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The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* is an official publication of Adult Learning Australia (ALA). It is concerned with the theory, research and practice of adult and community education, and to promote critical thinking and research in this field. While the prime focus is on Australia, the practice of adult education and learning is an international field and Australia is connected to all parts of the globe, and therefore papers relating to other countries and contexts are welcome. Papers in the refereed section have been blind reviewed by at least two members from a pool of specialist referees from Australia and overseas.

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From the Editor's desk

Tony Brown

This issue comes out as many adult educators return to their work after attending one of the national or international conferences that recently concluded. This year Adult Learning Australia (ALA) in collaboration with New Zealand's ACE Aotearoa, held a combined conference in Wellington under the theme of *Confident Communities*

– *Hapori Tu Rangatira* with a focus on Indigenous knowledges and citizenship.[1]

The Canadian adult education association, CASAE, held its 32nd national conference in Victoria, British Columbia and the papers presented there reflect an active, engaged research and practice community. Papers covered topics on education and learning from refugees, race, ethnicity and linguistic minorities to 1st nations; on art, literature, pop culture, storytelling and creativity; volunteering; the non-economic benefits of learning; social repair; twitter and liberatory pedagogy; gender and sexual minorities, and much more.

In the UK the association concerned with teaching and research in the education of adults (SCUTREA) met in Scotland around the theme of *Mobilities and Transitions: Learning, Institutions, Global and Social Movements*. The climate for adult education in the UK is a cold one, many university departments have closed or merged, the economic downturn has see spending on adult education along with other social services and local authorities cut back so these are hard times. Not surprisingly a number of papers canvassed the situation of adult education in the early 21st century, however others looked at learning and refugees and other new arrivals, and popular culture, literature and media in learning. The SCUTREA Conference followed close on the heels of the 6th annual one-day Conference on critical perspectives on professional learning in Leeds, and the 8th International Researching Work and Learning Conference (RWL8) also held in Scotland, which considered the visible and invisible in work and learning. The RWL Conference has a strong tradition of theoretically informed research in workplace learning along with historical, contextual and practice-based analysis of workplace

1 Information about each of these conferences, including papers, can be found at the following websites:
http://www.aceaotearoa.org.nz/events/conference
www.casae-aceea.ca/sites/casae/files/2013_CASAE_Proceedings_0.pdf
http://scutrea.blogspot.co.uk/p/conference.html
http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/about/events/critical-perspectives-on-professional-learning-sixth-annual-conference
http://www.stir.ac.uk/education/researching-work-and-learning/

education and learning. Rounding out this series of UK based conferences was the 10th International Conference of the *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* held at Oxford University.

At each of these Conferences Australian educators presented their research making important contributions to knowledge around these diverse practice fields of post-school education.

While adult education is experiencing a difficult time in the institutional life of many universities the range of interests and research that is demonstrated by the activity and output at this collection of national and international conferences shows an intellectual community thoroughly engaged with the important issues of our time.

The papers in this issue similarly share an interest in examining teaching and education programs that in one way or another work to address barriers to learning, develop pathways for disadvantaged learners, or assist learners in transition to higher education. They detail a range of innovative and noteworthy pedagogical approaches aimed at adult learners navigating the changing higher education landscape and in an adult literacy class for adults with developmental disabilities.

Robyn Broadbent discusses how community programs aimed at young people in metropolitan Melbourne can be used to counter hatred and intolerance. The programs worked with young people between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age and were designed to promote a tolerant, safe and inclusive society. Funded in 2010 through the Youth Mentoring Grants Program, the paper discusses the evaluation of the project and its potential to counter young peoples' marginalisation and build community capacity.

Karen Becker, Cameron Newton and Sukanlaya Sawang identify and categorise barriers to e-learning take-up in the workplace in their paper. Starting from the perspective of learner perceptions of barriers and their importance, the authors review the literature and identify three key factors that represent barriers to e-learning.

Kathryn Trees' paper is a reflection on the teaching and learning strategies needed to work with the diverse student body that now makes up higher education in Australia. Any given class room today will comprise international and domestic students, mature age and young adult students, from different social and cultural backgrounds and with varying skill levels and learning preferences. This poses challenges for academic educators in choosing teaching and learning strategies that are responsive to the different student needs while also meeting the requirements of the program.

Clemente Australia is a humanities program offered at the Australian Catholic University and the University of Ballarat that aims to break the cycle of poverty, inequity and social injustice for students facing multiple disadvantages and social isolation. **Ann Gervasoni, Jeremy Smith & Peter Howard** seek to provide insight into the program by following six women students in regional Australia. Their study, based on in-depth interviews, give rich detail to the students' experiences and also suggests ways that the program could be extended for other students in other regions who are experiencing disadvantage or exclusion.

Tertiary bridging programs targeted at assisting potential students to access university programs have been expanding in response to national government policy aiming to significantly increase the number of university graduates by 2020. **Robert Whannell's** study of nearly 300 students aged 18-24 years in one such program at a regional university campus identifies predictors of attrition and achievement. Using regression analysis he is able to propose interventions that address attrition of these young students and which could have important consequences for students, academic staff and institutions.

In keeping with the emphasis on teaching strategies and support for adults in need **Jacqueline Lynch** from York University in Canada examines participants' perspectives on a volunteer-based adult literacy class and its support for adults with developmental/ intellectual disabilities. The paper reports on interviews with tutors, learners and co-ordinators as well as the author's own

situated observations as one of the tutors. The paper concludes with recommendations about further integration of out-of-school literacy activities into the class, as well as increased tutor knowledge of the adult learners' disability.

In the first of two non-refereed papers **Theresa Millman** also investigates transition issues for adult learners, in this case the move between TAFE and university study. She too identifies a context of an internationalised education market and pressures to increase numbers attending university as context for universities providing credit transfer and pathway opportunities for potential students. This has however thrown up tensions around a discourse of inclusivity and providing the resources to assist students meet new academic demands. Taking one program from both the University in Wollongong and the local TAFE College the author proposes a tailored induction program as a possible solution.

The final paper in this issue reminds us of one of the most important and influential forebears of adult education practice. **John Collins** first visited some adult education institutions in Scandinavia in 1978, and in particular the Folk High Schools of Denmark made famous by Nikolai Grundtvig. Thirty-five years later he returned to look again at the Danish Folk High Schools (Folkehojskole) and was reminded of earlier ideas about what makes a good education. In this article he poses the question whether these schools offer Australian educators a model of relevance?

By the next issue there will be a new government in Australia. Will the issues raised here about strengthening access programs, supporting community programs focussed on combatting extremism and developing social inclusion, and supporting disadvantaged students be on the education agenda?

Correction:

AJAL 53: 1

When amalgamating several sentences in the article 'Meeting diverse expectations: Department of Tutorial Classes, Sydney University, 1919 to 1963', published in AJAL volume 53, No. 1, in order to meet the journal's word limit, we inadvertently ended up with a sentence that retained parts of the original, but did not finally say what was intended. In the first paragraph on page 29, all we wanted to say was that Meredith Atkinson became heavily involved in the conscription debate, which politicised his university role. That involvement was not as an anti-conscriptionist, however, but as secretary of the pro-conscription Universal Service League. We regret we did not spot the error at the proof stage.

Darryl Dymock and Ann Kelly.

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Using Grass Roots Community Programs as an Anti-Extremism Strategy

Robyn Broadbent
Victoria University

In recent times the Australian Government has become increasingly concerned with the challenge to the dominant culture by humanitarian immigrants entering the country. As a part of a complex strategy, emerging from the events of 9/11 and the perceived changing face of multiculturalism in Australia, the Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced in 2011 more than $1.1 million in funding for projects to mentor and support young people to stay disengaged from intolerant and radical ideologies. The grants have been awarded under the Building Community Resilience – Youth Mentoring Grants Program (2010) *and are designed to promote a tolerant, safe and inclusive society.*

As a result of that funding a northern suburbs Council Youth Services in Victoria established a project to work with young people 12 – 17 years who have been identified by Victoria Police, the education sector, and welfare agencies as individuals who have or are exhibiting signs of fostering hatred and intolerance either

through the spoken word, written messages, graffiti, the media or the internet that live within this local government area.

This paper discusses the results of the evaluation of a multicultural leadership program that was delivered using an adult learning framework in which 16 young people attended and how such programs can continue to build the capacity of communities to build scaffolds of support that ensure the inclusion of young people and not their marginalization.

Keywords: *Young people, extremism, racism, community program*

Anti Violence Extremism Youth Project

The Australian Government has become increasingly concerned with the challenge to the dominant culture by humanitarian immigrants entering the country. These themes are picked up time and again by government ministers, in what Poynting and Mason (2008) referred to as the 'New Integrationism' took shape. Poynting and Mason would refer to it as a moral panic that was fuelled by a series of incidents including from 9/11 to the London transport bombings of July 2005. Regardless of the catalyst the Australian Government believed that there was reason to be concerned about the radicalisation of young Muslims in Australia. Whether, as Poynting suggests, that these concerns are a part of a moral panic that is not necessarily grounded in evidence, however, there is research that suggests the social fabric is tearing. A recent report by Robinson and Lamb (2012) on the state of young people suggests that too many young people who are not in work, education and training are from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those from low SES families (Robinson and Lamb, 2012).

In August 2007, researchers at Edith Cowan University released preliminary results from a National Fear Survey funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) 'Safeguarding Australia' grant. One of the major findings of this survey was that fear is isolating many Muslim Australians. Where non-Muslim Australians reported

generalised fears of such things as travelling in planes, Muslim Australians reported specific fears for their personal safety in public places and a mistrust of our society. Muslim Australians are highly likely to experience discrimination along the following three main themes:

- that Muslim Australians are potential terrorists
- that there is no place in Australia for Muslims
- that Muslims should abandon their cultural practices and 'assimilate', (Aly, et al, 2012)

The research would suggest that for young people this combination of fear and discrimination and being a part of a group that is experiencing poor economic, education and social outcomes is a toxic mixture. Falk et al (2011) suggests that young people's experience of socio-economic disadvantage as they are growing up is a predictor of possible engagement in right-wing extremist crime or REC's as they are referred to in Germany. The research using the German police crime statistics of extremist crimes committed by young people found that when the overall unemployment rate of offenders and their families was collated it was highly significant. The results suggest that the way unemployment affects crime is unlikely to be through young individuals' own unemployment experiences. The more plausible mechanism is that overall unemployment leads to an erosion of values in society, which induces young individuals to commit RECs. On that basis a strategy that strives to build social inclusion is welcomed.

As a part of a strategy to respond to the perceived changing face of multiculturalism in Australia, the Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced in 2011 more than $1.1 million in funding for projects to mentor and support young people to stay disengaged from intolerant and radical ideologies. The grants have been awarded under the *Building Community Resilience – Youth Mentoring Grants Program*, and are designed to promote a tolerant, safe and inclusive society.

The *Building Community Resilience - Youth Mentoring Grants Program* is a key part of the Government's $9.7 million investment in counter radicalisation initiatives. McClelland outlined that the

program was established to support activities that guide young people away from intolerant and radical ideologies and encourage positive participation in the community. The Government, it would seem, was convinced that effective community engagement was pivotal to building a stronger and more resilient communities that can resist violent extremism (McClelland, 2011).

The initiative was focussed on the Muslim community and aimed to provide them with extra resources to support young people who are at risk of engaging in extreme anti-social behaviour. Roy (2004) suggests that empowering specific Muslim communities and groups can help combat extremism and promote community integration, lessening the likelihood of engaging in violence and terrorism. Spalek and Lambert (2008) report that in studies undertaken by the EU Muslim youth describe themselves, often accurately, as victims of prejudice in the workplace and in society more generally. Surveys carried out in 2006 by the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, showed that minorities and immigrants in the European Union experience greater levels of unemployment are overrepresented in the least desirable jobs, and receive lower wages (Spalek and Lambert, 2008, p.267).

In Australia similar results have been found through consultations conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), Muslim Australians commonly experience discrimination, racial vilification, threats of violence and actual violence. Others reported a general insensitivity towards Muslim cultural practices such as a refusal to allow prayer breaks or negative comments about Muslim names or dress (HREOC, 2003).

As a result of the funding a northern suburbs Council Youth Services established a project to work with young people 12 – 17 years who have been identified by Victoria Police, the education sector, and welfare agencies as individuals who have or are exhibiting signs of fostering hatred and intolerance either through the spoken word, written messages, graffiti, the media or the internet that live within this local government area.

The project focus has been to engage those young people who are regarded as at risk by providing individual and group mentoring opportunities. This paper discusses the results of a multicultural leadership program in which 16 young people attended and how such programs can continue to build the capacity of communities to build scaffolds of support that ensure the inclusion of young people and not their marginalization.

About this Community

This community is located in Melbourne's north and is one of the fastest growing and largest municipalities. Young people (10 – 24 years old) constitute 23.3% of the total population; in comparison to metropolitan Melbourne. The residents are relatively young in age and young people face significant disadvantage when compared to the rest of the state. The number of young people unemployed or not attending formal education is the highest at 11.9% compared to metropolitan Melbourne at 7.4% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

There is a mix of over 140 nationalities and 125 languages other than English spoken. Just over one in three young people speak a language other than English at home, with Turkish, followed by Arabic and Assyrian being languages most commonly spoken. This contributes to a culture that is innovative and open. Such diversity can generate interaction, knowledge and understanding (which are the stepping stones to developing respect, fairness and increased tolerance for other cultures and religions) making for a more cohesive and socially inclusive community.

Underpinned by Good Practice

The project is framed by youth work practice which, in this case utilised a leadership program based on experiential adult learning principles as the primary means of engaging young people. The National Youth Association (NYA) (2006) in the UK sets out a framework for understanding youth work practice. According to NYA (2006) Youth Work helps young people learn about themselves,

others and society, through informal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenge and learning. Their work seeks to promote young people's personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole (NYA, 2006, p.4).

Youth work, according to McKee, Oldfield and Poultney, (2010) is a special combination of three necessary elements;

- Purpose: work is predominantly focused on achieving outcomes related to young people's personal and social development (as distinct from academic or vocational learning).
- Methods: the extensive use of experiential learning and group work (as distinct from a prescribed curriculum and whole-class teaching or individual casework).
- Values: include the voluntary engagement of young people with skilled adults. This relationship transforms what is possible for young people.

Good youth work is planned and purposeful to equip young people with a range of personal and life skills as well as developing structure and direction for themselves. Youth workers are skilled professionals who can help empower young people to use information and their judgment to make informed decisions. (Mckee, Oldfield and Poultney, 2010, pp.9-10)

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, (YACVIC) in the Code of Ethical Practice, (2007) identified at least three factors that make youth work unique firstly that Youth Work is the only profession with a discrete focus on the 12-25 age group. Secondly, that Youth Work considers young people in the context of broader issues and is not narrowly problem focused and thirdly that Youth Work is holistic; it considers the development of the whole person. (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2007)

Youth workers are skilled professionals who can help empower young people to use information and their judgment to make informed decisions for themselves (Unite the Union, 2010). In the UK, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

(Ofsted), (2009), have reported on their framework that has been utilised as a part of their Inspection services of Youth Work agencies. Effective youth work, according to Ofsted helps young people to develop essential personal and social skills and an understanding of their strengths and potential. It contributes to their understanding of their rights and responsibilities and how they can influence the decisions that affect their lives. Youth Workers understand the structural and systemic barriers faced by young people and recognise how they must partner with young people to overcome those barriers including participating in policy critiques that advocate the broader rights of young people in civil society (Ofsted, 2009, p.8).

Methodology

The methodology is built on valuing open inquiry. Recovering the unity among research and practice as one collaborative process shifts the expertise to a knowledge that comes from people and communities (Walter, 2006). The methodology is underpinned by a social ecological framework that focuses on the individuals social and physical environment as the focus of resources for personal growth (Unger, 2012) and in this case informed by the participants. Ultimately the goal was to develop a good understanding of what worked, how it worked, for whom it worked and in what contexts, providing a clearer picture of critical success factors that will inform how Youth Services might enhance the model.

Components of the Method

Literature Review

A range of literature on models of delivery and program implementation was reviewed to inform the program development.

Surveys

Survey data was collected post the program. The nature of the leadership program engaged young people to offer their views and therefore they were more amenable to the suggestion of completing

the surveys. The evaluation of the program was based on two main evaluation purposes; summative and learning for the future. The evaluation placed considerable value on:

- Systematic engagement with key program stakeholders
- Evidence-based determination of the value of the intended outcomes
- Learning that will help enhance program design and implementation

The limitations of this kind of methodology are that the research team do not stand apart from the program but are immersed in its development. There is always a risk because of the subjective nature of the approach however the premise is that without key stakeholders as part of the research process, outsiders are limited in their ability to build those rich and subtle understandings or implement change (Wadsworth 2011).

Participants

The project was reviewed by the Council ethics team to ensure that in the research process the processes of feedback, support and data privacy young people were respected. The Youth Service team had been working with a collaborative group of practitioners that included the police, local schools and the local community centre that was working with newly arrived unaccompanied minors. A set of protocols had been developed and referrals were accepted as reflected in the program funding guidelines.

Leadership Program

As a result sixteen young people signed up for the program. Youth Services had already decided that racism in their community is best combated by all of their programs reflecting the multicultural diversity that already exists and that fostering tolerance and providing young people who are marginalised an opportunity to undertake a more mainstream program was to be the strategy. In effect the program had 7 different languages being the first language of 10 of the participants. Of the other six three were second generation

Australians, one was indigenous and one was fourth generation Australian.

The Leadership Program was delivered by a team from Victoria University. The program material that has been utilised in the workshops was initially developed by young people in Leeds. It is titled as a leadership program but in effect asks young people to consider who they think are great leaders, role models, thinkers of our time and the qualities that they bring to a community as well as their contributions. The program, through many twists and turns, is built on a strengths based approach to working with young people. Strengths based approaches use young people's strengths as the foundation of the program and focuses on those strengths, their diversity, individuality and the interdependence of each of those traits as the very starting point. This program, in particular, reinforces each individual's personal strengths that they bring to the program and assists them in exploring what they know about themselves and what they can still learn.

The program does this while teaching a whole range of life skills such as problem solving, public speaking and team work in an environment that extends the social skills of each individual. All of this learning is undertaken in approximately twenty hours of workshops. The key to the workshops is that they are fun, hands on, active and each young person gets their turn to drive, shine, build bridges and think and walk tall.

This set of accolades of the program framework should not serve to underestimate the importance of the program delivery. The program material is an excellent framework to build the workshops upon. However, working with a diverse group of young people takes skill. What is evident in the results of the program evaluation outlined in this paper is that young people had a lot of fun and while they were participating in the program they learnt about themselves and others. They felt empowered to share their voice and were facilitated to engage with the program that then offered them the vehicle to learn new skills and insights.

Why Do Young People Want to Do a Leadership Program

Before starting the Leadership program young people were asked why they wanted to participate. Their responses are varied and provide an insight into the transition they call adolescence. Young people want to gain the skills that will allow them to be able to participate in the adult world. The term participation is used to refer to the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship (Hart; 1992). Different ideas, different cultures, different genders, indigenous people and difference in age is what makes an inclusive community and is at the essence of a tolerant, equitable and responsible society.

However, young people know that communities built on these ideals are not always the norm, particularly if you are young. They are often excluded from a distinct role in their community and as such they must watch from the sidelines waiting for their turn. This program afforded an opening to some of the participants as was detailed in their comments below.

I would want to become a leader in my community and to be a leader in the future.

I would like to improve my leadership skills as well as speaking skills. I would like to work and take on the issues in this area as a leader.

I would like to achieve and have the opportunity to connect with this community.
I would like to be a part of making a safer community for my friend's family and myself.

I want to improve my leadership skills and to meet new people.

I want to be involved to improve on my team building and leaderships skills and to help people out.

I would like to be involved in the program to improve my leadership skills and promote the young people of this community.

I would like to be more confident and improve on all my skills and to show the side of young people in this community that is positive.

I want to help the wider community and be a positive role model for young people.

> It is a good opportunity to have a say and be involved in what happens with youth projects in my community and to develop my leadership and community skills.
>
> I want to learn some leadership skills and be a part of the community.
>
> I want to help with the future.
>
> I want to be a positive influence and to make a difference for young people and be a positive influence.
>
> I want to learn about other cultures and how to get along in this community.

When asked about the three key issues that they would like to make a difference in their community the young people listed violence, drugs and racism. The issues themselves are complex and require a range of strategies; however, these young people want to engage in the big issues in their community that impact upon them. The program was underpinned by the principle that if, as a community, we want to change the behaviour of young people and the culture and/or context of their world we must enable them to be partners in the work ahead. No matter how complex the issue young people can be powerful change agents in their community and should not be underestimated.

This was a Leadership Program that aimed to Connect Young People to their Community

The key messages from these comments are around community and young people. Young people want to be active participants. Their comments are evidence that social capital is an essential component to a meaningful life; that is, the greater social connectedness one has to friendship groups, employment pathways, community organisations and social and cultural resources, the greater likelihood there is of maintaining good physical and mental health and being an active participant in civic life (Black & Hughes 2001; Forrest & Kearns 2001). Increasingly researchers have come to understand that the construction of healthy, dynamic and inclusive societies is largely the result of the development by individuals of strong social networks (Putnam 2000; Portes, 1998). Catalano and Hawkins (1996) also refer

to these important connections as vital protective factors for all young people to mitigate their risk factors.

