

# ***Get those brains into gear!***

## **Creativity and innovation in and through VET**

A NESSE seminar for Commission staff

**MADO auditorium, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2009, 11.30-14.30**

Creativity and innovation mean not only the capacity to *invent*, but also the capacity to critically look at, reflect on, and improve whatever it is we do in contemporary life and societies with original ideas. They are neither spontaneous nor inevitable. They cannot be guaranteed, decreed or imposed, but they can be made more likely through effective policies and practices, including in education and training.

However, many of those interested in education agree that existing E&T systems more often **kill** learners' creativity than nurture it. They argue that traditional schooling is obsessed with the teaching and assessment of only certain ways of thinking, communicating, doing and behaving and tend to neglect imagination, intuition, emotions and wonderment –qualities of mind that are vital for innovation and creativity and for our economic and social survival. Moreover, critics find that formal VET systems tend to focus almost exclusively on the teaching and learning of narrow job-specific skills and tend to neglect the conditions that enable the creativity and innovative potential of learners.

Enhancing innovation and creativity at all levels of education and training is identified as a key long-term strategic challenge in the Commission's "Updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training".

[Terri Seddon](#) from Monash University (Australia) and [Pasi Sahlberg](#) from the European Training Foundation will engage with two burning questions:

- *What are the necessary conditions for successful innovation in VET systems?*
- *How could European VET systems be reframed to foster creativity and innovative potential in learners?*



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**11.30-12.45: *Innovation in and through VET: debates, practices and perverse incentives***

Terri Seddon, Monash University

This presentation will offer a perspective on innovation and creativity in and through VET from an Australian standpoint. It will begin by outlining the debate about innovation in Australian VET and its take up amongst practitioners rather than policy-makers. The speaker will illustrate practitioner innovation that is reconfiguring learning in VET with reference to particular case studies based on VET providers in Victoria (Melbourne). Training reform since the late 1980s has acted as a kind of scissors driving the development of new practices within VET. While not necessarily intended, these reform processes have reshaped the character of some providers' work and the learning they support amongst learners. This special innovation capacity is anchored and enabled through the "applied adult education" expertise of some VET practitioners. Yet accountability frameworks steering VET in Australia have, mostly, failed to recognise this innovation and the significance of emergent applied adult education expertise. They therefore do not endorse, support or steer these preconditions for innovation, risking innovation failure through poor system coordination.

**13.15-14.30: *Creativity and innovation for economic competitiveness through VET***

Pasi Sahlberg, European Training Foundation

Globalization has increased competition within and between countries and the world's regions. National economic competitiveness is commonly seen as a valid index for judging a country's level of economic prosperity. Many recent large-scale education reforms have been justified by the urgent need to increase labour productivity and promote economic development and growth through expanded and improved education. It is generally assumed that to increase national economic competitiveness, citizens must acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for civic success and the knowledge-based economy. This presentation will argue that what many education institutions and increasingly also entire systems are expected to do in order to promote national economic competitiveness often contradicts commonly accepted *global education reform movement*. Experience in many countries indicates that increased standardization of teaching and learning for predetermined results, for example, may be counterproductive to the expectations of enhanced productivity, economic competitiveness and thereby prosperity of knowledge and innovation driven nations. The conclusion is that rather than competition between education systems, schools and students, what is needed is further networking, deeper co-operation and open sharing of ideas at all levels if the role of education in economic competitiveness is to be strengthened. The key features of education reform policies that are compatible with competitiveness are those that encourage flexibility in vocational education and training, creativity in learning and risk-taking in institutions without fear of failure and sanctions.



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**Terri Seddon** is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, Australia. She has built a research program in the field of education (lifelong learning) and work with a special focus on policies and politics of teachers' work. Her work is cross-sectoral in orientation, looking at schools, vocational and higher education, and workplace and community learning spaces. She has strong links with European research and is actively engaged in local and transnational partnership work. Terri has been research assessor for the European Commission's Framework program and for the Australian Research Council. Her recent books include: *Learning and Work and the Politics of Working Life: Global transformations and collective identities in teaching, nursing and social work* (with Lea Henriksson and Beatrix Niemeyer); *Education Research and Policy: Steering the Knowledge-Based Economy* (with Jenny Ozga and Tom Popkewitz); *Reshaping Australian Education: Beyond Nostalgia* (with Lawrie Angus). She co-edits the Routledge World Yearbook of Education with Professors Jenny Ozga, (Edinburgh), Agn s van Zanten (CNRS, Paris), Gita Steiner-Khamsi (Teachers College Columbia).



**Pasi Sahlberg** is Lead Education Specialist at the European Training Foundation (ETF). He received his Ph.D. in educational sciences (school improvement) in 1996 from the University of Jyv skyl , Finland. He was previously teacher, teacher educator, researcher, policy-maker and director in various positions in Finland before moving to work with World Bank in Washington, DC. He has global experience in education policy analysis, training teachers and leaders, coaching schools to change and advising education policy-makers. He has published writings on educational change, school improvement and cooperative learning. His most recent publications include "Creativity and innovation through lifelong learning" (2009), "Should 'failing' students repeat a grade?" (2008), "Education policies for raising student learning: The Finnish approach" (2007) and "Education reform for raising economic competitiveness" (2006). He is also Adjunct Professor at the University of Helsinki and at the University of Oulu, co-director of the International Association for Study of Cooperation in Education, and an assistant editor of the Journal of Educational Change.