

Schools, vocational education and training, and partnerships: Capacity-building in rural and regional communities – Literature review

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Contents

Introduction	3
Capacity building and ‘capital’	4
Capacity building	4
Forms of ‘capital’	5
Aspects of social capital	7
School-VET partnerships in rural and regional communities	9
Building social capital through VET in regional and rural areas	9
Benefits of school-VET partnerships	14
Student voices	16
National and state policies for VET and rural education	18
The national picture	18
State and Territory policy positions	20
Summary	22
References	23

Introduction

This literature review focuses on three main areas.

1. Capacity building, capital and, in particular, social capital, as this will assist in identifying social capital concepts in the research outcomes and how school-VET partnership programs apply them to successfully build social and economic capital in rural communities and regions.
2. A review of available reports of other school-VET partnerships in rural communities that have applied social capital concepts in order to identify existing knowledge and highlight absences.
3. How social capital concepts are reflected in policy at national and state levels in Australia.

The review provided a frame for discussing the research project's outcomes in terms of what existing knowledge was confirmed and/or challenged, what was expanded, and what absences can be addressed through an analysis of successful rural and regional school-VET partnerships.

Capacity building and ‘capital’

In recent years, the VET sector has become more interested in viewing its work from a capacity building and social capital perspective. This is reflected in a variety of NCVET and other Australian research centre reports and conference papers that use the terms ‘capacity building’ and ‘social capital’ (e.g. Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2000; 2001; Cummings 1992; Falk 2000; 2003; Johns, Kilpatrick, Loechel & Prescott 2004; Kearns 2004; Kilpatrick 2003; Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott 2002; Kilpatrick, Johns & Rosenblatt 2000; Misko 1998; Seddon & Billett 2004).

Capacity building

The concept of capacity building emerged from the World Bank and United Nation’s statements from the early-mid 1990s in relation to their community development programs funded in developing countries (Eade 1997). It has increasingly entered the realm of public health, education and rural development in Australia. For example:

Capacity building is constructed as externally or internally initiated processes designed to help individuals and groups associated with rural Australia to appreciate and manage their changing circumstances, with the objective of improving the stock of human, social, financial, physical and natural capital in an ethically defensible way. (Macadam et al. 2004, p.ix)

The idea of ‘capacity building’ was drawn from James McKnight’s work with inner-urban renewal programs in Chicago, USA (McKnight 1995). He developed the assets model, ‘a community-based health initiative [that] emphasises community empowerment, local definition and control, and creating or rebuilding relationships among local residents, associations, and institutions’ (Ammerman & Parks 1998, p.32). McKnight started from the position that people have capacities to manage in their current situations, but need to be better resourced so they are able to solve their own problems. The focus is on acknowledging existing abilities and strengthening them in order to tackle issues more comprehensively and effectively. It involves bringing together the different groups of people in a community to develop mutual goals, pool resources, advocate to bring in resources they do not yet have and develop strategies for sustaining the outcomes of their joint work. Although mutual goals are developed, people may have *different* reasons for wanting to achieve these goals.

Principles of capacity building include (NSW Health Department 2001, pp. 5-7):

- ✧ Respect and value existing capacities of all stakeholders – capacity building has a strengths orientation.
- ✧ Develop trust and respect between key stakeholders as they commit to ongoing and sustainable processes to achieve mutually negotiated desired goals.
- ✧ Be responsive to the context – this includes the physical, social, political, organisational, cultural and economic environments within which an initiative operates. Contextual factors may be negative when they create barriers, or positive when they create opportunities for stakeholder involvement.

- ✧ Avoid pre-packaged ideas and strategies. Although recommended approaches to building capacity exist, they cannot be applied as a recipe. It is important to identify ideas and strategies that can be *transferred* into a context, but they will often need to be modified to suit the specific needs and nature of this context.
- ✧ Develop well-planned and integrated strategies that fit with existing community or organisation plans relevant to the goal being pursued.

There are three main strategies through which capacity building is seen to occur: developing infrastructure, enhancing program sustainability, and fostering the problem solving capabilities of organisations and communities. This research identified what the case study sites did that aligned with these strategies.

Forms of ‘capital’

Definitions and their application to the research

Capacity building involves strengthening different forms of ‘capital’ (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation 2004), of which social capital is one, however it is not mutually exclusive in relation to the other forms of capital. It is increasingly common to find ‘capital’ combined with different preceding adjectives to create phrases with both different and overlapping meanings, as follows:

- ✧ *Human* capital relates to individual capabilities of community members (however that community is defined).
- ✧ *Social* capital is about networks, relationships, and levels of trust and reciprocity among community members that supports them to demonstrate their personal capabilities. Valued and mutually beneficial partnerships are fundamental to the notion of social capital. Social capital both contributes to and is dependent on human capital being fostered.
- ✧ *Physical* capital is about infrastructure, e.g. buildings and equipment.
- ✧ *Financial* capital means the goods or services that people produce, including “knowledge”, not just things.
- ✧ *Natural* capital refers to natural resources that we use to sustain our existence, whether they are renewable or non-renewable (although sometimes these resources are collapsed into physical capital).

The latter three – physical, financial and natural - can also be termed economic capital. Social capital and economic capital are interdependent: social capital will generate economic capital, and economic capital can resource social capital. When applied to the context of this research, health, human and education services and their physical location (infrastructure) are forms of economic capital in rural and regional communities, as are the presence of viable business enterprises. The operation of these services and businesses depend on the nature and amount of human capital among local community members. Interactions between community members as they engage with and support each other through services, businesses and community events reflect social capital.

Some of the people required to staff health, human and education services are often ‘imported’ from elsewhere, or before young people can take up these positions they may need to leave for university study before returning to the area. Rural and regional communities tend to accept that this will occur. When there are ineffective pathways into other local employment options, including skilled vocations, i.e. those that require an apprenticeship process, businesses are unable to fill positions, grow in size and opportunities, and remain viable. Young people, therefore, look elsewhere for employment options.

