; Porter, Blank, Smithson, & Osthoff, 2005; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2010; Wan & Lam, 2010).

On a lesser scope personal barriers to CPD have been identified as: the lack of support from family, work role frustration, burnout, reluctance to change, and a lack of extrinsic rewards literature (see: Beatty, 2001; Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Glass & Todd-Atkinson, 1999; A. C. Lee, Tiwari, Choi, Yuen, & Wong, 2005).
In varying degrees responsibility for workforce skill development is placed on professional associations, academic institutions, employers, and government agencies (Toner, 2011). The paucity of studies examining CPD from the educator’s perspective (Nesbit, 1998; Timperley, Aaron, Barrar, & Fung, 2007), establishes a need for further research on how educators identify and fulfil their learning needs and the issues they face in sourcing and completing relevant CPD activities.

1.2 Background

The Australian government depends on VET trainers to deliver competency based training qualifications in an effort to develop and maintain a skilled Australian workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2013). The VET sector includes both public Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, which are directly funded by the government and private training providers who typically operate as small businesses. In 2010 there were 2,797 registered training organisations (RTOs) in Australia, many of which were private (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Although there are no statistical databases built around the private VET sector, Harris, Simons and McCarthy (2006) estimated that there were 2.2 million private sector students in 2003.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) links the qualifications accredited by the VET sector, the secondary school sector and the university sector (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013), a linkage that is unique across nations (Australian Government, 2014). This
framework provides formal pathways between the education sectors with the intention of allowing “choice and flexibility in career planning” (Australian Government, 2014a).

Formal VET qualifications are typically at the level of Certificate I-IV or Diploma/Advanced Diploma (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2013). In an attempt to assure the quality of these vocational qualifications, all training providers are registered via an audit process required by a set of national standards (see: Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), 2014). ASQA regulates the VET industry according to the Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012 (SNRs), through having the power to audit an RTO at any time and to apply sanctions (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2014).

Industry skills councils and employer groups develop curricula for the VET sector in the form of competency-based or skills-based training packages which are available through the Australian Government website: training.gov.au (Australian Government, 2014b). The traditional role of the trainer and assessor in this sector is to interpret the training package requirements, to provide appropriate learning strategies for students, and to develop appropriate assessment tools. Trainers are also required by the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 [Part 2, Division 1, sections 21–30] and the Essential Standards for Registration [SNR 4.4] to engage in continual development to maintain currency in the qualification(s) they deliver and assess. As each individual RTO is required to prove their trainers are qualified to train and assess as
well as being industry current at a registration or re-registration audit, trainers who fail to take measures to ensure their educational and industry currency run a high risk of becoming unemployable. Although both aspects of trainer development are equally important, this study focuses on trainers’ competencies regarding their ability to be trainers and assessors in Australia’s national system.

Since the Australian VET sector is expected to deliver current government objectives regarding skilled workforce numbers in an education sector which has been referred to as “subject to very significant changes” (Harris, Clayton, & Chappell, 2007, p. 1), “astonishingly diverse” (Figgis 2009, p. 9) and a “quagmire of standards, qualifications, and skills” (Takerei, 2010, p. 7), where looking for “trends in teaching and learning is a risky enterprise” (Figgis, 2009, p. 9), it is not surprising that maintaining VET trainers’ qualifications through continuing development is emerging as a VET sector priority (Wheelahan, 2010). What is surprising is the lack of information available on the VET workforce, particularly the workforce in the private VET sector.

Consequently, neither the extent to which these trainers participate in CPD activities, either in the workplace or externally, nor the outcomes they seek from CPD are known (H. Guthrie, 2010b; Nesbit, 1998; Takerei, 2010). Despite the large number of private training providers in Australia, little research evaluating their contribution to the VET sector has been undertaken (Harris, Simons, & McCarthy, 2006). There is “no repository for nationally comparable and consistent data across education and
training sectors and federal, state and territory jurisdictions” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). In general, there is a “notable lack of information about the VET workforce both nationally and by state” (H. Guthrie, 2010a, p. 10). For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics collects information from the private VET sector on a voluntary basis but has only been doing so since 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Unfortunately, private RTOs have reportedly been hard to contact and uncooperative when approached by researchers (Harris et al., 2006). Although experienced trainers could be expected to offer insight into continuing development, no studies were found that had been informed by exploring the perspectives of such trainers in the private VET sector. Instead, the literature in this area focuses on the recommendation of policy changes such as the incorporation of national capability framework/qualification and the professional certification of trainers (Wheelahan, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011).

1.3 Research problem, purpose and questions

Whilst the policy-oriented research that has been done is important to the future of the VET industry, the voice of the VET trainer in the private sector remains underrepresented. This is a problem because little is known about which skills or capabilities experienced trainers in the private sector perceive they lack, and what types of learning and development activities they believe would strengthen their workplace capabilities. Since the idea that VET trainers are under-qualified and/or under-skilled is generally accepted amongst VET stakeholders in the face
of legal requirements for their qualifications and professional development, clarification is needed as to what skills these trainers deem necessary and which of these skills might be lacking.

The purpose of this research is to address this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of a sample of eleven trainers employed in the private VET sector. It is anticipated these trainers’ perceptions of the qualifications and skills they need and of their CPD experiences will shed light on the problems they face in acquiring new skills and updating or enhancing those they already have. Furthermore, this study seeks to shed light on how the VET community can support trainers in their efforts to acquire necessary capabilities through appropriate CPD activities.

To address the research problem, four research questions were developed. These questions and associated objectives are listed in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Research questions and objectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions to be explored</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What qualifications/skills do VET trainers perceive they need in order to maintain their ability to work effectively in the private VET sector?</td>
<td>To clarify the formal qualifications and skills trainers believe they need for their current work roles in the VET education private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What prompts VET trainers to engage in learning and development opportunities?</td>
<td>To determine how trainers come to understand they have a skill gap concerning their ability to perform current work tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What prompts VET trainers’ learning needs and development activities?</td>
<td>To identify the CPD activities trainers engage in to fill the skills gap(s) they have identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What barriers to learning do VET trainers face?</td>
<td>To examine the difficulties trainers have in trying to fill the skill gaps they have identified and to assist VET stakeholders in understanding how to assist trainers in obtaining the continuing development that they need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1.4 Research methodology**

Because this study concerns phenomena about which little prior information is available, it is based on a constructivist inquiry paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2009), and was conducted using an exploratory qualitative approach, with the aim of arriving at a collective reconstruction of those experiences (Creswell, 1998; Kumar, 2005; Silverman, 2011).

Because the characteristics of the population of VET trainers in private RTOs are unknown and there was consequently no sampling frame available for this study, a snowball sampling technique was used to source volunteers through the social network of the VET community. Based on previous research recommendations concerning sample size
(Creswell, 1998; Dukes, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, 1994), eleven participants were chosen to inform the study.

Once volunteers were selected on a first response basis, they participated in interviews with the researcher. As collective reconstructions are best attained through face to face interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), data were collected through semi-structured interviews of VET trainers. Once the interview data was collected and reflected on by the researcher the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent to the informant for verification. Once verified, each Interview transcript was then systematically explored and coded according to the predetermined data analysis process. The analysis process involved locating pieces of interview text through NVivo software and linking them back to a priori codes to create sets of data. Data sets that developed from the informant’s discussion of workplace skills and their importance to doing the job of a VET Trainer led to the identification of new codes and data sets. Finally, a narrative was developed to convey the findings and analysis.

1.5 Research Limitations

As with all context-bound research studies, this study is subject to the inherent limitations associated with qualitative research and only represents the circumstances of the informants directly involved in the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Therefore, whilst this study may assist in the further exploration of CPD activities (particularly
for VET trainers), and may be transferable to other workplace situations (particularly RTOs), it will not provide a basis for general theory.

1.6 Thesis outline

This research study is laid out using a five-chapter structure:

Chapter 1 explained how the researcher has approached the study. Being at the core of the research, the problem, purpose, research questions and their objective have been outlined. This chapter also describes the research approach, limitations of the study and provides an outline for the following chapters. All the following chapters move the reader forward from this point.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature that is central to the study, specifically, literature on current theory, research and practice in the area of human resource development (HRD) with a focus on how adults acquire new skills through continued learning and development. CPD as a process of HRD and learning provides a further context for exploring how experienced VET trainers determine what new skills they need as their workplaces change. Since this study takes place in the Australian VET sector, CPD literature on studies conducted in this context is also reviewed. This chapter concludes with the identification of the gap in knowledge which this study is designed to help fill.

Chapter 3 identifies the research paradigm appropriate to the study. It goes on to describe the processes used to identify participants and then to
collect and analyse data. This chapter also discusses how trustworthiness was achieved through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Discussion of ethical considerations and limitations of the methodology conclude this chapter.

Chapter 4 describes the setting of the study and analyses the data in two sections. Section 4.3 explores the role of VET trainers in the private sector and their formal qualifications and identifies the skills they require in their current roles as trainers. Section 4.4 explores how trainers engage in CPD opportunities and the barriers they have to overcome in order to do so. Analysis of the data is organised according to the research questions and the analysis of the data pertaining to each question is immediately followed by a discussion of this data and how it agrees or disagrees with what is already known. Finally, this chapter presents the six major findings and summarises the findings of the study under two main themes that emerged from the data 1) VET trainers’ role, qualifications and skills, and 2) VET trainers continuing learning.

Chapter 5 provides additional insight into the findings of this study by proposing answers to the research questions, identifying the knowledge contribution of the study, and calling for further research into VET sector issues.

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the study by outlining the problem and purpose of the study and presenting the questions that will be explored in an
attempt to understand the phenomenon of VET trainers’ continuing learning and development. The problem identified concerns the little known aspects of VET trainers in the private sector and their perception of the qualifications and skills they lack, and what types of learning and development activities they believe would strengthen their workplace capabilities. The purpose of the research is to address this knowledge gap through the exploration of VET trainers’ experiences with CPD activities. The assumption is that this exploration will shed light on the skills VET trainers in the private sector seek development for, and highlight the problems they face in acquiring these skills.

Four questions were proposed to explore the phenomenon of how VET trainers acquire necessary qualifications and skills through appropriate CPD activities. This exploration takes place through an exploratory qualitative approach based on a constructivist inquiry paradigm.

This chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of the qualitative study and provides an outline for the thesis. The thesis is conventionally structured through five chapters, and this chapter concluded by explaining the purpose of each of the chapters.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to explore how trainers in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector manage their continuing professional development (CPD) to meet the ongoing challenges of their workplace. This chapter reviews the literature that is central to the study, specifically, literature on current theory, research and practice in the area of human resource development (HRD) with a focus on how adults learn new skills through continued learning and development. Since this study takes place in the Australian VET sector, CPD literature on studies conducted in this context is also reviewed.

Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual framework of this literature review. As indicated in Figure 2.1, the broader HRD and adult learning literature provides context for understanding how and why adults acquire knowledge and develop skills relevant to their work. The literature specific to CPD provides a context for exploring how experienced workers determine what new skills they need as their workplaces change and what CPD activities workers engage in to improve their skills in areas where they have identified skill gaps. A review of the CPD literature specific to the Australian VET sector focuses on the industry level and is concerned
Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework for the literature review

with the perspectives of industry stakeholders, including individual workers. Sources used in this review include scholarly journals, books, internet resources, professional journals, and government and industry reports.
The first section of the chapter presents an overview of how adult learners develop workplace knowledge, skills and competencies. The second section discusses the continuing development of professionals, including emerging models of such development, the participant’s perspective, and barriers to adult learning. Section 3 turns to CPD in the Australian VET sector. Section 4 discusses the research questions to be pursued.

2.2 The development of workplace knowledge, skills and competencies in adult learners

The principal foundation for this research project will be the study of human resource development (HRD) from a social learning perspective. HRD resides at the intersection of the disciplines of psychology, economics and systems theory (Swanson, 2001). Of particular relevance to this study is the psychological foundation of HRD. Cognitive psychology considers the mental processes essential to learning and development. Cognitive psychology is important to this study because it explores the ability of individuals to process information (Kuchinke, 2001), and to gain situational expertise, and solve problems (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). These processes link directly to the continual learning of individuals and the process by which they become highly skilled in their task domains (Eysenck & Keane, 2010; Kuchinke, 1999).

In this way, the study of HRD links learning directly to the tasks of individuals in the workplace and their continuing professional development (CPD). The next section will elaborate on HRD as the parent discipline for this project.
2.2.1 Defining HRD

One of the challenges associated with situating this research in the discipline of HRD is that there is some debate about whether HRD is a stand-alone field of study. Because of its segmented nature, those trying to define HRD over the years have met with resistance on the grounds that HRD is ambiguous (Mankin, 2001; McLean & McLean, 2001), is applied and multidimensional (McGoldrick, Stewart, & Watson, 2001; McGuire, O'Donnell, Garavan, & Murphy, 2001), and therefore changes over time and should not or cannot be defined (Lee, 2001). Lee (2001) further argues that since HRD is a process of becoming rather than of being any definitions will simply reflect workplace ‘best practice’ rather than being derived from theoretically based evidence. Arguments in favour of defining HRD tend to focus on the desire to move HRD forward as a recognised and unique academic discipline, and having HRD recognised as an applied occupational and professional domain (Kuchinke, 2000; Ruona, 2000; Wang & Swanson, 2008).

The first definitions of HRD appeared in the 1960s. The economists Harbinson and Mayers (1964) define HRD as “the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills, and the capabilities of all the people in society.” Definitions over the next four decades evolved to include the development of the organisation as well. Jones (1981) defines HRD as “a systematic expansion of people’s work-related abilities, focused on the attainment of both organisation and personal goals,” and Swanson (1999, p. 4) defines it as “process of developing and unleashing human expertise
for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance.” Numerous other definitions also mention individual learning and development (Garavan, 1991; McLagan, 1989; McLean & McLean, 2001; Ruona & Lynham, 2004; D. Smith, 1990; R. Smith, 1988; Stewart, 1999; Watkins, 1989, 2000) and systematic improvement (McLagan, 1989; Swanson & Holton, 2001; Weinberg, 1998) which are processes central to the concept of CPD and learning.

The debate over the definition of HRD is also fuelled by literature on the application of HRD, which portrays HRD as encompassing a range of widely differing activities relating to the development of knowledge, skills and competencies in vastly varying contexts (McCracken & Wallace, 2000; McGuire et al., 2001). The HRD application debate focuses on two issues: 1) whether HRD should focus on learning undertaken by individuals in an effort to improve personal performance, as opposed to focusing on the performance of organisations (Bing, Kehrhahn, & Short, 2003; Hutchins, 1994; Mabey, 2003); and 2) the lack of an integrated framework or a substantial research basis to support any causal linkages between employee development and organisational performance (Callahan & De Dávila, 2004; Korte, 2012). These two issues form the basis for the following discussion.

Although there is no consensus on an overall framework for HRD, the various HRD definitions centre on the relationship between the development of employees on the one hand and improved individual performance (or expertise) and improved organisational capabilities on
the other (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008; Jacobs & Washington, 2003). The premise is that if individual employees develop their skills and then collaborate with others using their newly learned capabilities, workplace performance increases (Choy, 2009a; Gubbins & MacCurtain, 2008; Kim, 1993; Peler, Boydell, & Burgoyne, 1989; Sandberg, 2000; Senge, 1990; Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003). This premise is adapted for this research.

One challenge for any approach to CPD is that, given the changing nature of work, maintaining expertise in any given task area over an extended period of time becomes problematic (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008). This raises important questions concerning which developmental methods or activities will most enhance continuing development and the achievement and/or preservation of task expertise. Asking such questions makes primary the focus or purpose of HRD research, rather than the definition of the field.

Definitions put forth in the literature include the global definition offered by McLean and McLean (2001):

Human Resource Development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the longer-term, has the potential to develop adults’ work based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately the whole of humanity (p. 1067).
Another is the “all-embracing,” “catch-all,” “composite” but “non-definitive” statement of HRD” put forth by Hamlin and Stewart (2010):

HRD encompasses planned activities, processes and/or interventions designed to have impact upon and enhance organisational and individual learning, to develop human potential, to improve or maximise effectiveness and performance at either the individual, group/team and/or organisational level, and/or to bring about effective, beneficial personal or organisational behaviour change and improvement within, across and/or beyond the boundaries (or borders) of private sector (for profit), public sector/governmental, or third/voluntary sector (not-for-profit) organisations, entities or any other type of personal-based, work-based, community-based, society-based, culture-based, political-based or nation-based host system (p. 213).

Although they capture the multidimensional nature of HRD, these “all-encompassing” definitions do not specify the activities or systems that bring about this advancement of human potential. Since the intent of this study is to explore these developmental or improvement processes through the use of identified developmental activities, its focus is on the purpose of HRD rather than its formal definition.

As well as providing the all-encompassing HRD definition above, Hamlin and Stewart (2010) examined twenty-four definitions of HRD going back to 1964, and determined that each definition was underpinned by the
intended purposes reflected in it. They identified these intended purposes as:

1. Improving individual or group effectiveness and performance.
2. Improving organisational effectiveness and performance.
3. Developing knowledge, skills and competencies.
4. Enhancing human potential and personal growth.

Whilst all four purposes reflect important aspects of why HRD is important, and the four purposes overlap in some respects, this study is an exploration of the continuing development of knowledge and skills to maintain competency in a specific industry. More specifically, this study will look at the Australian VET industry and how experienced VET trainers in the private sector are continuing to develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies. With this in mind, the following section reviews the literature concerning how adults learn knowledge, skills and competencies.

2.2.2 Developing knowledge, skills and competencies through adult learning

Adult learning has been identified as having common roots with HRD through psychological theories such as Bandura’s (1977, 1991, 2001) cognitive social learning theory. Since the literature shows learning to be a core element of HRD (Ruona, 2000, 2002; Swanson & Torraco, 1995; Woodall, 2003), it is important to understand the learning and development processes of adults is in order to fully appreciate how adults acquire knowledge and develop skills and competencies to build and
maintain workplace expertise. It is also important in understanding what models or activities are likely to be successful for adults seeking to develop their skills. In particular, theories of adult learning have been selected as a foundation of this study because those theories have been shown to support teacher development (Zepeda, 2011).

Theories of learning can be divided into two schools of thought: behaviourism and constructivism (Baumgartner, Lee, Birden, & Flowers, 2003). Learning behaviour (behaviourism) has been studied by theorists such as Skinner (1974) (operant conditioning), E. R. Guthrie (1930) (contiguity theory), and Hull (1943) (drive reduction theory). These theorists share the beliefs that learning will occur as a result of stimuli, that an activity will improve with practice and that learning will be more enjoyable if associated with positive reinforcement. Behavioural theorists proceed from the premise that learning takes place through conditioning and can only be measured through observation (Watson, 1930). Constructivist learning theories are of particular interest to this study as they advance the belief that learning is a search for meaning and problem solving which is constructed, organised, and indexed by the learner (Baumgartner et al., 2003; Billett, 1996). Studies based on constructivist theory have contributed significantly to what we know about learning (Pedder, James, & MacBeath, 2005).

Theories of adult learning continue to develop. Adult learners are considered to have certain characteristics that make their learning needs unique. Conlan, Grabowski and Smith (2003) have found that adult
learning theory is an integration of action learning and experiential learning, which is self-directed and project based. Similarly, adult learning theories such as those of Malcom Knowles (andragogy) and Jack Mezirow (transformative learning) postulate that adult learners take a situational approach to learning and therefore have special needs and requirements (Knowles, 1975; 1984). Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory postulates that learners reflect or challenge current values and assumptions to arrive at new views about themselves and their work. Theories such as Gagne’s (1985) conditions of learning theory hold that it is necessary for learners to practice what they have learned. Adults have also been reported to work harder and to do better work when they have discretion to choose their own task building opportunities (Hicks & Klimoski, 1987; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999).

Research on adult learning has identified the following adult learning characteristics that are potentially important to this study (Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1984; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991):

1. Adults are self-directed and need to be involved in the learning process.
2. Adults have an accumulation of life experience on which to base new information.
3. Adults set specific goals and know what skills they wish to attain.
4. Adults learn best if the new information is immediately relative and useful to them; adults see learning as a means to an end.

5. Adult learners prefer single concept, single theory courses.

6. Adults take errors personally and take fewer risks.

These characteristics suggest that adult learners are willing to set goals and learn new information as a means to an end. This idea suggests that adult learners will voluntarily undertake CPD to develop greater expertise in their professions. Cross (1992) who integrates Knowles’s theories into her model of adult learning, argues that adult learning programs should capitalise on the experience of learners, and that learning activities should move increasingly into advanced stages of development and provide as much choice and flexibility as possible for the learners.

Although many adult learning theories identify the situation or condition that prompts learning as an important factor in learning for adults, the main criticism of current adult learning theories is that they do not address the situation in which learning actually takes place (Baumgartner et al., 2003). This is problematic for workplaces, as employees come from a wide variety of age groups, cultures, and economic backgrounds and will inevitably have an even wider set of life experiences relevant to the new concepts they are learning. Therefore, although the need for adults in a particular workplace to learn may be rooted in the same situation, CPD for that workplace cannot be based on a “one size fits all” learning strategy. Even though the same learning theories might apply to all
adults, adults do not all have the same level of experiences from which to draw.

Brookfield (1995, 1998) identifies four learning strategies that educators draw on in structuring attempts to facilitate adult learning. These strategies are self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning, and learning to learn, and are described below in Section 2.2.2.1. Several studies have also shown that, because of adults’ need to control their learning, voluntary participation in CPD activities is more conducive to learning commitment than are mandated activities (Brookfield, 1986; Horsley, 2002; Livneh & Livneh, 1999).

**2.2.2.1 An overview of adult learning strategies**

Self-directed learners take control of their own learning and prefer to be free to do so. They also take responsibility for setting their own goals and making sure they achieve them (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Self-directed learners are most interested in the procedural knowledge directly applicable to their workplaces, and will focus on the processes being taught (Brookfield, 1995). Self-directed learning is a cornerstone of adult learning theories and is an important consideration in designing CPD activities that the community of learners will accept.

Critical reflection in its simplest form is reviewing what has been done and deciding how it can be done better or differently in future situations. Critical reflection can be facilitated by tools such as journals (Heath, 1998; Orem, 1997). Some researchers on adult educator consider the ability to
reflect critically on experiences, to combine the knowledge gained from experience with prior knowledge, and to take action on insights to be distinguishing features of the adult learner (Brookfield, 1998; Ecclestone, 1996; Mezirow, 1991). Critical reflection is important to this study as its benefits are well-documented as a CPD activity in the field of education. Pedder et al. (2005, p. 218) cites that “Without reflection, teachers cannot change their practice in a controlled or deliberate way.” Critical reflection as a CPD activity is discussed in Section 2.3.1.2.

Experiential learning focuses on the fact that adults have life experience. For example Kolb’s (1984) cyclical model of experiential learning consists of the phases of (1) concrete experiences, (2) observations and reflections, (3) comprehension of abstract concepts and (4) application to new tasks. Boud, Kegoh and Walker (1985) link experiential learning to the concept of reflection through the notion that reflection transforms experiences into learning. Lindeman (1926) and Rogers (1969) argue that experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth and that people will learn according to their own needs. They also argue that learning is part of “self-actualisation” and that the degree of learning will depend on the learner’s desire to learn.

Learning how to learn (Kitchener & King, 1990) is often referred to as the basis for lifelong learning. Adults generally have an awareness of how they come to understand something. They have an advanced awareness of logic, reasoning, and the role of evidence. This theory shares ideals with the concept of metacognition, which is the process of thinking about
thinking (Flavell, 1976). Duell (1986) argues that as people get older they are more aware of their thinking processes, which enables them to develop new strategies for learning and thus eventually allows the “expert” to emerge. Metacognitive processes are important in training and education as they are central to problem solving, planning, and evaluation. Problem solving, planning and evaluation, in turn, are key elements of critical reflection.

The literature on adult learning discussed above suggests that adult learning will be most successful if the developmental activities offered are based on adult learning characteristics and constructivist facilitation practices. Learning and development activities must capitalise on the experiences of adult learners, move increasingly into advanced stages of development, and allow learners to exercise a significant amount of control over their learning. Adults are self-directed learners who will employ various learning strategies such as critical reflection and experiential learning, and must continue to learn throughout their lives to avoid workplace obsolescence.

