

<b>Serial number</b>	0055
<b>Title</b>	What does higher vocational education bring to higher education that is distinctive?
<b>Session</b>	Cheap, local and distinctive? Possible futures for college-based HE in competitive HE markets: evidence from Australia, Canada and England (Bathmaker)
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What does higher vocational education bring to higher education that is distinctive?

Australian higher education is in a state of flux. One sign of this flux is the entry of new providers, including those with a track record in vocational education and training (VET). This paper considers two questions: Are these providers offering similar qualifications to universities or do they bring something new and distinctive? Are these new providers increasing opportunities for new students and widening participation? Answering these questions through the case of Australia has increasing wider relevance given that the growth of vocational institutions (VIs) providing higher education is a major international development in the field of higher education (HE) (Trow 2006). VIs are non-university higher education institutions whose primary mission is to provide qualifications connected to vocations (vocational qualifications). Arguably, this expansion of the HE system has prompted the need for more research that aims to identify the effects of the expansion of vocational institutions as non-university providers of undergraduate degrees on the structure of higher education. In other words, the research questions the paper is addressing contributes to literature that considers whether the system is becoming increasingly vertically stratified between providers or whether this increase in provider types is merely creating greater horizontal differentiation in higher education (Brennan et al. 2008; Wheelahan 2009). Social equity is central to this focus on whether expansion is increasing stratification or differentiation (Brennan & Naidoo 2008).

Data analysed to date (Webb et al. 2017) has highlighted that degrees in VET in Australia recruit many young students from more privileged backgrounds, as well as disadvantaged students. Why is this and what are the implications for equity in higher education? In this paper new empirical research being undertaken for an Australian Research Council grant 'Vocational institutions, undergraduate degrees, distinction or inequality?' will be drawn on. The framework informing the research design and analysis is informed by the work of both Bourdieu (1984; 1977/1990) and Bernstein (1990) who have each developed conceptual understandings of education as fields or sites of cultural and structural mechanisms that mediate the maintenance and reproduction of social inequality. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction is specifically used to consider how the entry of new providers may be troubling the boundaries between the VET and higher education fields. VET provider degrees potentially alter the structure of the higher education field, disturbing the established order and changing the rules of the game. Basil Bernstein's

concept of 'message systems' is also drawn on to nuance the theory of distinction in the context of the Australian tertiary landscape. Research attention is thus given to the messages associated with the marketing of undergraduate degrees and the presentation of teaching, curriculum and assessment to students by VET providers. The paper deploys these concepts of Bourdieu and Bernstein to explore the messages of distinction constructed through institutional practices. In a later phase of this three year research project, the authors will examine how these messages are received and responded to by prospective and current students, employers and other institutions. However, at this stage (December 2017), the paper will present early indicative findings about the marketing and institutional leaders' messages taken from case study research of VET providers in two Australian states. Discussion of the analysis presented will explore the extent to which the actions of VET providers are reconfiguring the concepts of higher education distinction and equity.