Wyn and Stokes (2001) point out that, 'unemployment contributes directly to the destruction of rural communities, as the young make an exodus from their communities to towns and cities, and it places greater strains on the provision of support services for those who remain' (p.138). This has a flow-on affect to regional and state decisions about the number, size and distribution of health, human and education services and can create a vicious cycle of urban drift and rural decline.

Population loss and economic shifts in the rural sector, resulting in a declining contribution of the rural sector to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and to employment, have affected the structure of many rural communities. At the same time, rural education and other services are increasingly unable to provide the necessary ingredients to service the rural populations. This is directly the result of government policies driven by concerns with efficiency and the need to reduce public spending, the consequence of which is the withdrawal of health, social welfare, and educational services to rural communities across Australia. (White & Wyn 2004, pp.58-9)

Debates about 'social capital'

There is an ongoing debate regarding definitions of social and other forms of capital that is driven by theoretical positions and concerns with measurement. The debate in relation to social capital is most pertinent to this research. Pope (2003) outlines some of this debate, using the following broad definition as her starting point for social capital, 'the social ties or membership of particular communities that make resources, advantages and opportunities available to individuals' (p.1), before detailing the two main theoretical positions and definitions. She argues that the 'fundamental difference between the... definitions lies in how and why the social processes develop' (p.2).

In the early 1980s in France, Pierre Bourdieu defined social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (1985, cited in Pope 2003, pp.1-2). He was focused on the benefits that were gained through people's participation in groups and ability to create resources through these social interactions. His definition proposed two parts to social capital: 1) social relationships enable individuals to access the resources of other people in their network, and 2) the amount and quality of the resources that are accessed or created. He focused on structural economic organisation and how group members are affected by the economic context in which they find themselves. The opportunity for all to profit creates solidarity and reason for relationships to develop, but the resources are for collective benefit, not just individual benefit.

At a similar time, but independently of Bourdieu, James Coleman of the United States of America proposed a functional view of social capital from his cultural perspective. It was 'a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure' (1988, cited in Pope 2003, p.2). This emphasises groups of people who share a common concern, build mutual trust and use their networks to support each other's activities - individuals draw on 'collective capital' to maximise personal benefits. There is an economic-rationalist flavour to this theoretical position combined with valuing a self-interested individualism and believing people make decisions to participate based on free will. The ability to develop trust in the other partners to reciprocate and act on social obligation is very important for this to work.

The differences in definition between these two authors are important because any measurement using the Bourdieu definition would have to include an understanding of the material conditions that drive the formation of social processes, whilst an analysis using the Coleman approach needs only to consider motivation at the individual (or aggregated individual) level. (Pope 2003, p.2)

People like Robert Putnam in the USA and Eva Cox in Australia have built on Coleman's definition and developed measures of 'collective social capital' based on aggregates of individual social capital in terms of trust, social inclusion, membership of formal networks and community groups, level of civic engagement, etc. There has been more work on developing measures based on this definition as individualistic approaches are common in a range of health, human and education services that focus on measuring risk or protective factors to make judgements about what action needs to be taken. Pope (2003) reported four criticisms of this approach:

- ✧ Social capital indicators lack clear definition – although there is something important going on between people, some glues that binds them, it is still difficult to achieve agreed descriptions of what this is in a way that is measurable in quantifiable terms.
- ✧ Collective social capital is not the same as individual social capital – the sources and benefits of social capital at individual levels may be quite different to those that are effective at institutional and state levels; by collapsing them together you lose these differences.
- ✧ The presence of social capital may not always result in positive outcomes – social capital can be used to create safety and bonds between one group to the detriment of other groups, e.g. on the basis of racism, classism or heterosexism, or between members of a criminal network and those who are negatively affected by their activities.
- ✧ Solutions based on an individualised notion of social capital may not work or may reinforce inequality – this approach may ignore the structural inequities within an individual's context that have significant economic implications, e.g. expecting families to maintain care of very ill family members because there are high levels of social capital in their family and friend network, despite limited economic resources and specific skills to take on this task. In rural situations, it could mean the state or nation expecting close-knit social and support ties in rural communities to compensate for a lack of employment opportunities and economic investments.

Others have used Bourdieu's definition to develop measures but have found it important to consider the historical social and economic conditions of the geographical area under study. They have found 'social relations are complex and cannot be quantified simply by using individual indicators, because they are not merely the property of individuals. An examination of social capital using this definition therefore requires more qualitative methodologies' (Pope 2003, p.4).

This research project aimed to provide a descriptive account of social and economic capital as reported by participants in local school-VET partnerships. It considered the social and economic context of the rural or regional location and how the partnership responded to that context, similarly to Bourdieu's emphasis. It was not focused on testing or measurement of social or economic capital with pre-determined tools; such measurements can produce valuable information, but require a different methodology and focus to that proposed in this research and would need to engage with the above debates and draw on the considerable body of work on community and social indicators, such as outlined by Salvaris (2000). In this sense, the project heeds this advice:

Researchers and policy makers will need to examine carefully the underlying theoretical basis of the definition of social capital they use, in order to decide whether it resides solely in the actions of individuals or whether it is underpinned by economic conditions.
(Pope 2003, p.14)