2.3 The continuing development of professionals

In part because of the continually changing nature of work, the continuing development of individuals and the notion of lifelong learning are prominent in scholarly and general literature (Chappell & Johnson, 2003; Inayatullah, 2006; O'Donnell, Allan, & Peetz, 1999; Robinson, 2003; Sienkiewicz, Chlon-Dominczak, & Trawinska-Konador, 2013). Often
deemed crucial across disciplines, CPD is linked to the promotion of organisational growth and improvement (Borko, 2004; Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006; Hargreaves & Dawes, 1990; Jacobs & Washington, 2003). There are few occupations in which CPD is not recognised as a necessity for maintaining sustainable employment (Jensen, 2007; Queeney, 2000). Moreover, the notion of the necessity of updating occupational skills and knowledge is increasingly manifesting in government policy and legislation and across various professions, industries, and countries (Berridge, Kelly, & Gould, 2007; Clayton, Harding, Toze, & Harris, 2011; Desimone, 2009; Golding & Gray, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2010). For example, regulation of the Australian VET industry, is mandated by the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011, and the VET Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012 ("Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012," 2012). Section 15.4 (Appendix 2) specifically mandates CPD for trainers in the VET industry.

Even though a significant body of literature supports the notion of CPD as an essential humanistic endeavour (Desimone, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2010), CPD research is relatively new, and the literature shows little agreement on important issues. For example, there is little agreement concerning a useable framework for CPD, or on what methods or activities are likely to be effective in ensuring that the desired developmental outcomes are attained. Therefore, although many embrace the ideal of CPD and CPD programs aimed at improving teaching quality
(particularly through changed pedagogies), the characteristics and outcomes of effective CPD are still elusive (Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, & Youngs, 2013).

There is escalating argument, particularly in educational research on CPD, that CPD should be reframed in an effort to move towards a theory and/or models of continuing professional learning (CPL) (Burke, 2013; Easton, 2008; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009, 2010). Arguments for this reframing initiative focus on two issues cited in the current CPD literature. The first of these issues is that professional development practices and the research about CPD practice focus on the delivery and measurement of the content of CPD activities and participants’ satisfaction ratings rather than on investigating the effectiveness of these activities in enhancing professional learning (Blank, 2010; Livneh & Livneh, 1999; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Timperley, Aaron, Barrar, & Fung, 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009, 2010). This focus is problematic, as change is the desired outcome of CPD activities. Because these outcomes are not typically being measured, it is difficult to determine trends concerning whether the desired outcomes, whether it is a change in teaching pedagogy, a change in teaching practice, or learning and implementing a new skill, are being achieved. Participants’ rating of CPD activities as satisfactory may show that they find the activity enjoyable, but such ratings have not been shown in the literature to have a direct link to any change in practice. This leaves the content of CPD activities in question as well: if teachers enjoyed the activity, but learned nothing new or actionable, the content is not
likely to stimulate change. Until the shift is made from measuring content to measuring developmental outcomes, CPD activities that result in desired outcomes will remain elusive.

The second issue pointing to a need for reframing of CPD cited in current CPD literature concerns the developmental view of individuals as empty containers to be filled with new knowledge through attending didactic development activities such as workshops and conferences – a view that largely ignores the professional learning that takes place in the workplace (Billett, 2001; Bound, 2011; Choy, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1998; Webster-Wright, 2010). This limitation has implications for managers who are interested in evaluating the effectiveness of their CPD programs, suggesting again that evaluation of learning activities should reflect learning outcomes rather than the satisfaction level of participants. A second problem with the didactic approach is that it is general in scope and offers little in the way of the constructivist learning activities that are suitable for adult learners.

Considering the changing nature of work, CPD is considered to be important for workers in their efforts to maintain sustainable employment. Despite the general acceptance of CPD activities as a means for continuing development, there are issues cited in the CPD literature concerning the absence of an established CPD framework, the measurement of what is learned through participation in CPD activities, and that some forms of CPD activities do not observe adult learning principles. This research project proposes to explore if similar conditions
exist in the context of private sector VET trainers in Australia. The next section of this chapter focuses on CPD activities identified in the literature and emerging models which may assist in developing CPD programs.

2.3.1 CPD activities and emerging models

Whilst there is agreement in the literature that various CPD activities promote continuing development and the attainment of expert skills to some extent, there is a notable lack of causal and longitudinal literature to support that agreement (Guskey & Kwang Suk, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Webster-Wright, 2010). There is also little agreement about the relative effectiveness of various types of learning activities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Moreover, it can be argued that, since professional practice is a dynamic flow of work produced and reproduced by professionals, what would be deemed “effective CPD” is likely to differ across contexts (Billett, 2001; Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird, & Unwin, 2006; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Nevertheless, it is has been established that CPD offers the most benefit to stakeholders where it is 1) sustained over time, 2) embedded within a particular type of workplace, and 3) collaborative (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Hardy & Rönnerman, 2011; Heibert, 1999; Hunzicker, 2011; C. Mitchell & Sackney 2000; Opfer & Pedder, 2010).

The CPD activities most often identified in the literature on the developmental activities of educational practitioners include engaging in research, critical reflection, mentoring, workshops and peer observation
(Liddle, 1996). Literature shows these activities are linked to the need for participatory or constructivist methods of adult learning (Coolahan, 2002; Devereaux, Prater, Jackson, Heath, & Carter, 2010; Margolis & Doring, 2012; Zhao, 2013). In many cases, CPD activities overlap or are combined with others in a CPD program. For instance, participants may complete research as part of a collaborative team, workshops might be followed up by sustained mentoring, or activities like mentoring and peer observation could be completed within a community of practice (see: Domitrovich et al., 2009; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Gratton, 2003; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

In order to better understand how the identified CPD activities might reflect the needs of learners it is important to investigate each of the activities in question. This knowledge is important to this study in which VET trainers discuss their experiences as participants in some of these activities, as this is a necessary step toward a more informed practice. As previously mentioned, there is no currently agreed upon framework with which to measure the success of individual or integrated CPD activities (Desimone, 2009), and it is not the intention of this study to do so. This study is an exploration of whether experienced trainers in the private VET sector use these activities and how they perceive them.

2.3.1.1 Conducting and reporting on research

Educational research is one of the skills that Mitchell and Ward (2010) (Appendix 1) identify as a necessary capability for VET trainers. The inclusion of research as a skill for VET trainers implies that they should be
able to collect and analyse data, as well as being able to understand VET related publications. The value of research as a CPD activity includes the expansion of educators’ knowledge base through engagement with reading and writing and consequent changes in their practice (Noffke, 1999; Rhine, 1998).

The main drawback of research as a CPD activity is that participants do not always perceive research as transferrable to practice. Literature shows that when practitioners cannot envision the application of research findings, they largely ignore these findings (Eraut, 1994; Garner, Bingman, Comings, Rowe, & Smith, 2001; Quigley, 1997). Teachers’ personal values and beliefs also play into their determinations of whether research is useful (M. Kennedy, 1997). Several authors have suggested that this alleged disconnect between research and practice occurs because practitioners want guides to workplace problems, whereas research offers broadly applicable knowledge (Cross, 2000; Hultman & Hörberg, 1995; Warby, Greene, Higgins, & Lovitt, 1999). To overcome this perceived disconnect Huberman (1985) suggests that researchers and practitioners should collaborate in research efforts, and that educational researchers should consider “interactive dissemination” (p. 29) to refine conceptual tools. On the other hand, studies have shown that collaborative research processes such as action research have led to disputes over who sets the research agenda, who determines the research processes to be used, and who owns the outcomes of the research (Aspland, Brooker, Macpherson, & Cuskelly, 2002; Macpherson et al., 1998).
Studies evaluating research as a CPD activity have characteristically reported discouraging results. For instance, Jindal-Snape, Hannah, Smith, Barrow, and Kerr, (2009) surveyed a group of 170 psychology teachers who participated in collaborative research projects. Less than half of these 170 participants believed the research they conducted was a useful CPD activity. A similar survey asked 1,018 teachers whether research findings related to what worked in their practice, and whether they adapted their teaching practice on the basis of research (Pedder et al., 2005). In this study the rating for research as a learning activity was low, with just 34% reporting that they had modified their practice in on the basis of research, as compared to 86% who modified their practice as a result of critical reflection. Overall, teachers viewed research as a low value CPD activity, and only 33% believed research findings related to their own practice. It is not known at this time whether VET trainers in the private sector use either scholarly or VET industry research as a CPD activity, or how they might use it.

2.3.1.2 Critical reflection

It is widely agreed in the literature on teacher education that educators should develop skills in reflective practice (Calderhead, 1989; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991; Stenhouse, 1975), and the ideal of a reflective approach to developing educators has been around for some time (Tom, 1985). Critical reflection is thought to play a role in transforming practical experiences into higher forms of knowledge (Kolb, 1984) and underpins the notion of learning for skill development based on practice (Loughran, 2002;
McKauge, Stupans, Owen, Ryan, & Woulfe, 2011; Reynolds, 1998). The meaning of critical reflection varies somewhat in the literature, and terms such as reflection, critical reflection, reflexivity, critical thinking, reflective thinking (and others) seem to be used interchangeably (van Woerkom, 2010). Although reflection is a contested term with varying meanings, van Woerkom (2010, p. 340) argues that “they all express normative ideals for better, deeper, or more liberating ways of learning.” Thus, this process of thinking critically about workplace practices (teaching or otherwise) in order to improve them is a fundamental premise for continuing development, and this study is concerned with the practice of this technique as a CPD activity.

Critical reflection has frequently been reported to be used in the development of preservice or beginning teachers (Burton & Reynolds, 2009; Chitpin, Simon, & Galipeau, 2008; Collier, 1999; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009; Lamb, Lane, & Aldous, 2013; Tsangaridou & O’Sullivan, 1994; Zeichner & Liston, 1987), and to a lesser extent by in-service teachers (M. Hicks, Garvey-Berger, & Givens-Generett, 2005; Shockley, Bond, & Rollins, 2008; Sackett, DeMulder, LePage, & Wood, 2001). All of these studies, irrespective of the tenure of informants, show critical reflection as a process that has been used as part of or in conjunction with practical teaching situations. Therefore, although it is difficult to determine from the literature whether critical reflection alone is a viable CPD activity, it has been reported to be an aspect of successful development programs for experienced and beginning teachers who need
to develop or change their educational practices. It is not known at this time whether VET trainers in the private VET sector use critical reflection as a CPD activity, or how they might use it.

2.3.1.3 Mentoring

Mentoring has been studied from both an HRD (organisational) perspective and an educational (academe) perspective. In general, mentoring is thought to be increasing in popularity because of the necessity for continuing learning and management of one’s own career (Garet et al., 2001; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Because mentoring has been studied through many lenses, the literature is extensive, and much of it is well beyond the scope of this study. This literature includes a limited amount of empirical research and a plethora of industry literature relating to best practice and program implementation (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). Because this study focuses on VET trainers, the mentoring literature analysed here is limited to empirical literature on: 1) mentoring for the skill development of educators, and 2) formal versus informal mentoring. These particular topics on mentoring are important because research in the VET sector conducted by Balatti, Goldman, Harrison, Elliott, Smith and Jackson (2010) shows that formal mentoring has been used as a CPD activity in the public VET sector. However, there is as yet no evidence on whether mentoring is used amongst trainers in the private VET sector.

Mentoring has been studied through the lens of leadership and the development of beginning teachers, head teachers and school principals (T. Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Lashway, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007; Yost,
Mentoring is less studied as a method or activity for continuing teacher development. Moreover, since the literature concerning the effectiveness of mentoring programs for experienced teachers shows mixed outcomes, it is not possible at this time to determine any trends related to mentoring as CPD activity. For example, Grierson and Gallagher (2009) reported a successful mentoring program targeted at continuing development in which experienced teachers successfully changed their teaching practices as a result of a mentoring/peer observation CPD program. In contrast, a similar mentoring/peer observation program which reported successful results in a trial CPD mentoring program (Skippington & Goldman, 2007), later reported the program had failed. The program was reported to have failed due to time constraints, competing trainer priorities, and lack of management support, and these problems resulted in a lack of legitimacy for the program (Balatti et al., 2010). Unfortunately, there are few studies of longevity or sustainability concerning whether formal or informal mentoring offers superior outcomes (Zellers et al., 2008).

Although there is little research comparing formal and informal mentoring, there is a component of the literature that seeks to evaluate specific formal or informal mentoring experiences. These evaluations tend to be derived from practice (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006) and to depict mentoring as a positive or successful experience. Negative or unsuccessful mentoring experiences have, however, been linked to manipulative behaviour on the part of the mentor or a lack of compatibility between the
mentor and mentee (Eby & Allen, 2002). It is difficult to assess the suitability of mentoring programs for CPD because the success of these programs is typically evaluated on measures such as salary raises and promotions (Peluchette & Jeanquart, 2000), rather than measures of learning such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Formal mentoring programs in particular are typically established as part of an overall career development program which follows a set of predetermined goals (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Noe, 1998), and these goals in turn are considered to be most readily achieved when aligned to performance appraisal and other forms of recognition (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Hegstad, 1999; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004; Scandura, 1992). Unfortunately, program variables in formal mentoring arrangements differ greatly, making it difficult if not impossible to compare (Zellers et al., 2008).

As well as sharing the benefits of formal mentoring arrangements, informal mentoring (informal in the sense that there are no mandated activities) has been reported to be associated with additional benefits such as positive career outcomes (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), and more career related support (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992). Hopkins and Grigoriu (2005) also report that mentees in a community college identified an informally structured mentoring program as an ideal context to support their professional development. Mentees in this situation also reported they believed meetings with other mentees would be beneficial. The main disadvantage of informal mentoring has been cited as accessibility (particularly for minorities) (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).
Current literature concerning workshop attendance as a CPD activity tends to evaluate it negatively. For example Sparks (1997) and Hunzicker (2011) both describe workshops as mind-numbing experiences that do not meet the developmental needs of specific individuals, and are unlikely to have a positive effect on classroom practice (Danielson, 2006; Hunzicker, 2011). Brophy (1993) echoes this sentiment, suggesting that the generic content offered through workshops does not meet specific teacher needs.

Whilst workshop content may be problematic for diverse sets of learners, workshops can have a positive effect through the socialisation or networking that takes place when participants come together. The current literature might overlook this factor. Pedder et al. (2005) found workshops to have a social learning factor which in turn supports collaborative learning. Teachers might see value in participating in CPD activities outside their workplace irrespective of the topic in order to widen their social networks. A survey conducted by J.E. Bush (2007) confirmed the importance of social networking. In that survey, in-service music teachers indicated that the most important thing they wanted from workshops was discussions with fellow teachers. Incidentally, they also rated district sponsored generic workshops as the least important CPD opportunity available to them. A further study found that teacher interaction between CPD participants and their peers who did not participate had a spill-over effect in that “findings indicate that the extent to which teachers benefit from professional development programs through interacting with professional development participants almost equals the effect of direct
participation” (Sun et al., 2013, p. 362). This finding supports the idea that social learning takes place when teachers come together. Workshops offer a formal and organised opportunity for them to do so.

Time and monetary constraints limit the availability of in-person workshops (Archibald & Gallagher, 2002), but online workshops in the form of webinars, podcasts, videoconferencing and online courses are rapidly proliferating. Online workshops typically receive satisfactory ratings by participants, but little is currently known concerning the effectiveness of such programs (Fisher, Schumaker, Culbertson, & Deshler, 2010), or what might make them effective. Reported problems with online workshops include overextension of participants due to workload, lack of clear expectations (Cavagnetto, Dunkhase, Yager, & Burketta, 2005), and lack of qualified online facilitators (Fisher et al., 2010). Fisher et al. (2010) also reported that participants in a face-to-face workshop rated their overall satisfaction ‘significantly higher’ than did participants in a similar virtual workshop. Thus, the social benefit which may accrue from attending a face-to-face workshop could be lost in virtual online offerings (Schlager & Fusco, 2003; Wilson et al., 2008). Although the number of external workshops available to VET trainers in the private sector suggests that VET trainers use workshops as a CPD activity, the extent or specific purpose of workshops as a CPD activity is not known.

2.3.1.5 Peer observation

Research on the effectiveness of peer observation as a CPD activity or as part of a CPD program is still in its infancy (Amrein-Beardsley & Osborn
Popp, 2012; Thomas, Chie, Abraham, Jalarajan Raj, & Beh, 2013). It is particularly difficult to find qualitative evidence because of the difficulty of studying teachers in practice (A. Bell & Mladenovic, 2008; M. Bell, 2002). It is, however, the situated nature of peer observation within the teacher’s classroom domain that those who support the practice of peer observation value (Martin & Double, 1998; P. Palmer, 1998; Weller, 2009). The main benefits of peer observation and the review or feedback that typically follows have been reported to include the transformation of teaching perspectives and/or practices (Austin, 1992; M. Bell, 2005; Centra, 1986; Fullerton, 1993; Marshall, 2004; Pressick-Kilborn & Te Riele, 2008; P. Sullivan, Buckle, Nicky, & Atkinson, 2012), as well as the fostering of peer collegiality, reflective practices and self-esteem (Bodone, Gudjonsdottir, & Dalmau, 2004; Cosh, 1998; Keig & Waggoner, 1994; Marshall, 2004; Pressick-Kilborn & Te Riele, 2008; Quinlan & Akerlind, 2000; K. Smith, 2009; Stillwell, 2009).

Challenges to the effectiveness of peer observation may stem from the reality that teaching is for the most part a solo endeavour, and teachers may consider observation intrusive and intimidating (Lomas & Nicholls, 2005; Perlberg, 1983), not to mention the anxiety and fear they may experience in anticipation of the criticism that may follow (M. Bell, 2002; Mather & Seifert, 2014; Straughter, 2001). Even if teachers are willing to participate in teacher observation sessions, there is also the problem that peers may not prove to be qualified observers (M. Bell, 2002; Bowers, 1999; Cosh, 1998; J. Hanson, 1993; Keig, 2000; Sheal, 1989). Furthermore, peer
observation and review may simply allow reviewers to maintain the status quo or to force change through social reinforcement rather than offering colleagues an opportunity to explore new teaching perspectives (Hall & Noyes, 2009; Weller, 2009).

In order to improve understanding of how peer observation is used in practice, Gosling (2005, 2014) identified three different contexts for peer observation: 1) as part of a formal judgment or evaluation (i.e. teaching practicum, performance review), 2) as a developmental tool where senior staff observes a less experienced teacher and offers improvement advice, or 3) as a collaborative process between two teachers interested in enhancing their teaching practice. Peel (2005) offers similar insight and finds two main purposes of peer observation: teacher development or performance management.

The difference between forced (performance managed) and voluntary (developmental) participation in peer observation may determine whether teachers readily accept it as a CPD activity. Peer observation used as an institutionally required review is an evaluative tool rather than a developmental or a collaborative tool (Gosling, 2014), and a number of researchers have argued that for peer observation to be successful it should be voluntary and conducted by trusted colleagues (Hanna, 1988; S. Sullivan & Glanz, 2000; Willerman, L, & Koffman, 1991). Against the backdrop of collegiality, peer observation is a collaborative process that offers participants the opportunity to engage in professional dialogues and reflection about teaching (M. Bell, 2002; Bennett & Barp, 2008; Cosh,
1999; Gosling, 2014; Kell, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Sachs & Parsell, 2014; Schuck, Aubusson, & Buchanan, 2008), whilst the barriers to participating are minimised.

The experienced trainers in the VET sector who are the focus of this study already have their training and education (TAE) qualifications and so can be assumed to have participated in some sort of evaluative or developmental peer observation in order to receive their qualification. Several required units in the Certificate IV TAE require the assessor to observe the beginning trainer in various training situations. What is not known is whether experienced VET trainers in the private sector use peer observation as an ongoing professional development activity. It has been previously reported that junior teachers with one to two years of experience are more likely to engage with and learn from peer observation/review than are mid-career teachers (Blackmore, 2005; Hustler et al., 2003; Lueddeke, 2003; Martin & Double, 1998). Furthermore, because the VET trainer in the private sector often has the role of a workplace trainer rather than that of a classroom trainer, it is possible that the traditional classroom based notion of peer observation is not relevant to VET trainers in the private sector. Moreover, because peer observation is time and labour intensive (Hutchings, 1996; Keig, 2000; Little, 1988), it may not be practicable as a developmental activity within private RTOs because of the sparse resources available. This is not to say, however, that VET trainers do not informally observe their peers in a collegial effort to learn new skills.
CPD activities for educators have been identified in the areas of research, critical reflection, mentoring, workshop attendance and peer observation. In summary, an analysis of the body of literature concerning CPD activities has uncovered:

1. Studies evaluating research as a CPD activity have characteristically reported discouraging results. Teachers viewed research as a low value CPD activity, particularly when they cannot envision the application of research findings in their day to day practice.

2. Critical reflection as a CPD activity is thought to play a role in transforming practical experiences into higher forms of knowledge, and underpins the notion of learning for skill development based on practice. Critical reflection has been reported to be an aspect of successful development programs for teachers who need to develop or change their educational practices.

3. The literature concerning the effectiveness of mentoring programs for experienced teachers shows mixed outcomes. Therefore, based on the body of literature available it is not possible at this time to determine any trends related to mentoring as CPD activity.

4. In spite of the negative stigma that appears in the literature towards workshops as CPD activities, there is literature that supports the notion that teachers may be seeking out
workshops as a social forum in which to have discussions with fellow teachers. Content may be of secondary importance.

5. Peer observation as a CPD activity is considered to be in its infancy, difficult to research, but valued for its situational learning factor. Using peer observation as a CPD activity is reported to be problematic because of the large demands on time and labour involved, issues of teacher anxiety, and finding qualified observers. Peer observation has been reported to have positive results, particularly when the process is voluntary rather than forced. The main benefits of peer observation as a CPD activity have been reported to include the transformation of teaching perspectives and practices, fostering peer collegiality and self-esteem, and the building of critical reflection skills.

Since little research is available concerning the CPD activities of VET trainers in the private sector, the intent of this research study is to explore if these trainers engage in any of these CPD activities, and their perceptions of the activities they engage in.

2.3.1.6 Emerging models of CPD

Most models of CPD in the literature are grounded in cognitive psychology (Dall’Alba & Sandberg, 2006), and it appears that the CPD activities described above are starting to emerge in models of CPD. One example is Burke’s (2013) Experiential Development Model (EDP), which incorporates several of the CPD activities identified in the literature over a sustained period of time. Burke’s (2013) model stipulates that on the job
training is necessary for CPD to be successful and incorporates the CPD activities of reflection, mentoring, and peer observation in a collaborative environment. This particular model of CPD is important because it not only incorporates well established CPD activities, it also closely reflects the principles of adult learning identified in the previous section of this chapter, as well as Kolb’s cyclical model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Burke (2013, p. 252) states that his model was influenced by “expeditionary learning (EL) design, inside-out professional development (which imitates critical reflection of classroom practices), job-embedded learning, self-directed growth, modelling and demonstration of a skill”, all of which are concepts closely tied to cognitive psychology and adult learning.

After implementing his EDP Model with four language teachers, Burke attributed the success of the program to allowing the teachers to learn in their classrooms with support, rather than just telling them what to do. The concept of EL is also endorsed by Klein and Riordan (2011) whose findings in an eight teacher sample of CPD involving EL suggest that EPD, although not widely researched in educational contexts, has potential for educators because it allows teachers to assume the role of students and enables them to rethink traditional educational pedagogies. Through EL, it can be seen that it is possible to cater simultaneously to the ideals of constructivist learning, adult learning theory and the characteristics of adult learners. The linkage between CPD activities and learning theory is important for educational stakeholders in all
educational sectors, as the ability of CPD activities to deliver measurable learning outcomes rather than just satisfactory participant ratings will determine the legitimacy of CPD activities and models in the future. In addition, the legitimacy of these activities and models will in part be determined by the participants’ interpretation of their usefulness and may depend on their ability to overcome the barriers involved in embarking on CPD activities that involve long term, situational, and collaborative outcomes. The perspective of teachers on CPD activities is explored in the next section.