For young people, social capital is a vehicle through which goals and career pathways can be created, sustained and achieved (Stokes *et al* 2003). Priest (2008:4) asserts that;

> *High levels of social capital have been linked with greater productivity, better personal health, improved child welfare, lower rates of child abuse, lower crime rates and better government. Social capital has also been linked to improved community safety, educational outcomes and general individual and community well being.*

The importance of establishing strong community connections for young people is apparent in a range of Government policy developments undertaken in the past decade. The policy constructs of communities, partnerships, young people and their transitions was the focus of the two Youth policies released during the three terms of office for the Labor-led Victorian Government. The first, called *Respect: the Government's Vision for Young People* (2002), referred to encouraging young people's contributions to building communities and increasing young people's skills and resilience (Department for Victorian Communities, 2006). It is programs such as the Leadership program which is seen to be strengthening community bonds by acting as a community facilitator and connecting young people to community networks. It is a program foundation that connected with the aspirations of these young people to be a part of the whole, a part of their community and to make a difference.

The Students of Today Leaders of Tomorrow program was revised to fit the Australian context keeping the essence of the UK program developed by young people in Leeds intact. According to Barnes and Harrison (2006) the activities aim to develop a young person's communication skills, self-esteem, confidence, and to build resilience to become leaders of their own lives, at home, school and in their community (Barnes and Harrison, 2006). They go on to discuss the following as attributes that are developed in a young person through such programs:

- Confidence: through positivity and strong self-belief knowing this provides solid assurances.
- Self-awareness: The knowledge that understanding the self and our own personal motives, needs, prejudices, fears, dreams, passions and likes believing that such leaders embrace personal growth and development in themselves and others.
- Vision: The ability to see the big picture and the value in encouraging and supporting the creative process and imagination in their own lives and the lives of those around them.
- Community Inclusiveness: Building the understanding that individuals and organisations work most effectively when everyone is involved in some way.
- Inspiration: Enthusiasm in finding the passions of others and doing their utmost to inspire and support this passion (Barnes & Harrison, 2006).

Embedding Adult Learning Principles

Researchers in the United States such as Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Resnick (1987) argue that learning should be situated within the context of practice. Billett (2010) suggests that knowledge is socially mediated and that, therefore, the process of social mediation and facilitation is much more likely to provide a favourable means for learners to access and construct conceptual knowledge. Billett goes on to discuss this construction by learners' should be seen as an ongoing interpretive process because individuals make sense of knowledge in an interpretative and constructive way rather than internalizing externally derived knowledge (Billet 2010 p.206,) Von Glasersfeld, (1987) concurs also suggesting that learners construct knowledge from the circumstances in which they experience that knowledge

In relation to young people the pedagogy of learning and knowledge construction does diverge from adults and must transcend adults ways of knowing to meet the level and particular learning needs of young people. King (2007) drawing on her work in schools talks about the construction of knowledge through story telling. She outlines how

all of us have stories to tell, writing and speaking may be difficult for students who lack self-esteem or who do not feel safe or when English is not their native language. There are many reasons why students are afraid: They worry that they do not know the "right" answer; they're afraid to ask for help because they fear ridicule from peers. They lack confidence in their ideas, or they have little experience expressing their real feelings or experiences (King, 2007 p.210).

The program has taken these underpinning principles and packaged them within a program of applied and experiential learning that provides the opportunity for young people to drive the program, create their own stories and tailor their learning. The more life experiences, community connection, personal development opportunities afforded young people the stronger their position will be to create their own personal narrative of some substance. Non formal education is essential for the personal development and life-long learning of individuals. In recent years employers are increasingly looking for people who have obtained not only academic qualifications but who can also demonstrate that they have a wider range of practical skills that are acquired in addition to skills learnt through formal education. These 'soft skills' cannot easily be 'taught' in formal education because they are learned through 'hands-on' practical experience and thus are much more effectively gained in non-formal environments (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2003).

Applied learning provides young people with different opportunities to be successful, share expertise that they have not had the opportunity to evidence in traditional learning settings. (Broadbent, et al, 2008). In effect young people need a range of life skills to navigate the complex transitions that await them. Corney (2004) in his paper on Youth Work values highlights the importance of empowering young people and that youth workers promote the social development of young people and facilitate their ability to learn through experience from others and their environment.

Results

There were three key points of data collection. The first was in the form of a program application form that each participant filled in and

answered questions about their own motivation for the program and identified community issues. The second was a program evaluation that was available online to each young person to complete. Sixteen of the eighteen participants completed the survey. Twelve of the participants were female and four were male. Table 1 identifies the numbers in each of the age categories.

Table 1

What is your age		
	Response Percent	**Response Count**
13-14	6.3%	1
14-15	18.8%	3
15-16	12.5%	2
16-17	18.8%	3
17-18	43.8%	7

The participants were asked what they had learnt in the program within a set of prescribed answers and the opportunity to give more than one answer. Table 2 summarises their responses.

Table 2

What did you learn during the program?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
I could be a good leader	62.5%	10
How to communicate when I am working in a team	68.8%	11
What type of character and personality makes a good leader	75.0%	12
How to be a good team member	68.8%	11

The following question (Table 3) provided the participants with the opportunity to articulate what they had learnt about themselves. The responses gave some insight into how much they had enjoyed the program and how the environment of fun and experiential learning engages young people to reflect on their learning.

Table 3

In the course of the program I learnt that I was really good at ....

Making people laugh.
Communication skills.
Public speaking.
Socialising.
Communicating with in a group and getting my point across with a variety of powerful words. I also learnt how to make new friends in a safe environment which I have made many great friends in this program!!
Talking in front of people and not being shy.
Working in a team.
Listening to what others have to say.
Working with groups and thinking outside of the box.
Coming up with ideas.
Being confident and one day i will be a great leader.
In the course of the program I learnt that i was really good at public speaking and working with others from different cultures and religions.
Supporting people with the same problems that i have had trouble in the past.

The responses below set out in Table 4 summarise the skills that participants identified as a part of their own learning in the program. It is commendable that the participants could articulate their learning in this program; however, it is important to note that some young people identified both trust and accountability as key skills they had gained. They are key attributes for civic life and a bridge to community inclusion.

Table 4

What skills did you learn that you could use at school or TAFE?

Leadership qualities.
Good communication skills.
Confidence.
Leadership skills and qualities.
Accountability.

Responsibility.
Trust. To be trustworthy and to trust others will get you everywhere. Trusting people and showing it in turn earns and gains trust. It also shows people you are reliable and accountable when needed. I learnt to think on the spot and out of the square.
Talking in front of others.
Confidence.
I learnt that I can use some of these skills such as being patient to help me out in supportive friends program and SRC in school.
Always have faith no matter how many times you get put down.
Speaking up for what I believe in and make a contribution without fearing of it sounding stupid.
The skills that I learn and I will use at school is how to organise an event and also use my public speaking skills to make a speech.
To communicate with others, to work in a team and respect other people's ideas and thoughts.

Graph 1 set out below summarises the responses to a question about the actual program. Participants were asked to describe what they enjoyed about this program; again they could provide multiple answers. The young people acknowledged that the program was fun, which is one of the key engagement ingredients for any program that aims to engage young people to participate in their personal time.

Graph 1

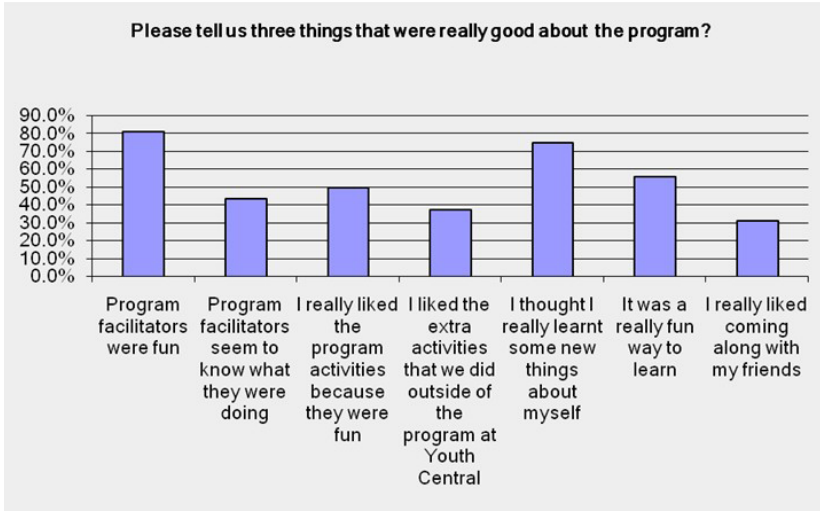

Table 5 asked the participants about what can be improved in this program to which they responded - nothing. However, one participant noted the program was timed for an early start on one of the school holiday days and that was too early.

Table 5

• Nothing. Everything was good.
• I loved everything.
• NOTHING. I know this is something you need to use to improve but if someone was to do the same program again I would advise them to repeat it exactly the same. Change nothing!!
• I liked everything.
• The one thing that i didn't like about the program was that some of the days we started at 9 in the morning, i found it too early.
• I liked everything.
• Nothing really to be honest.
• Nothing, everything was awesome!

Table 6 reports on the responses from the participants when asked about their favourite activity; note the experiential learning components of their answers.

Table 6

- Team Building Activities.
- Favourite activity would be the ball games.
- Creating the presentation on a program as a group of youth created based on what we would like to see happening in the Hume. It was informative and a real learning curve.
- The book-work and going Luna Park.
- Group activities.
- My favourite activity throughout the program was building a bridge between the two tables to hold the brick.
- Getting to know everyone.
- Debating and making new friends.
- Designing a community.
- My favourite activity throughout the program was the debating and speaking in front of people I didn't know well because I never thought I was able to do that but I was able to do so.
- Working with other people, debating and the games.

The real test is when you ask young people would you do it all again. Table 7 gives their answer as a resounding yes.

Table 7

Would you participate in another leadership program?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes	100.0%	16
No	0.0%	0
answered question		*16*

Concluding Comments

This program asked young people to attend a leadership program. They responded with (as a common theme) I want to make a difference in my community or I want to connect to community life.

They have identified one of the foundations to social inclusion policy around the globe; connection to community. By offering the program this Local Government now has a greater responsibility to consider its own inclusion record and identify opportunities for offering a voice to young people through engagement and participation in their own community. Young people want to be involved in the decisions that impact on them and not limited to community beautification schemes but the range of issues that matter to them and to their peers and to their communities.

The challenge is for the lessons of this program to be shared to other Local Governments. This particular Youth Service has offered the opportunity to establish a community youth group that can identify its reasons for being and its rules for operation and to decide on resources and to lead community events as well as participate in mentoring the next group of young people that will enter the program. Though there will face limitations, there are also limitations in adult life; those limitations are a part of the process to be facilitated by the Youth Service and the young people. What is critical is that a group of young people from a range of local community cultures have come together to *draw a line in the sand* for both themselves and for their community. They want to participate, they want to make a difference and now that they have been taught some of the skills and seen some of the possibilities they are ready for action.

The United Nations Social Development committee (2005) in their work on learning for work, citizenship and sustainability reinforced the need to provide young people skills for life and for citizenship. There is a global movement that acknowledges the importance of this skill development and secondly the opportunity for young people to use those skills in participating in the decisions of their community. Every persons need to be included means that excluding young people and not equipping them with the requisite skill sets will simply move them into margins to engage with others that feel marginalised (United Nations, 2005).

In the course of the program each young person was asked to build their own tool kit that they would need to enable them to be a

change maker in their community. One young man included Justin Bieber in his tool kit because in his song Never Say Never, he says he will "Never say Never again" and he concluded by saying that this program has changed his life and he will never look back. Another young woman identified the skill set of stating her case publicly that was now in her tool kit. A skill set she never believed she could achieve but by the end of the leadership program said her confidence to speak in public had grown to the point that she was keen to lead on issues.

What was evident is that by the end of the program that this multicultural, multi age group of young people could operate as a corporate group, working through issues, identifying tasks and negotiating disagreements. To observe this group is a lesson in tolerance for us all as well as a refresher on how to plan and implement an idea; and it is all because a local youth service said, come along to a leadership program we want to partner with you to make a difference in our community.

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A learner perspective on barriers to e-learning

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This study aims to identify and categorize barriers to e-learning adoption and the relative impact of those barriers on learners. It contributes to the understanding of learner perceptions of barriers, the different types of barriers and their relative importance. This study used a quantitative methodology grounded in previous literature. The study is based on a self-administered questionnaire conducted with employees in a rail organisation. This research demonstrates there are three key factors that represent barriers to e-learning: the nature of e-learning as a learning approach, the use of technology, and concerns about lack of time and potential interruptions when trying to complete e-learning.

Keywords: *e-learning, learning barriers, learning technologies, e-learning adoption*

Introduction

The use of e-learning in the workplace has become widespread and with the continuing emergence of new technologies, growth in popularity can be expected to continue. The many potential benefits of e-learning have long been extolled by researchers and practitioners alike, however there is far from widespread consensus on the benefits of e-learning and whether it is more effective than traditional forms of training and development in every situation (Derouin, Fritzsche, and Salas, 2005). Beamish, Armistead, Watkinson, and Armfield (2002) claim cost effectiveness, access and flexibility amongst the benefits of adopting e-learning and similar claims have been raised by many others (Brown, Murphy, and Wade, 2006; Hill and Wouters, 2010; Welsh, Wanberg, Brown, and Simmering, 2003). However, some research has reported finding no significant difference between learning outcomes of e-learning and those of more traditional modes of delivery. Indeed, in a review of previous studies Derouin et al. (2005:929) concluded that "overall, it is difficult to conclude that e-learning is more, less, or equally effective at the learning level than traditional classroom-based training". In many situations, it may be the case that individual or organisational contexts will determine whether e-learning is the most effective means of providing learning opportunities for employees in the workplace.

Regardless of the arguments supporting the use of e-learning, much of the research into e-learning highlights factors that, when present, facilitate a greater likelihood of success of e-learning. It could be assumed that an absence of such factors may represent barriers to effective implementation of successful e-learning. Indeed, much literature in the e-learning area, whether focusing on education or corporate settings, identifies a range of factors for success and these are typically issues relating to the individual, the technology and/or the organisation/institution. In contrast to research about "enablers", this paper considers this range of potential barriers and takes the perspective of the individual learner in relation to their perception of barriers to effective e-learning.

Purpose of the Study

Given the growing importance of e-learning and its use in the workplace, it is critical to understand the barriers that act upon and hinder successful adoption of such technologies. The purpose of this study was to identify and categorise barriers to e-learning adoption, and to assess their relative impact on learners. Understanding learner perceptions of barriers, the different types of barriers and their relative importance, will enable those responsible for workforce development to focus upon the most critical potential barriers to successful e-learning implementation.

Literature Review

A wide range of terms and definitions have been offered for learning that involves the use of technology. For the purposes of this research, the term e-learning has been used exclusively and is defined as "instructional content or learning experiences delivered or enabled by electronic technology" (Servage, 2005:306). E-learning has the potential to offer many advantages beyond those of more traditional forms of training and development at the level of the individual learner and at the organisational level. While this potential may not be realised in all e-learning courses (Derouin et al., 2005), this dilemma is not unique to e-learning. Indeed, even in traditional forms of learning and development, many decisions within the development and implementation of the individual intervention will impact on its ultimate success or failure.

One of the most common arguments in favour of e-learning is the potential to deliver learning tailored to the specific needs of learners, essentially offering "just-in-time and just-for-me learning" (Berge and Giles, 2008:46). In comparison to other forms of delivery, the quality of the learning process and the information provided for learners can potentially be enhanced as e-learning material can be immediately updated to be "more accurate and useful for a longer period of time" (Kathawala and Wilgen, 2004:5.04). Tynjala and Hakkinen (2005:324) also believe that learning quality can be enhanced in an e-learning environment where "technology has made

it possible to create virtual environments that almost exactly mimic authentic ones". In some cases, it is even possible to create learning environments that could not be created in a face-to-face training course. However, the capacity for e-learning to result in superior learning outcomes has been the topic of widespread disagreement with some experts concerned that a higher level of thinking and engagement may not occur without facilitation as a part of e-learning (Kanuka and Kelland, 2008).

Regardless of the many potential benefits of e-learning, it is critical that the debate acknowledge potential drawbacks and barriers to the development and implementation of e-learning. Indeed, e-learning has the potential to be seen as an impersonal mode of delivery and assessment, which can potentially be isolating for the learner (Bell, 2007) and such concerns have led to consideration of social presence in e-learning (for example, see Hall and Herrington, 2010; Kreijns, Kirschner, Jochems, and van Buuren, 2011). To further understand the barriers to e-learning it is important to first review the related and more established literature of technology adoption.

Technology adoption barriers

A full consideration of the potential barriers to e-learning is not confined to, or informed by, just the e-learning literature. Indeed, it is appropriate to consider the literature and research in the information systems (IS)/information technology (IT) field which has a long history of considering technology adoption and factors affecting IS success. Within this literature, a widely accepted model of IS success is that of DeLone and McLean (1992) which has become known as the D&M IS Success Model and used extensively in the measurement of IS success for over twenty years (DeLone and McLean, 2003). The taxonomy introduced in this model considers six factors important to the success of IS implementation: system quality, information quality, use, user satisfaction, individual impact, and organisational impact.

Since it was originally developed, this model has been refined to group individual impact and organisational impact together as "net benefits", and an additional factor added, that of "service quality".

Importantly, the addition of this factor recognises that as well as more quantitative measures (e.g. response times and nature of use), the level of support offered to users in the form of assurance, empathy and responsiveness can make a critical difference to the success of systems (DeLone and McLean, 2003). This represents a move to recognise the importance of 'people factors' and the role individuals may play in determining the ultimate success of IS adoption efforts.

In a study referring back to previous barriers research, Brzycki and Dudt (2005) considered technology adoption in teacher training. Originally, a model had been proposed in 1999 that identified five barriers to adoption of technology by teachers: time, support, models, infrastructure, and culture/tradition. After six years of interventions and study, Brzycki and Dudt (2005) emphasised the most significant issues to overcome barriers to technology adoption were the effective management of change, appropriate and available support for users, and finally they highlighted the critical role of ensuring incentives exist to motivate adoption. Most importantly, they identified new barriers that had not been considered in earlier studies. More specifically, the authors emphasised the need to consider issues of organisational size and complexity, and the continuing development of technology requiring not just learning how to use technology but also being prepared to change on a rapid and ongoing basis.

Adoption of advanced technology and the potential barriers have also been studied by Baldwin and Lin (2002) who were able to identify five groups of impediments namely cost-, institution-, labour-, organisation-, and information-related. The most unexpected finding from this study was that impediments were more readily cited by innovators using advanced technologies than by non-innovators. This finding can be explained based upon the fact that particularly early adopters are those who experience the most challenges with new technology and are therefore more likely to foresee potential impediments (Baldwin and Lin, 2002).

Overall, technology adoption studies provide at least an initial indication of the potential barriers that may be faced when developing and implementing e-learning in organisations, with a growing

recognition of the role of people, and not just the technology itself. However, the nature of IS/IT as a discipline means that much of the technology adoption literature from this field does have a general tendency to focus on the system and content rather than specific individual issues (although they are considered as an element). Researchers in the areas of learning, education and human resource development have also begun to investigate e-learning as a specific type of learning intervention and therefore, the results from studies in these areas are also critical to understanding the potential barriers to e-learning.

Barriers to e-learning adoption

Given the growing use of e-learning, it is not surprising that research has turned to specifically addressing potential barriers to successful implementation of such technologies. Although more recent advances have focused on corporate e-learning, the large majority of studies of e-learning originated from the education literature, with the research generally based on samples of students in educational institutions. While this research can inform the practices of those implementing e-learning in a corporate context, it cannot be assumed that learners in a corporate setting will be the same as those in educational settings.

In the context of higher education, Rogers (2000a) investigated the adoption of learning technologies from the perspective of those delivering the classes. Barriers to e-learning adoption were argued to often come in the form of pre-existing norms such as institutional or teaching method norms. These studies focus on why educators might choose to adopt learning technologies in their teaching and why learners may or may not choose to take them up. While this is appropriate to a higher education context, in a corporate context there is often no choice about learning mode, and the option to learn using alternate forms may not be available. However, Rogers (2000b) argues the need for behaviour change in both the learner and the instructor for successful implementation of learning technologies.

Other research also conducted within the tertiary education sector has investigated barriers to technology adoption by teachers and tertiary educators. For example, Rogers (2000b) drew together previous studies conducted in the 1990's and identified barriers as being related to internal and external factors, and factors cutting across both areas. Internal barriers are related to the individual learner and encompass factors such as attitudes and level of technological competency. On the other hand, external barriers are related to a lack of availability and accessibility of technology, the quality of support, and insufficient development of skills for stakeholders (both learners and educators) in the use of learning technologies. Last, barriers that were reported to cut across both internal and external factors include a lack of time available, a lack of appropriate funding and a culture that resists adoption of learning technologies. Similarly, Beamish et al. (2002) identified workplace barriers to e-learning adoption; individual barriers such as cultural resistance and learner motivation, and barriers relating to the technology itself such as cost, availability and access to computers or necessary devices.

The theme of internal versus external (or individual versus institutional) factors is prevalent in much of the research conducted regarding e-learning barriers and success factors. For instance, Muilenberg and Berge (2005:29) identified eight key factors that represent barriers to the uptake of online learning; administrative/instructor issues, social interaction, academic skills, technical skills, learner motivation, time and support for studies, cost and access to the Internet, and technical problems. Of these factors, the research found that lack of social interaction was the most significant barrier followed by administrative and instructor issues, time and support and learner motivation. It should be noted, however, that while this research drew a sample from a wide and diverse population, only 7% represented respondents from a business context.

Overall, it should be highlighted that much of the literature about barriers and obstacles to e-learning has been conducted in educational rather than corporate settings (see Berge, 2002). Moreover, many of the existing studies have looked across many organisations at different stages of adoption and implementation of

learning technologies. Nevertheless, findings from this research have identified a wider range of barriers that, in general, highlight a lack of technical expertise and inability to manage organisational change as the most significant barriers across all individuals surveyed.