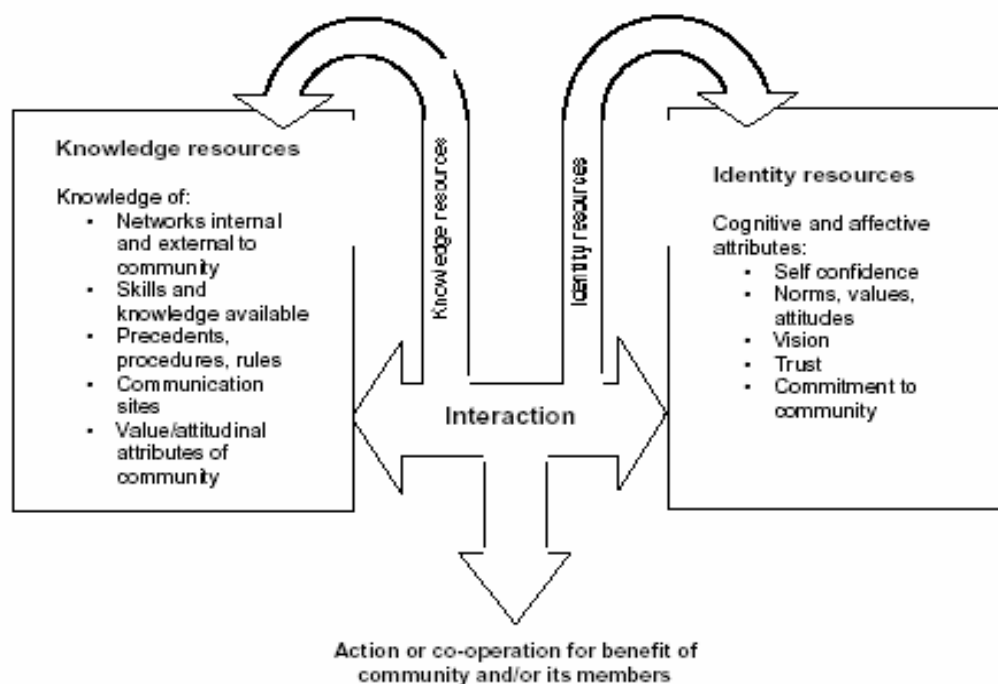
Aspects of social capital

There is specific emphasis in this research on social capital as this illuminates how school-VET partnerships successfully meet the mutual goals of schools and local communities in rural and

regional areas through their cooperative action, and what strategies can be transferred to other contexts.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Falk and Kilpatrick (2000, p.101) believe that social capital requires two sets of resources. “Knowledge resources” include the knowledge of how to gain advice and resources and where to go to obtain this information. “Identity resources” refer to self-confidence, trust, shared values and vision, and commitment to the community. Learning takes place through people’s interactions, drawing on both sets of resources, which result in mutually beneficial outcomes and the development of reciprocity (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000). They also emphasise leadership as critical if communities are to benefit from their stores of social capital, i.e. through their efforts to renew or strengthen communities through community development processes (see section below).

Figure 1: Building and using social capital



operation within or among groups’ (Kearns, 2004, p.37). In line with the World Bank, Kearns (2004) identifies seven key sources of social capital: families, communities, firms (business and industry), civil society, public sector, ethnicity and gender. He also distinguishes between the bonding aspect of social capital - the ‘sociological superglue’, and bridging social capital - the processes that are important in building communities that are inclusive and cohesive. VET, it is claimed, can contribute to both.

School-VET partnerships in rural and regional communities

At the beginning of this decade it was claimed that:

There is an urgent need to identify models of best practice in the area of regional economic development, demonstrating how education and training provision can be linked to growth industries, the local economy, and new civic initiatives that offer employment to young people in rural areas....Partnership approaches, which model integrated service delivery, and are focused on employment pathway generation for young people, can be further developed....*What should we be aiming for?* To create a more enterprising culture that is future and opportunity oriented. To provide a central role for youth in this dynamic culture which increases their sense of belonging. To build best-practice education and training systems linked directly to the regional economy, which focus on technology, enterprise, and sustainable employment. (Mulraney & Turner 2001, p.151)

Both during and since that time, many rural and regional communities across Australia have attempted to do just this. Mulraney and Turner (2001) also argued that successful principles of regional economic and social development include: ensuring young people have a voice that is heard by powerbrokers and acted upon so they feel empowered; focusing on social capital; and having community organisations that are reliable and willing to build partnerships, whether business or social. All of these principles contribute to increased community capacity and are facilitated further by adopting a lifelong learning approach and moving from silo to joined-up or collaborative government service provision.

This section outlines what has been learned to date through research on school-VET partnerships in rural and regional communities, and illuminates these proposed principles.

Building social capital through VET in regional and rural areas

An assumption underpinning the idea of school-VET partnerships, and schools as active players in the development of social capital, is the role and place of education within a community. From a narrow perspective, education's mandate is the education of students and provision of educational services. In contrast, a holistic perspective argues education and provision of educational services has observable and direct effects on local communities in terms of confidence and quality of life of community members. To this extent education is, indeed, a critical component in local development. This is reinforced through recognising that schools are not merely 'way stations' for a state-provided service, but rather their contribution is intertwined with: 'aspects of community life – cultural, sporting, organisational, informational and environmental contributions and participation in ceremonial occasions that celebrate the identity and unity of the community' (Squires 2001, p.6). This, in turn, is seen to be 'directly related to the

ability of the schools to harness, develop and nurture human capital and engage in productive capacity building' (p.16).

An increasing number of investigations have explored whether VET in schools contributes to social capital, including VET in regional and rural areas. The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania has an active research program on this topic. They have explored whether and how VET programs emulate the elements of social capital discussed in the literature: networks, shared values, trust and enabling leadership. In commenting on their research program, Johns (2003) claimed that when rural schools work in partnership with their local communities to create and manage VET-in-schools programs, they build community capacity and social capital, and therefore have the potential to contribute to community renewal. Kilpatrick (2003) found that:

VET was most effective in building social capital and learning communities where there was attention to customising or targeting education and training provision to local needs. The key to matching provision with local needs, particularly in the more rural and remote areas within the study sites, was collaboration and partnerships. (p.1)

Where local needs were integrated into the objectives of VET it was likely to be more effective and this was underpinned by a foundation of social cohesion and trust – key elements of social capital. Based on research into the impact of VET on social and economic wellbeing in seven Australian regional areas, Falk (2000) stated that, 'strong cohesion, trust and social capital underpinned all *successful* VET outcomes' in the study (p.10, emphasis added). Kilpatrick (2003) argued that rural communities have a higher level of social capital than their urban counterparts because they tend to be culturally homogeneous, with overlapping social and work related networks. Yet, social capital does not equate with social inclusion, and rural/regional communities are culturally diverse. It is possible that although an area appears to demonstrate a high level of social capital, this may only be evident for a proportion of the population. Even if it is a large percentage, there are still 10, 15 or 25% of the population to whom this may not apply. It is important to consider social capital among whom and for the benefit of which people.