2.3.2 CPD from the participant’s perspective

Conspicuously missing from the literature on CPD, particularly in the field of education, is the voice of the teacher engaged in learning activities and the impact such teachers believe learning has on their workplace abilities (Timperley et al., 2007). What we know about adult learners suggests that the ways in which individuals view their CPD opportunities and their outcomes have a significant impact on whether these adult learners will apply themselves to learning (Livneh & Livneh, 1999). For example if an adult learner does not see the necessity for a CPD activity or is unable to immediately implement what is learned, it is significantly less likely that the CPD will result in any practical and lasting change in the skills of the trainer. Browell (2000) indicates that CPD is a personal experience that should be managed by the individual. Thus, it is imperative that the voice of those engaging in CPD activities also be heard.
In one of the few studies of the perspectives of teachers on their CPD activities, Dunst and Raab (2010) examined and evaluated the effects of three types of CPD activities on teachers’ classroom practices, as rated by the teachers through self-evaluation. Research participants attended either 1) conference presentations, or 2) 1-day or 2- to 3-day workshops, or 3) received one of two types of intensive in-service training (weeklong institutes or on-site training in the trainers classrooms). Study participants rated the usefulness of training content and the extent to which the training changed or improved their classroom practices one or six months after training (Dunst & Raab, 2010). This research showed that the two types of intensive in-service training were more effective than either conference presentations or workshops, and that on-site training was more effective than weeklong institutes in affecting study participants’ judgments of their in-service training. This finding that on-site or on-the-job training is a successful development activity is supported by literature that finds such training necessary to the success of teachers in any educational context (Blank, 2010; Comber et al., 2004; Easton, 2008; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Taitelbaum, Mamlok-Naaman, Carmeli, & Hofstein, 2008).

Additionally, Comber, Kamler, Hood, Moreau, & Painter (2004) examined the professional development experiences of female teachers with thirty years’ teaching experience. The subjects reported their resistance to CPD activities which were managerially mandated rather than self-initiated and their frustration with attempts to implement the ideas of “experts” in
the classroom. The same study also reported teachers’ successful CPD experiences with collaborative research projects. Deblaquiere and Williams (2007), who investigated issues pertaining to CPD through teacher’s immediate work, reported parallel results with respect to collaborative CPD experiences.

A similar study of a teacher development program in which teachers had no input into learning activities showed that teachers attending a CPD workshop series found the sessions to be of little value (Gravani, 2012). The study found that the facilitators had made no attempt to incorporate their learners’ prior knowledge and skills into the sessions and that the sessions were not directly related to the teachers’ current learning needs. Teachers were further frustrated because, while the learning outcome indicated for the sessions focused on their becoming more communicative or team oriented, the CPD sessions offered no chance for open dialogue or collaboration. Gravani (2012) attributed this failure of the CPD program design to correspond to what was expected of the learners to its lack of consideration of adult learning principles. Thus, lack of teacher input into on-campus CPD activities may be one of the reasons why teachers report that leaving campus for learning activities which include collaboration with peers and consultants (mentors), in addition to participating in CPD activities that have clear learning objectives, enhances their ability to learn (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006; Devereaux et al., 2010).

CPD from the participant’s perspective is often overlooked; however the small amount of research available shows that on-the-job activities,
particularly those of longer duration which allow time for practice and consider the current level of participant skills, are more favourably received. Although literature in this area is scarce, these perceptions align with what is known about the characteristics of adult learners. This research study will add to the existing literature by exploring whether VET practitioners might have similar perceptions towards their CPD activities.

2.3.3 Barriers to CPD

Barriers to CPD participation are discussed across disciplines throughout the literature on CPD, but there are few empirical studies of these barriers (Stenfors-Hayes, Weurlander, Dahlgren, & Hult, 2010).

The majority of literature analysed includes time and workload as contributing barriers (Braden, Huai, White, & Elliott, 2005; Day, Sammons, Stobart, & Gu, 2007; Devereaux et al., 2010; L. C. Lee, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2010; Porter, Blank, Smithson, & Osthoff, 2005; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2010; Wan & Lam, 2010). Also, mentioned are problems such as poorly structured activities, irrelevant content, lack of administrative and scheduling support, and lack of expertise on the part of facilitators (Gallagher, Clifford, & Maxwell, 2004; A. Hanson, Bruskiewitz, & DeMuth, 2007; L. C. Lee, 2002; Lobman & Ryan, 2008; Margolis & Doring, 2012; Penz et al., 2007; Schweitzer & Krassa, 2010). With the emergence of online CPD activities, barriers related to computer use, technology and website access have also been reported (Braden et al., 2005; Gagnon et al., 2007).
In an effort to categorise CPD barriers, Zinn (1997) conducted a study of the CPD barriers faced by American public school teachers. A later university case study elaborates on these results (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999). These studies describe four “domains” that support or impede teacher professional development: 1) interpersonal relationships, 2) workplace structure, 3) personal commitments, and 4) intellectual/psychological characteristics. This study implies that a lack of the support needed impedes (or creates a barrier to) effective CPD. It also implies that individuals can manage or balance barriers that impede successful development. For example, they can choose mentors and cultivate friendships both internal and external to their workplace. The typical barriers identified in the paragraph above were all recognised within the four domains, as were some barriers that had not previously been identified. Whilst the domains tend to overlap in places, particularly with interpersonal relationships and workplace systems, Caffarella and Zinn’s (1997) domains provide a structure which will be used to review the literature related to the CPD of teachers.

According to Caffarella and Zinn (1999) the domain of interpersonal relationship barriers includes a lack of personal support from family as well as from workplace systems and colleagues/leaders. Since the literature analysed did not explore lack of family support in any depth, discussion here will combine domains one and two and focus on workplace related issues that include systems and relationships. This combined focus is reasonable since studies have shown that barriers
reported by teachers are predominantly organisational or departmental (Fanghanel, 2004; MacDougall & Drummond, 2005; McInnins, 2000; A. Palmer & Collins, 2006; Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2010; Zibrowski, Weston, & Goldszmidt, 2008). Caffarella and Zinn (1999) identified workplace CPD barriers as a lack of resources (particularly financial resources) and time, poorly coordinated opportunities or few opportunities available, and a workplace climate that encourages infighting and only recognises formal CPD activities. A. Kennedy (2011) elaborates on the ways in which lack of suitable systems and policy can impede teachers’ CPD. He suggests that workplaces should take a more holistic or collaborative approach to recognition of teacher learning rather than the present focus on formal individual CPD.

One research study of workplace domain barriers in the public VET sector showed that experienced teachers faced CPD barriers such as time constraints, competing workplace priorities, and lack of management support, leading to a lack of legitimacy for the CPD program (Balatti et al., 2010). Opher and Pedder (2010) conducted additional exploration into workplace barriers regarding the availability of high quality CPD activities. After surveying and interviewing primary and secondary teachers in the UK, they suggested that there might be a disconnect between the CPD activities teachers needed and the activities made available to them. Although it is generally accepted that teachers know what development they need and are able to choose their CPD activities accordingly, participants in this study chose to engage in activities that
were of short duration (less than a week), and had little opportunity for active learning. Teachers reported that the CPD activities/topics needed for their continuing development were not met by the CPD activities available, so they took the opportunities available as opposed to taking nothing. Thus, the primary barrier to CPD participation identified in this study was the lack of appropriate CPD opportunities offered to teachers at various stages of their careers.

An Australian study by Ryan and Bhattacharyya (2011) of sessional university teachers showed similar results: these teachers also encountered barriers to formal and informal CPD opportunities. This study also found that teachers with the highest levels of qualifications reported the least support from key people in their work environment. This noted lack of availability of CPD opportunities, particularly high quality opportunities, may also be linked to school administrators’ concern with whether teachers are getting the sustained, content focused CPD they need (Desimone et al., 2006). Thus, even if teachers are willing to participate in CPD (and no research has shown they are not) high quality CPD opportunities providing relevant content may simply not be available.

Caffarella and Zinn (1999) also identified personal commitments as a third domain for barriers to CPD activities, again listing lack of support from family as well as difficult life transitions, health issues and religious values. Although lack of family support or the need to be home with the family has been mentioned as a barrier in the CPD literature (see: Beatty,
barriers concerning life transitions, health issues and religion are seldom discussed. That is not to say however, that these barriers do not impede CPD, only that little is known about them.

Intellectual/personal characteristics was the final domain of CPD barriers that Caffarella and Zinn (1999) identified. This domain includes CPD barriers such as the teacher’s lack of commitment, interest, and confidence in the need for development and/or improvement. Other issues cited were work role frustration, burnout, reluctance to change, and a lack of extrinsic rewards. Other studies have also shown lack of incentives as a barrier, as well as poor networking abilities, having no influence over the curriculum, and job insecurity (Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2010). It is not known whether VET trainers in the private sector view similar issues as barriers to their CPD.

In summary, the literature on CPD barriers shows the majority of barriers are related to the organisation. These barriers include workload, scheduled participation time, lack of resources, poorly coordinated/structured opportunities, few opportunities available, and workplace climates that encourage infighting and only recognises formal CPD activities. Other barriers related to personal commitments and issues, such as the lack of support from family, work role frustration, burnout, reluctance to change, and a lack of extrinsic rewards.
Based on the literature on CPD barriers reviewed above, it seems possible that the lack of available and appropriate CPD activities is the central barrier to CPD for teachers. Although issues such as time and workload are well documented across the literature, teachers might be more motivated to overcome such difficulties if CPD activities were truly offering the developmental opportunities that they are asking for. It is not known whether VET teachers in the private sector face similar barriers to accessing high quality CPD activities, or whether VET trainers perceive these CPD opportunities to exist.

One additional barrier to CPD that is related directly to VET trainers is described as the “balancing act between maintaining vocational currency and fostering skills to improve teaching, learning and assessment practices’ (H. Guthrie, 2010a, p. 12). Although this study is primarily concerned with how VET trainers engage in CPD activities to become experts in teaching, these trainers are also required to maintain industry currency. VET trainers have to allot their time for CPD activities between two requirements, and typically consider the maintenance of industry (vocational) skills to be of primary importance. It is not known at this time how VET trainers view this dual requirement, or what barriers the requirement poses to their ability to participate in education-related CPD activities.
2.4 The Australian VET sector

2.4.1 Role of the trainer in the VET sector

Little research has been done on VET trainers and what they do, even though there have been calls for this type of research for many years (Nesbit, 1998). The available research concerning the role of the VET trainer shows this is a role that continually expands and becomes more demanding (Chappell & Johnson, 2003; Figgis, 2009; Harris, Clayton & Chappell, 2007), with the result that VET trainers need to continually develop new or higher level skills (J. Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, 2006). As the VET industry has become increasingly competitive, it appears private RTOs have required trainers to step up and take on additional workplace roles and tasks other than learning and assessment, particularly in the areas of administrative and quality assurance processes (Chappell & Johnson, 2003).

The Australian VET sector literature indicates there are ongoing attempts to categorise VET trainers in an effort to better understand their roles or tasks, where categories are shown to be developing such as VET practitioners and/or VET professionals (Chappell & Johnson, 2003; H. Guthrie, 2010c; Productivity Commission, 2011; Stevens, April 2011). For example, in an effort to recognise the changing role of VET trainers Chappell and Johnson (2003) used the term “new VET practitioner” in an attempt to include full time TAFE teachers who take on duties in addition to teaching, enterprise trainers, people who promote learning within
enterprises, adult and community education managers, managers of RTOs, HRD specialists, and independent training consultants.

Other VET sector research conducted by Harris, Cooper, Robertson and Clark (2010) showed VET trainers at TAFE ranking capabilities such as learner/client focus; communications skills; flexible, adaptive, creative teaching; pedagogical expertise; instructional skill design; coaching/mentoring; industry/technical currency; educational technology skills. Williams (2010) offers similar insight into the competencies VET trainers need to effectively deliver VET training and suggests that CPD “strategies are needed to assist with the processes of energising teaching and training approaches applied in the VET sector” (p. 13). Although identifying VET trainers’ skills and capabilities is important, what is missing from the literature is insight on how trainers engage in development opportunities to achieve these capabilities. These research studies were also completed within the TAFE or public sector domain, so whether these studies are relevant to trainers in the private RTO sector is unknown.

The skills and capabilities presented in the aforementioned research studies also closely resemble the activities of VET professionals identified and used in surveys conducted on Education and Training (called SET) in 1997, 2001 and 2005 which include the list of skills presented in Figure 2.3. The professional activities identified in the SET studies are also reflected in Mitchell and Ward’s (2010) model of VET Capability Development, which identifies nine skill sets needed by VET trainers (Appendix A). This
model has been identified as an important and ongoing attempt to identify the skills that current VET trainers need.

Figure 2.3 VET Professional Activities

More importantly these nine skill sets (see Figure 2.4) were identified by surveying 2230 VET trainers across Australia, a sample which included trainers from the private sector. The response sample consisted of 9.9% of trainers from Queensland, and only 17% from private RTOs (as opposed to TAFE 46%), which is a start but also reflects the necessity of further exploration of the capabilities of VET trainers in Queensland’s private RTO sector.

Despite the under-representation of private RTOs in the Mitchell and Ward (2010) study, these nine skill sets have been used as a basis for discussion in this study. Caution must be exercised however, as
organisations in the private sector and public sectors are different (Boyne, 2002; Davies, 1971; Mulgan, 2000).

**Figure 2.4 Structural model of VET professional practice**

This means that trainers within these organisations will have different work role requirements, and some skills will be more important and more sought after than others. For example Chappell and Johnson (2003) showed that private sector trainers identified commercialisation skills as a natural part of their work roles, where public sector trainers found the idea of participating in commercial or workplace training as “disturbing”
These differences between the public and private VET sectors have not been addressed in the model and may become problematic in the general acceptance of this (or any) model capability framework. TAFE and private RTOs might also differ on the necessity of some of the other skills listed in the model, specifically advanced skills in facilitation and assessment and research skills. For this reason the nine skills identified in the model have been adopted for use in this study, and the two broad components of the model identified by Mitchell and Ward (2010) consisting of ‘foundation practice’ and advanced practice’ have not been adopted for this study.

2.4.2 VET trainers’ qualifications and skills

Most research in the VET sector is born as a result of research grants designed to shape government policy and is undertaken by researchers directly involved with the government-funded National Centre for Vocational Research (NCVER). The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA) also publish research on the VET sector. AVETRA is also committed to the development of VET policy, reviewing VET research priorities, raising awareness of VET research, promoting research activities for those in VET, and the dissemination of research findings. Although this type of research is important for the future of the VET industry, it too often overlooks the voice of VET trainers in the private sector.

The voice of the VET trainer in the private sector is a focus of this research project. Current VET literature increasingly often notes that VET Trainers
are under-skilled for their teaching roles and responsibilities (see: J. Mitchell et al., 2006; Wheelahan, 2010; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). But, whilst these researchers make plausible arguments for this notion, (and anecdotal evidence suggests that the VET education sector is evolving), it is currently an argument with the need for more empirical support, particularly from the private VET sector. In particular, little is known about which skills or capabilities trainers lack and what types of learning and development activities they believe would strengthen their workplace capabilities. As the VET sector is increasingly expected to meet government objectives concerning the number and availability of skilled workers, assuring that VET trainers have suitable qualifications and skills is emerging as a VET sector priority (Wheelahan, 2010). As the quality of VET teaching comes under increasing scrutiny, some noteworthy literature on the development of VET trainers has been published in the past several years. This literature presents arguments for professional recognition, qualifications, certification, and CPD (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011).

In an attempt to provide some empirical evidence on the level of qualification(s) of current VET practitioners in Australia, Smith and Grace (2011) reported on data collected on the formal qualification levels of VET practitioners in the Service Skills Industry (i.e. retail, hospitality), and argued that the qualifications held by VET trainers are inadequate for teaching in the VET sector. Their findings show that VET practitioners have relatively high levels of industry qualifications (high deemed to be
diploma level or above) compared to teaching or educational qualifications (where high is deemed to be diploma and above). The data further indicated that a majority of VET practitioners, regardless of tenure, had only obtained the Certificate IV in Training and Education (TAE) for teaching in the VET sector, which is the minimum qualification required. The article asked why the “VET sector is willing to accept the current situation of under-qualification for vocational education?” (p. 215). Unfortunately, empirical evidence connecting higher teaching qualifications (such as a university degree) to more highly skilled educational practices is scarce. On the contrary, the literature available suggests that many of the skills needed to be a successful teacher in any educational practice are learned on the job (Taylor, 2003), or as part of CPD after an initial pre-service teaching program (Blank, 2010; Comber et al., 2004; Easton, 2008; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Taitelbaum, Mamlok-Naaman, Carmeli, & Hofstein, 2008; Tofade, Foushee, Chou, Eckel, & Caiola, 2010).

Research on CPD strategies and programs for VET trainers has also emerged. For example, The State of Queensland has put forth a Queensland Vocational Education and Training (VET) Continuous Professional Learning Strategy: 2012–2015 which outlines a “forward plan to enhance the capability of our VET workforce” where the “focus is on lifting standards for teaching, learning and assessment, developing expert leaders, engaging with industry and improving business systems” (Queensland VET Development Centre, 2012, p. 4). Whilst the paper
claims to support a “broad range of learning approaches’ (p. 21), there is no way to determine the extent to which VET trainers might participate in any CPD activities, what skills and capabilities these activities might focus on, and what kinds of learning activities will be available. To date it appears that this training has for the most part been limited to free webinars and some workshops which incur fees of $185 or more. There was also a two day conference in October 2013 with full registration costing $580.

Additional research conducted specifically in the VET sector concerning the CPD of training practitioners includes a research study done by Balatti, Goldman, Harrison, Elliott, Smith, and Jackson (2008) which conducted a trial of a voluntary model of professional development at three public Australian TAFE institutes. This training offered formal mentoring delivered by “teachers for teachers.” Findings showed that the institute organised mentoring program had very little uptake by trainers and was quickly set aside because time constraints, competing priorities, and lack of management support undermined the legitimacy of the program. This parallels a study completed by Margolis and Doring (2012) in which the participants were high school educational leaders involved in teacher facilitated CPD. They found that stakeholders viewed the CPD program organised by the institute as a necessary developmental activity, but that insufficient attention to the details of how the program should be structured resulted in reduced, legitimacy for the program. Because the program lack structured protocols and understood outcomes, the learners
did not believe that they would receive any direct benefit from the program, and the program failed. Barriers to success of the CPD program cited were 1) unclear messages concerning the purpose of the program, 2) lack of learning goals from the program, and 3) lack of trust amongst teachers.

What has been notable in analysing the VET literature is the overall “lack of information about the VET workforce both nationally and by state” (H. Guthrie, 2010b, p. 10). Also notable is the lack of any national CPD strategy or guidance for the VET sector (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). The viewpoint of teaching professional is typically overlooked in educational research, and this holds true for the VET trainer as well (H. Guthrie, 2010b; Takerei, 2010). Optimal CPD strategy will result from research that reflects practice (Dirkx, 2006), and in which processes of knowing are viewed within the social, cultural, political and economic environment in which trainers engage. The research questions presented in the next section of this chapter will assist in the understanding of these questions as they pertain to VET trainers in the private sector.

2.5 Research Questions

Because of the changing nature of work, it has become necessary for individuals to employ lifelong learning strategies to maintain current skills, knowledge and capabilities in the workplace. One of the purposes of HRD is to develop individuals to meet the changing nature of their work roles, and to continue developing experienced workers in achieving
advanced workplace capabilities. Within HRD, cognitive psychology seeks to identify the mental processes essential to learning and development and to improve our understanding of how adults learn. Application of these ideas to developmental activities can help to bring the purpose of HRD into focus and the processes essential to HRD can be explored. Little is known about these processes in the VET sector, particularly the private sector. This study aims to explore this literature gap.

In order for individuals to develop new and advanced workplace capabilities, stakeholders offering developmental opportunities must be cognizant of adult learning characteristics and strategies. Stakeholders who support teacher development should recognise the characteristics of adult learners and incorporate them into CPD activities. When seeking developmental opportunities, adults will choose activities that serve their immediate learning goals and offer developmental opportunities immediately applicable to the workplace. CPD opportunities will also be more successful if the participants are actively involved and are allowed to practice what they have learned. Any CPD not meeting these basic adult learning needs is likely to fall short of achieving desired learning outcomes.

If trainers are to achieve the higher skill levels they are reported to need in the VET sector, the developmental opportunities available must provide the content and support they need to rise to the challenge. Although CPD activities such as participating in research, critical reflection, mentoring,
workshop attendance, and peer observation have all been identified in the literature, it is not known which (if any) of these activities trainers in the private VET sector use. There is also little empirical evidence available on which CPD activities are the most effective for teacher development, although we can assume from the literature that they should be based on what is known about adult learners. Research seeking to fill this literature gap concerning CPD activities within the VET context would assist VET stakeholders in understanding trainers’ developmental needs, and in identifying the CPD activities they are participating in to meet those needs. Once these aspects are better understood, stakeholders could move forward to ensure that VET trainers have access to high quality relevant CPD opportunities. This study therefore proposes to explore the CPD needs of VET trainers in the private VET sector.

Unfortunately, little is known about these trainers. This makes the voice of the trainer in this sector of the utmost importance, particularly since it is their skills that are being questioned. As little is known about what skills and knowledge these trainers believe they need or how they would go about obtaining them, there is currently no sound basis for improving the relevant CPD offerings. Even for those researchers primarily interested in VET sector policy, the perspective of teachers is critically important because the best policies and practices will only bring about desired results if they are embraced and effectively implemented.

Barriers to CPD have been identified as being related to workplace issues (time, workplace, resources, lack of admin/management support), the
quality and availability of activities/facilitators, and personal characteristics (commitment, confidence, ability, job insecurity). Whilst these barriers are well identified in the literature, what is not known at this time is what (if any) barriers to CPD trainers in the private VET sector are facing. Consequently, although the CPD of VET trainers in the VET sector is under increasing scrutiny, little is known about how VET trainers in the private sector engage in CPD activities and what barriers stand between them and the CPD they need.

Given the importance of the VET sector, the need to understand CPD from the point of view of participants and the current literature supporting continuing development and learning, this study will focus on the following research question:

What qualifications and skills are perceived to be needed by VET trainers in private training organisations, and what impacts their learning of the skills they need for their evolving day to day workplace practice?

More specifically, the research study will question trainers directly in order to explore:

1. What qualifications/skills do VET trainers perceive they need in order to maintain their ability to work effectively in the private VET sector?
2. What prompts VET trainers to engage in learning and development opportunities?
3. What prompts VET trainers learning needs and development activities?

4. What barriers to learning do VET trainers face?

The first question will establish what qualifications and skills VET trainers believe they need to fulfil their current job roles. Since adult learners are thought to determine their own learning needs, the second question will examine how trainers determine that they have a gap in their workplace skills which requires CPD. Question three will determine what skills VET trainers see as necessary areas of development in an effort to become experts in their work tasks, and what CPD activities they engage in to learn these new or advanced skills. Finally, trainers will identify what barriers they face in seeking to obtain the CPD they have identified a need for. The answers to these questions will lay the basis for an improved continuing development process.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter provides a review of the literature on HRD and adult learning as they pertain to the ongoing development of workplace skills. It situates the study in the field of HRD in that the study seeks to carry out the purpose of the development of knowledge, skills and competencies that is central to HRD. Adult learning theories provide the means for exploring how adults learn new skills, and research has shown that adult learners are self-directed, have significant experience that they can draw on, and seek material that they can apply in practice.
CPD as a process of HRD and learning provides a further context for exploring how VET trainers as experienced workers determine what new skills are needed as their workplaces change. It is anticipated that VET trainers will report having engaged in some of these activities. The specific CPD activities identified as important to this study and briefly discussed were: doing research, critical reflection, collaboration, mentoring, workshop attendance and peer observation.

Following this, CPD from the participant’s perspective was identified as an important area of literature in need of expansion, and the barriers to participating in CPD activities were explored. CPD literature specific to the Australian VET sector was then analysed. To date, this literature has identified the capabilities necessary for VET trainers but has not explored the types of CPD that VET trainers engage in, how they see their own CPD needs, or what barriers to CPD they face.

Based on this review of the literature, there is little empirical research on CPD activities from the participant’s perspective or on the skill development of VET trainers in the private VET sector. The chapter concludes by indicating that, in order to add to the research in these areas, the study will address the question of what skills VET trainers in private training organisations need and how they learn the skills they need for their evolving day to day workplace practice.
Chapter 3:
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, there is a need for information about the qualifications and skills of experienced trainers in the Australian VET industry. In particular, there is a need for research focusing on the continuing professional development (CPD) of trainers who are employed in private sector registered training organisations (RTOs) and how they address those needs. The overarching research question for this study is:

What qualifications and skills are perceived to be needed by VET trainers in private training organisations, and what impacts their learning of the skills they need for their evolving day to day workplace practice?

Table 3.1 presents four sub-questions and the objectives associated with them:

Table 3.1 Research questions and objectives

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<th>Research questions to be explored</th>
<th>Objective</th>
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<td>1. What qualifications/skills do VET trainers perceive they need in order to maintain their ability to work effectively in the private VET</td>
<td>To clarify the formal qualifications and skills trainers believe they need for their current work roles in the VET education private sector</td>
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</table>
2. What prompts VET trainers to engage in learning and development opportunities? To determine how trainers come to understand they have a skill gap concerning their ability to perform current work tasks.