Less prevalent are studies with a specific focus on organisational e-learning and the barriers to successful implementation. A study by Anderson et al. (2010) explored organisational barriers in small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and their adoption of e-learning. The authors found that the level of sophistication of general information communication technology (ICT) used in the organisation was a predictor of the extent to which e-learning would be utilised. This finding indicates that organisational readiness is key to the adoption of e-learning and that unless an organisation is mature in its use of ICTs generally, e-learning is not likely to be used in the organisation. Overall, this research suggests that, as discussed previously, e-learning can be considered just another form of technology and therefore the nature of the organisation itself may be a barrier to successful e-learning.

To synthesise some of the previous findings to inform the current study, results from some of the key literature (Ali and Magalhaes, 2008; Berge, 2002; Brzycki and Dudt, 2005; Muilenburg and Berge, 2005; Rogers, 2000b) has been summarised in Table 1. For each study, the table shows the focus of the study categorised as: education, corporate or general. This relates to the nature of the sample present in the study, including the category 'general' which represents studies conducted on the broader population and not necessarily within a specific context of education or an organisation. The second element of the table identifies whether each study took a specific e-learning focus or a broader technology adoption focus. Finally, Table 1 maps the factors, both individual and organisational/institutional, that were identified by the study. Whilst some of the studies identified unique factors, it is clear from this mapping that some factors are universal. In particular, ability to use technology, lack of user support, difficulty with availability/access to technology and workload concerns were common barriers.

Table 1. Barriers identified in previous literature

	Rogers, 2000	**Berge, 2002**	**Brzycki & Dudt 2005**	**Muilenburg & Berge, 2005**	**Ali & Magalhaes, 2008**
Educational / Organisational / General focus	E	O	E	G	O
Technology/ E-learning context	T	E	T	E	E
Individual factors					
Attitudes to technology	X	X			
Capability/ability to use technology	X	X		X	
Social interaction/ quality concerns		X		X	
Lack of motivation to use				X	
Lack of 'academic' (eg reading & writing) skills				X	
Organisational/ external factors					
Lack of user support	X	X	X	X	
Lack of administrative support				X	
Lack of training/ professional development for users	X				
Lack of management support					X
Availability/ accessibility of technology	X	X	X	X	

	Rogers, 2000	Berge, 2002	Brzycki & Dudt 2005	Muilenburg & Berge, 2005	Ali & Magalhaes, 2008
Cost of technology	X			X	
Time/workload	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of incentives to use		X	X		
Organisational culture / resistance to change	X	X	X		
Problems with the technology				X	X
Language barriers					X
Evaluation/ effectiveness concerns		X			

Overall, this study aims to extend the existing literature by identifying and synthesising existing barriers to e-learning adoption in an organisational setting, and in particular to consider these barriers from the perspective of the learner. To this end, barriers were assessed with a view to exploring their underlying factor structure and subsequently their relative impact on intention to adopt further e-learning. Our study seeks to answer the questions:

What are the key barriers in e-learning adoption? and

To what extent do these barriers influence the intention to adoption further e-learning?

Methodology

This study used a quantitative methodology grounded in the previously reviewed literature and the findings of a pilot qualitative exploratory study, and utilised a self-administered questionnaire to

gather data. The questionnaire was made available both online and in a paper-based form.

Participants and Procedure

The study was conducted in a case organisation which operates and maintains an Australian state suburban, interurban and rural rail network for passenger and freight services. In accordance with ethical approvals for the project, this organisation cannot be named. The organisation started utilising e-learning in 2008 for employees, covering topics such as the use of financial systems, security transit procedures and safety-related policies and practices. The focus of this study was the perceptions of users based on past experience of e-learning, and therefore our key informants were individuals who had used e-learning in the past two years. All those who had used e-learning during that time were invited to respond to the questionnaire regardless of their location or position in the organisation. Whilst the invitation to participate was issued by the Learning and Development Manager, all responses came directly to the researchers either via postage paid envelopes or through the online survey tool.

The most common form of e-learning undertaken by respondents related to topics such as health and safety, environmental compliance, and use of financial systems. A small number had also undertaken courses relating to supervisory skills. These courses were predominantly completed by the participants in the workplace at a desktop computer.

Overall, 1,047 employees responded to the survey. Within this sample, 364 respondents reported that they never experienced e-learning and 683 respondents had used e-learning at some stage during the last two years. It is these respondents who are the focus of this study. Of those who had used e-learning most respondents reported participating in one or two courses. The majority of e-learning users were male (67%), with an average age of 40 years (ranging from 18 to 71). This profile is typical of the composition of the Australian rail workforce more broadly. A majority of e-learning users (59%) had

qualifications lower than a bachelor degree (e.g. high school, trade certification or diploma qualifications), and average tenure within this organisation was 10 years (ranging from 1 to 44 years). In relation to the types of positions held by e-learning users, the majority worked in non managerial positions (76.5%) such as technical, administration or operational roles.

Instrument

In the introduction to the questionnaire, e-learning was defined broadly for participants as "*any type of training which has involved you using the internet, company intranet or other type of computer technology*. *This might include working through information online or on the company intranet, through to the use of simulators*". The definition provided was purposely broad to encourage respondents to consider all forms of e-learning to which they had been exposed. As the purpose of this research was to address perceptions of e-learning and not one particular course, this was considered the most appropriate definition. Respondents were asked to rate a number of questions in a larger study. However, this study focused on questions related to perceived barriers of e-learning and intention to adopt more e-learning in the future. These constructs are explained in detail below:

E-learning barriers. Based on a pilot study in the organisation, there were a number of potential e-learning barriers identified. Drawing from interview information and the review of literature outlined previously and summarised in Table 1, we listed potential barriers and asked respondents to rate the extent to which they believed each to be a barrier to using e-learning a five point Likert scale. Example items were "Physical health barriers such as eye strain" and "Concerns of privacy or confidentiality online." Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide additional barriers however these were not significantly different to those listed, and in many cases were aligned with one of the forced choice items. The internal reliability of this construct is .87.

Intention to adopt e-learning in future. Respondents were asked to rate the possibility of adopting e-learning in the future using a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Two items were adapted from Sawang, Unsworth and Sorbello (2007). An example of items in this scale is "*Based on my experience I would use e-learning again in the future*." The internal reliability of this construct is .85.

Control variables. Based on e-learning and technology adoption literatures, respondents' demographic information such as age, gender, tenure and educational background may influence intention to use e-learning (Sawang and Unsworth, 2011) and thus we controlled for these variables in our analysis.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis, correlation, and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to examine the data with respect to the research questions. First, SPSS 19 was used to conduct an exploratory factor analysis on the data ($N = 683$) to determine the underlying factor structure of the barrier variables. A principal components extraction using varimax rotation was requested. Investigation of the rotated component matrix revealed that the variables that loaded onto three factors at a level above .5. As per Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), Bartlett's test of sphericity showed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix, indicating that significant correlations among the items existed ($\chi2 = 3491.82$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was high (0.85) and above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.60. Overall, the three factor solution explained 67.55% total variance (Table 2). Items loading onto each factor were inspected and labelled as nature of e-learning, system difficulty, and time concerns.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of e-learning barriers

	Nature of e-learning	System difficulty	Time concerns
1. Impersonal nature of e-learning	.87		
2. Concern about the validity of training and assessment that is done online rather than face-to-face	.62		
3. Concerns about the effectiveness of e-learning	.68		
4. Lack of interaction with other learners or a trainer	.82		
5. Doesn't suit the way I prefer to learn	.77		
6. Inability to work with computers		.81	
7. Anxiety or stress related to the technology		.82	
8. Concerns of privacy or confidentiality online		.66	
9. Physical health barriers such as eye strain		.62	
10. Interruptions when I am doing the training			.83
11. Lack of time			.82
Eigenvalues	44.67	13.42	9.46
Mean (SD)	2.86(.87)	2.28(.71)	3.39(.90)
Cronbach Alpha	.88	.76	.65

Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability coefficients for focal variables of this study are displayed in Table 3. Overall, intentions to adopt e-learning were negatively correlated with the nature of e-learning system (r =-.55, p<.01), system difficulty (r =-.40, p<.01), and time concerns (r -.19, p<.01). As such, all barriers were related to lower levels of intention to adopt e-learning in the future. Two control variables (age and tenure) were significantly negatively correlated with intention to adopt e-learning in the future indicating that older and longer serving employees reported lower levels of intention to adopt e-learning.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations among constructs (N = 577)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	SD	SD
1. Intention to adopt future e-learning	(.85)	-.55**	-.39**	-.19**	.04	-.10*	-.15**	.07	3.85	0.83
2. Nature of e-learning		(.88)	.55**	.42**	-.03	-.01	.07	-.04	2.86	0.88
3. System difficulty			(.76)	.28**	-.07	.05	.05	-.12**	2.28	0.71
4. Time concerns				(.65)	-.13**	-.02	-.03	-.01	3.39	0.90
5. Gender						.18**	.21**	.03	0.63	0.48
6. Age							45**	-.12**	41.32	11.33
7. Tenure								-.27**	9.88	10.05
8. Education									0.41	0.49

Note:**p<.01, *p<.05, Gender (0=female, 1=male), and education (0 = lower than bachelor degree, 1 bachelor degree or higher) are dummy coded. Cronbach alphas (internal reliabilities) are in the diagonals.

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the differential roles of e-learning barriers on intention to adopt e-learning in the future. Step one of each regression was designed to control for possible confounding effects related to personal demographic information (gender, age, education, and tenure). To test main effects, e-learning barriers (nature of e-learning, system difficulty, and time concerns) were entered at step two.

The initial two steps in the regression equations explained 34% of the variance in intention to adopt future e-learning (Adj. $R^2 = .32$, $F(7, 555) = 41.69$, $p < .001$). After partialling out the effects of control variables, e-learning barriers accounted for a significant proportion of additional variance for the prediction of intention to adopt e-learning in the future. Table 4 demonstrates that nature of e-learning (β=-.50, t(555) = -11.31 p < .001) and system difficulty (β=-.13, $t(555) = -3.20$ $p < .001$) negatively predicted intention to adopt future e-learning. However, time concerns did not significant predicted intention to

adopt future e-learning (β=.05, t(555) = 1.31, ns). In relation to RQ2, we found that nature of e-learning was perceived as the most important barrier influencing individuals' intention to adopt more e-learning in the future. System difficulty was also perceived as a barrier to future adoption of e-learning. However, time concerns did not have an impact on future adoption of e-learning.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analyses predicting intention to adopt further e-learning in the future (N = 577)

	Intention to adopt further e-learning			
	B		t statistics	
Step 1: Control variables	1	2	1	2
Gender	.08	.07	1.90	2.01
Age	-.04	-.06	-.01	-1.66
Tenure	-.15**	-.11**	-3.10	-2.60
Education	.01	-.02	.30	-.56
Step 2: Main effects				
Nature of e-learning		-.50***		-11.31
System difficulty		-.13***		-3.19
Time concerns		.05		1.31
R2	.03	.35		
Δ R2	.03	.32***		

Note: ***p < .001, **p <.01; *p < .05. The coefficients reported are standardised regression weight. Significance of ΔR2 tested with partial F-tests in regression equations.

Discussion

This research sought to identify the key barriers to e-learning use as perceived by past users, and the extent to which these barriers impact on a user's intention to use e-learning in the future. Whilst previous research has identified some potential barriers (often in an educational setting or focusing on broader technology adoption), this study provides a unique insight into the key factors that serve as

barriers to e-learning particularly in the eyes of learners. The study also identified specifically the extent to which these barriers mean users are less likely to want to use more e-learning.

Three key factors emerged as barriers to e-learning from the current research. The first factor related to the nature of e-learning as a learning approach. This factor includes general concerns about the validity and effectiveness of e-learning and the lack of a "personal touch" in comparison to more traditional forms of learning and development. It also represents a concern that e-learning doesn't suit some learning styles and represents less opportunity for interaction with other learners and facilitators. Whilst these perceptions may not all be true of all forms of e-learning there is little doubt that time must be taken to address these concerns in the minds of users if e-learning is to be successful. Whilst Berge (2002) identified some of the elements within this factor as potential barriers, the current research identified this as the most likely factor to impact on future e-learning use and therefore the most critical to address for successful implementation.

The second factor relates specifically to the use of technology. This factor includes both physical and psychological issues perceived to be barriers to the use of e-learning. Issues such as a lack of technology skills have often been argued to act as a constraint on the implementation of e-learning (Berge, 2002; Rogers, 2000b) and the results from this study reinforce this argument. However in addition to the element of ability, there also exist anxieties about the use of computers for learning, and concerns about the physical impact of e-learning. In general however, this factor can be considered to represent concerns about the use of technology more broadly and therefore may be addressed using similar strategies to those used to overcome barriers to IS adoption more broadly.

The third factor relates to concerns about lack of time and potential interruptions when trying to complete e-learning. This represents a common concern amongst learning and development professionals that when learning material is converted to e-learning, there is often the erroneous assumption that this learning will simply

be 'absorbed' into the normal working day of the individuals. Importantly, of the previous research studies analysed (refer Table 1), the only noted barrier common to all studies related to these time and workload concerns. Although the hierarchical regression results did not find this factor to be predictive of future use, there was a negative correlation between the time factor and future use intentions, suggesting it is still important to consider in any strategy to implement e-learning. Indeed this factor may be seen to relate to the issue of 'affordances' as described by Billett (2001) whereby individuals may not be equally provided with opportunity to undertake learning. It would seem considerations of affordances applies as much to e-learning as to other forms of workplace learning. This finding highlights the importance of ensuring equity of access to learning opportunities and the critical role of managers and HRD professionals in providing all employees with time and space to engage in e-learning, even if it is to be undertaken in the normal place of work.

The final noteworthy finding relates to the impact of age and tenure on future use intentions. This research found that older employees and those who have spent significant time in their organisation were less likely to intend to use e-learning in the future. For younger generations, the use of technology in learning is more prevalent even in school settings and therefore the likelihood of acceptance of this form of learning in the workplace could be anticipated. Older workers are more likely to have developed expertise in traditional learning settings and therefore may be less accustomed to an e-learning approach to development. In a study of the general population, Muilenburg and Berge (2005) reported the same finding in relation to age. Tenure (which was correlated with age) was also found to impact on an individual's outlook on e-learning. It could be expected that if individuals had been in the organisation for a lengthy period of time and had used predominantly face-to-face methods of learning, the use of e-learning may not be as appealing. In contrast to other findings (for example, see Muilenburg and Berge, 2005), gender did not impact on future use intentions.

As with all research, there are some caveats to be offered in relation to the findings from the current study. Firstly, the respondents to the survey were all employed in one industry and therefore generalising to other industries, particularly those with significantly different profiles to that of the transport industry should be undertaken with care. Secondly, the survey asked respondents to comment on their most recent experience of e-learning and across all respondents this may have represented a range of different types and formats of e-learning experience, and they may have undertaken the e-learning at different times in that two year timespan. The limitation of providing respondents with a broad definition of e-learning is also acknowledged as this can lead to respondents considering a broad range of e-learning approaches. However as the intent of this research was not to focus on one specific course but on overall perceptions it was deemed appropriate for the context.

Conclusion

Contemporary organisations are constantly looking for ways to continually develop the capabilities of the workforce in a rapidly changing business environment. With this need as a key driver, many organisations have turned to e-learning to facilitate this process of learning and development in a more time-efficient and cost-effective manner. However, whilst the supporters of corporate e-learning have demonstrated the benefits to be gained by the use of technology in a learning environment, it is also critical to understand why there may be resistance to such approaches. The findings from this research provide the perspective of the individual learner and identify the potential barriers to e-learning adoption.

The key message from this research is that if organisations planning the implementation of e-learning can address only one issue, it is the issue of the perception of e-learning that should be addressed. The critical issue is to reassure users about the nature of e-learning and to address concerns about validity and usefulness of e-learning, as well as provide opportunities to engage actively with the material, and potentially with other learners. In many cases, this may only be accomplished by implementation of a quality learning product

that can then be experienced by the individual learners. However, the research also reinforces the need for those in the organisation responsible for e-learning adoption, be cognisant that organisational issues such as support and time allocation should be part of any strategy to adopt e-learning. By awareness of the potential barriers to e-learning implementation, organisations will be well placed to capitalise on the benefits technology can bring to the learning environment.

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Effectively teaching diverse student groups: a reflection on teaching and learning strategies

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This paper discusses facilitating student collegiality within diverse student groups. It argues that diverse student groups of international, domestic, mature age and Gen Y students often have similar difficulties and strengths although they may occur for quite different reasons and understanding this is useful when deciding on teaching and learning strategies. It describes several teaching and learning strategies and explains the outcomes of using these with diverse student cohorts.

Keywords: *Diversity, effective communication, critical reflection, teaching strategies*

Introduction

Teaching classes with diverse student populations is increasingly the norm in Australian higher education, including universities. This

change reflects “the expanding market in cross-border study” (Sawir, 2005, 567), resulting in more international students, from diverse backgrounds studying in Australia, a focus in Australia on work oriented training and increasing numbers of students with inadequate reading literacy skills. There are “an increasing proportion of Gen Y students worldwide” who are a “diverse group” (Skene, et. al., 2007: 1). They are the Digital or Net Generation born in or after 1982 (Gardner & Eng, 2005, 405). They have their own education histories, including learning using interactive computer technology and through a system of “‘bricolage’” whereby their learning preferences are “influenced by their peers and their own capacity to search out information and piece it together (Moore, Moore & Fowler in Skene, 2007, 3)”. For academics, such as me, effectively teaching diverse student groups requires being critically reflective, adaptable, able to respond to varying needs and implement strategies for facilitating students learning from each other.

A reflective teacher engages in “thoughtful observation and analysis of their actions before, during and after” teaching (Snowman et. al., 2009, 15) by assessing the “ethical implications and consequences” of teaching practices on students and self-reflection involving “deep examination of personal values and beliefs embodied in the assumptions teachers make and the expectations they have for students” (Larrivee, 2000, 294). This necessitates the teacher questioning them self about what, how and why they are teaching. What do I believe needs to be achieved in the tutorial to provide students with effective learning experiences? How do I ensure as much as possible that these learning experiences have relevance for students in their everyday lives into their futures? How do I facilitate students’ development as ethical global citizens? I need to “examine judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations” (Larrivee, 2000, 294) of students especially those based on stereotypes – ‘international students are passive rote learners, work and training oriented students are opportunistic learners’ – that close off rather than open up the possibilities for conversations and shared learning and adapt content and teaching strategies appropriately.

I and other academics often voice our struggle to provide students with the best possible learning experiences for a variety of reasons including moves to standardised curriculum, “education [suited] to job-training sites” (Giroux, 2012, 186), ever changing student cohorts, pressure to research and teach; reasons not necessarily specific to this socio-political period. Importantly, most of us are time poor. At the same time, more students – those for whom English is a second language, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, mature age students either returning to education after time in the work force or raising families, and increasingly school leavers with higher visual literacy but lower reading literacy – require individual or group remedial assistance and thus more time. Students who regard themselves as clients receiving a service increasingly expect academics to respond to their inquiries immediately and accommodate their schedule, particularly if they are also working and are time poor.

Time constraints are often at odds with developing collegiality, knowing how to listen and speak with fellow students, particularly those who are ‘other’. They are at odds with enabling students to be “transformative intellectuals”, (Adler, 2011, 610) for whom education is about intellectual and personal growth and wider social change including supporting that in their peers. There is a useful, growing dialogue amongst academics about effective strategies, including time management and “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Adler, 2011, 609), and resources for teaching diverse groups of students.

This paper is a discussion of my critical reflection on teaching *Gender, Globalisation and Cultural Politics* (*GGCP*), to undergraduate and postgraduate, international and domestic students over three years (2010 – 2012), within the context of the constraints outlined above. I began teaching the unit part way through a semester, which is often difficult for students and teacher. I came into the unit with my own expectations of how it would operate, without time to do enough of the usual preliminary work to build relationships. For me, there was a lack of engagement between international, mature age and domestic students. This prompted me to reflect on a tutorial for a unit, five years earlier in which, Singaporean students reluctant to speak to the

whole class wanted to be in groups with fellow Singaporean students, found reading comprehension difficult and lacked confidence to try out their ideas with others. The tutorial group was not cohesive; a significant number of domestic students were not patient with international students and avoided having them in their group. The students did not benefit from the cultural diversity and the range of knowledge this offered; they did not learn how to listen and speak cross-culturally; and did not develop a sense of themselves as part of global citizenry. The learning environment and teaching strategies were ineffective and I did not want that dynamic in *GGCP*. I was concerned to promote positive group dynamics and confidence so that students experienced the classroom as a safe learning space where ethnicity, cultural and socio-economic differences, future aspirations including career, enrich rather than inhibit learning.

Here, I discuss teaching strategies, such as small group learning opportunities and impromptu oral presentations I used in 2011 and 2012, to enhance the students' recognition of their knowledge and experiences and to help them develop the confidence and ability to interact and thus build collegiality. I also wanted to facilitate all students in developing an understanding of themselves as global citizens (a central unit aim). This paper is not a research project and therefore I did not collect data to monitor the outcomes of activities. However, students' verbal feedback and university teaching surveys have guided my reflections about, and changes to teaching and learning strategies and confirm my observations, assumptions and comments about their effectiveness.

The learning environment

Contemporary socio-cultural pedagogic theory argues, "teaching and learning are shaped by the social and cultural context of the learning environment and the complex and dynamic human activity systems within them at a particular point in time" (United Kingdom Council for International Student Affairs, 2012, 1). To optimise learning, students need to communicate effectively, which is facilitated when they are comfortable to speak and try out their ideas, feel accepted as one of the group, are not 'othered'. I, like most academics understand

this in relation to teaching domestic students with their diverse "socio-cultural contexts" and their "previous learning environment". As an Anglo-Celtic, female, Australian academic who has much in common with these students, I teach effectively for most of them. However, I – as with teachers Susan Adler interviewed for her research on teaching epistemology and diversity – rarely know much beyond "tourist information" (Adler, 2011, 609) about the international students' cultures and less about their previous learning environments. While over time we accrue general knowledge, it is rarely possible to acquire specific knowledge of the "socio-cultural context of the learning environment" and the previous learning on which individual international students "schema" or "meaning system" is built. Generally, we meet students in the first week of semester and work with them for fifteen weeks and if lucky work with them in successive units.