Developing, nurturing and sustaining partnerships

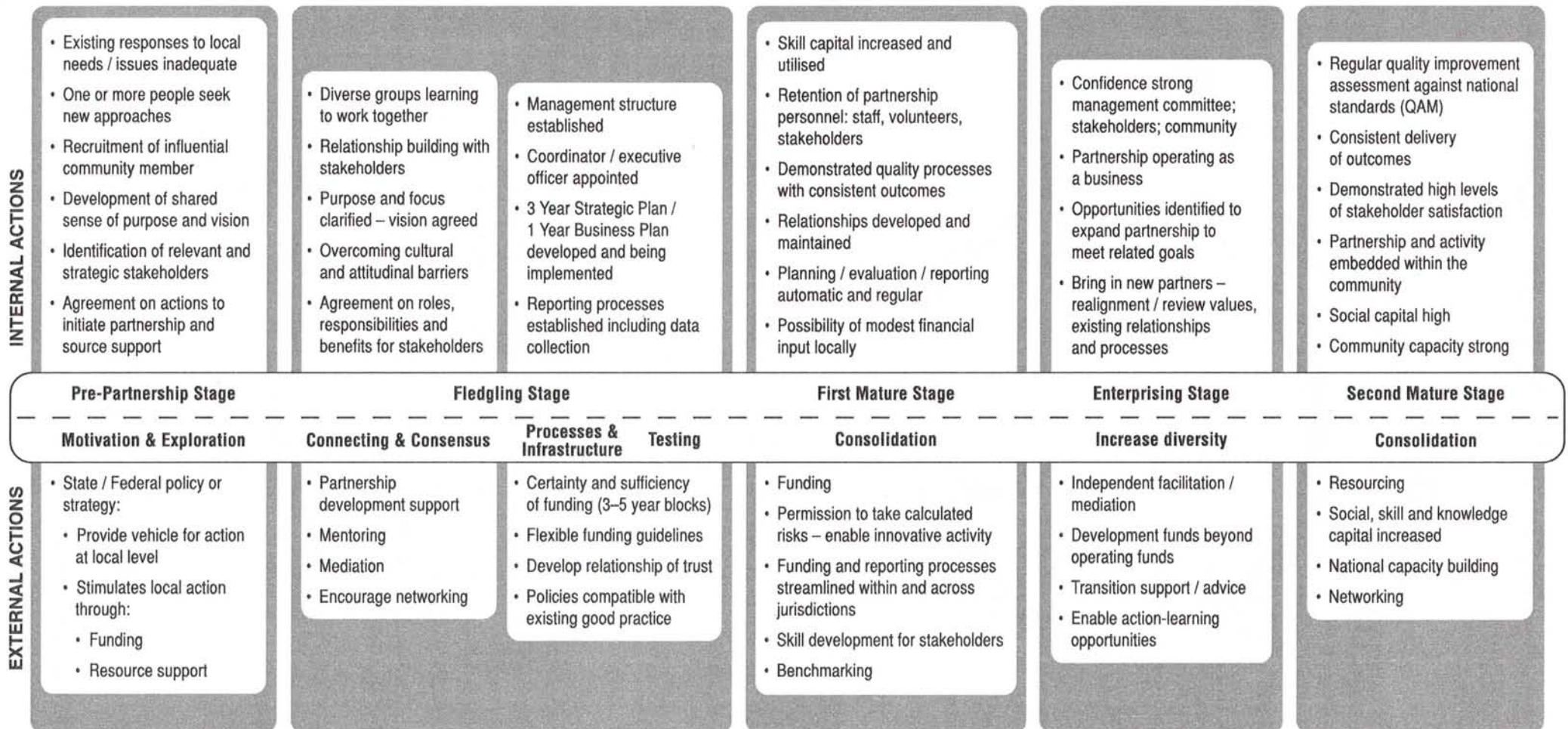
A repeated theme in both research and theoretical papers on school-VET programs is the significance of investing effort in developing, nurturing and sustaining partnerships in successful programs. To be effective and demonstrate social capital, partnerships must exist in more than name - they must be vibrant and active, and include several players from a local community or region, including other schools. The Country Education Project & Youth Research Centre's research (2001) emphasised:

...the significance of partnerships (between schools, with TAFE and with local industry) based on a recognition of mutual benefit, to support the development and implementation of VET programs. Of particular value within these schools is the existence of cluster arrangements which allow sharing of resources in staff, the delivery of subjects, co-ordination of work placements, and co-ordination of time-tabling and travel. (p.6)

Shimeld (2001) has developed a model for describing the spiral lifecycle of partnerships – see Figure 2. There are five main stages – pre-partnership, fledging, first mature, enterprising and second mature - with many steps at each stage.

Shimeld emphasised that once a stage is achieved this is not 'final', as many factors impact on the ability to sustain a partnership's development. Hence it may be necessary to loop back to earlier stages, either because the circumstances have changed or a new initiative is developed, or because some of the original parties have left and new relationships need to be built. According to the Australian Quality Council (cited in Shimeld 2001), two years of operation are considered essential to test and refine initial processes and infrastructures in a partnership.