3. What prompts VET Trainers learning needs and development activities? To identify the CPD activities trainers engage in to fill the skills gap(s) they have identified.

4. What barriers to learning VET trainers face? To examine the difficulties trainers have in trying to fill the skill gaps they have identified and to assist VET stakeholders in understanding how to assist trainers in obtaining the continuing development that they need.

The intent of this chapter is to explain and justify the research methodology used to explore these research questions. The chapter begins with an exploration of the inquiry paradigm chosen for this study, followed by a discussion of the rationale for the methodology chosen for this study. The second part discusses the research design. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research process, including how the data was collected and analysed and how ethical issues were addressed. The chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of the study.
3.2 Inquiry paradigms

An inquiry paradigm is a set of basic beliefs concerning the ontology, epistemology and methodology that is to inform research. It examines the relationship between the research being conducted, the participants of the research and the researcher (Wadsworth, 1998), and determines who has the right to claim knowledge production. Inquiry paradigms are suggested by some researchers to exist on a continuum (Hussey & Hussey, 1997; Ticehurst & Veal, 1999), such as that proposed by Guba and Lincoln (2009) and presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 outlines the basic beliefs of individuals concerning the foundation of new knowledge (ontology, epistemology, and methodology) and how these beliefs resonate with research or inquiry paradigms (positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory). As ontology, epistemology and methodology are interwoven ideals, when a researcher acknowledges a particular ontological, epistemological or methodological view, constraints are placed on the other basic beliefs and the suitability of an inquiry paradigm. Simplistically, taking a position on questions about basic beliefs leads to the selection of an inquiry paradigm that is appropriate for the researcher and the purpose of the study. For example, individuals who have the ontological belief that knowledge is co-created or participatory are steered in the direction of the constructivist or participatory research paradigms shown at the right hand end of the continuum. Similarly, the belief that a manipulated experiment is the best
### Table 3.2 Inquiry paradigms

<table>
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<th>Objective</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong></td>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivism</td>
<td>Naïve realism-‘real’ reality but not apprehendable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpositivism</td>
<td>Critical realism – “real” reality but only imperfectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical theory</td>
<td>Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivism</td>
<td>Transactional/subjectivist’ co-created findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Participative reality – subjective-objective reality, co-created and given cosmos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

way to answer a research question would steer a researcher towards a positivist paradigm shown on the left end of the continuum.

Although each of the inquiry paradigms described in Table 3.2 can provide a framework for social research, the nature of this study as one in which the beliefs and perceptions of VET trainers are the heart of the inquiry places it within a subjectivist epistemology (Timperley, Aaron, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). In contrast, objectivist paradigms are more appropriate to the search for facts or causes (Hussey & Hussey, 1997), neither of which is the focus of this research study. Mertens (2005) further argues that inquiry paradigms cannot be independent of the values of the researcher, and that the researcher must understand the complex world of the participants’ “lived experiences” in order to create specific co-constructed findings. This dictates the ontological notion that there is accurate representation in descriptions of reality and that truth and values are relative to a specific system of beliefs (Horner & Westacott, 2000).

Based on these basic beliefs about knowledge creation and the intent of this research study to disseminate the informants’ personal views concerning their CPD needs, a constructivist inquiry paradigm was chosen for this research study.

The constructivist inquiry paradigm was chosen because the intent of this research is to explore and provide unknown aspects of the experiences of VET trainers through collective reconstructions. The constructivist paradigm, as described by Guba and Lincoln (2009) and highlighted in
Table 3.2, considers the researcher to be a facilitator of multi-voice, informed, sophisticated reconstructions of situational experience, extending knowledge through individual reconstructions. Therefore, the constructivist inquiry paradigm fits the research question and allows the researcher to explore these social situations.

As the constructivist inquiry paradigm is based on the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, the creation of new knowledge through this study will take an inductive, hermeneutical approach. The subjects of this research relate their engagement with the world to the researcher concerning “how” things are (Chang, Voils, Sandelowski, Hasselblad, & Crandell, 2009; Maynard, 1994). In contrast, deductive approaches to research explain causal relationships and define scientific principles, which are commonly based on the collection of quantitative data. Exploratory qualitative research is a preferred research approach when the phenomenon is little understood and the exact variables unknown (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative and quantitative studies are both used in educational research and have similar processes (Kumar, 2005), but differ concerning how data is collected, how data is processed, and how the findings are communicated. Qualitative data should be collected for studies such as this when details of the issue can only be understood through talking to individuals, when an understanding of the participants context is important, when statistical analysis does not fit the problem, and the informants situation (findings) will be presented in a written narrative.
(Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Furthermore, there is little question that postmodern inquiry paradigms have been legitimised and established as equal to conventional paradigms (Howey, 1985; Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999), and the value of qualitative methodologies has risen in applied fields such as education (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Methodologies in qualitative research prescribe that certain procedures be used throughout the process from data collection to the completion of data analysis. However, it is rare for a researcher using a qualitative methodology to set a research scope and stick to it throughout the study, as it is natural for changes in the scope of a qualitative study to change based on the researcher’s growing understanding of the situation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, although the nature of qualitative research is complex, it allows subjectivity to take priority over measuring and theorising (Morell & Tan, 2009). As a less structured and flexible methodology is needed with which to explore this phenomenon of VET trainers’ CPD, a qualitative methodology is suitable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Silverman, 2011).

As discussed in Chapter 2, few studies were found that included private VET sector information and no studies were found that had been completed solely on VET trainers in the private sector. Consequently, as a qualitative study focusing on trainers’ perspectives from the field, the present study is a departure from previous VET literature. This departure however, is necessary to provide a better understanding of important issues in the private VET sector concerning CPD issues.
The next section of this chapter will describe how this exploratory qualitative research project was carried out using the specified research design.

3.3 Research design

Research design is the development of a systematic process for carrying out the research which includes identifying the steps to be taken in carrying out the research study. This research study used an exploratory qualitative research framework, that is, one that is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. Qualitative research uses socially constructed data to explore and permit empirically based descriptions of informants’ accounts (Silverman, 2011).

The main strategy used in the qualitative research genre of individual lived experience is an in-depth interview strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, the primary data gathering method for this study is interviewing. In-depth interviewing strategies require close personal interactions between the researcher and the informant, and “rely on a single primary method for gathering data” (p. 55). Additionally, the majority of published qualitative research articles use interviews (Silverman, 2011).

The research approach for this study is exploratory. As little is known about the situation of the VET trainer, the focus of this study is on creating a general picture of conditions, allowing researchers to become familiar with basic facts and concerns rather than describing or explaining them
Exploratory research design is also more flexible than other kinds of research design, which is an important feature given that no clear understanding of VET trainers’ professional development perspectives is available (Howey, 1985).

The next section will outline 1) how the key informants were selected, 2) how the data was collected, and 3) how the data was analysed.

3.3.1 Selection of key informants

When using a qualitative methodology, the selection of key informants is purposeful rather than random (Patton, 2002). A purposive sampling strategy signifies choices concerning where, how, and who should be studied (Liu & Lee, 2008), and ensures that the informants are tied to the research objectives. As the study began, it was recognised that the participant numbers might change during the data collection period as Luborsky and Rubinstein (1995) contend the exact sampling technique “must emerge during the process of conducting research” (p. 97), if one is to use a sample for meaning approach. Sampling for meaning implies the uncovering of experiences through conversations, and the interpretation of these events and social occurrences into narratives. The purposeful “sample” of informants chosen yields “insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on the particular characteristics of informants, in order to produce authentic representations of their situation and rich data concerning the research
questions. Using a purposive strategy also enhances sample coverage and provides a framework for analysis (Barbour, 2001).

It is common for qualitative researchers to use more than one sampling technique in order to achieve authentic representation of a group or community (Abrams, 2010). Although several sampling techniques are suited to carrying out this research, the approach adopted in this study is constrained by practical concerns. First, issues in identifying a representative sample for this study stem from the problem that the population of Australian VET trainers is not known (H. Guthrie, 2010c; Productivity Commission, 2011), and attempts to accumulate such data have not been comprehensive (see Figure 3.3.1). In particular, information concerning the number of trainers in the private training sector is lacking (Productivity Commission, 2011). Thus, in order to access this hard to reach community of VET trainers a non-probability snowball sampling technique was deployed.

Because the population of VET trainers in private RTOs is unknown and there is no available sampling frame for this study, snowball sampling was used to tap into the social network among members of the VET training community to reach volunteer informants (Spreen, 1992). The basic assumption of such a link-tracing technique is that there are existing network linkages within the VET training community (Kumar, 2005; Spreen, 1992).
The individuals initially contacted through the snowball technique were a convenience sample, drawn from the managers or owners of private RTOs known through prior contact with the researcher to be interested in the research findings.
Those managers were then invited to identify managers of other RTOs who would be sent an information letter. All managers identified through the process were invited to send out an information sheet and an invitation to participate in the study to their trainers. This linkage of people in the network ensured that the volunteers were recruited ethically through an arm’s length process.

Second, in order to ensure that the informants identified by the snowball sample were individuals who had experienced similar phenomena with respect to CPD in the private VET sector, a criterion sampling process was used. The criteria used were as follows:

1. Trainers are employed on a permanent basis by their RTO. This criterion was established as important since it is anticipated that contract or casual trainers’ CPD is not typically funded by an RTO during their temporary periods of employment. Casual and contract trainers are also likely have other employment, and training might not currently be their main career. Using permanent employees of RTOs for this study thus ensures that participants are from the same sub-group of private sector trainers, and that the trainers are dedicated to the industry as their main source of employment.

2. Trainers are employed in private RTOs in the Southeast Queensland area. Employment in a private RTO was chosen as a criterion because little is known about trainers in private RTOs. RTOs located in the Southeast Queensland area were
chosen for two reasons. First, this area has a specific job market to service which includes retail trade, manufacturing, tourism/hospitality, education, health care and social assistance and construction ("Major industries and employers in South East Queensland," 2010). This means the trainers will have experience delivering similar qualifications based on the industry needs of this geographical area. Secondly, it was a matter of convenience for the researcher, limiting the time and expense required for travel.

3. Trainers must have completed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA or TAE). This is the minimum educational requirement for trainers to be employed in the Australian VET Sector as a trainer. It also ensures that all the interviewees have a similar level of foundational educational knowledge directly related to the VET sector.

4. Trainers participating in the interviews have a minimum of two years' training experience in the VET sector. It is already well documented that beginning teachers inevitably discover gaps in their teaching competencies as they start teaching (Chapman, 1983). This means beginner trainers are unlikely to have all of the foundation skills described by Mitchell and Ward (2010), and even more unlikely to have any of the advanced skills. It is the intent of this research project to explore the continuing development of experienced trainers who have already addressed the issues faced by new teachers and are trying to
maintain and enhance their capabilities to remain current in training and industry.

The use of the criterion above also enables the reduction, simplification and facilitation of data collection. As the intent of this study was to select individuals for data collection who could inform the understanding of the research questions, the individuals chosen would need to come from a homogeneous community. This was to ensure they had experienced CPD within the Australian VET sector and had done so in an area offering similar developmental opportunities. It was also the intention of this study to source informants from different RTOs rather than doing a case study of one RTO. The first reason for choosing a diverse set of informants is that it adds the perspective of trainers from across the industry, thus providing richer data concerning the industry as a whole and the trainers within it. The second reason for this choice is that many private RTOs are small organisations focused on specific areas of training and may employ only one or two permanent trainers. In order for these small RTOs to be represented, it was deemed necessary to seek information from a cross section of trainers at different research sites in order to obtain an authentic representation of the private VET training community.

Once a list of informants had been obtained through the sampling techniques described above, a decision was made on how many informants were needed. As is this study focuses on an unrepresented and hard to reach community, a small number of purposely selected
individuals were recruited in order to achieve authentic representation of the community (Moustakas, 1994).

In qualitative research there is no priori sample size required for a valid interpretation, only the necessity to show significant engagement with the target phenomenon (Chang et al., 2009). In research which examines specific phenomena, there are many examples of research participants being limited to one or two (Huber & Whelan, 1999), six (Siau & Long, 2005), ten (Wan & Chiou, 2006), and twelve (Kautz, Hansen, & Jacobsen, 2004). Furthermore, recommendations by qualitative researchers include the following recommendations concerning the number of participants needed for an exploratory qualitative study:

- Creswell (1998) up to ten participants is optimal
- Lincoln and Guba (1985) twelve or less is optimal
- Morse (2000) between six and ten are optimal
- Dukes (1984) a sample of between three to ten participants is optimal

Little, Jordens and Phillipson (1998) and Crouch and MacKenzie (2000, 2006) also argue that it is not only reasonable but also advantageous to have a small sample size for exploratory research. Small sample sizes “facilitate the researcher’s close association with the respondents and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in depth inquiry in naturalistic settings” (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 487). In this instance of exploring the phenomena of CPD amongst VET trainers who are a hard to reach
community, it is imperative to focus on the questions to be answered rather than the number of cases studied (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

Based on this previous research and recommendations concerning sample size, twelve participants were selected on a first response basis. However, one participant withdrew due to workload issues, leaving eleven informants. The VET trainers who volunteered to be informants for this study were predominantly female, and more than half had obtained educational qualifications beyond the minimum required (Certificate IB TAE) to be a trainer in the VET sector. Two of the trainers also held teaching registration through the Queensland College of Teachers. All informants held diploma level industry qualifications as a minimum; several had earned bachelors and masters degrees in the areas they teach. A majority of the participants who volunteered for this study also had significant tenure in the private VET sector, with the average tenure being just under ten years. The participants came from nine different RTOs in the Southeast Queensland area, and ten out of eleven RTOs provide both classroom and workplace training. An overview of the makeup of the eleven informants who volunteered to participate is presented in Table 3.3.1.

The following section will outline the procedure for collecting data from these participants.
3.3.2 Data collection

Within the qualitative research methodology, Silverman (2011) advises the use of a single method to collect data. Although several data collection methods may be appropriate such as observation, textual analysis, and various interview formats, the desire to collect additional data from separate sources may result in the over collection of data regarding a single phenomenon.

Table 3.3.1 Makeup of study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational qualification above Certificate IV Training and Assessment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*all trainers have a diploma level qualification as their minimum level qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 have 1 or more Diploma level qualifications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 have Bachelor’s Degrees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 have Graduate Certificates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 have Master’s Degrees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in the VET education sector</td>
<td>Least 2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most 15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is also the possibility that a second set of data that has been collected in a separate context (i.e. individual and then focus group interviews) may not represent the same phenomenon. Furthermore, data for exploratory studies are typically collected through interviews with people who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007). Lofland and Lofland (1984) further suggest that interviews advance the validity of findings in social sciences. Therefore interviews were determined to be the most important method of data collection for this research project.

The primary goal of interviewing is to provide insight into people’s experiences within a social context where the interviews specifically target the participants’ perceptions (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Although interviews will provide indirect information and rely on the participants’ memory, this type of information cannot be observed or recorded by other means, as the collection of data focuses directly on the participants’ experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interview strategies used in qualitative research involve conducting a structured or unstructured interview consisting of open ended questions with individuals or groups.

It was immediately determined that, due to the nature of competition in the VET industry between private providers and the workload/time issues of the participants, a focus group would not be practical. Although a focus
group could provide viable data for this study, the potential for inclusion of informants from different RTOs competing for the same industry business was high, given the sampling technique used. Having business competitors in a focus group is not likely to produce relevant or reliable data for this study. A more appropriate strategy for this study was to conduct interviews of individuals, since such interviews are more conductive to elicitation of the true insights and the feelings of the participants and offer the researcher the most control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2003; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Semi-structured rather than unstructured interview questions were chosen in an effort to base interview discussion on previously published literature concerning trainers’ skills. Thus, participants were specifically asked to discuss the importance of the nine skills on the Mitchell and Ward (2010) skills list. Once the importance of these skills was verified, the interviewer could then dig deeper into CPD issues with respect to these skills. Semi-structured interviews also require close personal interaction between the participants and the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and allow the trainers an opportunity to tell their stories within a particular context. In an effort to allow trainers’ stories to unfold naturally there was no set of predetermined questions that were asked of each participant, however the interviewer was prepared with a set of potential questions (see Appendix 3; Stage 2) in case the interviewee needed prompting. Once trainers engaged with the skills list and were asked to describe how they obtained the skills stories concerning the skills took on a natural and similar flow during each interview.
Interviews were conducted in May and June 2013. In order to preserve the participants’ privacy, all interviews were conducted away from their immediate worksites. Arrangements were made to use a private boardroom on the Gold Coast, but if this location was not convenient for the participants they were able to choose a more convenient one. The interviews began with several prompted questions as outlined in Chapter 2, but then were allowed to unfold as the participant related CPD experiences. The interviews were originally scheduled for two hours, but, with the exception of one interview, lasted an average of an hour and a half. Details of the interview process can be viewed in Appendix 3. All interviews were audio recorded, which is an “increasingly important part of qualitative research” as recorded interviews offer a highly reliable record of events (Silverman, 2011, p. 58).

The interview process typically went as planned, with several notable exceptions. As mentioned previously one of the initial twelve volunteers withdrew at short notice and could not be replaced. Seven of the volunteers came to the boardroom provided; the remainder wanted the researcher to come to their workplace. In order to ensure the privacy of the volunteers, however, the remainder of the interviews took place in restaurants. Before these interviews began, restaurant staff was informed and permission to do the interviews there was obtained. Interviews were not scheduled during busy times of the day for the restaurants, and only one interview was briefly interrupted by a colleague of the interview participant. The restaurant setting did compromise the quality of one of
the recordings; however, the recording was transcribed by a third party and reviewed by the participant for accuracy. The next section of this chapter describes how the data collected from the interviews was analysed.

3.3.3 Data analysis

This section describes the process of organising and sorting the data collected through the interview method via coding. The coding process used for this study consisted of 1) compiling a list of defined codes based on themes apparent in the text; and 2) reviewing the text to determine when/where a specific theme was present (Hoon, 2013; Hruschka et al., 2004). Through the coding process data was broken down into logically connected sets of data to reveal themes or patterns. Coding continued throughout the project as new categories were recognised (or deleted). Coding was also revisited as the development of categories unfolded (Richards, 2005). Once categories were determined, data segments in the category could be analysed. The remainder of this section explains how the data was treated for analysis, how the analysis progressed, and the rigor involved in the process.

3.3.3.1 Data treatment

At the end of the interview process the audio recorded interviews were transcribed by a third party, and then reviewed by the researcher to determine whether they provided adequate data to determine consistencies concerning the CPD of VET trainers in the private VET
sector. This initial review of the data revealed a great deal of consistency between the trainers’ stories in the areas discussed, and therefore that little, if anything, would be gained by conducting additional interviews. The data was also checked against the inclusion criteria and the interview of Trainer 4 was excluded as this trainer did not meet the criteria for tenure in the VET industry. This left a total of ten interviews to be analysed.

The raw interview data in the form of interview transcripts was imported into NVivo to assist analysis. NVivo is a software program that allows the researcher to analyse data such as interviews according to the researcher’s categories. NVivo may also be used for the unrestricted coding of data; however the researcher chose to do manual coding based on a set of a priori codes, leading to the identification of emergent codes. Manual coding is more time consuming, but helps to ensure that all the coding has a purpose that relates it directly back to the research question (Richards, 2005). The following section explains how the codes were identified and how the data was analysed.

3.3.3.2 Analysis process

Once each informant’s audio interview was transcribed, a copy of the transcript was sent to the informant so the informant could check the transcription for accuracy (informant validation). None of the informants made changes to their interview transcripts. Thus, with the informants’ validations of the transcripts complete, the researcher uploaded the
transcripts into NVivo and began analysing the raw data with the following set of a priori codes:

1. Generic skills
2. Learning theories and learning styles
3. Foundation learning theories
4. Foundation assessment skills
5. Advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills
6. Course organisation and student management
7. Commercial skills
8. Educational research

The reason for selecting these codes was that each trainer was asked to discuss these specific skills, which have been previously identified in the VET literature regarding VET trainers’ skills, knowledge and capabilities. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume that, as these topics were discussed, common themes concerning VET trainers’ skills and their CPD experiences would surface. A text search was also done in NVivo to locate and gather logically connected information. Initially the skills labelled learning theories and learning styles were separate codes, however it became obvious from the data that the trainers did not look at these skills separately, particularly since visual, aural, read/write and kinaesthetic (VARK) learning (as detailed in the learning styles skill in Appendix 1), is typically viewed as a learning theory. Thus, these two a priori codes were combined for the purposes of analysis.
Each interview transcript was then systematically explored and coded according to the a priori codes. This involved locating pieces of interview text and linking them back to the codes to create sets of data. Data sets that developed from the informant’s discussion of these skills and their importance to doing the job of a VET Trainer led to the identification of emergent trends concerning how and when these skills were learned. To reflect these new themes, the emergent codes workplace learning and academic learning (which includes all structured learning such as courses, seminars, and workshops) were added and a similar systematic linking of text to these codes began.

As the analysis continued, some common barriers to the trainers’ CPD started to emerge as important, and time, availability and support were added to the coding. As themes were developing, additional text searches were also conducted with NVIVO to locate similar conceptual elements. This included searching for key words such as networking, mentoring and workshops within the data set coded under workplace learning, and then again under academic learning. Finally, the code experiences was added to capture some of the more in depth thoughts and feelings of the VET trainers concerning their CPD. At this point, no new themes relevant to the research questions were identified in the text. The fourteen codes used, eight a priori codes and six emergent codes, are presented in Table 3.3.3.2.
Table 3.3.3.2 Coding for data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review of interview data to determine saturation and themes for coding</th>
<th>a priori codes</th>
<th>emergent codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generic skills</td>
<td>Workplace learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning theories and styles</td>
<td>Academic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation learning theories</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundation assessment skills</td>
<td>Availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course organisation and student management</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section of this chapter discusses how trustworthiness was achieved throughout the research process.

3.3.3.3 Trustworthiness

Whilst traditional (quantitative) research is normally evaluated based on constructs of validity and reliability (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), due to the differing nature of qualitative and quantitative methodologies it is
“erroneous to apply the same criteria of worthiness or merit” (Krefting, 1991, p. 214). Thus, alternative evaluation models or frameworks for ensuring rigor in qualitative studies have been developed. One prominent example often cited in the literature (Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004), is Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1998) who argue that research based in qualitative methodology should be assessed on the basis of the trustworthiness of the research.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1998) the trustworthiness of qualitative research is established through determining credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility in qualitative research recognises the importance of using appropriate procedures in the data collection and analysis to ensure that the study explores or tests what was actually intended to be explored. Furthermore, the questions being explored should be linked to similar previous research projects (Shenton, 2004). In this study the issue of credibility has been addressed through 1) the adoption of well-established research methods, 2) triangulating site sources, 3) tactics which help to ensure informant honesty, and 4) member checks. As mentioned previously, interviewing is the main method used for collecting qualitative research data (Silverman, 2011). This study has also incorporated the use of a priori codes based on previous research reports completed in the VET industry for analysing data.

Site triangulation has been achieved through the inclusion of trainers from nine different RTOs (Barbour, 2001; Shenton, 2004). The emergence of similar findings from trainers working in different RTOs gives the
findings greater credibility with respect to their relevance to the VET community rather than to a particular institution. Similar individual viewpoints across informants provide rich data concerning the needs and attitudes of the informants (Guion, 2002). Individuals participating in the study did so with full consent and understanding of what the research project was about. They freely agreed to give information, and had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. These measures, as well as the assurance of privacy, increase the honesty levels of the informants (Shenton, 2004). Finally, what Guba and Lincoln (1998) term “member checks” were used to assure the accuracy of the data being analysed. Member checks for data accuracy were carried out by having the informants review their transcripts for authenticity prior to their inclusion for analysis.

The issue of trustworthiness with respect to transferability in qualitative research considers the application of studies to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Although transferability is not the intended goal of this research, nor is qualitative research generally thought to be applicable to a wider population or situation due to its context-specific nature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Patton, 2002), some researchers believe the transferability of a qualitative study to others in a similar context is up to the reader (Bassey, 1981; Firestone, 1993; Guba, 1981; Stake, 1994). Stake (1994) argues that, although each study is unique, the participants are part of a wider community of likeminded individuals who may relate this situation to their own situations, even though the situations are not identical. Claims
of transferability may be considered plausible in qualitative research if the following criteria are presented to the reader (Shenton, 2004, p. 70):

1. The number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based.
2. Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data (inclusion criteria).
3. The number of participants involved.
4. The data collection method that was employed.
5. The number and length of the data collection sessions.
6. The time period over which the data was collected.