In *GGCP*, my teaching model and expectations are new for the majority of international students, who are familiar with the lecture format but not with listening in English spoken as a first language or to ideas framed within a western theoretical context. They are often not familiar with interactive tutorials in which they are required to speak about lectures they have heard an hour before and make links to the week's reading. However, many international students in *GGCP* are familiar with the issues the unit focuses on, so they can assimilate new information with their current knowledge. Importantly, the international students can provide valuable cultural knowledge for other international and domestic students and the teacher if the learning environment facilitates this. When this occurs, they play an important role in internationalising the curriculum while gaining experience speaking in class. In 2010, I had not determined the unit content or teaching strategies. Further, I was behind all semester, often reading the unit material at the same time as the students. This left little time for reflection and adapting teaching and learning strategies sufficiently to give students the best possible learning experience or have students benefit from each other's knowledge. I was able to remedy this the following year; a reminder that learning is incremental for everyone.

In her paper, "Teaching International Students: Strategies to enhance learning", Sophie Arkoudis challenges readers to accept that at least to some extent academics' views of teaching international students are based on preconceived ideas that international students are "reluct[ant] to talk in class, [have] a preference for rote learning and an apparent lack of critical thinking skills" (Arkoudis, 2011, 5). Arkoudis's observation was useful to me as a reminder to reflect critically on what is happening for students rather than making assumptions based on stereotypical ideas. It assisted me to rethink the experience with the Singaporean students some years earlier, to question what was missing from the teaching and learning environment in 2010 and remedy this. It was also necessary to extend my reflection to include other Asian students, African and European students to whom the same stereotypical ideas are applied. Importantly, the same principles apply to the domestic students.

Arkoudis identifies four challenges specific to international students, for moving beyond stereotypical thinking. These are: "learning and living in a different culture; learning in a foreign university context; learning with developing English language proficiency; and learning the academic disciplinary discourse" (Arkoudis, 2011, 5). While these challenges are self-evident, it was useful to read and reflect on them in relation to international and domestic students who experience the same challenges. Again, this is not new, rather a reminder to think about strategies that Arkoudis identified: "internationalising the curriculum; making lectures accessible; encouraging participation in small group work; ... supporting students in developing critical thinking skills; and, explaining assessment expectations" (Arkoudis, 2011, 6) and plan learning tasks accordingly.

The *Gender, Globalisation and Cultural Politics* unit

The *GGCP* unit provides students with a global perspective, focusing specifically on the gendered dimensions of economic and cultural politics. It discusses the growth of international capitalism and, especially since the early 1980s, its expansion beyond national boundaries, which has created a greater degree of integration and interdependency between nations and national economies. Students

interrogate the positive and negative impacts of global economics on cultures, poverty, health and the environment. It analyses issues such as sex trafficking, HIV/AIDS, transnational corporations and corporate social responsibility. The readings are drawn from a wide range of sources, including the United Nations website, relevant government and NGO websites and journals; problematically, only one is from a local community group. True diversification of sources for readings, at the required academic standard, is a challenge for the future.

From 2011, the unit sought to have all students understand themselves as international and global citizens. To achieve this, students learn to situate the economic, political, social systems of their home country, including Australia, within global economics, politics, and cultures. This is an important step in students understanding that all countries are interconnected, whether we recognise this in our daily lives or not. It helps clarify the need for thinking ethically about global as well as local issues. At the end of the unit, a few Australian students, who had not travelled overseas, expressed their initial difficulty with understanding Australia as just one example of a socio/economic/ political model because for them Australia was the norm. The students also analyse what responsible citizenship means, requiring an understanding of being a global citizen and the necessity to engage with issues of equity and social justice, sustainability and the reduction of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination (ALTC National Teaching Fellowship, 2012). This analysis can be confronting, in particular for the domestic students, as they engage with their own social, including gender and non-Indigenous economic and political privilege.

In the first two years, the unit had undergraduate and postgraduate level students. The international students were ethnically, culturally and linguistically different to each other, coming from places as diverse as Ethiopia, Bhutan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Canada and Seychelles. The postgraduate students work for government agencies, NGOs, university and various businesses. Importantly the international students, in particular, had chosen to study in Australia rather than elsewhere. They all expressed global

worldviews, which were markedly different to the domestic students. All the international students, to varying degrees, found listening, speaking, reading and writing English difficult. The following year, the student cohort was less diverse with a mix of students from Europe, Asia and Australia, most were Gen Y students, and a smaller number of mature age domestic students.

Student dynamics and introduction to theoretical concepts through engagement with identity

My first concern in the tutorial was to establish effective group dynamics and make apparent the relationship between personal and theoretical discourses. I thus began the first tutorial in 2011 (and again in 2012), with an exercise in which students formed a group or groups based on their identities and later explained their grouping to the class. This ensured all students spoke with others immediately in conversations that explicated the nexus between theory and the everyday. All students thus spoke and listened to each other and exchanged personal information to make decisions about identity. As expected students were more or less confident about introducing themselves, so that more confident students often initiated exchanges. Questions students asked me about how to do the activity and the students' explanations of their decision making process raised a series of issues to work into the unit content and teaching strategies.

Students had conversations, formed and reformed groups. One student asked twice whether he should look at the colour of other people's skin. A domestic student asked whether the Australian students should identify their cultural heritages even if their grandparents were Australian. Once they had formed their groups, they negotiated how to explain their grouping. At the end of the sorting process, there were several groups with interesting accounts of why they were together. One student asked if it was all right not to join a group.

The explanations of groupings raised questions and identified concepts central to the unit. A man and woman paired up based on having a similar colour, and being from the same broad geographic

region. One man and woman paired up because they are both indigenous, rather than pairing with others from the same country. The indigenous students also identified themselves as being in a lower socio-economic group to the other students from both countries. The domestic students sorted themselves into groups depending on their families' countries of origin, so that three students identified themselves as Mediterranean and the remainder as either Anglo or Celtic Australians. Two men grouped together because of the geographic proximity of their countries but were uneasy about this because one was indigenous and the other was not. For many of the international students politics was a key identity factor while for the domestic students it was not. Interestingly, whether they were international, domestic, mature age or Gen Y students was not an issue. The activity and the discussion facilitated students speaking and listening to each other, exchanging personal information and thereby starting to form meaningful relationships. The process produced what Adulis et. al. termed a "climate of interaction" (Higher Education Academy, 2012) that opened up possibilities for learning through the exchange of experiences, because students began speaking meaningfully to each other.

Students critically analysed their groupings and explanations for their choice of grouping, which included discussions of racial difference. This prompted one student to say she had read about scientists disputing the idea of 'different races', a way the class were describing themselves. It highlighted important concerns about everyday use of concepts and terminology including whether people use them correctly, what information they convey, the affects of using concepts and language, such as 'race' in outdated and inaccurate ways. The exercise also highlighted the heterogeneity of identity within the international and domestic groups, which the students were able to link to notions of international and global identities.

For the Anglo/ Celtic Australian students hearing about Chinese people in Asian countries other than China, including their higher socio-economic status raised issues about their own limited knowledge of non-British colonialism and imperialism. They

acknowledged that they were unaware of the social and economic effects of intra Asian colonialism and migration. One student explained that she had learnt Japan is culturally and ethnically Japanese and homogenous though she knows that the Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan are 'the original inhabitants' and occupy the lowest socio-economic class as in other colonial societies. Students' interest in what each other had to say was immediately apparent.

Doing the exercise encouraged students to raise questions about what is acceptable and not acceptable to say and do depending on gender, culture and religion. This prompted a discussion about asking if you want to know something. We agreed that in the class, as long as everyone is respectful, we would put 'political correctness' aside. This is in keeping with Kathleen Melymuka's finding that being caught up in political correctness and well-intentioned sensitivity "can stifle constructive engagement" and cause abrasive situations. She writes, "we draw conclusions, but we don't say anything and we don't learn anything. So not only is there no connection, we drive a wedge into the relationship with suspicion and fear, and it becomes difficult to work in that relationship" (Melymuka, 2006, 42). Students also raised concerns about the difficulties of talking about unequal power relations in a tutorial where those power relations already existed through gender, culture, religion and privilege; for instance between Indigenous and non Indigenous Asian men, women and men, and those who could use technology and those with limited skills. While students began tentatively, the outcome was the creation of a safe space to speak and listen to others in which they had a responsibility to actively participate.

Doing the identity exercise – in 2011 and 2012 – was a useful first step in having students interact effectively. In later classes (for both years), when students formed small groups, men initially paired up and international students formed groups with others with whom they felt most comfortable. I asked the men to stand, look at the distribution of men and women, move accordingly, and repeated this for international and domestic students. It reconnected students to the earlier discussions of heterogeneity and the opportunities to learn

through diversity. In 2011, with the more diverse group, my blatant, "at least one man and one black and white person in every group" made students laugh but more importantly reconnected them to the rule about putting aside 'political correctness' within the classroom. The humour was useful. I appreciate that whether speaking in such a way is appropriate depends on the group and a careful assessment of everyone's sensibilities. Hence, the need to reflect critically on the skills and learning outcomes the unit is trying to achieve with each new group of students and the socio-cultural context of their previous learning as identified by the Higher Education Academy.

The exercise worked equally well when the student cohort was less diverse with students still focusing on ethnicity, often through ancestral history and interestingly music. It also identified similar teaching and learning content and strategies to those identified with the more diverse group.

Difficulties understanding and communicating

In 2010 and 2011, I found from conversations with the students that the majority of international students had difficulty engaging with the reading, lectures and tutorials because, they find listening, speaking and writing English difficult. I assume that their initial reluctance to speak in tutorial was because of their lack of English proficiency and therefore difficulty in understanding the lectures. While, from later conversations with students, I find this is true, their reluctance might also be because of cultural and gender rules, education, life experiences and other issues that we have not been able to explore. Difficulty with understanding lectures because of language was particularly the case for the first four weeks which introduce, define terms and the theoretical perspectives, and tend to contain language that is technical, and have less every day examples. In 2012, I simplified the lectures, gave more everyday examples from a variety of cultural perspectives and did more close reading of texts in tutorials. The readings, which supplement and extend the lectures, add another layer of anxiety for those students who cannot read English proficiently and for those who focus on visual media rather than written texts. However, I think they are vital. Some

international students can also experience lectures and readings as too western centred, as was the case in the first weeks dealing with theoretical perspectives on globalisation and gender. Mid semester in 2011, students explained that they were thus anxious about having to articulate ideas and did not know what questions to ask in the tutorials. This is consistent with Mills (1997) and others who found that international students lacked the proficiency in comprehending and speaking English to keep pace with domestic students. I asked three confident students how they experienced the tutorials. They explained that they felt an added burden to speak up not only because of the international students but also for the domestic students, who for whatever reason may not have much to contribute some weeks.

Several domestic students – each year – certainly had difficulties communicating and comprehending the readings and lectures, likewise the four first theoretical lectures. However, in 2011 and 2012 groups interacted well from the beginning of semester so talked to others openly about their difficulties. Further, by doing the reading and asking questions most domestic students could work through their difficulties. They have the advantage of English being their first language and familiarity with their learning environment. These issues were exacerbated for all students at the beginning of each year because students often found it difficult to understand what others were saying and became embarrassed to keep asking them to repeat. Two domestic students drew my attention to this problem when they were working in small groups. A student beckoned me to join their discussion so I could see the difficulties they had communicating and their reluctance to keep asking others to repeat themselves. I was able to raise the issue with the class, acknowledge my difficulty understanding some people. I owned that I found it difficult to ask people to repeat themselves too often and that it can take me some time to concentrate on listening rather than what I might say next. Knowing that the tutor faces similar problems can, I think, be useful to students.

Listening is not always simple. An inability to know how to listen appropriately often exacerbates difficulty with communication. "To listen well, students must understand the difference between hearing

and listening while recognizing and controlling the many listening barriers within the classroom" (Bond, 2012, 61). In her work on listening and emotional support, Jones explains that:

> Listening is a multidimensional construct that consists of complex (a) cognitive processes, such as attending to, understanding, receiving, and interpreting messages; (b) affective processes, such as being motivated and stimulated to attend to another person's messages; and (c) behavioral processes, such as responding with verbal and nonverbal feedback (e.g., backchanneling, paraphrasing) (Jones, 2011, 86).

In addition, active listening consists of verbal strategies (asking clarifying questions), whereas passive listening is nonverbal in nature (providing back channelling cues) (Jones, 2011, 86). I assume most people usually take listening and hearing for granted, and are often passive listeners; however, effective cross-cultural communication is a complex process that requires active participation. Most rarely, practice or teach this skill, which Beall et al. argue, "fosters motivation and improvement in both learning and listening among the students and the instructor" (Beall et al., 2008, 63). When students learn to actively listen, they engage with the content and each other in ways that dispel notions of students – particularly some international students – as rote learners unable to think and speak their own ideas. Through this peer interacting and learning – hearing first hand about the effects of HIV, or knowing what mining in WA is like – the students learn from each other.

In 2011, a further barrier to understanding and communication for several domestic students was feeling intimidated by the international students' first hand knowledge of unit content such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, civil war, the negative effects of transnational corporations. These domestic students felt reluctant to express their ideas or ask questions because their knowledge was from texts rather than first hand. It was the case, that the international students' class status – in most of their cases – achieved through access to education has not distanced them from families, including their own, living in chronic poverty, with HIV/AIDS, and socio/economic insecurity without government welfare systems to rely on. This first hand knowledge of

issues the *GGCP* unit focuses on brings a wealth of knowledge to the class and sharing in this is a benefit and privilege for the domestic students, which they appreciate once they overcome their own insecurities in a respectful environment.

Working in small groups

In both 2011 and 2012, working in small groups, a large part of the two-hour weekly tutorial was a key factor to the success of the unit, reflecting my belief that when students develop social interaction and communication skills they learn more effectively. According to Illingworth and Hartley work in groups is used "to manage a large cohort; to develop appropriate skills in collaboration; to simulate a real work environment; etc. and is considered by some to "lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness" (West, 1994 in Illingworth and Hartley, 2007, 1). Others argue, "teams are inherently inferior to individuals, in terms of efficiency" (Robbins and Finley, 2000 in Illingworth and Hartley, 2007, 1). For me, depending on the student cohort and the purpose, one of the key considerations is whether group work facilitates students' collegiality and learning.

Volet and Mansfield argue, in their writing about group work, that understanding the value of "social forms of learning" (Volet and Mansfield, 2006, 335) can be "challenging for lecturers and students" most particularly when group assignments "are emotionally and socially demanding with unclear benefits for student learning" (Volet & Mansfield, 2006, 341). Further, as Barron (2006) argues, domestic students can resent small group work if they feel international students lack of English skills will jeopardise their own grades; this is particularly true for students who regard education as a product. To alleviate students' defensiveness about their grades or feelings of disadvantaging others, there was no grade directly attached to group work (in all three years). Rather, students used part of the group time to discuss texts, concepts and lectures and connect these to practical examples, before doing individually assessed writing exercises. This will not always be ideal but as my central concern was group cohesion and open communication it worked well.

In 2011 and 2012, as students discussed the weekly topic, I moved between groups ensuring that all students participated by asking questions of quieter students. This monitoring of the groups and prompting acted as a model and the outgoing students actively prompted others. This is consistent with Volet and Mansfield's finding that "explicitly valuing, and monitoring of group processes" … "encourage[s] positive outcomes for individuals and the group" (Volet and Mansfield, 2006, 355). Once students were working to include everyone in the discussions, they became more patient about listening to others; thus encouraging the less confident ones to speak. They were in Volet and Mansfield's terms "regulating peers' behaviours and motivations to reflect concern for peers' benefits (Volet and Mansfield, 2006, 355). As each group, and all students, had to report to the class, the confidence to have something to say was important.

Encouraging students to speak to the whole class

Students' having the confidence to speak to the class was a key concern. A few weeks into semester in 2011 and 2012, I announced a series of guest speakers in tutorial, to elaborate in some way on the week's topic. Students initially thought this was to be an external speaker. Then because I had just heard one of the Asian students, in the small group discussions, explaining community consultation processes in the villages where he worked, I asked him to tell the class about this. My strategy was to choose students who had spoken on a topic in the small groups because they had rehearsed it informally. Students remained in their groups. The informality of the seating was less threatening than standing in front of a class. After a few minutes, I asked a question and others followed. We did this every week with more than one student speaking some weeks. This form of impromptu oral presentations was useful because students did not feel burdened to prepare work separate to the week's readings. It had the added benefit of keeping students on task, rather than them just chatting, when in small groups.

In 2011, one of the domestic Gen Y students asked for notice the week before she spoke, as she was not confident of having enough to say. Several domestic Gen Y students required more questions to prompt

them. Their dilemma arose because they could not speak with first hand knowledge of issues relying instead on the readings and general media information. They were reticent feeling that they had to gauge the validity of the statistics and information from the readings in relation to what international students said about these topics. For some domestic students the international students were the arbiters of the validity of much knowledge, this included the Gen Y students who were looking up material in class. These students were concerned that everyone else already had all their knowledge. They were also more likely to direct their speaking to me rather than the larger group, a sign of their insecurity. Because of the nature of the tutorial group and the close monitoring of small group discussions this did not cause negative dynamics; however it could have and certainly some students were uncomfortable which I needed to address.

While I tried to alleviate the domestic students' difficulty by explaining Australia as a political, economic model like any other country, I had not built this into the curriculum adequately in 2011. I reworked the unit so that in 2012, students focused on issues, including transnational corporations, the increase in HIV/AIDS in Western Australia as they do with the same issues in Tanzania, for instance. This more clearly situated Australia in the global sphere and increased their confidence of the social context about which they were speaking. It did not eliminate their need to rely on secondary sources, for few of them have direct experience of the issues – though they may well have family working on mines – however, more felt they had some authority on the topic. Each year there will be a new group of students and the same issue may not apply; however, Australia will always need to be situated in the international context.

In conclusion, as I reflect on my teaching with diverse student groups, I appreciate that interrogating pedagogy, adjusting curriculum and teaching strategies to meet specific group needs is central to providing the best possible learning experience. Enhancing communication between all students and the teacher is the most important step in this process. Clearly, it is not possible given the time constraints to radically review curriculum content after meeting new student groups for the first time. However, time taken to learn

about their backgrounds and providing them with ways of drawing on their socio-cultural experiences to understand and contribute and possibly finding supplementary readings is rewarded. Teaching strategies adapted to the particular student cohort are central to making students learning experience as comprehensive and positive as possible. For future classes, I evaluate and decide on as many teaching strategies as possible once I have met classes. This is difficult when student numbers are large, it is also complicated by having more than one tutor in a unit. In 2013, I propose to work with a tutor who is willing to work in a similar way. We will begin by deciding what it means to each of us to be a reflective teacher and how this will inform our teaching decisions.

I am very happy with domestic and international student's continuing responses to their experience of GGCP in particular, their recognition of benefitting from speaking up, even though they were uncomfortable doing so at the time. I am enjoying ongoing conversations with students who feel they have made strong connections with others because the class overcame the desire "not to offend" and opened up discussions of sensitive issues. For me, this is about having created a safe learning environment, facilitating students to become transformative intellectuals, which they take to other situations.

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Humanities education as a pathway for women in regional and rural Australia: Clemente Ballarat

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This paper provides insight into the experience of Clemente humanities education for six regional and rural Australian women living around Ballarat. Each took part in an audio-taped semi-structured interview which explored the impact that university study had on their lives. Their responses suggest that Clemente Ballarat was life-giving. The student insights identified the critical importance of: providing a supportive learning environment for people lacking life opportunities and routine; students feeling better and happier with themselves resultant from personal learning

achievements; doing something that was about 'me'; support from others including Learning Partners and the program's counsellor; students appreciating their academic and inner strengths; rekindling dreams and hope; seeking ways out of poverty for their family; finding friendship and connection; appreciating the academic disciplines; improvements in well-being and mental health; and pride in achievements. Students also were apprehensive about what the future may hold after completion and graduation. These insights highlight the treasures that students found when engaged in humanities education based upon community embedded socially supported structures that enable learning. Further, these insights provide contextual outcomes for the Clemente program, which could be implemented across regional and rural Australia for people experiencing multiple disadvantages or social exclusion.

Keywords: *social inclusion, equity, disadvantage, transformation, humanities education, community engagement.*

Introduction

Promoting social justice and connection for all is essential for Australian regional and rural communities who acknowledge those who are socially excluded for brief or prolonged periods of time. Social exclusion occurs when individuals, families and communities: experience low incomes relative to community norms; do not have secure and safe shelter; experience unemployment; cannot access the health, child care and social services needed; receive inadequate schooling; are not connected with friends, families and their community; and experience self-esteem and quality of life well below those of the general Australian community.

Education is well established as one domain of social inclusion and its corollary social exclusion (Headey, 2006; Headey & Warren, 2007; Scutella, Wilkins and Kostenko, 2009; Eurostat 2009; ASIB 2010; Scutella & Wilkins, 2010). This article looks at how a broadly Socratic approach to education – specifically the Clemente Humanities Course

in Ballarat – can diminish the effects of social exclusion and empower those excluded to participate as democratic citizens with greater autonomy. The focus is the experiences of a group of women in an Australian regional/rural setting where tertiary education is delivered through a partnership between universities, local government and community organisations and enterprises. The authors add to a growing body of research on the personal efficacy of Clemente education (Egan et al, 2006; Howard & Butcher, 2007, 2009; Howard et al, 2010; O'Gorman, Howard & Butcher, 2012; Yashin-Shaw, Howard & Butcher, 2005) and strengthen the evidence-based case for harnessing the humanities to achieve social justice goals.