Figure 2: Building and strengthening community partnerships: Typical activity in the stages of partnership development



Seddon and Billett (2004) identify that governments support 'social partnerships' through policy and funding across a range of sectors, including VET, however they are not a panacea to complex problems. As is apparent from Shimeld's model, partnerships have many complexities and challenges, especially in the establishment and maintenance phases.

In their report on social partnerships and their relevance to VET, Seddon and Billett (2004) described two forms of social partnerships that have different compositions of people or groups and motivation for existing. 'Community partnerships' are formed to address local issues or problems and grow out of community concerns and commitments. In contrast, agencies external to local communities often initiate 'enacted social partnerships,' although with the intention of developing and/or supporting particular functions within those communities.

Vocational education and training is characterised by both community and enacted social partnerships, which are often constructed in ways which support vocational learning, particularly for young adults, through a range of diverse local initiatives. Social partnerships also contribute to broader objectives aimed at strengthening communities by building relationships, working productively with a diversity of partners, and enhancing capacity for local governance. (p.5)

In later work, Seddon and Clemons (2004) extended this to include a third form: 'Negotiated partnerships...[are] formed between partners with reciprocal goals to secure a service or support and require effective negotiation of interests and agendas' (p.3). The partnership itself is necessary in order to provide services or gain required support. They also reported that partnerships are not simply one type or another, but may operate concurrently or sequentially through the life of the partnership. Regardless of type, all partnerships have a common need to negotiate and develop shared goals that they can meet collectively in an effective and mutual manner, which they named as 'building relationships of trust' or 'partnership work.'

As noted by Kilpatrick, Falk, Johns and Smith (2002), a partnership's level of maturity determines how schools and communities manage new challenges that may require creating new links and developing new interventions.

Success factors

Earlier research work funded by the Enterprise Careers and Education Foundation identified the following success factors in good school-industry programs (Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999):

- ✧ A history and/or culture of responding constructively to change at the school, community and industry level.
- ✧ Leadership from a critical person in initiating then maintaining the program – the most robust programs are those where the Principal plays an active role.
- ✧ A general education model in the school that accommodates workplace learning, again often mediated by the beliefs and commitment of the Principal.
- ✧ Schools providing strong support to students and employers through regular visits, along with smaller class sizes, individualised student attention, self-guiding learning materials and/or log books, phone help lines, newsletters and training courses for employers.
- ✧ Program management strategies, such as changes to curriculum timetabling that assisted students, and creative resourcing.

These factors are similar to those identified by the Country Education Project and Youth Research Centre (2001), and by Falk (2000). Falk also emphasises leadership and builds on these success factors by arguing that successful partnerships are those that have community-based, bottom-up planning processes built on collaboration. In addition, it is seen to be valuable if the program fits the identified needs of all participants, there is adequate resourcing (particularly

from government), and continuity of relationships as they facilitate trust building. Finally, it is vital to appreciate that ‘one form of provision of VET, or one approach, or one set of courses, or one teaching method, does not work across the board. This is sometimes described as “one size does not fit all”’ (Falk 2000, p.9).

Leadership for partnership development

The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia has highlighted the importance of leadership in rural and regional school-VET partnerships (Falk 2000; Johns 2003; Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford 2001; Kilpatrick, Falk, Johns & Smith 2002; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott 2002). This has been acknowledged by other researchers, for example, ‘leadership from within the school in establishing these partnerships is crucial to their success’ (Country Education Project and Youth Research Centre 2001, p.6).

Rather than the traditional conceptions of leadership relying on the vision, motivation and facilitation of a main person, in the case of schools this is often assumed to be the Principal, a different form of leadership is advocated. Although the Principal is critical to the process (Country Education Project and Youth Research Centre 2001; Falk 2000; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999) not all leadership roles should necessarily fall to him/her. This different form of leadership is referred to as *enabling leadership* and is defined as ‘leadership which facilitates others to come together to create visions and plan futures, inspires commitment and action by enabling people to solve problems, and builds broad-based leadership involvement’ (Johns, Kilpatrick, Mulford & Falk 2001, p.3).

A key feature of *enabling leadership* is supporting a wider group of community or partnership members to take up leadership roles throughout the process. This form of leadership is viewed as contributing very strongly to social capital (Johns 2003; Johns, Kilpatrick, Mulford & Falk 2001). The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia’s work is supported by recent research on resilient communities in rural Queensland that also identified the importance of promoting the concept of leadership rather than leaders (Plowman et al. 2003).

The Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia have outlined a set of five stages in the leadership process from an ‘enabling leadership’ perspective (Johns 2003; Kilpatrick, Falk Johns, & Smith 2002; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott 2002), each requiring different leadership roles that can be fulfilled by one or more people from education, industry or community sources:

1. *Trigger Stage* – a problem or opportunity is identified that will affect the parties involved. The main leadership role is:
 - ◆ The ‘entrepreneur’ role, which involves looking at the issues from differing perspectives and identifying possible solutions or options.
2. *Initiation Stage* – the different parties are invited to meet to discuss the issue and decide whether they will formalise a partnership or collaboration to address the issue and pursue possible solutions. There are three leadership roles here:
 - ◆ The ‘networker’ role focuses on identifying and bringing people together to gather their opinions and build a community of support.
 - ◆ The ‘teacher’ role involves providing required information, facilitating common purpose and vision among the participants, and encouraging other to build their skills and confidence so they can step into leadership roles.
 - ◆ The ‘supporter’ role means being available for other participants for discussion and debriefing, encouraging them to take risks and validating that it is a partnership through these actions.