With this in mind, the researcher has provided information on all the above listed points concerning the context surrounding the studies informants. Thus, it is not impossible that VET trainers and/or researchers outside this study may identify with the context and findings described in this study, making it plausible for this study and its research design to be viewed as pertinent to other studies.

Dependability in qualitative research requires that a detailed account of the process of design and development of the study be provided by the researcher. Basically, dependability in qualitative research turns on whether the study can be replicated (Shenton, 2004), and whether the findings are dependable and consistent with the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is not expected that replication of a qualitative study would yield the same results (Shenton, 2004), just that the study could
reasonably be replicated. Dependability is also enhanced by using verbatim accounts of what informants say (Silverman, 2011; Thomas, 2006). In order to address the dependability issue, the researcher has provided detailed information concerning the research design and has made use of multiple direct quotes from the informants.

Finally, the confirmability of the research study is first addressed by the researcher’s explaining the reasons for the approach that has been taken, and, once again, by providing an in-depth methodological description which allows the reader to determine the integrity of the research results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Shenton, 2004). Second, the limitations of this study’s methods are discussed below in Section 3.4. Thus, the researcher has taken steps throughout the study to document and provide an audit trail of the choices that have been made concerning all aspects of this research study, from choosing parent disciplines in which to situate the research, to collecting data through interviews, to writing up the findings.

The next section of this chapter outlines how ethical issues were resolved.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Potential ethical risks were flagged for this project which included the safety of the participants and the researcher during interviews, the privacy and confidentiality of the RTOs and participants, autonomy of the participants, and the security of data. There are numerous stakeholders involved in this study, including the University of Newcastle, the RTOs, the direct participants of the study, and the wider VET community. In an
effort to manage the collection of the data and maintain the utmost integrity and respect for all parties, all the individuals directly involved in the study provided informed consent and knew exactly what the research was for and why it is being done. As part of informed consent, the participants were made aware of and provided with written information concerning the following common concerns (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012):

1. A clear depiction of their role within the research.
2. Confirmation they could withdraw from the research at any time without explanation or obligation.
3. Assurance they were at liberty to refuse to answer any line of inquiry throughout the research.
4. Confidentiality and anonymity was assured by removing all identifying information removed from transcriptions, and keeping transcriptions anonymous by coding with numbers rather than names.
5. Assurance of data security through passwords and limited access.

The participants signed an approved consent form (Appendix 4) agreeing to the use of their information in a thesis and/or other publications resulting from this study. Transcripts of the interviews will be kept in university storage for five years.
3.5 Limitations

This research was subject to the inherent limitations associated with qualitative research: the data collected and analysed is bounded by the specific context of the study and will only directly reflect the circumstances of the VET trainers directly involved in the research. One of the basic assumptions of qualitative research is that the research data is unique to the participants and the context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Therefore, whilst the usefulness of the study may assist in the further exploration of CPD, particularly that of VET trainers and may be transferable to other workplace situations, it will not provide grounding for general theory. It only describes this particular context in depth.

Snowball sampling presents inherent challenges. It does not produce a random sample and is therefore subject to bias (Kaplan, Korf, & Sterk, 1987). This makes the results unlikely to provide valid generalisations concerning the population of VET Trainers. In addition, relying on networked referrals might exclude individuals who have small social networks (Van Meter, 1990).

A final limitation is the sample size. This research project analyses the qualification and skill development requirements of VET trainers at a number of RTOs in the Southeast region of Queensland in Australia. The group chosen consists of permanently employed VET trainers, with causal and contract teachers excluded. Casual and contract workers do, however,
make up a substantial part of the VET workforce (Guthrie, 2010c; Productivity Commission, 2011).

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the paradigmatic contexts in which this research lies and described the research process that was used to identify participants and collect and analyse data. Since it is the focus and intent of this research study to elicit the informants’ personal views concerning their CPD needs, a constructivist inquiry paradigm was chosen. The research approach for this study adopted an exploratory approach since exploratory research attempts to discover information that is not readily available or understood by stakeholders and is a valuable tool to determine the current conditions of the informants. As a less structured and flexible methodology was needed with which to explore the phenomenon of VET trainers’ CPD, a qualitative methodology was determined to be suitable. Thus, this research study was undertaken through an exploratory qualitative research framework.

When using a qualitative methodology, the selection of key informants is purposeful rather than random. Because there is little information available concerning the population of VET trainers, and no available sampling frame for this study, snowball sampling was used to reach volunteer informants in the VET training community.

The study was limited to the SE section of Queensland, and a criterion sampling process was used. This ensured the informants that were
identified from the snowball sample were individuals who have similar experiences with CPD in the private VET sector. Invitations were sent to RTO managers as per the snowball process, and the first trainers to respond back to the researcher were chosen to be contacted for interviews.

In-depth interviews were chosen because they are more conductive to elicitation of the true insights and the feelings of the participants and offer the researcher the most control over the line of questioning. Interviews were completed as scheduled and the interviews from ten informants were included for data analysis.

Data was analysed taking an interpretational approach to coding so the researcher was able to consider the meaning of the information in order to develop new ideas about the data. NVivo was also used to assist with analysing the data and building useable data sets. Coding began with a priori codes, and emergent codes were added as they were revealed by the data.

Trustworthiness of the study was achieved through addressing the concepts of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. In this study the issue of credibility has been addressed through 1) the adoption of well-established research methods, 2) triangulating site sources, 3) tactics which help to ensure informant honesty, and 4) member checks. Dependability and confirmability have been addressed through the provision of a detained research design. Although transferability has been
addressed as one of the aspects of trustworthiness, this study does not make a transferability claim.

This research was subject to the inherent limitations associated with qualitative research: the data collected and analysed will only directly reflect the circumstances of the VET trainers directly involved in the research. In an effort to manage the collection of the data and maintain the utmost integrity and respect concerning all parties, all the individuals directly involved in the study gave informed consent to participate. Other ethical considerations, including participant privacy and data security, were also addressed.

The next Chapter will present the findings of the study.
Chapter 4
Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 identified gaps in the CPD literature concerning the perspectives of vocational education and training (VET) trainers’ CPD experiences. As discussed in Chapter 2, the changing nature of work in the Australian VET industry and the consequent changes in the developmental needs of trainers currently pose significant challenges for all industry stakeholders. Despite these challenges, the voice of the trainers in the private VET sector remains largely ignored. This chapter seeks to capture and articulate their perspectives.

Section 4.2 describes the setting of the study. The data analysis is presented in two sections. Section 4.3 explores the role of VET trainers in the private sector and their formal qualifications and identifies the skills required in their current positions. The main findings from systematic analysis of the data are that 1) the role of the trainer in the private VET sector has evolved to include aspects of audit compliance, administration, and sales, 2) the percentage of VET trainers in the private sector with educational qualifications beyond the Certificate IV Training and Assessment is higher amongst these informants than has been previously reported, and 3) that trainers unanimously agree the list of skills in
Appendix 1, as determined by Mitchell and Ward (2010) reflect the workplace skills required in their current roles as trainers.

Section 4.4 explores how trainers engage in CPD opportunities and the barriers they have to overcome in order to do so. The main findings in this section are 1) that the workplace tasks expected of VET trainers in the private sector are what prompts their engagement in CPD activities; 2) this need for CPD is most often filled by activities such as informal mentoring and critical reflection; and 3) in addition to recognised barriers to CPD, such as time and workload, trainers identified unavailability of appropriate activities, lack of networking opportunities, and lack of support by VET stakeholders as barriers to their participation in CPD.

4.2 The setting

Public and private training organisations in the Australian VET sector have recently been facing significant challenges linked to events such as the shift of control from the states to the federal government (DEEWR, March 2011). This has resulted in a restructuring of the audit requirements for the VET sector, through the replacement of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) with the National VET Regulator (NVR) Standards and has also resulted in the elimination of many state and federal monetary training incentives for training in the workplace. Because organisations in the VET sector that deliver nationally recognised vocational training are now competing for fewer resources in a more heavily regulated audit environment, volatility in the VET sector is
inevitable. Although it is too soon to quantify the many ways in which this volatility may come to fruition, what is known is that the Queensland Government has decided to close half of the six public TAFE campuses in the Gold Coast Region and ten out of fifteen Brisbane area campuses. (Cournoyer, November, 2012; "Queensland Skills and Training Taskforce Final Report," 2012). The researcher has also observed several private RTOs on the Gold Coast in SE Queensland close or severely downsize in the last eight months (prior to April 2013).

The reduction in the number of VET educational institutions in the SE Queensland VET sector has significant implications for trainers employed in the industry as they become displaced. As trainers become displaced from the closures of VET institutes and seek new placements as trainers, competition for jobs will likely become more intense and CPD will likely play a paramount role in the effort trainers make to enhance their capabilities and remain competitive in their local job market.

Finally, because these dramatic changes in the VET sector require training providers to do more with less, there is a growing premise amongst VET stakeholders that VET trainers are under-skilled for their current roles and responsibilities (Clayton, Harding, Toze, & Harris, April 2011; Guthrie, 2010a, 2010b; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, 2006; Smith & Grace, 2011; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). This research project explores the private VET sector trainers’ perceptions of the qualifications and skills needed for their workplaces and their experiences with obtaining these skills through CPD activities.
4.3 Importance of VET trainers’ workplace roles, qualifications, and skills

This part of the data analysis explores the current role of VET trainers in the private sector, their formal qualifications, and their perceptions of the skills required in their current roles as trainers.

The main findings in this section are that 1) the role of the trainer in the private VET sector has evolved to take on tasks beyond the traditional trainer role, 2) the percentage of VET trainers in the private sector with higher educational qualifications is higher amongst these informants than in groups previously studied, and 3) trainers unanimously agree that the list of nine skills originally derived by Mitchell and Ward (2010) discussed during their interviews reflects the workplace skills they require in their current roles as trainers, and identify skills where advanced level learning CPD activities are needed.

4.3.1 Role of the VET trainer in the private sector

A general theme communicated by trainers in the private sector is that they have job descriptions which include various responsibilities that extend well beyond the immediate tasks of facilitation and assessment. The data suggests trainers have vast and varied work roles within the private sector which can be envisioned through the following statements of the informants:

Trainer 1: “...The VET sector doesn’t have just one sort of job role anymore, there’s the administration functions, there’s the sales functions, there’s the
training, there’s the educational design, there’s the quality side, so I think it’s a mix...for a new start up RTO obviously I’m going to have to go out there and sell our RTO as well as do training and everything on top of it…”

Trainer 3: “…I’ve worked in three private RTOs since I left TAFE; they all varied in different ways in the way they delivered and the type of students they had...I’ve been a Trainer... I worked in the administration section in a private RTO where I got the whole organisation through audit; and instructional design I did all the designing in setting up of their courses and the moderation, and all that sort of things you had to do…”

Trainer 6: “…I’m also responsible for areas such as quality control, and doing risk analysis [compliance] on qualifications…”

Trainer 7: “…My greatest challenge as a small RTO is the amount of regulation and compliance that we are obliged to meet, just feels like its growing all the time…”

Trainer 9: “…I don’t know if you noticed the three screens on my desk, it looks mission control... I’m covering everything at the moment so I’m doing the job of probably about four people at this point…”

Trainer 10: “…so at the moment I’m probably dealing with close to 100 students... 60 to 70 are all out there on their own and email me when they get home at night and stuff like that... things change so dramatically and so quickly at the moment…”

The findings of this study show that the traditional role of these VET trainers as being a facilitator and assessor has expanded, probably because of the current conditions in the VET system described earlier in this chapter. These private sector trainers appear to take a big picture
approach to their roles in the VET sector rather than maintaining a narrower focus on ensuring their students’ learning.

4.3.2 Qualifications of the VET trainer in the private sector

The findings discussed in this section address research question 1: What qualifications/skills do VET trainers perceive they need in order to maintain their ability to work effectively in the private VET sector? Based on previous literature concerning VET trainers’ lack of formal qualifications, particularly in education, informants were asked about the type of training provision they were currently delivering in, the qualifications they have and were currently completing, and their tenure in the VET industry. Responses are summarized below in Table 4.3.2.

Table 4.3.2 Participant qualifications and tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training provision</th>
<th>Industry qualifications</th>
<th>Educational qualification(s)</th>
<th>Tenure as a VET trainer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainer 1</td>
<td>Diploma of Management</td>
<td>• Graduate diploma in education</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in a combination of classroom and worksite training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer 2</td>
<td>• Cert IV Finance</td>
<td>• Master of education and training</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in a combination of classroom and worksite training</td>
<td>• Cert IV Human Resource Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Involved in a combination of classroom and worksite training</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master of Business</td>
<td>Teachers certificate from NSW Education Department</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Certificate III in business</td>
<td>Master of adult &amp; vocational education</td>
<td>11 years VET sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of Management</td>
<td>Master of education</td>
<td>12 years university sector (concurrent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor of Business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Certificate in TESOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Certificate in Research Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Certificate IV Financial services (bookkeeping)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 ½ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of business management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate certificate in LLN (current enrolment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor of Commerce</td>
<td>Graduate diploma in further education and training</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainer</td>
<td>Involved in</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Trainer 8 | classroom and worksite training | 3 years | • Degree in Homeopathy  
• Bachelor of social science (honours in counselling)  
• Currently doing a graduate certificate in dispute resolution | |
| Trainer 9 | a combination of classroom and worksite training | 2 ½ years | • Cert IV Frontline management  
• Diploma of management  
• Advanced diploma in children’s services | |
| Trainer 10 | a combination of classroom and worksite training | 11 years | • Diploma in children services  
• Bachelor of education in early childhood | • Graduate diploma in learning Support |
| Trainer 11 | a combination of classroom and worksite training | 10 years | • Diploma in IT  
• Diploma in business management | |
As mentioned in the previous chapter, eleven VET trainers in the private sector volunteered to become informants concerning their CPD experiences, and the data from ten trainers was used for this analysis. All participants in the study met the participant inclusion criteria which were 1) having completed the Certificate IV in Training and Education (TAE) qualification, 2) being permanently employed by a private RTO, and 3) having worked in the VET sector for a minimum of two years. This selection criterion ensured that experienced trainers who would be actively involved in seeking advanced level CPD opportunities were interviewed.

4.3.3 VET trainers’ perspectives on the skills needed in their industry

The findings of this section further explore research question 1. The discussion concerning trainers’ skills was informed by the nine skills identified and defined by Mitchell and Ward (2010) (Appendix 1/Figure 2.4), which were discussed at length with each trainer during their interview. When asked whether the list of skills adequately represented the skills needed to be a trainer in the private VET sector, all trainers agreed that it was. For example, Trainer 3 believed the list “covered everything,” despite not being currently actively engaged with each skill.

Informants indicated they were not contemplating seeking additional learning opportunities in generic skills. Although they all agreed that generic skills were very important, Trainer 3 says:

“…if you’re missing out on one of them, well you’re in deep trouble…”
As experienced trainers, however, they believed they already had these skills, and several trainers mentioned that they brought generic skills with them from previous work experience in other industries. Trainer 6 and Trainer 9 made the following comments concerning how they believed they had learned generic skills before coming to the VET sector as trainers:

Trainer 6: “…Okay, generic skills. Negotiation skills, communication skills, decision making and critical thinking and ethical standards; I think that’s developed not just from the training sector, I think that’s just years of working in various industries in various roles…”

Trainer 9: “…my knowledge of the industry and everything really helped me with my skills to be able to do this job, so really… it helped me by having the good background…they [generic skills] really just transition straight over…”

The interviewees made similar comments concerning learning theories/styles skills: none of them was seeking development in this area, and some observed that the skill had come through some basic level theory workshops and workplace experience:

Trainer 6“…I definitely don’t think that they’re [learning theories] taught well enough through TAE in that lower end, I think has come through experience…”

When discussing the area of foundation learning skills, all trainers believed this skill took significant time to develop. Trainer 7 says that:

“…being good at facilitating groups didn’t come for many years…”

And Trainer 5 had already developed this skill through:
Data analysis also showed similar results for foundation assessment skills where trainers perceived they already had learned these skills through experience. Trainer 7 describes their perception of foundation assessment skills as being critical on two levels 1) in making a justifiable judgement about your trainee’s competency, and 2) to pass a government audit:

“...this one is critical to pass an audit, I believe it’s interesting as you go through audits, all they really care about is your assessments, and they drill down to finite details so in the industry I do think PD spent in that area is really critical because you know you can spend a lot of time on developing your [facilitation] resources and your platform and the right learning management system and everything like that and your training can look good and look professional, but at the end of the day the most important thing is the assessment and I can understand why because obviously what we’re doing is we’re ticking a box to say that a person is competent in this skill set and its recognised from all around Australia, so it’s not what you taught them, it’s not the handouts that you gave them, it’s not the online management platform that they had access to, it’s what proof did they provide to you that they can actually demonstrate that skill set on multiple occasions faced with a number of different scenarios, so if you haven’t got the right assessment instrument, you can’t really make that judgement...”

Trainer 3 found the skill of assessing to be the hardest to implement as assessments continually have to be adjusted for individual workplaces:

“...setting assessment is probably one of the biggest and hardest thing to do properly I think, teaching was the easy bit. Getting the assessments right for the students is more than just learning...especially in the workplace; the assessments
in the workplace really have to be based on that workplace, so it means you’ve got to adjust every assessment slightly for the workplace…”

Trainer 4 further indicates that not only does the assessment have to be adjusted for individuals and workplaces, but individual RTOs have different systems and processes for administering assessments:

“…I think there’s a lot of misconception about how that [assessment] should be carried out and that’s why when you can talk to 10 different RTOs, they’ll have 10 different ways of delivering an RPL or delivering an assessment…”

Most trainers (with the exception of two who do not currently do workplace training) considered workplace skills to be an extension of workplace training and the ability to adapt learning and assessment resources. The premise was that if you could not manage the relationship with workplace managers and adapt the training programs for various situations, training programs would ultimately fail. Trainer 6 went on to say that no processes or guidelines were able to be identified to assist in developing commercial skills:

“…I don’t think that we’re taught that anywhere, I think that comes just from basically working in industry and fumbling your way through and figuring out whether it’s working or not with your stakeholders because there’s no clear guidelines on how you should go about it from a VET sector point of view, there’s no guidelines on the process that you should be following for industry consultation and for developing relationships with high end customers and adapting training packages for particular industries…I think that comes with experience and if you’re lucky enough to be taught [about training packages] by
someone that knows what they’re talking about. Failing that, you’re basically swinging in the breeze with that side of it...”

Overall, it is difficult to determine any potential skill development needs or trends based on commercial skills since trainers in the private sector do not really differentiate this skill from the skills previously discussed, which included workplace training and adapting training resources. For example Trainer 5 reports confidence in this area of commercial skills because consultation with industry facilitated adaptation of materials and teaching practices:

“...Yes I am confident in these skills as I have worked closely with a company that I consult with and offer personalised training materials/teaching in the workplace...”

With respect to educational research skills, trainers all agreed that whilst being able to research was important, the research and reading they are doing is related to the industry they are training in (i.e. childcare/management etc.) rather than to broader VET sector issues. Few trainers indicated that they collected primary data, but some were the users of data from internally collected student surveys. So, whilst it appears trainers do use secondary data, they do not typically use it to advance their understanding of VET educational issues. For instance, Trainer 3 talked about doing research in order to obtain information on specific skills from industry websites and emails:

“...I’m mainly in the business field and because I’m interested in e-learning and the different sorts of learning and which is the best way to go for the institute I’m
with now, I do a lot of research on what people are saying on Linked In...I’m always collecting data, especially in relation to business in improving small business skills in the economy and I get that from two major websites that I have that send me messages every day actually and another one...there’s three I use that send information every day...”

Trainer 8 and Trainer 9 also confirmed that they got newsletters from industry associations in the areas where they were actively teaching:

Trainer 8“...I get newsletters from the American Psychological Association and also from the Australian Counsellors Association. Sometimes I’ll generally be doing research on a particular topic that the students are curious about or have to look at themselves, so it’s usually really tied into what I’m teaching...”

Trainer 9“...just from industry...we get one [newsletter] from the Department of Education that covers Children Services, then we also get magazines that come from the business sector... so they’re all from the particular industry that we’re looking at..”

When trainers identified VET sector related publications, they generally found them to be too bureaucratic or not to provide information useful to the private VET sector. Trainer 3 did not tend to read VET publications because they were too bureaucratic and complicated:

“...I’m not into bureaucracy but that’s the problem with VET at the moment, too much bureaucracy. Apparently there’s nobody on that thing [quality council] that’s really a teacher...I find they’re a bit too complicated to read...”

Trainer 6 was the only trainer who indicated having specifically read about VET sector issues:
“...Yes, I get their [NCVER] newsletter every week via the internet and I read a lot of their studies and research that they do. There’s another organisation AEI, which is to do with the CRICOS sector, which I’m now subscribing to so that I can start getting my head around what research is being done there, and also through the NCVER. It’s the same with LLN; I’m getting a lot of stuff about the LLN programs and stuff through them now as well…”

Trainer 6 goes on to say there does not seem to be enough data available on the VET sector issues concerning private RTOs:

“...I don’t think there’s enough educational research in the VET sector that can be used specifically for RTOs. I think it’s really difficult to find a collection of data and you know we touched on this before, it’s about there’s no networking. There’s no entity where RTOs collaborate so that they can analyse a collective amount of data across the spectrum of the VET system, like you’ll get a bit from this section or you might get a bit from that section and then you’ve got to digest and try and implement it in such a way or utilise that data to try and apply it to a specific industry that you might be working in. I think as a sector as a whole, we need to have something where people from the various industries within the VET sector can come together and start correlating...because that’s where you need to get the analysis like student feedback, it should be a national thing where they can say okay there’s been 10,000 students that have been surveyed over the last 12 months in this industry, this industry, this industry and this industry and this is where the gaps are, so then as a collective you can then start producing the required training material to meet the needs of what’s been missed in the sector...”

Trainer 6’s comments concerning the unavailability of relevant data were also supported by Trainer 5. Trainer 5 reported not finding the available VET related publications useful because the publications do not provide
information that is practical for current job needs, specifically mentioning audit requirements and the growth of the RTO:

“...I find them useless, I found when I was studying [at university] the journals were great, but there very policy, academic and teaching practice focused, not day to day focused on what you want to know...for example I know how to teach, I don't care about policy as its years away. I want to know the latest information on business practice, funding, and real life problems, so I can use it to pass an audit or grow the RTO...”

The final skills discussed were those where trainers identified a need for advanced learning opportunities: in the areas of recognition of prior learning (RPL), advanced learning and assessment, and course organisation and management. The data shows that trainers are often taking a self-taught trial and error approach to their learning in these areas. For example, Trainer 10 describes such a process with respect to facilitating RPL assessment:

“...Self-taught, you know look at the unit, look at the competency, look at the essential skills and knowledge that you know the students have to have, so it was basic self-taught...”

And Trainer 3 discusses a “trial and error” approach to learning how to use an LMS and facilitating advanced learning and assessment within the VET sector:

“...Trial and error, and that’s what happens too many times, it is trial and error on how you’re doing it...”
Trainer 7 further concedes that trial and error learning is likely commonplace in advanced learning and assessment skills:

“...people who have got experience with e-learning, distance learning, offshore learning and online assessment would have already have learnt a lot through trial and error...”

Trainer 9 also talks about a trial and error learning approach to meeting course organisation requirements after taking up the task of writing assessments and then having the finished assessment reviewed by other people in the organisation:

“...Really, to start off, it was trial and error because it was the first time that I’d done so it was having people check over my work to make sure that it was done, taking on board what they told me on how to fix things because they were the experienced people on how to do it...but I haven’t had any outside training on that, it’s just been all internal...”

Trainer 7, on the other hand, talks about a self-learning approach to course organisation and student management through reading the government documents and sorting through the details to assure compliance with the requirements of the training packages:

“...by documents that are put together by the Government, you know some of the training packages are really quite detailed now which is quite good, the critical aspects as well as the knowledge and I’ve learnt... when you have a look at a new training package they’ve made the assessment criteria so much stricter now and its very detailed in the critical aspects and skills and knowledge and if you just read those three areas, you can pretty much design your assessment
around that so all I do is to say...that’s what I do...I design the assessments around the Government documentation…”

Contrary to the above negative accounts from trainers, there was one positive account from Trainer 5, who has extensive experience teaching offshore, online/distance and e-learning, who reported positive CPD activities concerning advanced learning and facilitation skills. However, none of the activities was offered by VET sector CPD providers:

“…working across a number of universities and a number of RTOs has assisted greatly in the development/progression of these skills because of the networking and work experience opportunities made available to me personally… during this time I also attended many university based workshops for staff on using e-learning tools such as: Illuminate, blackboard, yahoo groups, wikis, forums, discussion boards…none of these opportunities were given to me whilst working in the VET industry…”

4.3.4 Discussion

Although it is well documented in the VET literature that various stakeholders in the VET sector believe trainers are under-skilled for their teaching roles and responsibilities, there is little data available to support which skills trainers in the private VET sector might be lacking. Furthermore, any data that is available concerning trainer skills in the VET sector is not similarly organised or defined, and therefore makes comparison problematic for potential users of that data.