Social Exclusion and the Impact of Education for Increasing Social Inclusion

The concept of social exclusion first emerged in France in the 1970s and is replacing more traditional ways of thinking about, and measuring degrees of personal isolation that people experience. Increasingly *social exclusion* is used to refer to the range of dimensions experienced by people who are marginalised that lead to a reduction in their opportunities to engage to their potential in social or political life (Saunders 2011; Scutella & Wilkins, 2010). Within the Australian context, social exclusion is viewed as multidimensional in nature, and therefore "its extent, character, causes and consequences can be understood only by examining the range of dimensions of disadvantage or exclusion that are present" (Scutella & Wilkins, 2010:449).

Kostenko, Scutella and Wilkins (2009), following on from Headey (2006), produced estimates of social exclusion in Australia based on 29 indicators distributed across seven domains that were identified by Scutella, Wilkins and Horn (2009): material resources; employment; education and skills; health and disability; social; community; and personal safety. The study used 2001 to 2007 data from Waves 1 to 7 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey to construct individual-level estimates of exclusion that depend on: the number of domains in which exclusion was experienced; the number of indicators of exclusion present within

each domain; and, the persistence of exclusion over time. Whilst recognising certain limitations in the available data and the need to further develop and refine this measurement process, the findings provide some insight about the depth of social exclusion in Australia during this period. The measurement exercise established that 20 to 30 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over were experiencing 'marginal exclusion' at any point in time. Four to six per cent were 'deeply excluded', and less than one per cent were 'very deeply excluded'. People found to be most prone to exclusion included females, the young and the old, single parents, persons in regional areas, Indigenous Australians, persons born in non-English speaking countries, persons in private rental accommodation, persons with a long term health condition and persons not completing secondary school or its equivalent (Kostenko, Scutella, & Wilkins, 2009).

One impact of social exclusion is increased levels of public spending on welfare and related public services (Martijn & Sharpe, 2006; Kohen, Leventhal, Dahinten, & McIntosh, 2008; Henry, 2008), and this social and economic reality provides further impetus for increasing *social inclusion*. This explains the current interest of the Labor-led Australian Government in the social inclusion agenda. In May 2008 the Australian Social Inclusion Board (ASIB) was established, and their definition of social inclusion enables dimensions of social exclusion in Australia to be discerned and politically discussed.

> Being socially included means that people have the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to: learn (participate in education and training); work (participate in employment, unpaid or voluntary work including family and carer responsibilities); engage (connect with people, use local services and participate in local, cultural, civic and recreational activities); and have a voice (influence decisions that affect them). [ASIB 2009:15]

Education provides one means of increasing social inclusion. Further, there are positive correlations between education and the good health and wellbeing of individuals (Hammond, 2002; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Hartog & Oosterbeek, 1998). The specific impacts of education upon health and resilience throughout the lifespan

have been thoroughly investigated (Hammond, 2004; Grossman & Kaestner, 1997; Hammond, 2002; Hartog & Oosterbeek, 1998; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). A number of studies have indicated that relevant education can lead to improvements in a number of areas of wellbeing: self-confidence (Carlton & Soulsby, 1999; Dench & Regan, 1999); self-efficacy (Wertheimer, 1997); self-image; (Stephenson, Yashin-Shaw, & Howard, 2007); self-understanding (Cox & Pascall, 1994); competencies, communication skills, and civic engagement (Emler & Fraser, 1999; Parry, Moyser, & Day, 1992); a sense of belonging to a social group (Emler & Fraser, 1999; Jarvis & Walker, 1997); and substantive freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999). Thus, there are clear research-based indications that purposeful and appropriate education can contribute to improvements in the social, economic, and personal domains of a person's life (Hammond, 2004; Luby & Welch, 2006; Scull & Cuthill, 2010). This is one clear aim of Clemente education.

The Clemente Course: International Origins

Clemente originated in New York in 1996 as an innovative approach to providing transformative humanities-based study for people who were otherwise locked out of tertiary education. Earl Shorris (1936-2012), a journalist and activist, was moved by the remarks of a woman prisoner who thought that the poor would benefit from another educational view of the world. He developed this idea into an educational inspiration - The Clemente Course - with the expressed purpose of empowering the poor and marginalised by offering a humanities based education utilising a Socratic teaching paradigm.

Shorris (2000) argued that often all the education the poor receive was training programs designed around instilling in people the daily habits of the disciplined life of work-ready subjects. The intention of such training is to move people from welfare to work. The other effect is to withhold from them a means of developing their cognitive and deliberative abilities. Rather than routines for the poor, Shorris (2000) envisaged an education that offered the rich cultural capital of citizenship. He believed that an active and engaged life is the model for the poor, and was quite explicit in his vision of Clemente

as a politicising experience for all involved. For its teachers and supporters, Clemente is a seminar in the lives of the poor, and a way to share experiences from different worlds. Shorris concluded that a Socratic-style education that re-engages people who are suffering isolation and profound disconnection, and fosters in them reflexivity and agency, should be the curriculum foundation of Clemente.

Shorris (2000) set out a striking vision for confronting the reality of poverty, especially multi-generational poverty through people studying the humanities.

> *'…poverty in contemporary America…is the life of necessity with all the violence the Greeks found in that word. To live in poverty, then, is to live according to the rules of force, which push people out of the free space of public life into the private concerns of mere survival.' (Shorris, 2000:32)*

In place of the vocationally-oriented training typical of many educational systems (Jensen & Walker, 2008), the Clemente course engages the disaffected, isolated, homeless and poor in a values-based education, and promotes practices of autonomy that counteract the routinisation experienced by the poor. It is a radical alternative to welfare training programs that often churn the poor through regulatory bureaucracy. Shorris (2000) expressed the following key pedagogical principles of the Clemente course.

1. It is generalist in content. The curriculum breaks down the substantive distinction between learning (for the well-off) and churning (for the poor), thus opening a regular routine of participation.

2. Dialogue is the purpose taking the place of a teacher-centred education.

3. Classes become a temporary public space, a "public sphere" (Habermas, 1989) to be involved in for its students to escape their "private troubles" and confront "public issues" as influential sociologists have cast it (Giddens, 1982; Mills, 1970). Clemente is a place and a time that students can break out of isolation.

4. Participation is the measure of success. Academic grades are important to the students to be sure. Being present and participating is a key aspect of the students' success.

Establishing the Clemente Course in Ballarat: Regional and Rural Australia

The potential of the Clemente course for providing all Australians with access to the treasures of tertiary education through the humanities was recognised in 2003 by Peter Howard from Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the St Vincent de Paul Society (Sydney). Since then ACU, with other partner organisations and national universities have collaborated in implementing the Clemente course across nine Australian locations and contexts, and the course has been acknowledged as an effective method of addressing the social injustices faced by many Australians (Mission Australia, 2007; Mission Australia, 2011; Howard, Butcher & Egan, 2010).

The Clemente Ballarat course benefits from the experiences of others and is the first regionally-based Clemente course in Australia (Gervasoni, Smith, & Howard, 2010). Established in 2008, the Clemente Ballarat course is an innovative venture in community engagement through the collaborative partnership of seven organisations: ACU - Ballarat; Ballarat Cares/United Way Community Fund; Centacare Ballarat; Ballarat Libraries; City of Ballarat; The Smith Family; and University of Ballarat (UB). These organisations collaborate purposefully to provide a rigorous, university-approved course in the humanities for people in the region who are otherwise locked out of university education at a given point in their lives. Students are enrolled at ACU and student fees are absorbed by ACU. Those who successfully complete the course's required four units across four semesters are awarded a Certificate in Liberal Studies by ACU. Subjects for Clemente Ballarat are selected from a national set of academic approved units of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Community volunteers recruited and supported by Ballarat Cares/United Way, act as 'learning partners' to students in planning, writing, research and learning computer skills. Community agencies, such as The Smith Family and Centacare, recruit students,

co-ordinate the program and provide personal and pastoral support for students. Both ACU and UB provide academics who teach academic approved units and offer a positive experience of tertiary learning.

Clemente is intended for a small cohort of students so as to address their individual learning and personal needs. The program goes beyond the mode of delivery of curriculum that mass education offers for more self-reliant learners. Students undertake one unit per semester so that their experience of tertiary study is focussed and manageable. Two learning sessions occur weekly: a two hour seminar supplemented by a one hour shared learning session with the learning partners. Both sessions take place in Ballarat's public library because it offers a civic atmosphere well suited to seminars in humanities subjects and is easily accessible for the students. The space used as the Clemente classroom is bright and accommodating with a kitchen attached where meals and afternoon teas are provided to foster conversation, engagement and fellowship amongst students, lecturers and learning partners. This sharing of a meal is an important feature of the Clemente Ballarat experience.

The units studied by Clemente Ballarat students during the first six semesters were: Australia's Indigenous Peoples Past and Present; Introduction to Australian politics; Introduction to Ethics; Introduction to Sociology; 2D Visual Arts; and Australian History Until 1900. Across each unit study skills support was offered by ACU and there was the supportive presence of a dedicated counsellor provided by Centacare. The study skills sessions conducted by librarians and study skills professionals each semester canvassed essay conception, planning and writing skills, time management and library-based research skills. The counsellor provided enhanced pastoral support for each student, ensured necessary transport and childcare arrangements were made available for students, dealt with critical issues and followed up students in between classes and learning partner sessions. Student learning opportunities were further enhanced by field trips to the Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art & Cultural Centre, the City of Ballarat Town Hall, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Sovereign Hill and World Café events where the students act

as co-hosts for stakeholders and invited participants from the Ballarat community who discuss the issues associated with the semester's unit of study following the World Café format.

The Clemente Ballarat course began in August 2008 when fourteen female students who each experienced social exclusion found the courage to walk into the Ballarat Library to commence a time of re-engagement and learning. This paper provides insights into the personal impact of the Clemente Ballarat course for six of these women aged between 35 and 55 years. These six were selected because they had each been involved in the Clemente course for at least three semesters and could discuss the personal impact of their studies over this extended period. The research design included interviews with students to gain insight about how they became engaged in the Clemente course, the highlights, personal strengths and challenges they wished to identify and, finally, how they and others, such as friends and family, had been influenced by their participation in Clemente education. Interviews were used because the researchers were interested in how students might 'biographise' their lives; that is write their lives as a narrative (Ricouer, 1988).

Clemente Ballarat – Examining the Impact for Students in a Regional Setting

Existing research has identified a number of positive outcomes for Clemente students in relation to their sense of self and their abilities, their relationships and their perceptions of the future (Mission Australia, 2007). This study sought to examine Clemente Ballarat students' experiences with respect to these outcomes, and contribute to the growing body of evidence about the impact of student participation in the Clemente course. The key aims of the research were to:

1. Gain insight into the life journeys of Clemente students with respect to their engagement in learning and re-engagement with the community; and

2. Explore the supports and barriers to students' successful re-engagement and ongoing participation in a regional-based Clemente course.

This study employed participatory action-based research with participants as partners in the research as, together, we seek to modify, adapt, refine, change and enhance the effectiveness of the Clemente Course. The research adopted a similar method to that used in existing published research on Clemente, in particular the 'methodology of engagement' (O'Gorman, Howard & Butcher, 2012).

All six students who were approached agreed to be interviewed in an audio-taped semi-structured conversation. Two elected to be interviewed as a pair. The research design included a piloting phase during which the interview schedule was validated, clarified and refined. Piloting the questions enabled the interviewers to hone their skills in interviewing a group of people with whom they have little previous experience. Five interviews were conducted by two of the authors (Gervasoni and Smith) and the sixth by a research assistant. Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed, and methods derived from grounded theory were used to identify the key categories and themes that emerged through personal inspection of the transcripts. These categories and themes were corroborated and refined by the three-member research team as part of the data analysis process.

Student Insights into the Personal Impact of the Clemente Course Students

The analyses of student responses to the interviews suggest that the Clemente course was life-giving for students. Each interview produced unexpected and varied results with some common insights identified across the interviews. Important for this study are the insights related to the life journeys of students with respect to their engagement in learning and re-engagement with the community; and any supports and barriers to students' successful re-engagement and ongoing participation in a regionally-based Clemente course. The following section presents interview excerpts from Debbie, Christine,

Tammy, Shell, Lily and Taryn (pseudonyms) in order to highlight and discuss the themes and insights that emerged from the analyses.

Debbie believed that Clemente provided a learning environment for people lacking life opportunities:

> *It's an opportunity for them and for people like myself who struggle a little bit to ... get us back out there into life, and, to see some sort of future….And for people who couldn't, didn't learn before, or didn't have an opportunity or weren't in the right environment years ago who can now.*

She described a scenario which seems common to the experiences of most students:

> *…it's been a reinforcement every week, and to be with the other women and know that they are…dealing with the same things, issues with children and so forth…and learning together.*

Debbie pithily described the general student profile although each student in the program is extraordinarily unique. In her life, Debbie viewed Clemente as a chance to reclaim something for herself. She had sacrificed much for her family and a distinct theme in her remarks was 'it's about me'. She engaged in a twofold reflection on her own place in the educational process. Often, it was a battle she fought with herself to just be there:

> *I withdraw, and then I have a constant battle with myself and then I get down on myself to…but…the times I could get through the door and come to sessions I did feel great…and have the support from everybody.*

The door was a portal metaphor for Debbie as well as referring to the literal door of the classroom. She repeatedly invoked this metaphor - the door that she must compel herself to traverse. The metaphor referred to Clemente as an opportunity, a door to something that was community-based and gave her life routine:

> *Getting through the door is half the problem and once you get through the door you feel okay and afterwards you feel better about it. So getting through that door is the hardest part, but*

> *once you are through it, it's the easiest part…. The course was really important for me…because I have routine in my life again. For the first time in years it was about me.*

The community that Debbie experiences when she passes through the door was made up of students who were true peers. The spirit of this community, including teachers, learning partners, the course co-ordinator and agency staff, was very supportive: *'The life experiences are brought into it so you are not feeling like some silly dodo sitting there or whatever. You're not made to feel inferior of anyone else in the room.'* Christine felt the same way. *'They …support staff and teachers… pump you full of confidence and lift your spirits.'* Support is vital to inclusion in this educational community.

Debbie explained the importance of the Course Co-ordinator.

> *When anyone comes through the door, whether it's someone who is having a hard time that day getting through the door, or somebody that's not happy or someone's upset…she's that one person we know, as we walk through the door…will always be there…if I know I am feeling uneasy, she'll look at me and try and pull me back again, and she knows.*

As the content of the Clemente course's units is rigorous, personal encouragement and assistance were vital to keeping Christine in the course when she faced personal challenges: *'I'm scared of failing.'* Even so, her tenacity to continue was an inner strength. Indeed, anecdotal observations from Clemente teachers and administrators were that every week was an occasion for most of the students, a test to see if they could just make it to the class. Passing through doors to attend Clemente motivated Christine in her everyday life. Invoking the well-known Foucaultian phrase that infers self-empowerment, she identified a major purpose of Clemente for her was to: *'get out of the house 'cos I get a bit cabin-fever-ish…Knowledge is power. And I think the more knowledge you have the stronger you are mentally, physically…'* Even in assessment (which by Christine's own admission she struggled with), she felt a power. Clemente education produces results in providing a learning environment in which people can find personal strengths. When asked about strengths Christine said, *'I like*

to debate…I surprised myself actually; I didn't think I could get up in front of people and talk.' Studying in Clemente was a journey of self-discovery for many students. Christine found a resource within herself in her talent for debating. Clemente has become an essential part of Christine's life journey: *'If I didn't have it I think I would be in a psych ward. I'd definitely be in a psych ward actually.'*

Students experienced an impact from their learning on their general outlook on the world. The greatest potential of humanities education lies in the self-transformation of an individual's world-view. Shell, for one, found that a conscious effort to practice what she was acquiring was noticed by those near to her:

> *With each lecture I try and take something away from it and put it into life outside of this room here, especially with ethics. Even my parents have stopped and said, "Shell…you've kind of changed a little bit…you're still the same but you're kind of a little bit different. And it's nice. It's a nice Shell".*

Shell commented that her personal problem-solving powers grew as she steadily comprehended the disciplines studied:

> *(T)his time last year when I was sort of getting paper work for all of this stuff [ethics unit], I looked at those words and I went, "Oh, I don't know what they mean. Can I get a dictionary? [laughs]. How do I spell that one?" And now I know them. And I know what they mean and I use them and I do what Richard says. If I've got a problem, and I think I've just used that theory, what was that theory I've just put into work today, you know. And that's what I try and do, and even with the sociology. It's taken me a couple of lectures to get my head around what's… going on but…each lecture I take something away from it and try and put it into life and it's made my life easier, to be honest with you. It's less complicated. My problems I have are simple ones, and I've got the thought processes to work them out so the simple problems are not usually that hard to solve now. Things are less complicated, if that makes sense?*

Lily also changed her views but in quite a different way. Her sense of herself and what she knows has changed as a result of studying the

history unit. She too uses the word 'horrified' in respect of a number of contentious issues in Australian society. She feels the history unit, particularly, has reversed her previous understanding of Australia's past. In her new view, she recognises that she was deprived of a vital appreciation of history in an earlier stage of education:

> *Half of it I didn't know. Like, for instance, when they said Captain Cook founded the country, when actually he just invaded it… when I first got into that one I started getting very angry…when I thought, "Why weren't we taught that at School?"…*

A different narrative emerges from Tammy, in her journey with Multiple Sclerosis. She had to 'rewire' her brain *(as she puts it)* after some short term neurological problems. Self-expression is her power: *'…there's stuff that's within you that just needs expression and it tends to find a way, once the obstacles have [been] overcome and Clemente's a path through that.'* Her dreams drove her on:

> *Okay. I have a couple of options. I overcome MS and I'm determined to do that. It is doable; people have done it before. The other option is …I mean…yes, I've done a few interesting things in my life and I like to write.*

Tammy's dream was for her children to flourish and she has a dream of writing to inspire them. She described Clemente as a 'path' to help her in this. Though creative writing came easily to her, not so academic writing. As with other students she did not face such challenges alone and unsupported:

> *My brain is still rewiring itself, but I've learnt such a lot along the way that I'm completely and utterly thrilled and proud of myself. Without the Clemente guidance and supportive, really, truly supportive atmosphere, I could not attempt to go into say UB Uni and…fulfil their expectations without any help along the way.*

The Smith Family, a partner in the Ballarat Clemente course, has helped Tammy's family access education through providing personal support and scholarships. This motivated Tammy to pursue her own education after circumstances had inclined her to *'put that dream on hold'*. The scholarships were a circuit-breaker in the life of her family.

For them, the potential to break out of the poverty trap through participation in education and an accumulation of cultural capital had yet to be realised. Tammy commented:

> *...it's the only way out of poverty because, I've lived below the poverty line for what, 30 years basically, and there starts to become a build-up to...need housing, to need things...and to seek the opportunities that would allow you to get what's needed to live life, instead of not being able to participate in life, not being able to do your hobbies and things like this.*

Tammy maintained her ambition to rise above a life of poverty which was partly caused by her illness - a neurological condition - that regularly interrupted her Clemente study. Nonetheless, she drew upon her inner resources to return. Creativity was one of her strengths, though she felt that this was inhibited by the requirement to write assessment tasks in a scholarly style. *'It's very hard for me just to do the academic stuff without being creative.'* She recognised that writing in a disciplined academic style was something she had learnt.

The way out of poverty for Shell appears different. She invests much hope in her son and wants to set an example for him. At the same time, she harbours a dream for herself; a path out of routine industrial jobs and into work where she can feel pride in herself:

> *I've looked at my son and said, "Hopefully, one day when I've finished doing all this study...maybe my next job won't be at Maxi Trans, maybe my next job won't be at FMP* [a local manufacturer – authors]*, maybe my next job won't be at Rivers, Oliver's or anywhere else I've worked. You know, it might be in an office, where I can put make-up on and wear high heels, and stockings and a dress [laughs]....That's the way I want to feel when I go off to work.*

Clemente has nurtured this future dream and hope for Shell and she reports that her ideal path of teaching looks possible. When she entered the Clemente course, the social networks were already established. One of the students *'looked at me and she said, "You'll like it here Shell. We're all the same, you know [laughs]...and you'll*

find you'll become a part of our family". Shell was sceptical but before long found herself socialising with her classmates and enjoying family-like relationships.

Shell's dream does not stop with education and a new kind of job. Quietly, she longs for re-connection with her family. *'In my family I am a little bit of a black sheep.'*

> *I miss out on family things, like my sister and her husband and my mum and dad go away to Bali every year. I don't go. I can't afford it. I'd love to be able to get myself a decent enough education, get a decent job. Be able to look at them one day and go "listen here mum, there's me cash for me ticket, get on that internet and book us tickets 'cos we're all going to Bali now 'cos I can come too."*

An overseas holiday matters to Shell for the value of connection it would bring. *'We have to hear your stories, we love your stories and we love the presents [laughs] but we want to be a part of that too.'* Shell spoke frequently and at length about her family. As with other students she seeks a space for herself: the part where 'it was about me' as Debbie describes it, and evidence of the transformative potential of Clemente:

> *I know I could come here and I could sit back in that chair… and say nothing and…I could just not be getting it…but it's not something like you want to stand up and go, "Nah'. You know, I'm not getting it." I know I could do that and just sit here and eat lunch and take in bits and pieces and be really blasé about the whole thing, but I don't want to be like that. I want to make the most out of this and then hopefully move onto something else. I don't know what that something else is; I'm just hoping I can find it between now and then, to be quite honest with you.*

Shell takes education seriously. Clemente has given her unexpected friendships as well as learning. Not only are the students friendly, so too are the Learning Partners, indeed they raise her esteem. *'Sometimes in life there are people that will speak above you…they try and tangle you up with words [laughs] and try and confuse you. Those tutors (learning partners) aren't like that.'* Shell reports that

the ACU library staff are also welcoming and act to enhance her pride and sense that she is on the path of education, *'They're very helpful up there. I don't feel like I'm not a part of the Uni because my classes are down here [at the Ballarat Library].'* Shell's brightness and the broad range of comments are indicators of the multifaceted nature of this transformative education.