3. *Development Stage* – the partnership is formalised, structures are put in place to support and sustain it, and the relevant stakeholders meet regularly in groups in order to distribute leadership from one or two key members to the group. The leadership roles for this stage are:
 - ◆ The ‘coordinator’ role keeps track of all the people and activity, shares information and resources, helps the group develop shared decision-making structures and process and work towards their goals.
 - ◆ The ‘motivator’ role focuses on reinforcing the shared vision, maintaining good and positive communication between partnership members, and fosters trust and commitment between members.
4. *Maintenance or Reflection Stage* – efforts are focused on both maintaining the gains to date from the partnership, and critically reflecting on the journey and progress of the group. The primary leadership role is:
 - ◆ The ‘sustainer’ role, which is committed to encouraging the group to review and reflect on the outcomes, both achievements and failures, and ensuring that any successes along the way are recognised and celebrated.
5. *Sustainability Stage* – this is not simply maintaining the resources and commitment to continue, but also involves renewing the vision and goals to see whether there are other possible strategies to implement, or other problems or opportunities for the partnership to be addressed. At this point the group has usually achieved collective ownership of the project and its leadership process. Two roles are relevant at this stage:
 - ◆ The ‘agitator’ role encourages the group to engage in regular review and renewal of the vision and goals, and also scans for new problems and opportunities and invites other members to do this too.
 - ◆ The ‘mentor’ role aims to develop and nurture opportunities within the community and engage the group in collective action to take advantage of them.

Such an approach to leadership can mitigate the likelihood of project breakdown with the loss of a key person, as there is sufficient energy, skills and commitment among the partners to continue down the path they have laid. In this way, leadership is embedded and is systemically, rather than individually, situated. Others joining the partnership can then take advantage of the existing social capital, rather than having to build it up all over again, and keep the project focused on the maintenance/reflection and sustainability stages without a complete revisitation of the development stage.

Benefits of school-VET partnerships

The MCEETYA (2002) taskforce drew attention to how VET is a:

...shared responsibility in the community and fosters collaboration between education, business, government and community interests...Vocational education recognises that students and their school communities have a significant and valued role in contributing to social, regional and economic development’ (p.10).

As outlined above, if schools are to play a role in building community capacity, then a collaborative approach and partnerships are required that lead to improved educational outcomes, increased viability and sustainability of towns themselves and, ultimately, to the enhancement and enrichment of the quality of life and opportunities presently experienced in regional and rural communities.

Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk and Prescott (2002) identified several benefits arising from school-community partnerships - training that meets the need of both students and the community generally, improved school retention, increased retention of youth in rural communities, positive environmental outcomes, and cultural and recreational benefits from

sharing physical resources. As noted above, these benefits contribute to both social and economic capital.

More significant, however, is the benefit derived from increased individual and community capacity to influence people's futures. This is particularly valuable to small rural communities where the school is a central institution and site for community activity, and through this interaction with community members fosters social capital, often in the face of low economic capital (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford 2001; Johns, Kilpatrick, Mulford & Falk 2001; Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2000). This is important given the much higher unemployment figures in many, although not all, rural/regional areas, particularly those who have experienced industry changes due to global or national trends, or corporate decisions on location and profitability.

The above outcomes are supported by a recent study into medium-term outcomes of VET programs delivered by rural schools for youth and their communities (Johns, Kilpatrick, Loechel & Prescott 2004). This research identified that school-VET partnerships provide benefits to schools, young people, communities and business. When VET pathways combined with locally supported work placements are designed to direct students into local employment, then: students are retained in schooling for longer, they are more likely to transition directly into local jobs or apprenticeships rather than leave the community, and they 'are more likely to indicate their intention to live in a rural location during their working life than those who do not undertake a VET program' (p.6). However, like other research (in both rural/regional and metropolitan areas), these benefits are usually greater for young men than young women, as there is a lower uptake of VET by young women and local employment is often in traditionally male dominated fields.

There are also specific benefits for business. These include: an increase in the productivity of their existing staff and through student contribution, enhancing the company's skills base through the training that staff gain or the rethinking of their role and existing work practices, more efficient and effective recruitment, community recognition for their contributions, improved public image, employer and staff personal satisfaction that has positive effects on attitude and motivation, and the positive impact of all of these things on their 'bottom line' (Figgis 2000).

Malley, Frigo and Robinson (1999) identified similar outcomes in their case study analysis of school-industry programs. This is a synergistic relationship, where businesses cannot fully achieve these benefits without the support of the school, and schools cannot achieve good outcomes for students in terms of educational experiences and future pathways to work without the commitment, loyalty and support of business. Further to this, Misko (2001) identified other benefits such as industry input for off-the-job training, developing student skills and awareness of suitable occupations and organisations, and improving teacher awareness of industry developments.

These findings are echoed in US experiences. Based on research in three states, the National Employer Leadership Council (2002) reported that benefits to students from 'schools to careers' activities, can be summarised as higher academic achievement, reduced dropout rate, higher attendance and better preparation for post-secondary education options. They also argue that there is benefits for the business community, including reduced recruitment costs, training costs and turnover, and increased productivity.

It is important to note that although businesses often contributed in-kind support and made available work placements, most of the administrative support does, or is certainly expected to, come from schools or entities established to take on this role (Figgis 2000; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999). Schools, therefore, bear most of the direct costs, having to absorb this either through central or grant-based funding. This is often not a sustainable situation and has led

several authors to question the appropriateness of traditional resourcing arrangements for schools given the ongoing expectation and encouragement to continue pursuing and building VET programs (Country Education Project & Youth Research Centre 2001; Falk 2000; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford & Falk 2002; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999).

Rural schools have embraced VET despite being faced by a number of barriers: the availability of a local TAFE or RTO, costs associated with placements, excessive costs involved with auspicings due to geographical factors, funding formulas for high schools, and a lack of the financial resources necessary to allocate even a partial FTE to the development and implementation of VET (Country Education Project & Youth Research Centre 2001). The issues are similar in the US (National Employer Leadership Council 2002). Benefits to rural and regional schools can be diluted when they bear the administrative and resource costs of school-VET partnerships, thus the inclusion of other schools within the partnership wherever possible is often advocated to support sustainability. The availability and range of local industries is a further difficulty encountered by rural schools, although Deden (2002) maintains that one of the outstanding features of many 'VET in schools' programs is the extent to which the local business community has participated.