Literature supports the evolution of VET trainers roles to include administrative and quality assurance processes to their work roles
(Johnson, 2003), which is consistent with the findings of the present study. Whilst this study confirmed that trainers’ work roles are changing, as is the culture of their workplaces, the previous study did not address the question of what skills trainers needed to remain productive in response to these changes, or how they might attain them.

With the role of the trainer in the private sector being reported by the informants to include active involvement in quality assurance processes (audit) it seems that VET trainers in the private sector are not only the buffers between “student and institution” and “institution and industry” (Takerei, 2010, p. 7), but also have become the buffer between “institution and government.” Takerei (2010) surmises that “the place inhabited by VET educators has become engulfed in a quagmire of standards, qualifications, and skills” (p. 7), and the data collected from this group of informants supports this statement.

One of the reasons for this quagmire could be that there is no accepted national framework used to categorise the skills of VET trainers (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). Australia is not alone in its lack of clarity for vocational trainers, and this issue is currently being addressed by countries such as the UK where a teacher registration process for vocational teachers is being implemented, and in Finland where they are limiting vocational teaching to those who to hold a master’s degree (Seddon, 2008).
As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, attempts have been made to identify and define the overall skills and capabilities needed by VET trainers (Mitchell & Ward, 2010), and attempts have also been made to rank capabilities (M. Harris, Cooper, Ronertson, & Clark, 2010), or present capabilities as a model for progressive career development (IBSA, 2014). Although the identification of a national skills or capability framework is gaining traction in the VET literature, and similar lists of skills/capabilities have been identified with little disagreement amongst stakeholders, including the informants of this study, any attempts to identify skill development needs from the perspective of trainers in the private sector were not found. Therefore, little is known concerning which skills or capabilities these trainers perceive they are lacking, and what types of learning and development activities would make a relative difference to their workplace capabilities. This lack of knowledge and the lack of comparable literature in this area preclude the identification of any trends. What this study offers that has not been previously identified is the VET trainers’ identification of the skills for which they believe advanced learning opportunities are warranted. These learning needs were in the areas of RPL skills, advanced learning and assessment skills, and course organisation and student management.

Current skill capability models, frameworks, or lists of skills also seem problematic in that they are not linked to university lead qualifications, which are further discussed in Section 4.3.2. Considering that none of the informants pursued higher level VET qualifications (i.e. Diploma of VET),
and instead chose university qualifications to advance their training skills, there is some basis for arguing that university qualifications need to be considered in the development of any national VET capability framework model. Although the capability model developed by IBSA (2014) does acknowledge “higher level educational qualifications in adult education” in their framework (which could be referring to university qualifications), there is no indication as to the content of such qualifications or who provides them. More importantly it gives no indication of how these higher level educational qualifications in adult education might align with or enhance any of the advanced VET qualifications listed in the model. It is not known at this time why trainers have avoided the higher VET educational qualifications in favour of the university qualifications, or what if anything about trainers’ workplace roles has prompted their participation in university degrees.

Despite inconsistencies of skill compatibility and educational qualifications between VET sector trainers, categorisation of some sort, particularly a categorisation of skills, is still necessary. Briggs (2005) argues that roles need to be understood for an individual to act professionally, and it is important to place differing perceptions of professionalism within a broader context of what the VET sector will comprise. So, categorisation by some means is essential to addressing the current issues in VET sector. If trainers are not reliably categorised or recognised by the skills they need, it is difficult if not impossible for stakeholders to determine where CPD needs lie, or how they might be
achieved. It is also going to remain difficult to research and build useful databases of information on trainers in the VET sector. So, whilst it is a well-documented trend and finding of this study that trainer roles in the VET sector are continually changing and that skill sets will have to evolve to meet these changes, little empirical evidence is available to determine what is happening concerning trainers skill development in the private sector.

Although there is not enough literature available to determine trends in VET trainers’ qualifications, these findings suggest that higher educational qualifications may be linked to tenure. For example, trainers that possessed educational qualifications above the Cert IV TAE/TAA could be linked to tenure, as the trainers’ having higher education qualifications have a minimum of eleven years’ tenure as compared to those who do not have a higher educational qualification (with the exception of Trainer 11) who have an average of only three years tenure. Furthermore, of those four trainers with an average of three years’ tenure, two trainers have current plans to obtain diploma level educational qualifications. Although this small sample of trainers appears to have obtained higher level qualifications as tenure increases, this may be due to the small sample chosen which included permanent trainers with over two years’ experience. Trainers in other contexts of the private VET sector which have been omitted from this study may not show similar findings.

The data presented in Table 4.3.2 show some consistency with the findings of a study completed by Smith and Grace (2011), which showed the
number of RTOs in the private sector (which they call the “commercial sector”) having trainers with high level industry qualifications (diploma level or above) at 43% compared with the participants of this study having 50%. The literature reviewed indicates that stakeholders typically believe trainers’ qualifications are insufficient for their work roles; however the literature also indicates that because of ongoing stakeholder debate there is no consensus on what qualifications should be required.

Despite these correlations, the findings of this study are not consistent with the literature concerning educational qualifications. This may be because the amount of literature available for comparison is small. For example, Smith and Grace (2011) report that only four of forty-nine (8.2%) private RTOs reported having trainers with a diploma or university degree (or above) in education, whereas five out of ten (50%) of the participants of this study report having graduate diplomas or university degrees in education, and one trainer having a state teaching certificate, showing 60% of participants having educational qualifications above the minimum Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA or TAE).

The findings of the present study also disagree with claims by Mlotkowski & Guthrie (2010) based on 2006 data that “only around one in ten” trainers outside the public VET sector “have a qualification specifically in the field of education or training” (p. 26). The possibility of a developing trend is made more plausible by Mlotkowski & Guthrie’s (2010) claim that the number of VET professionals having higher educational qualifications appears to increase over the years SET studies were conducted. The
present study suggests that they continue to do so. Since two of the eleven informants in this study have the intention of enrolling in higher level educational programs as part of their CPD plan for 2014, this may indicate that as trainers reach certain milestones in tenure they recognise the need for higher level educational qualifications.

The comparison of these findings with previous literature is difficult as both previous studies mentioned are quantitative studies of larger samples, while this is a qualitative study made up of a small sample. Thus, although this study might reflect a trend concerning tenure in relation to undertaking higher educational qualifications, such conclusions need to be made with care since this study is limited to a small sample of trainers in a localised area.

One final discovery which warrants additional research is that, despite the majority consensus concerning the skills list used as being representational, three trainers believed the addition of a skill set that addressed language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) was warranted. This identification of an LLN skill set has support in that the necessity of LLN in education and the workforce is well documented in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) (see: Australian Government Department of Industry, 2013). Furthermore, literature published by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (Skills Australia, 2011) states that, due to the increasing levels of knowledge-based work, higher levels of LLN are needed in the general workforce. Thus, these trainers make a
compelling argument concerning the addition of LLN to the skills list, and this would be worthy of further investigation.

4.3.5 Conclusion

This section of the data analysis has explored three main findings concerning the current role of these study’s participants in the private sector, their formal qualifications, and their perceptions of the skills required in their current roles as trainers. These findings correspond to research question 1. In section 4.3.1 it was found that the role of trainers in the private sector continually expands and becomes more demanding. The expansion of tasks has also moved towards trainers being assigned workplace tasks not typically recognised as part of the training role, such as managing audit compliance requirements. This move into non-traditional tasks makes it difficult to categorise the skills needed to ultimately develop a learning framework for trainers in the VET sector.

Section 4.3.2 explored the formal or academic qualifications of the participants. All trainers who participated in the study have the minimum qualification to train in the VET sector, and the intent of this exploration was to determine whether these trainers had advanced educational qualifications. In contrast to previous research, 60% of the informants of this study did have advanced level educational qualifications. It is possible that this is linked to tenure as longer-tenured employees already had advanced qualifications, where shorter-tenured trainers had this goal on their current development plans.
The third section, 4.3.3, explored the perceptions of these eleven trainers concerning the skills needed in their current work roles. This exploration was based on a list of skills previously determined by Mitchell and Ward (2010) and presented in Appendix 1. Of the nine listed skills, which the trainers unanimously agreed were appropriate, three skills were specifically identified as areas where experienced trainers required additional training. As experienced trainers they perceived no need for additional learning in generic skills, learning styles, foundation learning skills, or most of the foundation assessment skills. They identified three areas in which they needed additional learning: RPL assessment skills, advanced learning and assessment skills, and course organisation and student management. Trainers also identified language literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills as a potentially beneficial addition to the skills list.

It was not possible to determine any skill development needs in commercial skills, as these eleven trainers in the private sector viewed this skill as part of, or a natural extension of, their learning and assessment skills. Discussions in the area of educational research were also inconclusive. Data showed that few of the trainers engaged in primary research, but some were the users of student surveys when available. Educational research was also an area where there seemed to be some disconnect between the reason why the skill was required and the way it was used. It was apparent that, whilst the trainers did use secondary information for research, the research they did was industry related rather than VET sector related. Trainers said they did not read publications
concerning issues in the VET sector because they did not find the content of the publications useful.

This section of the data analysis also suggested some insights concerning the nature of the trainers and how they learn as opposed to what they learn. On the surface they describe self-taught trial and error approaches and processes in their learning. How trainers learn is an important aspect of skill development. Section 4.4 of this chapter considers the learning needs identified in Section 4.3 and delves into the learning and development experiences of VET trainers’ CPD.

4.4 CPD of VET trainers

Section 4.3 of this chapter explored the qualifications and skills trainers perceive they need in order to fulfil the expanding demands of their work roles. This section of the data analysis shifts the focus from identifying the qualifications and skills that VET trainers need to how experienced VET trainers engage in the CPD process to obtain skills and their perceptions of these experiences. The main findings in this section are 1) that the continual evolution of the tasks and skills expected of VET trainers in the private sector is what prompts their engagement in CPD activities, 2) this need to learn new skills is most often filled by CPD activities which include informal mentoring and critical reflection, and 3) in addition to well documented barriers to CPD such as time and workload, trainers also identified specific barriers to their learning in the unavailability of appropriate CPD activities, lack of networking opportunities, and lack of support by VET stakeholders.
4.4.1 What prompts VET trainers to engage in CPD activities?

The findings in this section address research question 2: What prompts VET trainers to engage in learning and development activities? Data showed the learning of new skills by VET trainers is typically prompted by being assigned new and different tasks at work. For instance, Trainer 3 reported quickly having to learn new skills as the RTO suddenly, and without additional training, expanded the job role:

“...yeah, they just threw me in...”

Perceiving the need for a specific set of new skills to complete this newly assigned task, the trainer had to quickly figure out how to complete the task within organisational and legislative guidelines. Trainer 1 confirms that ongoing development in the work role is based on self-discovery and the application of prior experiences to new tasks:

“...A lot of it [learning] from the school of hard knocks, what worked and what didn’t work. A lot of it came back from pulling skills that you used in different job roles such as management careers...”

4.4.2 VET Trainers’ learning needs

Having trainers identify their personal training needs or skill gaps is a key focal point of this study. If these needs can be identified, actions can be taken by all stakeholders to assist trainers in filling specifically identified skill gaps. The findings in this section address research question 3: VET Trainers’ learning needs and development activities.
The first immediate learning need that became apparent in Section 4.3 when trainers were discussing their workplace skills was that whilst they consider themselves competent with the various forms of foundation assessment skills described by Mitchell and Ward (2010), RPL was a specific area where more training opportunities at an advanced level were needed. Trainer 5 reports having substantial experience with RPL processes, but indicated willingness to undertake more development in this area if CPD activities that addressed RPL at an advanced level were offered:

“…it’s [RPL] only offered at a basic level, which I already have the skills in. However, if RPL workshops are offered that I believe are at my level, I would definitely attend…”

Trainer 9 similarly indicates confidence with respect to RPL, but also willingness to improve in this skill:

“…even though I know what I’m doing, I will always look for things to enhance that learning so if there is something else that comes out to do with RPL, to do with writing, to do with anything related, I will look for a conference or something to go and do…”

The availability of learning activities at an advanced level was also a concern of Trainer 6, who, like with Trainer 5 found the CPD available concerning RPL too basic or generic:

“…I went to an RPL breakfast conducted by [name removed] and it was supposed to be about the whole RPL process. I got there and it really didn’t tell me anything that you can’t get online, so for me that wasn’t what I wanted to
learn. I thought I was going there to find out exactly the correct way to conduct an RPL to make sure that you’re compliant, and got none of it. So I think a lot of the workshops are too generalised, I think there need to be more...and they need to be more practical. Like if it’s going to be about RPL, then get everybody in the room to do something related to the RPL so you know if you’re grasping what’s being taught, so I think they need to be a little bit more practical rather than theory...”

The second area where trainers identified a need for skill development in Section 4.3 was in advanced learning and assessment skills. When discussing the development of these skills, Trainer 2, who currently facilitates a great deal of advanced learning and assessment, says that participation in CPD activities in advanced learning and assessment skills is a good idea for all trainers, as it is the way of the future:

“...I think it’s a good idea because I think in the future it’s going to be just that. There will be no face to face apart from the higher education which is university...”

And even though Trainer 7’s RTO is not currently involved in advanced learning and assessment, or in the process of implementing a LMS to accommodate advanced learning and assessment processes, this trainer speaks of being online in the future as though it is inevitable:

“...We haven’t gone online yet but our thinking is, when we go online we want to replicate what we currently do face to face because it works well...”

The overall consensus concerning advanced learning and assessment skills is that all trainers except one will eventually seek CPD activities in
this area; however Trainer 1 also concedes inability to find any appropriate CPD activities in this skills area:

“...right now everybody’s just screaming for this and it doesn't exist…”

The third area where training needs were identified was course organisation and management. For example, Trainer 5, who does the course organisation, student management, and most of the training for an RTO, indicated confidence in this area but stated that there is always room for improvement. This trainer felt that trainers need to continually improve their practice, which is hard to do because of the low number of expert trainers they are able to network with:

“...I do feel confident but this is an area where there is always room for improvement. You need to be able to see and hear what others are doing and try to improve on your practices. I believe this is a skill that needs to be developed continuously and there is not enough focus on this in the industry unless you do it between your own networks. Also, it’s hard to find such networks as most people you come across work at a level lower then you work at, so sharing ideas is mainly one sided. This is not good for my own personal development...

Trainer 6, who also does a significant amount of course development for an RTO, reports encountering many trainers who have not learned how to use the VET industry’s competency based training packages properly in order to meet course requirements, which in turn are necessary to meet audit requirements:
“...I think there are big gaps in the learning in those areas and I think a lot of people [trainers] really haven’t been shown how to unpack a training package properly...”

4.4.3 Continuing professional learning of VET trainers

The identification of the ways in which VET trainers are learning the skills they need further addresses research question 3, and the continuing development activities trainers are engaging in to up-skill.

Nine out of ten VET trainers interviewed mentioned mentoring as a successful and important learning activity. In the situation of the VET trainer, the mentoring process appears to be an informal partnership rather than a formal or planned activity. Having had the experience of a good mentor, Trainer 1 says having a mentor, even in another RTO, is the way to go:

“...Oh I think mentors are the way to go having experienced that way, I think absolutely, and not being afraid of having a mentor in another RTO... I had a really good mentor teacher...”

Trainer 6 also credited a workplace mentor with assisting in the development of their learning in foundation assessment skills:

“...my mentor at [their workplace] introduced me to assessment tool development so I learnt a lot about training package rules, dissecting units of competency, writing and developing assessment tools, mapping assessment tools in accordance with the requirements...it’s only if you’re fortunate enough to have someone that will mentor you that you can actually correctly learn how to do RPL’s...”
Trainer 10 further identified the positive involvement of mentors in continuing development in both the industry they train in, and in their training abilities:

“…there has been a couple of mentors that I look to and say well okay yes that’s something that I’ve gained from that person, whether it be just industry experience or whether it’s actually been in the training sector looking at how people do things differently…”

Trainer 8 also reported having learned from mentors over the years:

“…when I was nursing I certainly learned a tremendous amount from a mentor, they just had phenomenal skills and patience and kindness… and another phenomenal mentor I had was the Manager at Aged Care Queensland…”

And would continue to do so in their current place of work:

“… there’s probably a mentor here…she’s an educator and she’s taken on a role as a manager just recently so she’ll move across to that role [mentoring] soon. I just see her as somebody incredibly knowledgeable who’s done some phenomenal work in different particular areas so I would go to her to ask her advice about something because I trust her…”

The informants reported that mentoring and having the opportunity to ask questions or observe peers before completing a new task was typically followed by completion of the task, critical reflection on the task’s processes and outcomes, and doing the task better the next time around. Critical reflection as a learning activity for VET trainers was typically an informal and collaborative process, and although the trainers recognised their actions as a reflective process, none of them used the term “critical
reflection.” However, critical reflection is a process of analysing what has been done, learning from what has been done, and considering how it could be done better next time, and trainers discussed it under the broader category of “continuous improvement”. For example, Trainer 6 reports viewing continuous improvement as an ongoing process of analysing feedback from internal and external stakeholders with the aim of reflecting on how things can be improved across all functions of the RTO:

“…the processes that we have to put into place to ensure that we’re getting continuous improvement from areas of feedback from the students, feedback from the employers, industry consultation. Even within the training and assessment area by doing validation, moderation all those sorts of things, that’s all in the continuous improvement basket. Dealing with complaints log, how we process complaints, refunds, its admin, its sales, it’s every area of the organisation comes under that continuous improvement…”

Trainer 5 supports this view and describes being involved in continuous improvement activities as an important part of daily work:

“…because a large cohort of students is industry based, it is just part of my day to day duties that the course materials are monitored/evaluated with the stakeholders otherwise I wouldn’t have a job. So, continuous improvement of the courses and stakeholder engagement is just part of the daily work environment in the VET industry if you are doing it correctly… continuous improvement focuses on management & delivery of courses, engaging stakeholders, evaluation of courses, ensuring training materials met requirements of training packages…”

Trainer 1 also confirms that continuous improvement is an ongoing process and sees continuous improvement as linked to CPD:
“…Continuous Improvement, that’s an ongoing process. Too often across all industries and all industry sectors people just look at the issue and not the underlying issue and don’t go through the continuous improvement as they should… if you’re continuously improving, you’re making some sort of professional development …”

It is not known whether the CPD activities that trainers report engaging in are their activities of choice, or whether trainers are merely taking advantage of immediate and available learning opportunities. For example, Trainer 3 describes workshops as a waste of time, often not covering the advertised material:

“...I find a lot of the workshops are a waste of time so I really don’t go to a lot of them because again, it’s just like a happy hour for Trainers, it’s like everybody gets together and has a cup of coffee and they show 10 slides on a PowerPoint and it doesn’t really tell you anything about what you thought you were going there for…”

This is supported by Trainer 5 who reports poor learning outcomes from attending a workshop offered by a well-known VET professional development provider:

“... [organisation name] workshop that cost about $500 to attend was useless, worthless as it didn’t cater for long term trainers. It only focused on answering questions from the attendees who obviously had not really learnt their TAE qualification and were asking dumb questions that they should have known if they had their qualification...”
However, when trainers were asked how they would choose to learn a new skill if any CPD activity was available, half of the informants responded that they would choose to attend a workshop:

Trainer 3: “…Oh you needed a workshop, you need them to sit you down and train you how to use it…”

Trainer 6: “…have a workshop on it, give people the skills and fundamental knowledge for it and then set them out there with tasks to do and say okay go out and do it…”

Trainer 7: “…I think a workshop with that one [e-learning skills] would be good because then you can see how other RTOs are doing it, in my ideal world, I’d like to see another RTO and how they’re doing it and get them to show you…”

Trainer 9: “…I think a workshop because then you have more people having input because I think you learn a lot from peoples’ questions…I think workshops, I love workshops so I am going to always lean towards that…”

Trainer 10: “…I like attending more of the workshops and lectures and things like that…”

4.4.4 Barriers to VET trainers’ continuing learning

This section addresses research question 4: the barriers to learning that VET trainers face. Literature has identified barriers to CPD for educational staff in the form of time, workload and experiences with poorly organised and run activities (Day, Sammons, Stobart, & Gu, 2007; Lee, 2002; Wan & Lam, 2010). Concerning the VET sector, literature has identified barriers to the industry currency of trainers (Clayton, Jonas, Harding, Harris, & Toze, 2013) and staff development (R. Harris et al., 2001), but no research was
found concerning the educational aspect of VET trainers’ learning. Identifying barriers is an essential step toward overcoming them and thus assisting stakeholders in providing trainers with appropriate CPD activities.

4.4.4.1 Time and workload

All of the informants acknowledged time and workload barriers to participating in CPD activities. According to Trainer 6, VET trainers in the private sector are time-poor for several specific reasons:

“...when you’re working fulltime, especially in the training industry, you’re time poor because as a trainer and assessor you’re either on the road going to and from trainees or you’re marking, or you’re getting involved in assessment tool development. You know you don’t just wear one hat when you work in the VET sector, you have to wear ten hats so you have to allocate time for all of that and then on top of that you’ve got to try and find the time for CPD...unless you’re going to be diligent and take the time out in your own time to do it, like doing lunchtime webinars or you know webinars after hours or reading after hours or studying after hours, you really struggle...”

Trainer 5 and Trainer 9 concur, suggesting that trainers have to fit their CPD in around their busy workloads, typically on their own time:

Trainer 5: “...you have to ensure your CPD fits into your working life and personal life. For example you don’t get time off to do development, it is expected that you fit it in around your own busy workload...”

Trainer 9: “...time because you’re so busy at work, so a lot of the things, especially within Children Services sector is done on weekends, but then that’s cutting into your family time so that is very hard...”
4.4.4.2 The availability of appropriate learning opportunities and the issue of quality

In addition to being time-poor, Trainer 5 says that there are no appropriate CPD activities at advanced levels offered in formal settings, and finding a mentor to compensate is difficult due to time constraints:

“...The type of PD I really require really desire doesn’t exist in a formal setting or on the level that I require. Only basic level training is provided. There is also not enough time and not enough access to the people that I believe would be able to mentor me as these people are busy running RTOs and participating in the day to day operations. Time is limited or the workshop topic areas that I am interested in are not offered, or very limited in terms of offerings, and therefore you may miss it. For example if it is only offered in capital city once a year...”

Trainer 3 and Trainer 9 further expressed concern over the lack of local opportunities available as an issue for attending relative CPD activities. Trainer 9 elaborated on this, saying the CPD needed is in Sydney, as opposed to Brisbane (which would be the nearest capital city), and this makes the training prohibitive based on time, cost and competing family priorities:

“...the one that I was talking about [CPD activity] ... it is in Sydney so you’ve got flight and accommodation and everything on top of the $900 fee, so it would be a lot better if there was more in different states that was affordable, and maybe an evening or you know start at lunchtime and go through the evening rather than having to chop out your whole workday but then also not interrupting your family life as well...”
Moreover, Trainer 6 says that what is needed to help trainers find relevant CPD opportunities is a centralised database:

“…I think by having something that’s centralised, then you can start getting recommendations so then you might you know an organisation that’s reputable, that you know is delivering the quality of what it is you’re looking for, they’re the only ones that are going to be linked to that website so that would really streamline it and make it easier for people to want to do their CPD because they’re not spending six hours trying to find somewhere that’s going to do what they’re asking for, so I think a lot of time wasting goes on in VET you know so I think that’s something that needs to be looked at…”

In addition to the lack of availability of advanced CPD opportunities, trainers report attending training that was less than satisfactory for their learning needs. Trainer 10 recounts that some CPD has been led by less than expert facilitators:

“…Sometimes I find the guest speakers are not really hitting the nail with what they’re talking about, you sit there for an hour and a half and you go wow, what did I learn out of that? Not a lot, and I think they need to look at some of those guest speakers there as well, just getting currency with what they’re talking about…”

Trainer 7 further acknowledges that there are CPD providers offering regular learning opportunities, however this trainer has not been impressed by the quality of the training:

“…I know there are a whole lot of providers out there that are trying to train people on how to be good trainers and assessors, I don’t tap into that because I’ve never been particularly impressed by any of that training or the cost…”
Trainer 5 also indicated that educational CPD offered by universities was less than satisfactory:

“...Additionally, now the non-research universities in Australia are offering Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas in VET teaching which are not really university level subjects and the standards are not really being met, so teachers are becoming more qualified on paper, but in real life, they are way behind the required standards, however nobody seems to be thinking this is a problem...”