Lily and Taryn (interviewed as a pair) spoke about the variety of goods – opportunities - available through education. Friendship and connection were high on their list. Their close friendship was born in the Clemente course. Lily explained, *'I've made some good friends in the class; two really good friends, and they help me a lot. They help me through it. So that was a bonus making new friends as well.'* She added that she expected to meet new people *'but I didn't know how I'd go because I don't go out a lot.'* Lily's experience of isolation was a common theme across all interviews. Taryn spoke further about friendship:

> *I'm good friends with Lily. I'm over there probably every second day but we talk on the phone every day and with another one of the ladies here. The girls have actually organised a weekend away for my 50th... If I wasn't here that...I'd probably be sitting at home or just going out for tea.*

Lily agreed, *'You meet nicer people, too, like.....different people, different atmosphere from what I've been used to...'* Sociability takes the form of friendship here. Students are peers but become more than peers. This deepens the experience of social connection and then extends that connection beyond the end of teaching semesters.

Other values informed the ways in which Taryn interacted with others. *'I think I've learnt more tolerance too, with knowing some of the people's backgrounds.'* Both Lily and Taryn had strong views about Clemente and the units they had completed. They appreciated the academic disciplines they had learnt, embracing both the academic challenges and the personal difficulties encountered through Clemente. As with Debbie, Taryn had to push herself to attend.

> *I have low days, but I've come here on low days and had tears in my eyes and still done it, which surprised me. In the past I usually just lock myself away when I have days like that. So that's something really different for me and a lot of people here have bad days, so everybody seems to understand and says "you'll be right". You know, and it's not as embarrassing as I thought it would be.*

The students appreciate the support and connections they have found through Clemente, as well as valuing the opportunities to participate in intellectual activity and conversations. Debbie highlighted the importance of the intellectual community shaped by Clemente classes.

> *All the time, when I read the newspapers…I'd be consumed by it. I would just have nobody to talk to about it, so coming to school was a good thing for that as well because I would have nobody to chat with; no neighbours or anybody who was, not on my level, but just not doing what I was doing, so I would suffer intellectually …. But then you would come to class and discuss these things, so you could get that out…what was inside me bursting and things like, "isn't this fascinating! and "I couldn't believe this, or "isn't that amazing!" and all that stuff. It's great.*

Debbie had a strong sense that Ballarat was an "*educational hub*", and that this gave her opportunities for the future: *"I love thinking I'm part of all this too, this progression that Ballarat is moving in…. That things are happening for the future in Ballarat and that I can be part of that."*

Debbie acknowledged the role of local government in her education and sense of community building.

> *It just reinforced for me that the community is in it together. That if your local government is supporting what you are doing, and supporting the program that you are in…it would make me think that someone like me, who's going through changes and rebuilding and so forth, that support is there, in your head, within your community…and it makes you feel good.*

In contrast to this view of a supportive local government, Tammy questioned the approach of Federal governments towards *"people like me who were struggling beyond my capacity to do the right thing and then being shunted through their system"*. In a manner that echoes the sentiments of Shorris (2000), Tammy recognises that many people would benefit from the educational treasures of Clemente.

> *They're really intelligent and they're being asked to do really simple stuff that gives them no challenge and gives them a lot of unhappiness. I mean we all know how to wash dishes. … It's a waste, a real waste of a good load of innate talent that people have,that really does need expression and I would really like to see people given a chance, but sometimes it's a hard road to get there.*

The power of the learning within each unit and the continuing impact upon their lives were other important insights from the interviews. Lily finished school after Year 8 and has had little opportunity for education since. As with the history unit, she and Taryn found the politics unit difficult but both continued to reflect on political issues. They had also needed to justify their participation in education to friends and family, but were convinced about its importance. Connection was important, as was the critical content of their learning. Taryn commented:

> *A lot of people said, "What are you doing it for?" "What job do you get?" and I go, "Well it just adds to everything else that you do in your life." And as I've said, it's made me more aware of things as in politics and ethics and especially with the Australian history – it just horrifies me when I look, think about what we did.… I would never have known any of that if I didn't come here. I would have just kept living, plodding on, not knowing, like, it's pretty ignorant not knowing about it.… As I've said, I've become a lot more aware of what goes on in society now, take more notice, don't just sit back in my house thinking nothing's happening out there.*

Taryn and Lily reflected on the end of the Clemente course when they qualify for the Certificate in Liberal Studies. Taryn worried in particular, *'I'm a bit scared of what I'm going to have to do next. I don't think I could handle full time work. I don't think I could go back full time. Not mentally.'* Such sentiments raised the need for the Clemente program to support graduating students to become more aware of and acknowledge the choices they have for further education and other life pathways.

Graduation is viewed as an important signal to the students' families of the role of education in their futures. In the words of Debbie:

> *I want to achieve that [graduation], and I want my son to be there [cries] and for him to see that...even if you have had a rough ten years you can still get up, and Mum's moving on. Even though Mum fell to pieces, she's getting up... All of that's important and then it rubs off on the grandkids, hopefully. So that's the plan.*

Conclusion

This study sought insight into the life journeys of students in the Clemente Ballarat course with respect to their engagement in learning and re-engagement with the community. It explored the supports and barriers to students' successful re-engagement and ongoing participation in a regionally-based course.

The Clemente course was life changing and path-breaking for the six students interviewed. All spoke variously about reconnection and the worth of relationships struck up through their participation. Three of them faced significant barriers in commencing and maintaining their participation. These barriers included their entrenched feelings of isolation, lack of self-belief, ill health, and pressures from family and friends about the worth of the education they were undertaking. The student insights highlight the gravitas of providing a supportive learning environment for people lacking life opportunities and routine in mitigating these barriers. Central to such support were the encouraging role of the Learning Partners recruited from local businesses, the enabling role of the Centacare Student Co-ordinator,

the helping role of the ACU librarians, and the civil responsibility role of local government. Significantly, the students report that the Clemente course has provided a number of personal benefits:

- increased feelings of positive wellbeing and self-esteem;
- focussing on doing something for 'me' for the first time in years;
- finding personal strengths;
- rekindling dreams;
- perceiving a future in which the cycle of poverty for their family is broken;
- discovering new friendships and connections;
- appreciating the academic disciplines;
- appreciating the role of education as a means of getting through bad days;
- overall improvements in mental health;
- pride in learning achievements; and,
- enhancing future life choices following Clemente graduation.

These student insights highlight the treasures of a humanities education for women in regional and rural settings. For some, it might appear that the humanities are too great a challenge for people suffering exclusion, deprivation and disconnection. Data from these interviews suggest otherwise. These analyses highlight the positive impact of the Clemente course upon students, confirm the relevance of the course's community partnership model for the Ballarat context, and suggest significant potential for the Clemente course to increase educative justice for women particularly in regional and rural Australian. Shorris' (2000) vision of Clemente as an especially inclusive form of education that expands the participation of the poor as citizens in society, found realisation in this Clemente Ballarat course. Community-based socially supported educational structures that have enabled these students, initially, to participate and, then, to sustain their engagement in Clemente are of critical value in allowing these women to seek future life choices.

The authors believe that the values of a humanities-based education that is supported with the high level of personal and pastoral care embodied in the Clemente Ballarat program would be of great benefit to many tertiary students. Such a re-visioning of higher education, properly resourced and led by universities in partnership with community organisations, could increase social inclusion and active citizenship for many Australians. The findings from this study suggest that the Clemente Ballarat approach to tertiary education has brought about purposeful learning and self-transformation, leading to ongoing life and learning opportunities for mature-aged women living in a rural and regional setting. This study adds to the growing body of published research about the benefits of Clemente education in achieving social justice outcomes, especially for women who face often unacknowledged obstacles to undertaking tertiary education. The insights from this study highlight the many positive outcomes for these students and the unique features of this Clemente course developed and delivered in a rural and regional context. Further research is needed to gain greater insight about the specific role of the community partners and their partnership in bringing about this outcome.

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Predictors of Attrition and Achievement in a Tertiary Bridging Program

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This study examines the attrition and achievement of a sample of 295 students in an on-campus tertiary bridging program at a regional university. A logistic regression analysis using enrolment status, age and the number of absences from scheduled classes at week three of the semester as predictor variables correctly predicted 92.8 percent of participant attrition. It was concluded that attrition is largely a phenomenon associated with younger students between 18 and 24. While the quality of academic staff support was found to be strongly positively associated with the emotional commitment and academic identity of the participant, it was also negatively associated with scheduled class absence for those participants who dropped out. Intervention to address attrition of these young students is recommended to involve the selection of appropriate academic staff and a comprehensive orientation process which allows the development of supportive peer and staff relationships. The purpose of the orientation would be to facilitate the development of a robust sense of emotional commitment to a positive academic

identity prior to the completion of the initial assessment tasks.

Keywords: *bridging education, attrition, emotional commitment, identity.*

Introduction

A recent report on the tertiary education sector in Australia (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) commissioned by the Australian government nominated that 40% of the Australian population should possess an undergraduate degree by 2020. At the time of the report the rate was only 28%. One approach used by tertiary institutions to address this issue is through the use of tertiary bridging programs, which give individuals who do not possess the necessary academic qualifications the opportunity to gain access to tertiary study.

Student retention and academic performance in the first year of tertiary study has been extensively studied in Australia with some institutions having attrition rates of over 30% (Allen, 2010). The challenge of student attrition in tertiary enabling programs would be expected to be even greater due to the relative lack of academic preparedness of the students and has been described in previous Australian studies (Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer, 2000; Guenther & Johnson, 2010). The current study examined two cohorts of students in an on-campus tertiary bridging program conducted at a regional university in Australia. The research question that guided the study was: What influence do social relationships have on academic attrition and achievement for students in a tertiary bridging program at a regional university?

Theoretical Context

A review of the academic literature was conducted which focused on the factors identified as being relevant to attrition during the transition into bridging programs and the first year of undergraduate university study. The literature relevant to the quality of outcomes

demonstrated by non-traditional versus traditional tertiary students was also examined.

A study (Cooper, et al., 2000) conducted over a number of years at the Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia identified an attrition rate of 50% for bridging program students. Specific reasons given for discontinuing study included problems with child care arrangements and the commencement of full-time work. The study identified that, even though students may attrit from the bridging program, their subsequent commencement of full-time work was often attributable to the new skills and confidence obtained.

A longitudinal study of tertiary student attrition utilised a quantitative approach to study data from a number of universities throughout Australia. It was established that mature age students "emerge as a highly satisfied group on the whole. They typically receive higher marks than their younger peers, and are slightly more positive about the way university has met their expectations" (Krause, Hartley, James, & Mcinnis, 2005: v). It was established that mature age students "tend to have strong clarity of purpose and are more likely to seek assistance from staff" (Krause, Hartley, James, & Mcinnis, 2005: v). Non-traditional students were also identified as receiving:

> marks higher than they expected during the first semester of study. This may reflect the general lack of confidence experienced by older students who often feel daunted at the thought of sharing classes with younger students after returning to study after years of being involved in home or work settings. (Krause, Hartley, James, & Mcinnis, 2005: 26)

The study by Krause et. al. (2005) also identified that the amount of paid work was having a negative impact on student outcomes due to students spending less time on campus. The ability to access academic staff was also reported in the study as being poor.

Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration Model identifies academic and social integration as the primary influences on the decision to abandon tertiary study. One method used by tertiary institutions to facilitate student integration is through the use of orientation

programs which introduce students to the institution. In the Krause et. al. (2005) study about half of the participants described the orientation programs as being a useful introduction to the university: however fewer stated that it assisted in developing a sense of belonging. Of particular concern was that a quarter of the students sampled expressed a negative view in relation to the usefulness of orientation programs.

The related constructs of commitment to tertiary study and intention to persist or leave were identified on a number of occasions in the Krause et. al. (2005) study. Females were identified as being more likely than males to cite health as a reason for deferring, while males identified their dislike of study. An overall gender difference in the level of commitment was also identified where female students demonstrate "more academic commitment and more satisfaction with their study than the males." (Krause et. al., 2005:70). A difference was also identified in attrition based upon the enrolment status where part-time students demonstrated higher attrition levels.

Cao and Gabb (2006) completed a study at the University of Victoria which examined student attrition during the first year of study at a new generation university. The study established that females had a higher attrition rate than males with a difference between 0.8% and 4.6% being recorded. Differences in attrition rates were also identified based upon age and socio-economic status (SES). Students between 20 and 24 years of age, full-time students and those from a low SES background were demonstrated to have a lower attrition rate. The influence of distance travelled to university was also identified as being relevant to attrition and it was suggested in the study that the "difference may be related to proximity and perhaps to local loyalty to the University" (Cao & Gabb:13).

A study of Australian school leavers (McMillan, 2005) which compared young people who had dropped out of tertiary study with those who persisted identified a number of factors which were associated with lower levels of student attrition, including having parents who were tertiary educated and higher secondary school academic achievement. The study also concluded that the number

of hours of paid work influenced attrition. While no differences were identified in attrition for students who worked up to 10 hours per week, “long hours of paid work while studying were associated with higher levels of attrition” (McMillan, 2005:v). A significant finding of the McMillan study was that student interests played a major role in the situation where tertiary students change course or dropout of university. It was identified that “students less commonly cited academic difficulties, difficulties juggling work and study, or financial difficulties as their main reason for changing courses or leaving the higher education sector” (McMillan, 2005:v).

The role of academic and social support was identified in a study done at the Queensland University of Technology (Tindle & Lincoln, 2002) relating to mature age students in their first year of tertiary study. The study participants identified the following factors, in order of frequency, as important to their academic success: social support from fellow students, preparation before arrival at university, family support, access to on-line resources, accessibility to academic staff, and personal attitudes with students referring to their own determination and perseverance in the face of obstacles.

Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001) compared the performance of undergraduate students from three non-traditional entry modes with that of students who had gained tertiary access traditionally. The study made a number of conclusions, including identifying that age was “a significant predictor of academic achievement, with older students outperforming younger students” and that “most older females faced more physical and psychological demands in their lives outside university than younger students” (Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001:232). Of particular interest was the conclusion that socio-economic status did not emerge as a significant influence on performance. The academic performance of students who gained access via enabling programs was also found to be comparable with those who gained access via traditional entry.

A comparison of the undergraduate performance of mature age students who had gained entry to the University of Newcastle via an enabling program and younger students who gained access based

on high school results has also been conducted (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke, 1999). The study concluded that mature age students coped "at least as well with their undergraduate studies as younger students entering via more conventional means" (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke, 1999:52). The research also identified a number of approaches to study exhibited by older students which gave them an advantage when engaging in undergraduate study. Older students were identified as having "more confidence to solve problems that arise in their lives, more confidence to plan a desired course of action, and more confidence to appraise accurately their strengths and weaknesses" (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke, 1999:50).

A particular challenge for mature age students with a substantial work history is the ability to adapt to, and engage with, tertiary study. While they may have "developed a positive learning profile, a continued belief in the structural simplicity of knowledge appear[s] to have a significant diminishing effect on the quality of adjustment and on the quality of learning outcomes" (Cantwell & Scevak, 2004:131). The adaptive ability of students is considered to have potential application to a tertiary bridging program where students are entering an educational environment from which they have been absent for a substantial period of time and with which they are unfamiliar. This would be expected to lead to substantial cultural and emotional shock. In such a situation, the ability to adapt quickly to the new environment would appear to be of importance to a successful transition during the early weeks of the bridging program.

Debenham and May (2005:89) also identified early experiences in an enabling program as being of particular importance when they stated that "the first milestone in an enabling program for both students and lecturers is the submission and return of the first assignments [and] it can be asserted … that the first assignment is surrounded on all sides by anxiety". They also concluded that "initially students are threatened by 'academic work'.

The literature reviewed indicates that the quality of outcomes for non-traditional students in undergraduate tertiary study is comparable to that achieved by students gaining entry by traditional means.

However, the attrition rate in tertiary bridging programs appears to be high, with attrition as high as 50% being recorded. A number of factors, such as gender, hours of paid work and the quality of orientation programs, have been identified as influencing attrition.

Method

A questionnaire was developed composed of an introductory demographics section followed by a series of Likert-style items using a five point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was reviewed by a number of academics to ensure the face validity of the items. It was also piloted utilising 63 respondents from a previous cohort of the bridging program. The final version of the questionnaire was completed in week three of two different semesters by a total of 295 respondents, comprising 94 (31.9%) males and 201 (68.1%) females, giving a response rate of 48%. This ratio of males to females is consistent with historical enrolment patterns in the program.

An analysis of the demographic data established that 221 (75%) students had attended a public secondary school, while 159 (54%) had completed secondary school. One hundred and forty seven (50%) participants reported that at least one immediate family member had attended university. These figures are consistent with research which has examined a previous cohort of students from the bridging program (Whannell, Lynch & Allen, 2010).

A Principal Components Analysis using Direct Oblimin rotation and Kaiser normalisation was completed using the Likert-style items. A five factor solution was identified which accounted for 59% of the shared variance in the factor items. The five scales comprised a total of 30 items giving a 9.3:1 response to item ratio. Factors were named based upon their constituent items and are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Scales

Scale	No Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Peer Support	8	.872
Emotional Commitment and Identity	7	.882
Family Support	6	.893
Staff Support	5	.809
Academic Self-Efficacy	4	.773

All items loaded on their respective factor with a minimum of .575 with all inter-item correlations for a given factor being statistically significant with p<.01. The Cronbach's alpha values demonstrate a good level of internal reliability for each scale. The eigenvalues and percentage of variance explained by the factors are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Variance explained by five factor solution

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Peer Support	8.887	27.771	27.8
Emotional Commitment and Identity	3.256	10.174	37.9
Family Support	2.945	9.204	47.1
Staff Support	2.119	6.621	53.8
Academic Self-Efficacy	1.734	5.419	59.2

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .885 indicating that there were sufficient items included in the analysis, while the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (p<.001) indicated that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis.

The family, staff and peer support scales included items such as "My family are supportive of my desire to attend university", "I have developed good relationships with other students at university" and

"Academic staff are supportive of my attempt to complete university study". The emotional commitment and identity scale included items such as "I feel proud of being a university student", "I am strongly committed to pursuing my educational goals" and "I like going to university". The academic self-efficacy scale included items such as "I consider myself to be a good student" and "I am a good note-taker in lectures". The academic self-efficacy scale was intended to address skills applicable to the bridging program.

The course results for participants were also examined with a view to determining what factors were associated with academic achievement. The result used was obtained by calculating the mean percentage of all assessment tasks completed prior to week five of the semester.

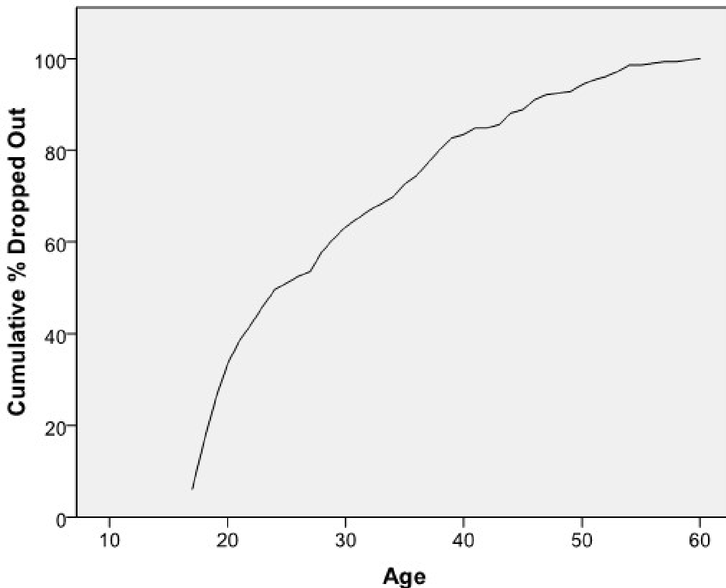
Findings and Discussion

The various demographic variables were examined to identify any statistically significant differences based upon program completion. No statistically significant differences were identified in attrition based upon gender (χ^2 $(df=1,N=275)=0.433,p=0.511$), secondary school type attended (χ^2 $(df=3,N=271)=0.948,p=0.814$), residential status ($\chi^2$ $(df=4,N=274)=5.778,p=0.216$), whether the participant had completed secondary school (χ^2 $(df=1,N=270)=0.145,p=0.703$), whether the participant was the first in family to attend university (χ^2 $(df=1,N=274)=0.565,p=0.452$) or enrolment status ($\chi^2$ $(df=1,N=275)=1.910,p=0.167$). The lack of a statistically significant difference based upon enrolment status is contrary to the findings in previous studies (Hillman, 2005; Krause, Hartley, James, & Mcinnis, 2005). A statistically significant difference was identified in relation to the number of scheduled classes missed by participants ($U=5404.5,Z=-4.221,p<0.001$) with participants who failed to complete the program (*Mean Rank=165.9*) demonstrating a higher level of absence than those who completed the program (*Mean Rank=127.5*).

A statistically significant difference in attrition based on age ($U=5636,Z=-3.179,p=0.001$) was identified, with younger

participants demonstrating a higher dropout rate. The age range of the participants was from 17 to 60 with a median age of 24 with substantial positive skewing. Figure 1 shows the cumulative percentage frequency graph for participants who dropped out of the program.