Mulraney et al. (2002) have suggested that caution is required in advocating benefits to business, as much of the research has been done from a schools/education or big business perspective, with less direct inquiry about the experiences of small enterprises. This has high relevance to rural communities, where many rely on small enterprises, whereas regional communities are more likely to be connected to big business operations. In their research into small enterprise perspectives on structured workplace learning, they found that these employers often felt left out of the design of structured workplace learning and were not always clear on what constituted structured workplace learning. To address this, like many other authors, they turn to the importance of the 'construction of learning partnerships based on mutual needs and benefits, in which transactions occur between stakeholders that benefit each party and help lead to the creation of a competent and multiskilled youth workforce' (p.8).

Student voices

A notable absence in much of the literature is student voice, although concepts of 'youth participation' and, more generally, 'youth development' are frequently invoked (e.g. Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford 2001). Many research studies include young people as participants, reporting on their reported satisfaction, experience, outcomes and the future pathways they take.

In contrast, there was limited discussion and little or no evidence of young people's active participation in designing and monitoring school-VET partnerships. They were more often portrayed in a passive position of receiving the program, and gaining their active participation experience *within* the program. Although participation at this level is of clear benefit to young people, i.e. they report this is the case and it is often one of the main reasons for a program's existence, another opportunity is being missed here. As Ausyouth (2002) point out:

Participation in decision-making can extend opportunities for building teamwork and leadership skills, strengthening self-confidence and inspiring [young people] to make further contributions to their communities. Willingness to be involved in decision-making processes provides a basis for contributing to active citizenship and participation in political processes. Young people learn to advocate for themselves and on behalf of others. (p.29)

This absence may relate to:

- ✧ The general practice in schools to minimise student participation in the active management and initiatives of the school, with some exceptions for the limited role that Student Representative Councils may play in this area.

✧ The culture of adult authority that permeates schooling structures.

Alternatively, or additionally, this may be an oversight or bias in the research literature to not consider a youth participation framework for investigating and analysing school-VET partnerships. Yet again, it may be a reflection of government policy that focuses on the end outcome of higher school retention rates, smoother school/education-work transitions and better employment rates, with less attention to young people's agency as key stakeholders in achieving these imperatives.

Wyn and White (1997) identified the risk that policy makers and practitioners can lose sight of young people's agency to play a role in their present situation, not just their possible future, when the primary focus is on their transition to adulthood, usually via the socially expected pathway of leaving school/further education and getting a job:

Although the 'transitions' approach is useful in identifying important processes that affect young people, the bracketing of the present is of concern because it tends to trivialise the issue of young people's *rights* and of their full *participation* in society. Young people are also citizens, not just in the future, but in the present. However, their understanding of and participation in democratic processes are seldom a priority in the institutions in which they are involved. (p.115, original emphasis)

They urge schools to consider more democratic processes as a vital component of increasing school retention and re-entry, enabling all students to participate in decision-making about their present and their future.

National and state policies for VET and rural education

A comprehensive overview of the history of Australian national and state policies for VET can be found in Malley, Keating, Robinson and Hawke (2001), therefore, this section will focus on the presence of social capital concepts in the current policy environment.

The national picture

Compared with other OECD countries, McDonald et al. (2000) argued that at the end of the 20th century Australia has achieved a high degree of coordination across states and territories to develop and support a coherent framework for policy and programs in vocational education and training through structures and commitments such as: the Australian National Training Authority, the National Training Framework and the National Strategy for VET. Like many other OECD countries, Australia has realised that achieving the goals of employers and young people relies on fostering close institutional links between industries and schools. This involves strengthening vocational education programs with an emphasis on work-based learning opportunities that lead to certification, provide career options and link into nationally recognised qualifications (Lerman 2001).

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs clearly established the importance of partnerships with the community in the implementation of vocational education and training in schools. This is most evident in the policy directions and implementation documents under the *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2001a; 2001b). Community partnerships were identified as one of the six key elements of the framework. There was the recognition that the ‘centrality of partnerships is a further indication that increasingly learning takes place in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings...the advancement of this learning is possible only as a result of the establishment and development of genuine, local partnerships between those concerned with youth’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2001, p. 25). With this emphasis on partnerships the *New Framework for Vocational Education in Schools* was reflecting social capital concepts and language.

The Ministerial Declaration *Stepping Forward - improving pathways for all young people* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2002a) and its related Action Plan (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2002b) provided further evidence that national policy was incorporating the language of social capital. This declaration and action plan was part of the direct response to the recommendation of the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce (2001) *Footprints to the Future* report that focused on young people’s transitions from schooling to further education, training and employment. For example, part of the vision was that “*young people benefit and flourish through sustaining networks of family, friends and community.*” This reflects the concepts of networks, relationships and trust, particularly

through the development of what Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) called ‘identity resources,’ as discussed above.

One of the named challenges for national and state governments was to ‘work creatively in partnership with young people to build comprehensive networks that draw together jurisdictions, government departments, families and communities so that united we can address the complex issues confronting young people’ – once again, reinforcing networks and partnership. Another challenge was to ‘ensure that young people have the information, skills and support needed to negotiate the transition to adult life and to make informed life decisions,’ which points to Falk and Kilpatrick’s (2000) ‘knowledge resources’ – having the knowledge or knowing where to access it.