4.4.4.3 Networking opportunities

Another major barrier identified by the informants was the lack of a network of VET peers available to them with whom to share ideas and discuss best practice. Trainer 5 says networks of trainers with similar CPD needs are difficult to find:

“...it’s hard to find such ‘networks’ as most people you come across work at a level lower than you work at, so sharing ideas is mainly one sided. This is not good for my own personal development...”

This lack of access is made more complicated by what Trainer 9 describes as active discouragement by their own managers, who are worried about industry competitors misappropriating their organisation’s ideas and/or resources:

“...because I think they feel that they’re [other RTOs] going to steal stuff and you know use our stuff so...one of our staff went over to a new RTO and I get asked a lot of the time [by management] if I’ve spoken to her. But no, neither of us is like that (LAUGH) so...yeah...”
Trainer 1 expands on this discussion saying that the managers’ discouragement of trainers’ networking with peers at other RTOs is a reality, although this fear of RTOs concerning stolen resources is inflated:

“…that’s a big thing for industry that everybody’s afraid they’re [competitors] are going to take something, but even if a trainer takes something it is no longer really utilised exactly the same way as you wanted it anyway, so it’s a transferring of ideas. I’d like to see private providers talking to one another, a private providers Association where they can hammer out how things are going to work for us...”

Furthermore, Trainer 6 not only believes that this lack of networking is hampering personal learning opportunities, but also that this lack of communication between stakeholders is hurting the entire VET industry:

“…continuous improvement process is an area where a lot of RTOs fall down because there’s a breakdown in communication between the various departments with their organisation, and then with other organisations, and I think it is an area where we need to start having networking between RTOs throughout the VET system because it’s true that we can all develop our own continuous improvement processes within our organisations, but it’s not just about the individual RTO or about the individual trainer and assessor, the whole sector needs to get continuous improvement happening...”

In addition to the unavailability of external networking opportunities, Trainer 8 says that internal networking opportunities are hard to come by:

“…the staff don’t have a lot of time to hang out and say ‘have you tried this’ or you know ‘have you presented’ and how did you present this particular module or whatever, so that’s a bit of a shame really...”
Trainer 2 finds the same internal communication issue and believes that RTOs need to take responsibility to ensure internal networking happens:

“...With PD I think it is also important that the RTOs are to provide some sort of training or one day a month that they all gather so then they can actually talk amongst each other and give their experiences of what is going out in the industry, they don’t do that even...”

And Trainer 11 contends it will be up to trainers to start their own networks to facilitate CPD, and speaks of wanting to start a network of trainers on the Gold Coast:

“...I have dreams of actually starting a Training Network...a Trainers Network on the Coast here, sort of like a business networking business afterhours type of thing but for Trainers and see whether we can try and do something...”

Trainer 2 also indicated willingness to support such a network of local peers:

“...I just wish somebody would start up a little... membership thing that the Trainer pays $5.00 to be a member of some sort of body because we don’t have backup, Trainers don’t have backup...”

4.4.4.4 Stakeholder support

Finally, trainers expressed concern over the lack of stakeholder support for CPD in general. When informants were asked about the support they receive from the various stakeholders in the VET community, only Trainer 9 reported high levels of organisational support:
“...we've got so much support here it's crazy (LAUGHTER), it's crazy, I've never had this support anywhere in any job before so... it's really good, it's really good.”

The general consensus amongst the trainers was that stakeholders offered little if any support, and trainers’ CPD responsibilities were placed well and truly on their own shoulders. Trainers spoke of the lack of support not only from their employers, but also from the government departments that regulate the VET sector:

Trainer 2: “…They [RTOs] haven't provided any training, all they want to know...or most of the RTOs it’s “[name removed] you have to fill out the form for your professional development because we need to keep that on file”. Really, okay I'll do that; so what have you done? There’s no one that actually sits with you and goes [name removed], what have you actually done to keep up your professional development?

Trainer 3: “…what support? You know like it's like this problem we’ve got with ASQA and with CRICOS, who do you go to get it fixed? There’s no one that you can go to and say look we’ve been waiting for five months, we’ve been approved and we’ve been waiting for it to be signed off and get our number, it’s costing us money in rent. They don’t understand that, so who do you see? What do you do? There’s nowhere to go, no not at all.

Trainer 5: “…you need to fund your own PD…”

Trainer 6: “…I don’t think there’s a lot of support, well I don’t think there’s any support from VET stakeholders… concerning CPD I think a lot of stakeholders within the VET sector brush CPD off…”

Trainer 7: “…I don’t feel that we’re supported by our VET industry body being ASQA... and having just recently come through two audits...the first 15 minutes
you’re being read the riot act of how you’re going to fined, how you’re going to be shut down and the consequences, it’s all based on fear. I feel that we’re on our own in terms of being guided by our body, by ASQA, so that’s the sort of training that I would like to go to on a regular basis. Not about my training skills or my facilitation skills or my assessment skills but keeping on top of all the changes that happen over time, but that should be next to no cost...I believe that that should be part of the fee that you pay to be registered as an RTO…”

Trainer 8:“...you know I’m motivated to be doing something outside of here for my own professional development, so I haven’t relied on them [employer] because I don’t think they’re going to be forthcoming with it [CPD] so I just...oh well, it is what it is hey…”

Trainer 10: “...I think support’s improving, but it’s still got a long way to go. I’d like to management know more about the actual programs they’re looking after, that’s a big thing... it’s really difficult when you have support, but they don’t know about the area…”

Trainers contend that this lack of support from stakeholders has resulted in a limited number of consultants taking up the role of CPD providers for the VET sector. Trainer 5 perceives this has driven up the cost of CPD activities, which is a growing barrier given that their CPD is typically self-funded:

“...I also think that a number of companies have specialised in the PD of the industry and overcharge/manipulate the cost for workshops. If we are required to be competent, up to date and current then the workshops should be subsidised by the industry. It is way too expensive to pay up to $400 per workshop. I also think government type legislation changes based workshops should be free…”
Trainer 3 agrees that appropriate CPD opportunities are becoming rarer and costs of attending are increasing:

Trainer 3: “…Money, oh yeah some of its damn expensive, for example the Government they’re really charging you, once upon a time it was $27 or $30 to go, now its $200 and something dollars… it’s just getting too pricey and they’re not as regular as they used to be. It used to be once a month there would be something that you could go to, now they’re bigger and less often and they’re more expensive…Some of the webinars now they’re charging you $150 and $250 for a webinar, now come on…”

Furthermore, even though Trainer 9 reported feeling well supported by the employer, this trainer reported that some CPD activities were too costly for the RTO’s budget as well:

“…we’re finding it really hard to find PD on Children Services in particular unless you want to pay $900 to go and do a course and I can’t afford that and they [employer] won’t pay that so…”

Based on the lack of support the trainers believe they receive from stakeholders of the VET industry, there is some support for a professional association of VET trainers. Trainer 1 suggests that an association that was not involved in CPD provision would work as long as it consulted with trainers about a framework for CPD:

“…maybe an association that wasn’t an RTO themselves…would work. A little bit more information, since everything’s legislated now for VET, a little bit more information about how they’re going to interpret this legislation would help. A lot more consultation with the private sector instead of this is the way it’s done.
You can have a framework that’s developed in consultation as opposed to a framework that’s just handed down…”

Trainer 2 also supports the idea of a professional association for VET trainers:

“…Trainers don’t have anywhere to go, they don’t have...and there’s so many grey areas of what Trainers can do and can’t do so you know, to me there’s no professional legislation for trainers so...like being a Counsellor, you could be a member for the Australian Institute of Professional Counselling, they should have an Australian Institute for Trainers, do you know what I mean?…”

4.4.5 Discussion

The body of literature on adult learning characteristics stipulates that adults seek out learning experiences which directly reflect their current needs (Baumgartner, Lee, Birden, & Flowers, 2003; Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980; Gravani, 2012; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), and this study shows that VET trainers in the private sector do the same. Therefore, trainers seeking learning opportunities would be looking for CPD activities that are task specific and fill a recognised learning need.

It was apparent from discussing this point with trainers that they do not perceive themselves to have a systematic method for determining what skills/learning they need in advance, nor do they follow any kind of framework or skills list to help them determine their future learning needs. They take a situational approach to learning new skills: they identify a gap in their immediate workplace skills and set about closing that gap. This is consistent with the literature reviewed on adult learning,
which shows that adult learners are willing to set goals and learn new information as a means to an end.

The body of CPD literature shows there is no agreed-on framework or model for ongoing professional development, a phenomenon which is also reflected in the VET sector literature. That literature reports that although continuing development is mandated through legislation there is no national development strategy or guidance available (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011). This absence of guidance may explain why the informants in this study who have taken advanced educational qualifications at various universities have taken different qualifications at different levels. Whilst this self-initiated learning is commendable, lack of a development framework for VET trainers makes skill levels hard to compare for both researchers and employers. The problem of comparison is further complicated when programs, such as the Masters in Adult and Vocational Education taken by Trainer 5, are cancelled after a short time.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and course management were two areas in which trainers reported that their employers expected them to undertake tasks for which they felt their did not have adequate skills. Even though RPL and course organisation are covered in the Certificate IV TAE qualification, these trainers’ perceptions were that they have had to determine an RPL process by themselves in a time of workplace need. Once the RPL process was determined and trialled, they had critically reflected on the process and updated it based on new information. They typically gained this new information through workshops and/or peer
observations. These experienced trainers are indicated that more practical and/or advanced training than the current minimum qualification of the Certificate IV TAE was needed in some areas.

The trial and error learning approach mentioned by several trainers with respect to RPL and course management might be one reason they typically reported that they were uncomfortable with their skill level in these areas. Whilst trial and error is an aspect of learning that could be linked to the problem solving nature of adult learners (Brookfield, 1986, 1998; Cranton, 1992; R. Smith & Haverkamp, 1977), and it appears from these informants’ accounts that they eventually found an optimal way to perform these tasks, perhaps the level of error during their self-learning process is what has created the perception of the under-skilled VET trainer in the first place.

Based on the analysis of the data collected, this study shows that the trainers interviewed have identified several main areas where they believe they would benefit from advanced level training. Although some of the data in this study agrees with previously published VET sector studies, the paucity of studies available makes the determination of trends difficult.

The trainers’ lack of confidence in managing the RPL process indicated a learning need in this area. This was initially an unexpected finding, since all the trainers except one were either required to do RPL as part of their current workplace tasks or had previously been in a training role where
RPL assessment had been required. However, the data analysis further revealed that trainers were expected to know how to undertake RPL processes without prior practical experience or on the job training, that they consider themselves to be self-taught, and that they perceive workshops they have participated in not to offer advanced level learning in RPL processes. These factors make the finding of a learning need in RPL less surprising.

Despite the trainers' perceptions that advanced level CPD activities are required for RPL, they informants did not elaborate on what content concerning RPL would be offered in such a CPD activity. Trainers also spoke of doing RPL through set processes, giving no indication that they did not have the skills they were discussing. This might mean that this perceived lack of skill in RPL, given that this process was typically perceived to be self-taught, is a lack of confidence rather than a lack of skill for experienced trainers. Trainers have indicated that the private RTOs they have been involved with tend to manage RPL processes differently, with no indication of an industry “best practice” for RPL. This would leave trainers who have developed RPL processes for their workplace to discover whether their processes are valid only as the result of a government audit. This is a scary prospect for trainers and RTOs, as improper processes discovered through a government audit can lead to substantial fines and restrictions on the RTO’s training registration. Under these circumstances, it would be difficult for trainers to be confident that they have the skills they need to manage a successful (and audit-worthy)
RPL process without going through either the audit process or what they believe to be advanced level training. As no other studies were found addressing RPL skills from the trainers’ view, only further research can determine whether lack of confidence in RPL skills is common throughout the community of experienced VET trainers.

The second area where data indicated a learning need was advanced learning and assessment skills. Although only three trainers were involved or immediately about to be involved in facilitating advanced learning and assessment skills, the data analysis indicated that trainers perceived that RTOs were strategically moving away from face to face training and that they would need these advanced skills in the near future. Further analysis of the data set showed that trainers viewed this skill as being linked to their current abilities to use an electronic learning management system (LMS) such as Blackboard or Moodle. Given that research on technology in the VET sector for education purposes is well funded and documented (for example see: ANTA, 2002a, 2002b; Booker, 2000; Harper, Hedberg, Bennett, & Lockyer, 2000), this suggests that the learning of an LMS would be a key component of any CPD activities in this area.

Trainers discussed skills in course recognition and management as a third area in which CPD activities at both basic and advanced levels are necessary. Trainers’ discussions in this area focused on meeting course requirements from an audit perspective, and the necessity to continually adapt and improve their learning and assessment materials. Trainers
tended to refer to these skills in terms of being able to “unpack” a training package and “course design.” The issue of trainers’ engagement with training package competencies has been shown in previous literature to be an area where VET trainers require learning opportunities beyond the Certificate IV TAE (Clayton, Meyers, Bateman, & Bluer, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2006). In the most recent report found, Hodge (2014) explores how thirty VET practitioners (including nine from the private sector) use and understand training packages and competencies. He found that the units of competency contained in training packages are “highly sophisticated” (p. 3), and indicated that training in this skill area needed to be more intensive during initial training and should include ongoing follow-up training activities. The findings of these previous studies, which are further supported by this study, suggest that CPD activities which involve skills in understanding and using training package competencies would be well received by trainers in the VET sector.

It was anticipated that during this study VET trainers would identify the learning methods or activities they specifically used to learn new and/or advanced skills. The activities most often identified in the CPD literature concerning the developmental activities of educational practitioners typically reflect participative or constructivist methods of learning (Devereaux, Prater, Jackson, Heath, & Carter, 2010; Margolis & Doring, 2012), and include activities such as researching, critical reflection, collaboration with networks or communities of practice, mentoring, workshops and peer observation. Therefore, as the informants of this
study identified the use of mentoring and critical reflection, along with the desire to attend workshops and participate in peer networks, this study is consonant with the current CPD literature concerning what CPD activities educational practitioners take part in.

As discussed in the literature review, mentoring is thought to be increasing in popularity due the necessity for continuing learning and the necessity to manage one’s own career (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Although mentoring as a CPD opportunity for teachers is considered to be in its infancy, Grierson and Gallagher (2009) reported a successful mentoring/observation program targeted at continuing development as a result of which experienced teachers successfully changed their teaching practices. These findings are supported by this research, as VET trainers described mentoring as an important learning activity.

In conflict with the CPD literature and the findings of this study concerning mentoring is a VET sector study completed by Balatti, Goldman, Harrison, Elliott, Smith, and Jackson (2008), who reported on a volunteer mentoring program that was trialled across three TAFE’s. This mentoring program showed little uptake by VET trainers and was quickly set aside because time constraints, competing priorities, and lack of management support led to a lack of legitimacy for the program. Although it is difficult to compare these findings from the public sector with the findings of the present private sector study, one notable difference in the mentoring processes of the two studies is that the TAFE
program was a formal program, whereas the trainers in the present study took part in informal mentoring opportunities. Trainers in this study reported taking the initiative in finding a suitable mentor and determining the topics they needed covered in an informal setting. This suggests that these VET trainers are situational learners who have little use for CPD activities that do not directly address their immediate learning needs.

Despite these differences in mentoring studies, the findings of this study were consonant with literature supporting on-site or on-the-job training as necessary to being a successful educator. For example research by Comber, Kamler, Hood, Moreau, and Painter (2004) and by Dunst and Raab (2010) showed that educators reported positive learning experiences when these experiences were associated with their immediate work. Similar positive results were reported by the informants of this study, with a particular emphasis on the importance of having had mentors and the ability and opportunity to critically evaluate their completed work tasks. These findings further confirm that VET trainers are self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning, often through an experiential learning process which consists of asking questions, doing a task, and then collaboratively evaluating the outcomes of the task.

Critical reflection as a learning activity in education is also well documented. It is thought to play a role in transforming practical experiences into higher forms of knowledge (Kolb, 1984), and underpins the notion of learning for skill development based on practice (Loughran, 2002; McKauge, Stupans, Owen, Ryan, & Woulfe, 2011; Reynolds, 1998).
Critical reflection as a CPD activity has also been reported to be a successful aspect of development programs for experienced educators (M. Hicks, Garvey-Berger, & Givens-Generett, 2005; Shockley, Bond, & Rollins, 2008; Sockett, DeMulder, LePage, & Wood, 2001), and beginning teachers (Burton & Reynolds, 2009; Chitpin, Simon, & Galipeau, 2008; Collier, 1999; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2009; Lamb, Lane, & Aldous, 2013; Tsangaridou & O’Sullivan, 1994; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Whilst the findings of this study, in agreement with the scholarly body of literature on critical reflection, show that the private-sector VET trainers studied engage regularly in this learning process, there are no previous similar studies from the VET sector for comparison.

The findings that trainers in this study found workshops to be a principal source of new information and identified them as a CPD activity they would seek out were surprising since the trainers’ own comments concerning workshop attendance were negative, and the CPD literature reports that workshops tend to receive the least favourable ratings (Brophy, 1993; Danielson, 2006; Hunzicker, 2011; Sparks, 1997). A possible explanation for the conflict here is that 1) trainers view workshops as a potential forum for networking in addition to learning, and 2) there might be a disconnect between how trainers are learning in comparison to how they would choose to learn if all the CPD activities discussed were available. There is no way to determine whether this is generalisable to all VET trainers without additional research, but if so, it would indicate that there are barriers to trainers’ preferred methods of learning.
In addressing CPD barriers, the trainers’ frustration was evident. The data analysed in this study showed time and workload as contributing barriers to trainers’ participation in CPD activities, which is consistent with the body of literature concerning educators’ CPD barriers (Braden, Huai, White, & Elliott, 2005; Day et al., 2007; Devereaux et al., 2010; Lee, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2010; Porter, Blank, Smithson, & Osthoff, 2005; Stenfors-Hayes, Weurlander, Dahlgren, & Hult, 2010; Wan & Lam, 2010). This finding is also consonant with Balatti et al., (2010) who reported trainers in the public VET sector to have workplace domain barriers in the areas of time constraints and competing workplace priorities. Due to the expanding role of the VET trainer, discussed in Section 4.3.1, this is not a surprising finding, or a trend that is likely to change in the near future.

In addition to time and workload, Caffarella and Zinn (1999) found educators’ CPD workplace barriers to include: 1) poorly coordinated CPD activities, 2) the number of opportunities available, and 3) a workplace climate that encourages infighting and only recognises formal CPD activities. Although this study found no evidence to support workplace infighting or failure to recognise informal CPD activities as barriers, the barrier of availability was prominent. Informants in this study indicated that availability problems stemmed from factors such as reduced delivery schedules of CPD providers, increasing personal costs of attendance, and the increasing need to travel longer distances to participate in CPD activities appropriate for their level of learning. While access issues have been shown in other studies (Opfer & Pedder, 2010; Ryan &
Bhattacharyya, 2011), providers’ schedules, personal costs, and the need for travel are not well documented as contributing to availability problems. Since these issues were not specifically reported in other studies, it is possible they are unique to the private VET sector.

Further analysis of data concerning availability of CPD activities illuminated other factors, including the quality and appropriateness of the CPD activities the informants found available. Informants reported that they were unimpressed with the quality of training provided because of the lack of expertise of the facilitators and the relative unavailability of activities providing advanced level skill learning. Literature shows that the barriers concerning the quality and appropriateness of CPD activities is not a new issue (Gallagher, Clifford, & Maxwell, 2004; Hanson, Bruskiewitz, & DeMuth, 2007; Lee, 2002; Lobman & Ryan, 2008; Margolis & Doring, 2012; Penz et al., 2007; Schweitzer & Krassa, 2010), and that the choice of CPD activities in some cases might be a result of what is available rather than what is appropriate (Opher & Pedder, 2010). Since this study shows similar concerns amongst these trainers in the VET sector, it would be worthwhile for stakeholders in the VET industry to consider taking a strategic approach to providing appropriate level learning opportunities for VET trainers within a CPD framework.

A final finding concerning the availability of appropriate CPD activities for the informants of this study was the lack of professional or peer networks reported to be available to them. Although not prominent in the literature, poor networking opportunities were also identified by Stenfors-
Hayes et al., 2010 as a barrier to CPD. What is troubling concerning this lack of networking opportunities in the VET sector is that, even though the benefits of networking or collaboration are considered valuable to the VET sector (R. Harris, Clayton, & Chappell, 2007) in assisting both individuals and organisations, informants reported that their employers actively discouraged them from participating in such CPD activities. Also troubling is the trainers’ perception of an overall lack of support for professional development on the part of stakeholders in the VET industry. Since this is a small localised study, there is no way to determine whether this is an industry wide trend or a local issue. Thus, there is a definite need to address this issue through additional research.

4.4.6 Conclusion

This section of the data analysis has explored an additional three findings regarding trainers’ learning needs, their engagement with CPD activities, and their barriers to CPD participation. This section addressed research questions 2 thru 4. Section 4.3 explored the premise that VET trainers seek out learning experiences which directly reflect their current workplace learning needs. Since there is no agreed on developmental framework in the VET sector with respect to qualifications and skills for trainers, trainers’ learning is situational, and when they discover gaps in their knowledge, their need for appropriate CPD activities is immediate.

Section 4.4.2 explored the learning needs identified in the areas of RPL skills, advanced learning and assessment, and course organisation and
student management. Even though trainers considered RPL an area where advanced levels of training were needed, consideration was given to the possibility that their perceived need for training at an advanced level might be due to a lack of confidence rather than of skill. In either case, however, if trainers perceive they need more training in this area, they will likely attend related CPD activities.

The findings in this section also indicate that trainers consider to some extent the workplace skills they might need in the future. Even though they did not consciously consider the question of additional skills, most were aware of a need for developing advanced learning and assessment skills, particularly activities pertaining to online delivery and the use of a LMS. Even though this need was recognised, few informants were considering taking immediate CPD activities in this area, and one trainer indicated an inability to find appropriate CPD opportunities in this area.

Course organisation and student management appeared to be a skills area where experienced trainers felt more training was needed, and data showed that this perception is likely linked to audit requirements associated with using training packages.

Section 4.4.3 found that trainers were using informal mentoring and critical reflection to meet their immediate learning needs. These activities were often followed by attending workshops once they became available. Trainers also expressed a strong desire to be involved in networking
opportunities with various VET sector stakeholders, and to have better access to workshops.

The final section of 4.4.4, addressed the barriers trainers perceived to their continued learning and development. This was an area of particular frustration for these trainers in the private VET sector. Aside from the common dilemmas of time and workload which are often reported in the CPD literature, these informants also identified less documented issues with the availability of and access to appropriate level opportunities and the quality of facilitation. Other barriers identified were providers’ schedules, personal costs, and travel. These are not well documented and may be unique to the VET sector.

The most troubling barrier trainers identified is the overall lack of support they perceive they have from other stakeholders in the VET industry concerning their continuing development and the perceived discouragement by RTOs of their participation in networking activities. It is troubling that in a highly regulated industry that is in constant flux, where trainers are being told they are not properly skilled, they also report having problems accessing the learning opportunities they need. Trainers gave the impression that they felt alone in their struggle to develop the necessary skills for their industry and abandoned by stakeholders who should be showing maximum support.
4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the six major findings of the study. Section 4.3 explored the importance of VET trainers’ workplace roles, qualifications and skills. Section 4.4 explored how trainers engage in CPD opportunities and the barriers they have to overcome in order to do so. The findings of the study fall under two main themes 1) VET trainers’ role, qualifications and skills, and 2) VET trainers’ continuing learning.

4.5.1 VET trainers’ roles, qualifications and skills

Based on the current state of the VET sector, discussed in Section 4.1, this study found that the role of the trainer in the private VET sector has evolved to take on tasks not typically thought of as part of the trainers’ role, particularly in the area of compliance and audit. Whilst it has always been a requirement for trainers to identify or write audit compliant assessments as part of the course organisation skill as defined on the skills list (Appendix 1), and TAFE trainers in the public sector have reported the inclusion of administrative and quality assurance processes to their work roles, the actual reporting of private VET trainers being key players in the audit process is not reported elsewhere.