Figure 1: Cumulative % frequency attrition



The graph demonstrates that attrition is a phenomenon mainly associated with younger participants. An examination of the correlations involving younger participants and scheduled class absence identified the quality of staff support as being associated in an unusual manner. For participants between 17 and 24 years of age who did not complete the program a significant correlation is evident between absence from scheduled classes and the quality of staff support ($\rho=-0.309, p=0.035, N=47$). The correlation between these variables for participants in this age range who did complete the program differs radically ($\rho=0.112, p=0.292, N=90$). The correlations between these variables for participants older than 24 are also not

statistically significant, irrespective of whether the program was completed or not (Dropped Out: $\rho=0.006, p=0.977, N=27$;Completed: $\rho=-0.049, p=0.613, N=109$). This data identifies age and the associated level of staff support as important factors in the attrition phenomenon for the participants.

One cited influence on attrition at the tertiary level is the hours of paid work which students complete (Krause, et al., 2005; McMillan, 2005). The dataset was coded to differentiate between students based upon the hours of weekly work reported at the week 3 data collection and using 15 hours as the cut-off point. A Pearson Chi-Square test identified no statistically significant difference in program completion ($\chi^2=0.816, p=0.366, N=275$) between these participants and those who completed less than 15 hours of paid work each week compared to those who had completed a greater number of hours. A comparison was also made of the extreme cases of those participants who reported having no outside paid work with those who reported doing 20 or more hours per week. A statistically significant difference in the attrition rates between these extreme groups ($\chi^2=0.796, p=0.372, N=211$) was not evident. A Mann-Whitney U test of Item 40 (The amount of paid work I do interferes with my university study) ($U(df=144)=1887.5, Z=-0.096, p=0.924$) also gave no statistically significant difference based upon whether the participant had completed the full bridging program. Contrary to the existing literature (Krause, et al., 2005; McMillan, 2005) which has identified the number of hours of outside work as increasing tertiary student attrition, it does not appear to be the case for the participants in this study.

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted on each of the summated scales in order to identify scales which may be predictive of program attrition. Outliers were removed from the analysis by examination of the boxplots. Only the quality of peer support demonstrated a substantial difference based upon program completion ($t(269)=-1.863, p=0.064, d=0.23$) with those students reporting higher levels of peer support demonstrating lower levels of attrition. No statistically significant differences were identified for the level of emotional commitment and identity

($t(266)=.356, p=0.722$), family support ($t(271)=-1.376, p=0.170$), staff support ($t(269)=0.228, p=0.820$) and academic self-efficacy ($t(261)=0.629, p=0.530$).

A number of the Likert-style items from Section 2 of the questionnaire were also tested to determine if there were any differences related to program attrition. Item 30 (The university provides excellent student support services) ($U=7100.5, Z=-0.248, p=0.608, N=271$), Item 39 (Travel to and from university is not a problem) ($U=7178, Z=-0.213, p=0.831, N=271$) and Item 42 (My family responsibilities make it hard to cope with my university study) ($U=7044.5, Z=-0.087, p=0.930, N=269$) demonstrated no statistical difference based upon program completion.

The influence of academic results on attrition was tested by examining the data available for the overall secondary school performance (Item 7) and the mean result obtained on the first assessment tasks. An independent samples t-test conducted on the secondary school academic result identified no statistically significant difference based upon attrition ($t(220)=-0.390, p=0.697$). A statistically significant difference was identified for the result on the first assessment task in the bridging program ($t(230)=-2.544, p=0.012$, $\bar{X}_{Dropped\ Out}=73.3$, $\bar{X}_{Completed}=78.1, d=0.4$). While the association between attrition and academic performance for tertiary students is supported by other literature (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993), the lack of association with secondary school academic performance is considered rather unusual. Secondary school academic performance is commonly identified as a good predictor of academic performance at the tertiary level of education, where success at secondary school is predictive of success at university (Dobson & Skuja, 2005; Evans, 2000; Evans & Farley, 1999). In this study, secondary school academic performance has not been associated with either better academic performance or higher rates of attrition. This would indicate that the use of academic performance at secondary school as a means of screening potential students for the bridging program would not be appropriate.

Thus, the factors which have been identified as having a significant difference based upon whether the participant completed the full bridging program are:

- Age, with older participants demonstrating a lower attrition rate;
- Absence from scheduled classes, with lower attrition associated with lower levels of absence;
- Academic performance at the first assessment task, with better performance being associated with a lower attrition rate;
- The quality of peer support, with higher levels of support being associated with a lower attrition rate.

A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted using the data from the week 3 collection to identify if a combination of predictor variables was available which could accurately predict attrition from the program. It was expected that the variables which would be suitable for inclusion in the logistic model would be those identified in the previous section as they were identified as having substantial differences based upon program completion.

The independent variables included in the logistic regression model were age, the number of scheduled classes which were missed, the performance on the first assessment task and the level of peer support which was available. Four cases with missing data and cases with a Cook's measure of influence greater than one or with standardised residuals greater than ±2 were considered outliers and were not included in the analysis, as recommended by Field (2009). The final analysis included 209 cases. A test of the model which included the predictors against a constant-only-model was statistically reliable, (χ^2 $(df=4,N=209)=57.691,p<.001$), indicating that the predictors reliably distinguished participant attrition. Nagelkerke's $R^2=.578$ indicated a strong relationship between the predictor variables and the attrition outcome while the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (χ^2 $(df=8)=0.622,p=1.0$) indicated a good match between predicted and observed probabilities. The model correctly allocated 92.8% of the cases, with 37.5% of the participants in the attrition group being correctly allocated and 97.4% of participants in the completion group

correctly allocated. According to the Wald criterion, the four predictor variables all made a statistically significant contribution to the prediction: participant age ($z=6.288, p=0.012$), number of scheduled classes missed ($z=5.826, p=0.016$), result on the first assessment task ($z=8.865, p=0.003$) and the level of peer support ($z=8.126, p=0.004$).

The SPSS result for the variables table of the regression analysis is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Logistic regression for program attrition – week 3 data collections

							95% C.I. for Exp(B)	
Measure	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower	Upper
Age	.578	.230	6.288	1	.012	1.782	1.135	2.799
Classes Missed	-.433	.179	5.826	1	.016	.649	.456	.922
Task 1 Result	.103	.035	8.865	1	.003	1.109	1.036	1.187
Peer Support	.288	.101	8.126	1	.004	1.334	1.094	1.625
Constant	-22.025	6.356	12.008	1	.001	.000		

The Exp(B) values indicate the extent to which the corresponding odds ratio is influenced by an increase of one unit in the variable. Thus, an increase in the age, task 1 result or the level of peer support variables will result in an increase in the probability of completion, while increased absence from scheduled classes will result in a reduction in the probability of successful completion.

A corelational analysis was also completed to examine the association between the variables. The correlation matrices relating all of the relevant variables, including achievement on the first assessment task, were generated for both the participants who completed the bridging course and those who did not in order to identify possible differences between the groups. Table 4 shows the correlation matrix for the scales from the week 3 data collection with the mean result on the first assessment tasks across all courses for those participants who completed the bridging program.

Table 4. Spearman's scale correlations week 3

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Task 1 Result	--								
2. Emotional Commitment and Identity	.164*	-							
3. Family Support	.109	.336**	--						
4. Peer Support	.046	.285**	.278**	--					
5. Staff Support	.132	.382**	.298**	.404**	--				
6. Self Efficacy	.162*	.413**	.278**	.368**	.309**	--			
7. Age	.261**	.078	-.050	.011	.139	-.078	--		
8. Hours Study	.173*	.234**	-.038	.104	.054	.092	.193**	--	
9. Scheduled Classes Missed	-.322**	-.016	.093	-.081	.016	-.099	-.317**	-.129	--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sample size range = 190 to 200

The correlations suggest that social factors were only indirectly associated with academic achievement in the early transitional period. While the correlation between the result on task 1 and the level of staff support was just outside the cut-off for significance at the 95% confidence level, the size of the association was low. The primary indicators of achievement early in the bridging program appear to be absence from scheduled classes, which was negatively correlated with achievement, and age. Age was also negatively associated with absence from scheduled classes. This again identifies age as an important factor in the outcomes achieved by participants in the program.

Table 5 shows the correlation map summarising the statistically significant correlations for those participants who failed to complete the bridging program.

Table 5. Spearman's scale correlation matrix week 3 –attrition group

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Task 1 Result	--								
2. Emotional Commitment and Identity	.030	--							
3. Family Support	-.099	.277*	--						
4. Peer Support	.006	.249*	.258*	--					
5. Staff Support	.158	.517**	.396**	.422**	--				
6. Self Efficacy	.000	.348**	.322**	.285*	.369**	--			
7. Age	.350*	.061	-.019	.191	.292*	-.163	--		
8. Hours Study	.147	.220	.049	.229	.337**	.209	.166	--	
9. Scheduled Classes Missed	-.093	-.059	.010	-.164	-.278*	-.146	-.281*	-.169	--

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sample size range Task 1 Result = 38 to 39

Sample size range all other scales = 72 to 75

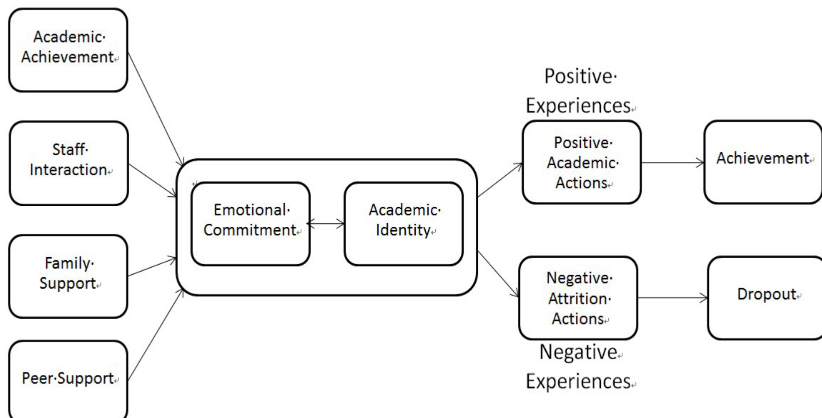
A difference in relation to the role of academic staff support is apparent in the correlations at week 3 based upon whether the participant completes the bridging program or not. Non-completers demonstrated a substantially higher level of association between staff support and their emotional commitment and identity. The participants who completed the program demonstrate no significant associations between staff support and the hours of study or scheduled classes missed. Both of these behaviours demonstrate significant associations for non-completers with higher levels of staff support being associated with higher levels of study and fewer classes missed. As the age of the non-completers is reduced, the association between staff support and absence from scheduled classes increases (Age≤24 years: $\rho=-.309, p=.035, N=47$;Age≤22 years: $\rho=-.347, p=.026, N=41$).

Conclusions

It was concluded that student attrition from the bridging program was primarily associated with the age of the participant and absence from scheduled classes. Attrition was identified as being essentially a phenomenon involving younger participants, who also demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement in the early weeks of the semester. Both peer support and staff support are concluded as having different roles to play in the process. Peer support was found to associate positively with higher levels of emotional commitment and identity, hours of study and academic self-efficacy during the early weeks of the semester and peers are considered to provide a support mechanism in assisting with coping with the rigours of the academic program during this time. Participants who completed the bridging program also had significantly better peer relationships than those who did not. Academic staff are considered to have had an important role to play for younger participants who did not complete the full program. These participants reported a substantial negative association between their level of emotional commitment and identity and absence from scheduled classes with the quality of staff support which they perceived available.

The analysis of the data may be modelled theoretically as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Theoretical model for the role of academic identity in achievement and attrition during bridging program transition



The model assumes that students will enter the bridging program with an existing academic identity and associated identity commitment constructed as a consequence of the experiences during the years of their primary and secondary schooling. The nature of the experiences students have which occur within the context of their attendance in the bridging program would then further shape their academic identity. Scanlon, Rowling and Weber (2007:223) identified that "it is the nexus of situated interactions with lecturers and other students that is the context and process of [student] identity formation". Where experiences provide support for, and allow the development of commitment to a positive and appropriate academic identity, the student will engage in positive academic behaviours, particularly study and attendance at scheduled classes, which will facilitate good academic outcomes. Conversely, negative experiences will cause a reduction in the commitment to the academic identity which will result in an increase of attrition related behaviours. The "fit between the student's identity production and their perception of the successful or enculturated student in their institution and program of study…is important in their retention by the institution" (Johnson & Watson, 2004:474). It would be expected that, due to the previous poor educational experiences and academic outcomes achieved by many students who enrol in the bridging program, there would be a heightened vulnerability to negative experiences, particularly related to staff/student interactions and assessment in the early transitional period. This model of the process involving the bridging program students' emotional experience and identity as a student was described in similar terms by Ingleton (1999). He viewed the decisions that students make in relation to learning as being dependent on their attitude towards learning and their self-esteem and identity as a student. He proposed that these aspects were developed as a consequence of their social interactions with teachers, peers and parents and their experiences of success OR failure within the academic context.

The model includes academic achievement as one of the factors which influences academic identity and commitment to that identity. It should be noted that this construct is considered to be broader than the results obtained on formal assessment tasks. While the analysis

only included such tasks, it is the case that some students attend the bridging program and withdraw prior to the first tasks which are submitted in week five of the semester. Students will form a sense of their level of academic achievement from informal as well as formal situations, and for this reason may be prompted to drop-out of the program even before the completion of any formal assessment.

It is concluded that interventions to address tertiary bridging program attrition would require the involvement of academic staff who are able to engage with students and develop appropriately supportive relationships. These interventions, designed to build a more robust sense of emotional commitment to a positive tertiary student academic identity, would also need to specifically target younger students as an at-risk group. Further research in relation to the form which such interventions should take would be required.

The results of this study also indicate that the process of identity building should commence at the earliest possible opportunity with activities which enhance emotional commitment and academic identity included in orientation programs. The process of orientation and enculturation should also not be considered to cease once the semester has commenced. Rather, early learning experiences made available to tertiary bridging students, many of whom are unfamiliar with formal education, also need to be designed and delivered with a view to the building of the students' sense of scholarly identity. Academic staff across all content areas should use teaching pedagogies which continue to build on the interventions commenced in the orientation program.

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A Case Study of a Volunteer-Based Literacy Class with Adults with Developmental Disabilities

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The purpose of this study was to examine participants' perspectives on how a volunteer-based adult literacy class supports the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Interviews were conducted with four tutors, three adult learners, and two coordinators and observations of the class occurred over a 6-month period during which the author was a tutor. The focus during this time period was on health and mathematics. Three major categories were identified: class organization (goals and structure), teaching strategies and behaviours, and class activities. Based on these findings, several recommendations are presented including the need for further integration of adult learners' out-of-school literacy activities into the class and for increased tutor knowledge of the adult learners' disability.

Keywords: *adult education, developmental disability, volunteers, literacy, health.*

Given that the demand for adult education seems to be steadily growing (Knighton, Hujaleh, Iacampo & Werkneh, 2009), there is a continual need for research on how adult education classes can be most supportive of adult learning. It is well known that volunteers often dominate staffing within adult education programs. For example, voluntary tutors are the majority of adult basic education (ABE) instructors, particularly for one-on-one instruction (Belzer, 2006). Within volunteer-based programs, less is known about how learning is supported with adults with disabilities (Silver-Pacuilla, 2007), specifically developmental/intellectual disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to examine a volunteer-based class for adults with a developmental/intellectual disability in a not-for-profit adult education centre in a large Canadian city.

There are a number of ways of examining how programs can best support adult learners' literacy development, including gaining knowledge from the experiences of the participant. Knowledge of the type of strategies used by volunteer educators in adult literacy classes as well as the examination of what adult learners take from education classes – what is meaningful and authentic to them, and how adult learners incorporate curriculum content and practices into their daily lives can provide insight (Lave, 1996). Authentic activities can be described as literacy uses found in social contexts outside of schools and that mediate people's social and cultural lives (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 2002). It is known that adults with developmental disabilities often require basic educational skills as well as educational skills that assist in their community living (Brown, 2011) and gaining information from these learners about what can assist their daily living and educational skills in general is significant given the limitations on what is known about how to support adult learners with developmental disabilities attending volunteer-based adult literacy programs.

Literature Review

The following literature review incorporates the research perspective, information on the general structure of adult education programs,

as well as information on adults with developmental disabilities and their education.

Perspective

When examining activities and events considered important for adult literacy learning, a social practice view of literacy was incorporated. Research that is based on literacy as a social practice takes the view that literacy develops though broad social relationships and that literacy events as part of these relationships are purposeful and shape one's learning (Barton & Hamilton, 2000:12). Through the examination of in-class literacy events as well as reported out-of-school literacy activities, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of what supports literacy learning for adults with disabilities through their interactions with others in the classroom as well as those in the community, including their everyday literacy events.

Program Structure

There are different ways of structuring adult education classes that can shape the teaching and learning process. A common format is a hybrid model of adult basic education and general education programs (Beder, Tomkins, Medina, Riccioni & Deng, 2006; Robinson-Geller, 2007) "in which students gather in a group with a teacher but work independently on individualized assignments while the teachers assigns work, corrects student work, keeps records, and assists students as needed" (Robinson-Geller, 2007:137). Robinson-Geller (2007:137) explain that "[o]ne-on-one interactions with the teacher occur as students need help." The commonality of this adult education structure has contributed to IGI (Individual Group Instruction) becoming viewed as almost synonymous with ABE instruction (Robinson-Geller, 2007:157) and the benefit of this type of group organization is that it enables participants to work individually on the skills that they require. Another defining aspect of this type of format is that the materials are the main transmitter of information with the teacher determining the topic (Robinson-Geller, 2007) and it seems that much of the focus is on increasing general or specific knowledge of topic areas with a focus on discrete skills (Beder & Medina, 2001).

In addition to the IGI format, another common structure for adult literacy classes is one-on-one volunteer tutoring in which an adult learner meets with a volunteer individually to help the adult gain knowledge in the specific skills that they require (Belzer, 2006). Tutors in Belzer's (2006) study highlighted the importance of the learner's input and the learner's goals for the tutoring process and this type of program seems more learner driven in general than that of IGI. Differences in common program structures seems to focus on whether program topics are determined by the teacher or adult learner and whether or not there is an individual tutor for each adult learner. Both structures seem to denote limited adult learner to adult learner interaction.

Developmental Disabilities and Adult Education

The participants in this study were adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Given this, it is important to understand how their learning may be different from adult learners without developmental disabilities. Adults with developmental disabilities, specifically intellectual disabilities, often have difficulties in learning and performing certain daily-life skills, and have limitations in adapting within their community environments compared to their peers because of impairments in mental functions during the developmental period (0-18 years) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare-AIHW, 2003). Therefore, there is a need for opportunities in adult education classes to support adults with developmental disabilities inclusion in society. It is known that adults with developmental disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, often experience slower learning and "the majority of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities need opportunities for an education in the area of social competency and community living" (Brown, 2011: "Social and Community Education" par. 1). Social and social adaptive skills for community living and independence, such as carrying out basic cooking, making basic purchases, working part- or full-time jobs, developing basic relationships with other people, and so forth are an important part of educating adult learners with developmental disabilities (Beck & Hatt, 1998; Brown, 2011). In addition, to support adult learners social competency, Brown (2011)

claimed that competency education is needed in basic skills, such as social sight vocabulary, and full reading skills when the individual wants this (8-10 year reading range). Based on this research, it seems that the instructional support for adult literacy learners with developmental/intellectual disabilities may be somewhat different from those attending other adult literacy classes. It was stated that "a two-pronged approach is necessary to address the 'performance gap' for students with disabilities; they need to develop learning strategies for independence as well as build their foundational skills" (Deschler cited in Silver-Pacuilla, 2007:127). Hence, skills for independent living seem to be as important as developing reading and writing knowledge for these learners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how a volunteer-based literacy class contributes to adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities' learning from the perspective of participants. The following questions supported the purpose of this study:

1. From the perspective of participants, what areas of the volunteer-based literacy class best support the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities?
2. What are recommendations for improving the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities in this volunteer-based literacy class?

Method

Participants

The class attendees consisted of four adult learners, four tutors (including the author), and two coordinators within one 10-month class in a volunteer-based, not-for-profit adult education centre located in a large Canadian city. The class was organised for adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities, and according to one coordinator, all adults had developmental and intellectual disabilities from a review of their prior educational files, and most scored at a Level 1 on a modified reading task based on the National Adult

Literacy Survey (NALS) (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins & Kolstad, 1993) administered by the coordinators. According to the class coordinators, there was a wait-list of adult learners who wanted to join this class and the goal was to help adult learners gain life-long learning skills, self-help skills, to get them to express themselves, and to make wiser choices.

Volunteer tutors and adult learners, as well as both coordinators, were invited to participate by the author after approximately three months of volunteering in the class. The author conducted all interviews during the fourth and fifth month of volunteer tutoring. One tutor-learner dyad in the class declined to participate and therefore two tutors, three adult learners, and both coordinators consented. In addition, two tutors who were working in another class at the centre with adults, and who were regular tutor replacements for adult learners in this class, were invited and agreed to participate. Tutors typically were retired or were looking for full-time employment in various job areas. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants: two coordinators (Andrea, Alison), four tutors (Brenda, Bob, Becky, and Barbara), and three adult learners (Christine, Colleen, and Carol). Adult learners varied in age from the 20's to 40's, and the adult learner that the author tutored was in her 40's.