The Career and Transition Services Framework (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2003) expanded upon the concepts and principles in *Stepping Forward – improving pathways for all young people* through operationalising them into a set of related activities, products and services that will be available to all young people within their local communities/regions, i.e.:

- ✧ *Activities* - career education; brokerage services; career information, guidance and counselling; follow-up support; individual support such as mentoring and case management
- ✧ *Products* - learning pathways plans, transition plans and portfolios, exit plans
- ✧ *Systems* - monitoring and tracking

The Career and Transition Services Framework outlined the expectation that Local Support Networks would be created by revising and streamlining existing relationships or building new ones – these are now referred to as Local Community Partnerships and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training. These are the structures through which the framework will be implemented at a local level, together with resources and support from state and national governments. The embedded assumption is that social capital will be the “glue” that bonds people and holds such partnerships together (Kearns 2004). Leadership by Principals in this process was emphasised – an important requirement if communities are going to gain benefit from their stores of social capital (Johns 2003).

National policy work specifically directed to rural and remote areas included the *National framework for rural and remote education* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs 2002c). This echoed the language and emphasis on partnerships found in *Stepping Forward* by naming ‘*environments* formed through effective community relationships and partnerships’ as one of six essential enablers for quality education in rural and/or remote areas.

In 2002 the Australian Government conducted an inquiry into vocational education in schools (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education & Training 2004). It had a strong focus on VET in schools and reported in 2004. In general, this Committee emphasised that, ‘partnerships are a key component of successful vocational education programs in schools’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education & Training 2004, p.274). In relation to the effective delivery of vocational education and training in remote and rural communities, a range of factors was identified as critical, including the:

- ◆ use of culturally appropriate, and where possible, local, trainers
- ◆ incorporation of vocational learning with accredited vocational education
- ◆ use of appropriate distance and online learning [options]
- ◆ awareness in schools and their communities of their roles in successful vocational education initiatives
- ◆ flexibility of programs and their ability to respond to local needs
- ◆ professional development of teachers and their need to access information. (pp.81-2)

In summary, social capital concepts have entered the language of national policy and framework documents in recent years and are reflected in principles, objectives, strategies, and desired

outcomes. How this translates into practice in communities is a function of funding and reporting criteria combined with demonstrated capacities to develop, strengthen and utilise social capital at the local level.

State and Territory policy positions

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs position on the importance of partnerships to vocational education and training, and its use of social capital concepts, are reflected in state policy to varying extents. The three states included in this research are used as examples.

Western Australia

In Western Australia there is acceptance of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs definition of VET, one that involves strategic partnerships between schools, business, industry and the wider community (Western Australian Department of Education & Training 2003). For example, an inclusive body on which the wider community has representation makes policy decisions with regard to VET in schools. This is a requirement of all 16 clusters that are responsible for the delivery of VET in schools in Western Australia. Partnership with the wider community is also reflected at the local level. This is most evident in one of the VET clusters that forms part of this research in which it is maintained that the 'budget is devoted to the establishment of effective community partnerships' (Goldfields Cluster Management Committee, 2004).

While the need for a statewide policy framework was acknowledged by the committee that reviewed the interface between education and training in Western Australia, (Tannock, 2002), the importance of addressing local needs was also emphasised. Local problems were seen to 'require locally-organised and community owned solutions...[and] these solutions will vary according to prevailing resources and circumstances' (p. 4). Such solutions will depend on the strength of social capital within a community, and inclusion – who is recognised as a participant with a share in the community's social capital resources.

South Australia

The current policy position in South Australia is to adopt the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' work, specifically with regard to the *Stepping Forward – improving pathways for all young people* document and the *Career and Transition Services Framework*, and develop complementary strategies and initiatives. The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services established the 'Futures Connect' strategy in 2003, which aims to increase learning opportunities for students through a collaborative, cross-agency approach to services that assist young people make the transition from school to further education, training and/or employment. Again, social capital concepts are evident in terms of 'community support,' 'greater connection with their local community' and the idea of resourcing young people with information they need to make learning and employment choices. South Australia has taken a partnership approach to funding with the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, as it co-funds Futures Connect to take on the role of facilitating Local Community Partnerships in South Australia. This requires Australian and State Government staff to work together at regional and state levels.

Another initiative has been funded and implemented in four regions across South Australia, including the Upper Spencer region in which two of the case studies are located. This is the 'Innovative Community Action Networks' initiative of the Social Inclusion Unit, South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet, under their state action plan and strategy, called

Making the connections to address low levels of school retention using a whole of government approach (Government of South Australia 2004). The aim of ‘Innovative Community Action Networks’ is to bring together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and different levels of Government, and facilitate their efforts to find local solutions to local issues that prevent young people from successfully completing their education (Social Inclusion Unit 2004). Once again, networks and relationship are evident as concepts of social capital.

Victoria

In Victoria, a commitment to partnerships and the need for social capital was evident in the 1999 *Joint Ministerial Statement on Vocational Education and Training in Schools* (Victorian Department of Education & Training 1999). It is maintained that both the students and the community have much to gain from a symbiotic relationship. Communities were seen to be aware of the ‘vital role secondary students will play in providing a sustainable economic and social future within their region’ (p1). In return, there is the expectation that the ‘preparation of these students for employment and participation in community life requires community commitment to providing ideas, skills and resources to support vocational programs’ (p1).

In the later policy framework for vocational education and training in Victoria, *Growing Victoria Together* (Kosky 2002), partnerships are seen to be fundamental to ‘caring communities.’ It is these partnerships between local people, their organisations and businesses that provide the basis for ‘a safe healthy environment; and active and inclusive social and volunteer networks’ (p2). There is the recognition that there is a limit to what governments can do and that of necessity ‘VET is a partnership’ (p.5). The importance of partnerships is reiterated throughout the document, including partnerships between schools and TAFE colleges, universities, businesses, industry and industry associations, and between teachers, trainers and others who work in the VET area.

Summary

‘Capacity building’ and ‘social capital’ have entered the language of the VET sector, and the policy documents that shape what occurs in the sector. This research project did not question whether VET can contribute to capacity building, specifically regarding social and economic capital, as the evidence is present and strong. The inquiry is focused on pragmatics - *how* this occurs, for whom and what can be learnt from successful examples of rural or regional school-VET programs that can be transferred and adapted to other areas.

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