

MEDIA PROFILE

Mark Brophy

2006 Fulbright Professional Award in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
sponsored by the Department of Science, Education and Training (DEST)

“The study circle is a unique learning approach that is being used in the U.S. to help develop the trusting relationships necessary for long-term change for disadvantaged learners. In a setting where everyone is equal and through open and democratic dialogue the small group of diverse circle members listen and learn from each other. The knowledge and experiences of all are valued and this helps the group talk through issues and find ways to mutually solve problems.”

Mark Brophy is a Senior Project Officer in VET Division of the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. He has won the 2006 Fulbright Professional Award in VET sponsored by the DEST. This Fulbright Award was established in 1995 to support the exchange of research and ideas on VET between Australia and the United States.

Through his Fulbright Award, Mark will undertake research at the Study Circle Resource Center (SCRC) in Connecticut. His work will investigate ‘study circles’ and ‘community wide circle programs’, where many circles take place simultaneously and focus on a particular issue. These programs often lead to a wide range of community action outcomes.

“The SCRC is an internationally recognised organisation with exceptional knowledge, skills, expertise and resources in regard to the successful implementation of study circles,” explains Mark. “They are dedicated to finding ways for all kinds of people to engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical issues, including a successful initiative that is addressing the U.S. Government policy to reduce the ‘achievement gap’ experienced by disadvantaged learners. My research will investigate this unique teaching and training pedagogy with the aim of introducing the program to Australia.”

To compliment the Fulbright Award, Mark was granted a Visiting Research Fellowship from Adult Learning Australia (ALA). ALA is a dedicated advocate of the introduction of study circles into Australia, and realises that this study is an invaluable opportunity for Australia to learn about the successful ‘on the ground’ strategies that the SCRC are employing in the US.

Mark has a Masters and PhD in Education and Training from Victoria University where his research focused on innovative educational programs for the unemployed. Having originally left school in Year 10 to complete an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic, Mark later completed his final schooling year while working full-time. He then went on to complete a Diploma of Teaching at Deakin University and a Bachelor of Education at the University of Melbourne while working with unemployed and disadvantaged learners. Mark’s personal education and training journey has been his motivation and guidance for his current research focus.

“My studies gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own ineffectual secondary school years and I became interested in issues surrounding adolescents and their attitude to post compulsory education and training.”

At Victoria University in the TAFE sector, Mark was involved in a multitude of courses and programs that assisted the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups such as youth, ex offenders, learners from non English speaking backgrounds and retrenched workers.

Mark’s successes have been recognised with an Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship, a Seacomb Scholarship to present his work at a UNESCO conference in Bangkok and a Distinguished Academic Achievement Award at Victoria University. He has also taught on secondment as a Senior Lecturer at Shanghai and Liaoning University in China.

The prestigious Fulbright program is the largest educational scholarship of its kind and was created by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright and the US Government in 1946. Aimed at promoting mutual



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understanding through educational exchange, it currently operates between the US and 150 other nations. In Australia, the scholarships are administered by the Australian-American Fulbright Commission headquartered in Canberra and are funded by the Australian and US Governments and a select group of corporate partners.

Mark joins the ranks of twenty talented Australians to become a Fulbright Scholar in 2006. Applications for Fulbright Awards open 1st June 2006. For information visit: www.fulbright.com.au