The changing role of the trainer in the VET sector might also account for the finding that informants of this study, as experienced trainers, had higher levels of educational qualifications than had been previously reported by VET industry studies. Trainers of longer tenure had educational qualifications, mostly from university education departments.
Trainers of shorter tenure have attaining higher level educational qualifications on their continuing development plans for 2014. This means that trainers recognise a need for advanced level skills in facilitating learning and have taken it upon themselves to identify and take part in learning opportunities. An increase in the number of trainers with higher level educational qualifications has been shown in the literature over time. What this study has revealed that has not been previously reported is that trainers have sought these opportunities from universities.

Because the informants of this study are experienced trainers, it was not surprising to find that they were not seeking learning opportunities in generic or foundation skills. VET trainers also felt comfortable with most of the higher level skills; however, they identified three skill areas where they perceived additional learning would be beneficial. These areas were 1) recognition of prior learning, 2) advanced learning and facilitation skills, and 3) course organisation and student management. These specific skill needs have not previously been identified.

The notion that trainers are under-skilled for their teaching roles and responsibilities could also be linked to the dramatic change in the Australian VET sector, and may be a factor in the growing amount of literature concerning the need for a VET trainer capability framework. Due to the diverse nature of the VET industry and the lack of information available on the VET sector in general, the development of such a framework on a national level is a huge challenge. To complicate matters, the current data that is available concerning the Australian VET sector is
incomplete, not uniformly organised or defined, and therefore problematic for use in the development of any framework for VET trainer capability.

4.5.2 VET trainers’ continuing learning

Based on the nature of change identified in the VET industry and the learning needs identified in Section 4.2 of this study, further exploration of these areas found that expansion of the workplace tasks expected of these VET trainers in the private sector is what prompts their engagement in CPD. As RTOs expect more from trainers due to the competitive nature of the industry, trainers’ tasks are expanded to meet the needs of the organisation. Therefore, trainers target specific CPD opportunities which align with their immediate workplace situation.

Since trainers identified skill areas where they perceived they require additional learning, information was sought concerning how VET trainers in the private sector learned new or higher level skills. Whilst informal mentoring and critical reflection were the main CPD activities trainers were engaging in to build skills, trainers also indicated that they seek information through workshops and networking. Although there is agreement in the literature that various CPD activities promote continuing learning on some level, and mentoring, critical reflection, workshops and networking are all recognised in the CPD literature, it was not previously identified what CPD activities were accessed by VET trainers for their learning.
Also uncovered as a result of this study, is that these trainers who are seeking networking opportunities are not finding them and are discouraged by their supervisors or managers from participating in them. This was one of the barriers trainers identified as having an effect on their ability to find appropriate CPD activities. These factors may also help explain why trainers perceive they have no support from stakeholders in the VET industry concerning their continuing learning efforts. Other barriers that this study identified were time and workload, which is not surprising since the role of the VET trainer looks to have expanded dramatically over the past few years. Whilst the work role has expanded, CPD opportunities seem to have diminished. For the trainers in this study, the perceived reasons for this lack of availability of appropriate CPD activities were the reduced delivery schedules of CPD providers, the increasing personal costs of attendance, and the increasing need to travel longer distances to source appropriate CPD activities for their level of learning.

Findings from the informants generally indicated that, in the absence of an industry framework or professional association, trainers in the private VET sector were responsible for all aspects of choosing and maintaining their professional development activities. Discussions radiated a sense of frustration concerning the lack of relevant CPD opportunities available for experienced trainers, and the lack of overall support provided by all VET stakeholders.
This chapter presented the six main findings of the study, which were organised according to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. The findings were derived from patterns and relationships in the data, which were then considered in view of previous research and existing theory.
Chapter 5
Conclusions, Contributions & Recommendations for Further Research

5.1 Introduction

The overall purpose of this study was to explore how trainers in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) private sector engage in learning and skill development to meet the ongoing challenges of their workplace. There was no prior research found concerning the qualifications and skills these trainers believe they need or how they would go about acquiring additional qualifications or skills. Consequently, there is no informed basis for the development of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) activities for experienced trainers in the private VET sector. The purpose of this study was to explore this previously unstudied phenomenon.

Figgis (2009, p. 9) states that “the VET sector is astonishingly diverse,” and that looking for “trends in teaching and learning is a risky enterprise.” Although the present study does not seek to characterise the entire sector or to provide definitive data on trends within it, investigation of this important sector must begin somewhere, and the study makes a
significant contribution by drawing out the voice of ten trainers in the private VET sector concerning their CPD issues.

168 and 169 have been changed to reflect

Finding 1: The role of the trainer in the private VET sector, as represented by the trainers who participated, has evolved to take on aspects of audit compliance, administration, and sales.

Finding 2: The percentage of VET trainers in the private sector with educational qualifications beyond the Certificate IV Training and Assessment amongst these study participants is higher amongst the informants of this study than the percentages reported in previous studies.

Finding 3: These trainers unanimously agreed that the skills required of their current roles as trainers are:

- Generic skills
- Foundation learning facilitation
- Foundation assessment skills
- Advanced learning and facilitation skills
- Learning styles and theories
- Course organisation and student management
- Commercial skills
- Educational research
Finding 4: The expanding scope of workplace tasks expected of VET trainers in the private sector creates their learning needs, and prompts their engagement in related CPD activities.

Finding 5: These trainers most often fill their learning needs through CPD activities which include: informal mentoring, critical reflection, and workshops.

Finding 6: In addition to previously documented CPD barriers such as time, workload and accessibility, the informants of this present study identified personal cost, the lack of networking opportunities, and a lack of support by VET stakeholders as barriers to their engagement in CPD activities.

These findings have important implications for all VET stakeholders; particularly those who help determine the CPD opportunities available to VET trainers in Southeast Queensland. The findings of this study reflect the perspective of a group of VET trainers in the private sector, and the conclusions provided in the following section attempt to assist VET stakeholders in understanding the learning needs of such trainers and what can be done to assist them in obtaining the learning they need through appropriate CPD activities. Although these findings are not specifically transferrable to other situations, trustworthiness of the study has been established through determining credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.
5.2 Conclusions and implications

The main research question of this study was:

What qualifications and skills are perceived to be needed by VET trainers in private training organisations, and what impacts their learning of the skills they need for their evolving day to day workplace practice?

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings reported in Chapter 4:

Conclusion 1: The work roles of experienced trainers in private RTOs have expanded due to the changing nature of the VET industry. Trainers studied reported that they required skills beyond that of trainer and assessor, particularly in the areas of compliance and auditing. Trainers also identified specific training needs in the skill areas of RPL, advanced learning and assessment, and course organisation and student management skills. This finding, which is consistent with adult learning theories, suggests that CPD activities for experienced trainers should be skill specific and offered at advancing levels, and moreover that this kind of CPD is not readily accessible. This finding suggests both a possible opportunity for CPD providers to gain market share by broadening their offerings and a need for more comprehensive study to determine the extent of applicability of these findings.

Conclusion 2: The trainers interviewed were in agreement on the skills they need to successfully complete their workplace tasks, even though workplace tasks are likely to differ across RTOs. This is significant as it
implies that it may be possible to establish a national VET capability framework based on the qualification and skill needs of trainers in the VET industry. Any capability framework should also consider the current and future input of universities in providing higher level qualifications. This also means that it would be beneficial for internal and external CPD activities to focus on the delivery of skills in the areas identified.

Conclusion 3: These trainers in the private VET sector face significant challenges in sourcing and attending appropriate CPD activities. Barriers faced by educators concerning CPD participation were found in the areas of time constraints, competing workplace priorities, availability of appropriate level training, and the quality of training provided. Other barriers were identified as providers’ schedules, personal costs, and travel, which were not found to have been previously documented and may be unique to the private VET sector. A perceived lack of stakeholder support and the discouragement of external networking by employers were also documented.

The findings of the study identify a need for RTOs that do not currently support their trainers CPD to step up and take some responsibility through offering internal opportunities such as mentoring, and assisting with external opportunities through financing and/or providing time off to attend. The findings also identify a perceived need for a network of VET experts specialising in specific VET related areas, and representing the various stakeholders involved in the VET system. It is possible that such a network of experts could become identifiable and accessible
through the formation of a professional association of VET trainers. A professional association for VET trainers also has the potential to limit the isolation these VET trainers report feeling by assisting them with some of the support they perceive they lack from the stakeholder community. Furthermore, if these barriers to accessibility cannot be overcome, the notion of a national capability framework for VET trainers’ development is a moot point.

Conclusion 4: Since trainers identified a compliance and audit aspect to everything they do, the private VET sector appears to be largely audit driven. This was particularly notable in trainers identifying a need for higher level training in the skill area of course organisation. The implication is that trainers need to be able to access CPD activities that assist them with being audit compliant when courses are being organised. Logically these CPD activities should be administered by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). Unfortunately, trainers participating in the study perceived ASQA as offering little in the way of information or support. Although it should be noted that ASQAs function is as the regulating body for the VET sector rather than a support body, as a major stakeholder in the VET industry ASQA needs to offer appropriate CPD activities which will enable stakeholders to understand how the sector is regulated, and how the regulatory standards are measured during the audit process.
5.3 Key contributions to the literature

Although the private VET sector is a major contributor to the Australian VET industry as a whole, the literature reviewed indicated that this sector has been largely underrepresented and unexplored. Contributions to knowledge in a field of study can be made on three levels (Scanlan, 2002). First level contributions may confirm or dispute research findings which have already been well explored through previous studies. Second level contributions may be made in areas where there is debate, or there has been limited exploration. Finally, third level contributions may be made where no previous research has been conducted and a study extends what is known about certain populations or phenomena.

The contributions made by this study are outlined in Table 5.3 Key Contributions. The contributions that Scanlan (2002) terms first and second level contributions are presented in column 2. New contributions to the literature are presented in column 3.

Table 5.3 Key Contributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Contributions to existing knowledge</th>
<th>New knowledge contribution pertaining to trainers in the private VET sector</th>
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<tr>
<td>Qualifications and skills of VET trainers in the private</td>
<td>1. A trend which has shown an increase in the number of trainers in the private sector obtaining higher level educational</td>
<td>1. Trainers’ higher educational qualifications have predominantly come from participation in university programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>sector qualification over the last 10 years is supported by the number of trainers in this study having higher level educational qualifications than previously reported.</td>
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<td>Rather than vocational programs.</td>
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<td>2. Trainers supported the skills list provided by Mitchell and Ward (2010) as representational of their workplace skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Trainers identified language, literacy and numeracy as a skill that should be added to the Mitchell and Ward (2010) list.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Identifying skill gaps (Research Q2) | The VET literature proposes that trainers are under skilled for their current workplace tasks. The informants of this study agree with this previous assertion, and add to this knowledge by indicating specific learning needs in RPL, advanced learning and assessment and course organisation/student management. |
|---|
| Trainers identify skill gaps based on the changing nature of tasks in their workplace; this research study shows trainers take a reactive position rather than a strategic position in their CPD. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult learning (Research Q3)</th>
<th>Adult learning theory proposes that adults learn to fill an immediate need; this study shows trainers (as adult learners) do the same, and trainers display the identified characteristics of adult learners.</th>
<th>Trainers reported attending CPD activities that did not consider their characteristics as adult learners, particularly concerning the appropriate level of learning and the need for information that is immediately relative and useful to them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The CPD activities used by educators (Research Q3)</td>
<td>The informants of this study recounted their use of researching, mentoring, critical reflection, workshops and observation as their main CPD activities. This agrees with what is currently known concerning the CPD activities used by educators.</td>
<td>Concerning the private VET sector:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Trainers use research activities predominantly to build their industry knowledge and currency in opposition to their educational currency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Critical reflection is used by trainers as a mechanism to continually improve their workplace skills as well as improving on workplace policies and procedures relating to compliance and audit issues.</td>
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<td>3. Informal mentoring is</td>
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</table>
used by trainers in an effort to gain new and/or advanced skills as well as to confirm the processes and procedures they are currently using.

4. Trainers attend formal workshops, and identified that workshops are their preferred CPD activity. However, consideration should be given to the possibility that their desire to participate in workshops might be affected by their unfulfilled desire to network with other trainers rather than workshop content.

| CPD barriers facing educators (Research Q4) | This study shows these trainers in the private VET sector share common barriers with educators in other education sectors in the areas of time, competing workplace priorities, and accessibility. VET literature has indicated that CPD for additional barriers which may be unique to the private VET sector trainers were identified as provider’s schedules, personal costs such as travel, lack of networking opportunities, and lack of overall stakeholder support. |
trainers is generic and does not cater for specialisations; this study supports this previous finding.

5.4 Practical Implications

Even though recent literature has increasingly indicated that VET trainers are under-skilled for their roles in the VET sector (Clayton, Harding, Toze, & Harris, 2011; H. Guthrie, 2010a; Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, 2006; Smith & Grace, 2011; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2011), there was no literature found that has been published on this issue from the perspective of trainers in the private VET sector.

Although the Australian Federal Government has enacted legislation to make certain VET trainers “continue to develop their vocational education and training (VET) knowledge and skills as well as their industry currency and trainer/assessor competence” ("Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012," 2012), the knowledge and skills that are to be developed and what makes up trainer/assessor competence is subjective. This is problematic as VET stakeholders such as ASQA auditors, industry representatives, RTO managers and trainers may disagree on the knowledge, skills, and trainer/assessor competencies needed to work effectively in the VET sector. Stakeholders may also disagree on how these knowledge, skills, and trainer/assessor competencies can be learned or maintained. This means that a trainer
might personally pay for and take personal time to participate in a CPD activity based on a skill or competency that an auditor does not find appropriate. Such issues need to be avoided if the VET sector ever wants to recognise an ‘expert trainer’, and it is logical that the government extend policy to provide clarity in this matter. This clarity could be accomplished by introducing a national skills capability framework that can be used by all VET stakeholders to strategically plan for VET trainers continued learning of skills from beginner to expert levels.

If such a skills capability framework was implemented, stakeholders such as RTOs, universities, and consultants would have a platform to design and offer appropriate CPD opportunities that target advancing levels of learning for VET trainers. These CPD offerings should also be constructed according to adult learning theory, the characteristics of adult learners, and be delivered by experts. Trainers have indicated they often use mentoring and critical reflection activities to bring their skills up to more advanced levels. They have also indicated that workshops and networking opportunities would be well received. Therefore, these activities should be incorporated into sustained and appropriate CPD programs that are offered by organisations who are involved with providing VET trainers with CPD activities.

This research also found that RTOs are not typically supportive of their trainers CPD. Although the high cost of some CPD activities such as conferences inhibit small RTOs from funding trainers attendance, trainers should be given appropriate time off to attend events that are local and
within their budget. Using both personal time and finances to attend CPD activities are substantial barriers for trainers to overcome. RTOs should also recognise the value of trainers networking across RTOs. This could be an informal and cost effective CPD activity which enables trainers to build the practical skills needed in the VET sector.

5.5 Future Research

Although the government will likely continue to set the agenda for VET research in Australia through funding initiatives, private training providers make up a substantial part of the VET industry in Australia, implying a need for all VET based research to be more inclusive of this sector. This exploratory study has been undertaken to provide initial insights into the private VET sector and the needs of trainers in this sector. Although this study’s findings were not intended to be transferrable across VET sectors, it was intended that this study could be replicated in order to further study the phenomenon of VET trainers CPD, or to provide comparative analysis of findings across geographical areas and/or VET sectors.

The limitations of using a an exploratory qualitative study with small numbers of informants suggests there is considerable scope within the VET sector to expand what is known about VET trainers, and what is known about the private sector of the VET industry. The further exploration or comparative analysis of replicated research would be valuable because it could provide further insight into commonalities and
differences between VET sector trainers, and/or local versus state and/or national issues. It is worthwhile further examining:

1. Whether gaining higher level educational qualifications through university is a widespread phenomenon amongst VET trainers in the private sector, or just indicative of this group of informants. Comparisons between the private sector and the public sector would also be valuable. If further studies indicate the participation in university qualifications by VET trainers is widespread, it would be worthwhile exploring the factors that lead to this choice.

2. The informants of this study identified they require advanced level training in the areas of RPL, advanced learning and assessment and course organisation/student management. Further research should be completed on a larger scale to determine whether these skills gaps might be a common amongst trainers in the private VET sector on a state or national level. It would also be valuable to explore whether trainers in the public sector have similar developmental needs.

3. The informants of this study have identified the use of CPD activities such as researching, mentoring, critical reflection, workshops and observation as their main CPD activities. Replicated studies would be useful to determine if this is common amongst VET trainers across geographical areas, and if
commonalities in choosing CPD activities exist across VET sectors.

4. Further research into the CPD barriers faced by trainers is important to determine if these barriers are indicative of the population of VET trainers across states, nationally, and between sectors. Understanding more about the barriers that have been identified in this study is essential in limiting the impact they have on trainers’ skill development.

There is a definite need for research to further determine how learning opportunities for experienced trainers can be made available and enriched based on VET trainers current learning needs. The focus of research needs to determine the best models and methods of providing developmental opportunities that can close skill gaps. The skill gaps of experienced trainers are obviously harder to cater for than beginning trainers and therefore require more specialised learning opportunities, but this does not mean their needs can be ignored if the VET sector is improve the overall quality of those delivering Australia’s national qualifications.

Finally, there is also a growing need to explore the impact (if any) of the audit driven VET environment on small private RTOs. There is also a need to explore whether this audit driven environment has an effect on the quality of student outcomes. Does this process really assure a quality educational experience?
5.6 Chapter summary

This final chapter provided additional insight into the six findings of this study by proposing answers to the research questions. Thus, four conclusions were discussed, the first conclusion being that experienced trainers in private RTO's have work roles which have expanded due to the changing nature of the VET industry and their workplace roles. The second conclusion being that the trainers involved in this study are in agreement concerning the skills they need to successfully complete their workplace tasks. The third conclusion is that trainers in the private VET sector face significant challenges in sourcing and attending appropriate CPD activities. The fourth and final conclusion was that the private VET sector appears to be largely audit driven.

Following from the conclusions the key contributions this present study makes to the literature were presented. Knowledge contributions were presented concerning: the qualifications and skills of VET trainers in the private sector, the skill gaps these trainers have identified, the CPD activities these trainers participate in and the impact of adult learning characteristics on these trainers, and the participation barriers faced by this group of trainers.

Based on the knowledge that has been gained from this study practical implications were identified and discussed. The practical implications of this research first called on the Federal Government to establish a national skills capability framework for the VET sector. This would allow all VET stakeholders to move forward according to a mutually recognised model.
The second call was for organisations offering CPD activities to provide VET trainers with practical advanced levels of developmental opportunities. It was also suggested that sustained programs be developed based on accepted CPD activities and adult learning principles. Finally, RTOs were called on to support their trainers in accessing appropriate CPD activities (including networking between RTOs), and providing them with time to participate. The advanced skill levels of individuals increases the capabilities of the RTO, thus there is mutual benefit in RTOs being more supportive.

This chapter concluded with explaining how further research can benefit not only the private VET sector, but the VET industry as a whole. This study has provided a perspective that is not readily accessible in current literature. This foundation sets the stage for further exploration into this community of trainers in the private sector, as well as a foundation for comparing these findings with trainers in the public sector.
Reference List


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for educational scholarship among medical faculty. *Medical Education*, 42, 872-878.

Appendix 1: List of VET trainers’ skills
Appendix 1: List of VET trainers’ skills

Mitchell and Ward (2010, pg. 22)

1. **Generic skills**
   This skills set includes negotiations skills, communication skills, decision making, critical thinking, and ethical standards.

2. **Learning theories**
   A theoretical rather than practical skills set, comprising knowledge that underpins learning. This includes knowledge of: VET pedagogy and andragogy and the theories of cognitive learning, behavioural learning, experiential learning, learning styles and learning preferences.

3. **Foundation learning facilitation**
   This skills set includes facilitating individual learning, group learning, workplace learning and learning among equity groups.

4. **Foundation assessment skills**
   This skills set includes summative, formative, diagnostic and recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments, as well as the ability to perform such assessments within the context of the classroom and the workplace.

5. **Advanced learning facilitation and assessment skills**
   This skills set includes those learning facilitation and assessment skills that enable a trainer/assessor to work beyond the context of the classroom or the workplace. It includes facilitating e-learning, distance learning, off-shore learning and online assessment. This skills set also includes the ability to facilitate flexible learning.

6. **Learning styles**
   This skills set includes the ability to take into account visual learners, auditory learners and kinaesthetic learners when teaching/training.

7. **Course organisation and student management**
   This skills set is about the organisation and management of students. It includes such skills as the ability to apply continuous improvement to the management and delivery of VET courses, to engage stakeholders in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of courses, to ensure that all students receive necessary training assessment and support services, and the ability to ensure that all training and assessment materials meet the requirements of the relevant training package or accredited course.

8. **Commercial skills**
   This skills set is about the conducting of commercial educational activity. As well as teaching and training in a workplace environment, it includes managing commercial relationships, offering consultancy services, personalising training for commercial customers, and adapting training packages for commercial purposes.

9. **Educational research**
   This dimension is about the collection and analysis of data to inform educational quality. It also includes research skills for the purpose of expanding the understanding of VET educational issues.
Appendix 2: National VET Regulator (NVR) Standard 15.4
Appendix 2: NVR Standard 15.4

The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 govern VET training. The VET Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012; Section 15.4 ("Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations 2012,” 2012) requires specific skills and competencies for trainers in the VET sector as follows:

15.4 Training and assessment is delivered by trainers and assessors who:

   a) have the necessary training and assessment competencies as determined by the National Skills Standards Council or its successors; and
   b) have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered or assessed; and
   c) can demonstrate current industry skills directly relevant to the training/assessment being undertaken; and
   d) continue to develop their vocational education and training (VET) knowledge and skills as well as their industry currency and trainer/assessor competence
Appendix 3: The interview process
Appendix 3: The interview process

The interview process will commence over 3 stages.

Stage 1: Open the Interview

1. Welcome the participant and thank them for coming. Remind them that the interview is confidential and that they can refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the interview and the research project at any time.

2. Review the consent form and ask if they have any questions.

3. Remind the participant the interview will be taped and that I will be taking notes during the interview.

4. Review the skills to be discussed during the interview (Appendix A). This will focus the participant and provide a base for discussing the trainer’s skills and planned CPD.

5. Ask the participant to relate their CPD experiences in as much detail as possible.

Stage 2: During the interview

During the interview the researcher will guide the participant through the topics to discover key themes, some of which will be unanticipated and require the use of more probing questions. Initial focus questions may include:

- Can you tell me about your job roles/experience in the VET sector?
• Can you tell me how you determine your CPD needs based on your work role?

• Can you describe the types of CPD you have recently participated in?

• What were the strengths and weaknesses of the CPD activities you have participated in?

• Describe some of the barriers you encounter when trying to access CPD based on your specific training needs.

• Based on the skills document provided (Appendix A), what are your comments concerning your use of the skills identified here.
  o Additional prompting questions might include:
    ▪ Do you feel confident in your use of these skills?
    ▪ Do you feel these skills are important to your work role?
    ▪ Will you be seeking CPD in any of these areas?

• Can you elaborate on how you feel about the current support you receive for CPD from the various stakeholders in the VET industry?

• Are there any additional experiences concerning your CPD that you feel are important to discuss?

Stage 3: Close the interview:

1. Thank the participant for participating in the interview.

2. Ask the participant if they would be available to review the written transcript of their interview, reminding them it is not a requirement for them to do so.
3. Regarding this study, the participants are engaged in the construction of new knowledge through their answers to open ended questions, therefore the production of this knowledge is seen as specifically constructed realities where the recorded outcomes will be collected and presented as such (Crane, Hamilton, & Wilson, 2004; Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Liu & Lee, 2008).

4. Regarding this study, the participants are engaged in the construction of new knowledge through their answers to open ended questions, therefore the production of this knowledge is seen as specifically constructed realities where the recorded outcomes will be collected and presented as such (Crane et al., 2004; Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Liu & Lee, 2008).
Appendix 4: Approval consent form
Appendix 4: Approval consent form

Participant Consent Form

Dr Christian McComb
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Ms Ronda MacLeod
Faculty of Business and Law
University of Newcastle
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Consent Form for the Research Project:
VET Trainer’s perspectives on their continuing professional learning
Document Version 2; dated 11/04/2013

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I consent to:
• Participating in a face to face interview which will be recorded
• Answering questions concerning what skills and abilities I use in the day to day performance of my work duties as a VET Trainer, what skills I am planning to learn in the future, and how I plan to learn these skills
• Review interview transcripts

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers except as required by law.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name: _______________________________________________

Signature: ___________________________________ Date: ____________