Class-Context

The class began in September and finished in mid-June and the author was a volunteer tutor from January to mid-June. The class met for two hours one day a week in a boardroom within the centre. Generally each session began with the coordinators leading the session on a topic and then, after approximately 30-45 minutes, tutors would work with adult learners individually on a topic as directed by the coordinators. Most often tutor-learner dyads would stay within the boardroom when working one-on-one. The coordinators would monitor and support adult learners and tutors as needed. Toward the end of the session (the last 15-20 minutes), the participants would return to a whole-class format and the coordinators would lead the session by summarizing and inviting adult learners to share some of the work they were engaged in with tutors. The main topics of the class (January-June) in which the

author volunteered centred on health (specifically nutrition) and mathematics. An example of a class session included a news sharing of weeks events, the coordinators providing a recipe handout and asking questions about it (e.g., What types of words are used? What distinguishes it from a story? Why are order of operations for recipes important?), the tutor-adult learner dyad researching a recipe on the internet that would contribute to an overall healthy meal plan for the class (e.g., appetizer, entrée, dessert), the adult learner reading their recipe aloud with help from the tutor, and questioning from the coordinators and the other learners.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was an exploratory single-case study design (Yin, 2003) of how a volunteer-based literacy class supports the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Data collection involved both interviews and observations. The interview questions were composed by the author in collaboration with the adult literacy coordinators, and some questions were based on research by Purcell-Gates et al. (2002). The following is an example of questions asked/statements to each of the participants: What types of practices work best in helping the adult learners acquire new learning? (tutor); What are some of the activities you believe are effective for helping adult literacy learners gain knowledge about literacy and health? (literacy coordinator); and Please tell me about your learning experiences in this class (adult learner). All interviews were conducted individually in a quiet area of the literacy centre for approximately 45 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed in entirety. The author also recorded descriptive notes of her observations and, as a participant-observer (Merriam, 1998), minimal notes were recorded throughout the class observation and tutoring process but were recorded in detail following each session. Data was analyzed by first reading through all of the transcripts of the tutors, adult learners, and then the coordinators, and the observational class notes. After the initial reading of transcripts and notes, main ideas or summary points were recorded in the margins. From these ideas, a first level of codes was used to classify common findings among all the data. Three categories

were developed as a second level of codes was applied to the data and inductive analysis was used to identify the major categories.

Findings

In addressing the purpose of this study, to examine, from the perspective of participants, ways that a volunteer-based literacy class supports the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities, three major categories were identified: class organization (goals and structure), teaching strategies and behaviors, and class activities.

Class-Organization (Goals and Structure)

Support of learning was stated and observed in both the goals and structure of the adult literacy class. There was some variation in participants' responses on what the goals should be for the class but it seemed that one main goal was to build adult learners' oral language confidence level and both coordinators as well as two of the tutors expressed this goal. It was this goal that coordinators and tutors generally agreed was an important one based on the needs of adult learners in this study. As one coordinator stated: "It is very difficult for students with intellectual disabilities [to express themselves], and often that's because they are never given the opportunity to articulate an opinion."

Some of the adult learners, however, wanted to make gains in their reading and writing development from participation in the class. For example, Colleen stated that she wanted to improve her writing because it would help in tasks she could perform in her volunteer job. Another adult learner, Carol, claimed that she wanted to write more clearly. The coordinators stated that they made learners aware at the beginning of the class that the main goal was not to explicitly teach reading (indeed, all adult learners did have some reading and writing skills), but it was expected that by becoming more confident in sharing ideas and participating in meaningful literacy tasks that their reading and writing would improve. As Andrea stated, "the goal is to teach transferable skills that they can use in their lives...Phonics is not the way to go about it. They like to use their adult experiences

to tap into their adult literacy skills." From my observations, all class sessions involved reading and writing activities, although reading and writing were not formally taught by the coordinators. The coordinators and tutors believed that learning was supported when the goals matched the educational needs of adult learners, and for those with developmental/intellectual disabilities, building self-help skills and adult learners' confidence level was important. From observations and results of interviews, adult learner confidence levels seemed to improve throughout the class. As stated by Bob: "Students are more confident in what they do [from participating] and hopefully this will affect other areas that they're not so good at."

As part of the class organization, and in connection to the class goals, class structure seemed to support adult learning. The structure of the class supported interactions between the tutor and adult learner as well as opportunities for adult learners to interact in whole class discussions. For adult learners with developmental/intellectual disabilities, the extra support needed by an individual tutor was provided in contrast to the more common structure (i.e., IGI) of adults working independently in a whole-class format. The whole-class discussions led by the coordinators before and after one-on-one tutoring provided opportunities to optimize social interaction and for adult learners to gain confidence in sharing knowledge and opinions as the tutors supported adult learners. The structure of the class connected to the coordinators' and tutors' goals, in that of building self-confidence in adult learners through helping them learn to articulate their thoughts. Adult learners were held accountable for their learning by the coordinators, such as through direct questioning of content, and the author's observations of the class structure for supporting learning concurred with comments from tutors. Brenda stated that she believed the whole group gathering preceding and following one-on-one directed learning was beneficial for adults' learning, and Bob commented that having a group context was important as opposed to the common format of only one-on-one tutoring for these adult learners because "they support each other in the context [whole class] and this can reinforce the learning process." The author did not ask questions directly about the structure of the

class, but when asked about how class learning was supported, these comments were presented.

The size of the class was another aspect of the class structure that was reported to support learning. As mentioned previously, there were 10 adults in the room during each session. Both Brenda and Becky, as well as the coordinators, commented that an intimate environment was crucial for these learners' success and believed that this existed in the current class. Given that the goals of the program were to have adult learners more confident in expressing their thoughts and feelings, having a small class size nurtured opportunities for this happen by providing many opportunities for adult learners to have an audience, yet feel individually supported by the tutor.

Teaching Strategies and Behaviors

There were strategies and behaviors that tutors and coordinators believed were important for increasing adult engagement and learning, however few comments were made by adult learners about strategies that worked well for them. Adult learners were inclined to state the types of activities they enjoyed participating in but had more difficulty articulating strategies that supported their learning, perhaps due to their disability. The recommended strategies included a focus on visuals, learner accountability, and the establishment of a positive teacher-learner relationship.

The use of visuals was a commonly used strategy, particularly, it seemed, because several class sessions focused on mathematical activities. Visual strategies were used to help adult learners develop conceptual knowledge as well as word knowledge. In one activity, adult learners were asked to calculate fractions after a session demonstration and discussion of the topic. Susan claimed "drawing helps, particularly with things like fractions. To help somebody understand fractions I normally draw a pizza, [and ask] if you eat half of the pizza, how much are you leaving for me?" At the end of the session, adult learners would then talk about what they understood and did not understand about this topic. During one-on-one tutoring, drawing and writing activities in relation to oral discussions were also considered important for helping adult learners understand concepts.

Brenda particularly noted the importance of diagrams for the adult learner she worked with. Another form of visuals, the use of video recordings in the class, also seemed to support learning. The author had observed that when Christine had watched a video on the topic of hand washing, for example, she was able to recall more specific details from it than from a written handout on the topic that adult learners read to tutors and then discussed in a whole group. Bob shared that the visual strategy of having adult learners write down a word and tell the meaning, especially if it was orally spoken and the learner did not understand it, worked well for adult learners' common use of the word in that it supported recall and understanding. Tutors experimented in their teaching strategies with these learners and visual engagement was clearly viewed as an important tool for supporting adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. In addition, class coordinators often designed class activities using materials with pictures or drawings, such as grocery advertisements, and these visual materials were often ones that adult learners reported to see outside of the class, supporting connections between in-class and out-of-class learning.

Learner accountability, such as asking adult learners to explain the statements they made, was another strategy that seemed to support the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities and it could be linked to the goals for the class. According to Bob, asking if something makes sense is important for learning because too often adult learners with disabilities do not understand but the tutor does not probe to check. As Bob stated, "don't assume that what is being said [by the tutors/coordinators] is understood." Becky also claimed that there is a need to reinforce what is being stated: "I don't just let it go [when it seems that the adult learner does not understand]; I repeat," which seemed to be her way of making the adult learner accountable for learning. Both coordinators talked about the need to make adults accountable for their learning and to not let learning slide because learners have a developmental/intellectual disability. In the whole group setting, I noticed that some adult learners began to feel uncomfortable when they could not answer a question from the coordinator after a time lapse. The coordinators would often reword questions for the adult learners in these situations but did not direct

a question to another adult learner unless there was some response. The goal of making adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities more confident in their speaking skills and increasing their general knowledge was reinforced by teaching strategies and behaviours used in the tutoring process and in whole group discussions.

Although wanting to make adult learners accountable for their learning, tutors specifically commented on the importance of establishing a positive relationship with the adult learner, which involved establishing feelings of trust and getting to know more about their personal interests, including their likes/dislikes within the tutoring session. All tutors stated that a positive relationship with and attitude toward teaching an adult learner with developmental/intellectual disabilities was critical for supporting their learning. Particularly Bob restated this often with emphasis on when the adult learner is speaking in front of the class. To further establish a positive relationship, Brenda and Bob stated that discovering a learner's personal interests could take some time but it greatly supported the activities they engaged in with adult learners and their relation with them. Adult learners seemed to appreciate the opportunity to get to know the tutors as well as other learners on a more personal basis and the class structure assisted in this. One of the whole group activities was called "I Am", in which each member of the class shared information about their personal interests, and Christine stated in the interview that this was her favourite activity. Becky claimed that this autobiographical activity made a big difference in the way everyone related to everybody else. About half way through the author's tutoring with Christine, she shared that she experienced frustration when people tell her she is wrong and when she is rushed. This occurred the week following the author's participation in the 'I Am' activity when perhaps she felt more comfortable sharing her feelings. Christine did not share specific feelings about her learning prior to this without being probed. The author became more conscious of her responses to Christine, including providing more time for her responses, because of knowing what caused her frustration and this evolved as a more positive relationship developed over time with support from more personal sharing activities, such as the 'I Am' one. Several tutors did state that further information early in the class

about the everyday interests of the adults they tutor as well as their disability could support stronger tutor-learner relations and thus learning.

There were instances during the interviews where tutors shared teaching strategies such as pointing to print or sounding out words that one would find in adult educational classes focused on developing reading and writing skills, but what was considered most important for adult learning by many participants were those that reflected the goals for the class. Although the coordinators for the program established the topics and overall activities, there was flexibility in how the tutors made the material meaningful for adult learners and the use of visuals, learner accountability, and creating a positive relationship with adult learners with developmental/ intellectual disabilities were dominant aspects of teaching strategies and behaviors incorporated.

Class-Activities

Overall, the two main topics of the class were on health, specifically nutrition, and mathematics, and the activities related to these topics were linked to the class goals of supporting independent living and building confidence skills in adult learners by making connections to the their out-of-school lives. There were sessions that focused on healthy food options, locating and reading recipes, money and currency, such as buying healthy food on a budget, and the use of fractions. However, not all topics or activities focused on, which could be considered authentic for some adult learners, served a function in the lives of learners in this class.

Tutors commented, and adult learners confirmed, that overall, topics in the class related well to adult learners' lives, which supported functional literacy (Sticht, 1997). Within the area of health, several sessions focused on choosing healthy food options. For example, one activity focused on a map of a grocery store and the general locations of healthier food options within it, and another involved cutting pictures of food items from grocery stores advertisements to match with the Canadian food guide groups. Adult learners, such as Colleen, stated that attending the class has helped her to eat the right food and

Carol, who was trying to lose weight, stated that the topic of healthy eating was helpful and that she eats more fruits and vegetables. Christine also believed there was a benefit in focusing on nutrition and she stated that in addition to reading product labels "to see what's in there," as was focused on in one session, she had joined a health program, which one of the coordinators confirmed. Another healthy food option activity involved the demonstration of the amount of sugar inside a can of pop [carbonated drink] and adult learners had the opportunity to participate in this process, including tasting increased levels of sugar added to water. Following this, Colleen stated "I drink diet pop now" and Andrea noted that some adults were bringing fewer soft drinks to class after the focus on the ingredients in them. Although there were several reports of change in adult activities, some tutors stated that adult learners with developmental/ intellectual disabilities could be resistant to change in their practice. For example, Becky had stated that even though Colleen knew of healthier choices, in some activities, choosing all healthier options was difficult for her.

Cooking healthy meals was a prevailing part of the focus on health in the class and several activities involved locating and reading recipes. In addition, two sessions involved reading and following actual recipes, one at the literacy centre, and another at a cooking studio located in a local organic grocery. Computers were often used to search for recipes and adult learners read aloud in the whole group information about the recipes they located in order to create a possible healthy meal. For example, the author worked with her adult learner in finding information on the computer for different ways of making one type of entrée. Although using the computer seemed to motivate adult learners, as observed by the author and as stated by Brenda and Carol, following recipes was not a practice reported as engaged in by adult learners outside of class. This may be due, in part, to limited cooking materials in some of their homes as one tutor stated that Carol does not use recipes at home "perhaps because she does not have a stove and only uses the microwave." Carol also confirmed this in the interview and stated that she would often "heat foods up in the microwave taken from a tin," and like Carol, Colleen claimed she only cooks in the microwave. When asked about whether

reading and following recipes as part of the class resulted in a change in home practice, Carol stated that her cooking has not changed and Colleen could not explain if the class had changed her cooking practices. Therefore, the focus on following recipes did not seem to have an immediate effect on this area of their literacy engagement, even though choosing healthier food options were reported to change. Perhaps choosing healthier food was also an easier option because it may not involve as much reading and/or mathematical engagement as that of using recipes.

Specific areas of mathematics, also a major focus in the class, were seen as relevant to the lives of adult learners. Particularly, activities that focused on money were considered important (i.e., counting and pricing) by tutors and adult learners given that the adult learners wanted to become more competent in this area and the tutors and coordinators wanted to build confidence in adult learners' day-to-day interactions. One activity connected to the topic of nutrition focused on creating a healthy meal for under $20 incorporating the Canada's Food Guides' four food groups. Adult learners were to calculate the cost from the store advertisements provided in the session for the products they chose. Bob stated that knowing which healthy items costs less was considered beneficial for adult learning in that it "helps with selective buying." Adult learners had an interest in learning more about money and understanding if the issuing payment was correct, as Christine had stated that this is sometimes difficult for her. Christine stated that she looks at prices in stores, as well as grocery advertisements and pricing, and it could be assumed that the class activity that focused on adding advertised costs for food items would further support her knowledge of food pricing. Colleen believed that class activities, particularly those focusing on counting money, have helped her understand money bills more and she stated that she wanted to learn more about this area. Overall, from the author's class observations, adult learners seemed to enjoy focusing on the area of addition, particularly in relation to money costs.

Several class sessions focused on using and calculating fractions, and this section, perhaps because it was difficult for adult learners to understand, was viewed as less helpful to them. In fact, all of the adult

learners claimed that they did not enjoy learning about this topic in mathematics, mostly because they found the calculations difficult, and one tutor confirmed this in reflection on the adult learner she worked with. Carol stated that she does not use fractions outside of class and when asked whether she had measuring material at home (i.e., measuring cups), she stated that she does but that she doesn't use them. One activity involved worksheets containing fractions and this seemed particularly difficult for adult learners. Clothing prices and percentage discounts based on fractions using illustrated worksheets that may have been applicable to one's out-of-school life, did not seem to change adult learners' practice in their view. Fraction learning was also discussed in relation to recipes in several sessions, an activity that many adult learners did not report engaging in outside of class. Adult learners had difficulty understanding fractions despite attempts by the tutors and coordinators to make it meaningful for them (for e.g., using diagrams to illustrate the concept), and therefore, one could assume that adult learners did not become as competent in this area in comparison to others from participating in this class.

Discussion, Recommendations, and Limitations

Discussion

This study focused on how one volunteer-based adult literacy class contributes to the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities from the perspective of participants. Given that adult learners with developmental disabilities can have difficulty expressing their perspective, their sharing of everyday activities and views of these activities (i.e., whether they enjoyed engaging in them) provided some insight on their learning. The class organization (goals and structure), teaching strategies and behaviors, and class activities provided information on the learning process.

There were some contrasting viewpoints of what the class goals should be for adult learners with disabilities in this study. Adult learners wanted to improve their reading and writing ability while the class coordinators and tutors believed that increasing competency in everyday tasks and building confidence levels in communication with others was important. Differences in class goals could be an issue for

classroom participation, retention, and learning in other programs, and indeed, Comings (2007) highlights the significance of learner goals for persistence in adult education programs, but this did not seem to be a major concern here. From my observations and from the interviews, adult learners were interested in most class activities, and at least one participant (i.e., Christine) reported engaging in reading more often at home from participating. The goals identified by the tutors and coordinators, such as increasing adults' basic competency skills, were ones advocated in the research on the needs of adult learners with developmental disabilities (Beck & Hatt, 1998; Brown, 2011), and it was reported that adult learners were making some gains in this area.

Overall, the class structure seemed to promote social skills and establish accountability in adult learners through a combination of whole class and individual support, and by including a small number of participants. Along with the social opportunities provided from whole group discussions, the one-on-one learning provided extra assistance that adult learners with developmental/intellectual disabilities may require for learning. It is known that addressing the individual needs of all adult learners can be difficult within the IGI format when switching from student to student and topic to topic (Robinson-Geller, 2007; Venezky, Sabatini, Brooks & Carino, 1996) and this structure may prove even more difficult for adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Having an individual tutor provided the much-needed one-on-one support while also supporting learners' educational needs and the class goals. As claimed by Brown (2011), social competency and skills are an important focus for the education of adults with developmental disabilities and the class structure supported the focus on these areas. The small class size further assisted in opportunities for all adult learners to engage in social interactions with individual support. Although little seems to be known about the class structure of teaching adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities in volunteer programs, participants in this study were in support of the current format for assisting adult learning.

Some instructional direction was provided by the coordinators in the class but there was much autonomy in the tutoring process, as also found by Belzer (2006). In general, strategies used in volunteer tutoring were often incorporated based on adult learners' needs. For example, several tutors claimed to experience success in using visual strategies, particularly with mathematical topics to help adults with developmental disabilities understand new concepts, and this learning strategy has been advocated in the research (Beck & Hatt, 1998). It is widely known that volunteer tutors are often required to make decisions about learning with little background knowledge in educational processes and development (Belzer, 2006). Although the lack of specific strategy knowledge by the tutor can be a weakness in adult literacy programs, particularly in programs staffed by paid educators with the goal of increasing adult learners reading and writing knowledge, the goals for this class were more general than, for example, increasing reading and writing skills. Therefore tutor knowledge of specific reading and writing processes did not seem to pose the same restrictions to adult learning, although further knowledge of the adult learners' disability might have offered increased learning benefits. Strategy use and learning seemed to evolve as a stronger relationship was established with the adult learner, perhaps based on the tutors' increased knowledge about the learner needs. Developing a positive relationship with adult learners was an important means of supporting adult learners' confidence level, and assisted in supporting the goals for the class. Just as a positive tutor-learner relationship is important for those without disabilities (Beder & Medina, 2001), a trusting relationship seemed critical for the learning of adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities in this class.

The broad topics used in this class provided some support for their incorporation into adult learners everyday lives. The goals of the class, such as to support everyday competency, were linked to activities that, in many cases, replicated what adults encounter in their everyday lives. For adult learners with disabilities, making the transfer of new knowledge to common practices as easily as possible is necessary as adults with developmental disabilities have the reduced ability to transfer information (Beck & Hatt, 1998) and the

similarities between in- and out-of-school learning would contribute to the transition. Indeed, more authentic instruction leads to more change in adult literacy practices outside of class (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002).

The incorporation of out-of-school literacy topics and activities to assist learning also supports a social practice view of literacy learning. There are various debates about how to best support adult learning (e.g., social practice vs. autonomous models) (Street, 2001) and for the participants in this study, the social practice view of literacy was dominant in views about learning as demonstrated from the class goals and from the overall activities incorporated. Supporting adult learning was based on activities and knowledge class coordinators believed was an important part of adult learners social lives. Coordinators and tutors expressed the goals of providing transferable skills that can be used in adult learners' everyday lives, as promoted by Ladson-Billings (1995), and adult learners, even in their goals to improve in reading and writing, related areas of their social lives to their engagement in class activities. It may have be the case that adults learners would gain more reading and writing skills in a shorter period of time had a more autonomous view of literacy learning been adopted in this class. However, based on the goals and the general needs of adult learners with developmental/intellectual disabilities, this approach to literacy teaching and learning seemed most appropriate.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations based on the findings of this study. Given that the goals of adult learners, and tutors and coordinators, were different, one of the recommendations is to make more explicit for adult learners the link between the class content and reading and writing development in their daily lives (for e.g., the role of vocabulary discussed in class for reading comprehension in their out-of-school lives, such as in their volunteer jobs). This can be accomplished by pointing out new vocabulary in written materials that they bring from home or other authentic material incorporated in class. Because there are strong links between oral language and reading comprehension (Taylor, Greenberg, Laures-Gore & Wise,

2012), building stronger oral language skills in learners can support their literacy learning as advocated by the coordinators and tutors and this could be further explained to adult learners given some adult learners stated goals.

In addition to making more explicit to adult learners links between class content and their reading and writing development, it is important that adults continue to engage in activities in class that connect to their out-of-school literacy lives as prior research has shown it supports learning (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). However, asking adults about the types of activities that are purposeful to them rather than assuming they are functional may prove more beneficial for learning. In this study, some adult learners reported not having a stove and this could restrict some of their engagement in class activities, such as recipes. Many of the adult learners lived very social lives (claimed to engage in emailing, go to movies, etc.) and this could be explored by the coordinators and tutors early in the class, such as by asking the adult learners to bring in print materials that are part of their everyday social lives. More knowledge about adult learners out-of-school lives will further support a social practice view of learning as advocated by the coordinators and tutors. As explained by Dirkx (2001), as cited in Terry (2006), “personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative, connection with the self and broader social world” (p. 64).

Although this class provided flexibility in tutoring practices, it would have been more helpful to provide tutors with information on the disability of the adult learner at the beginning of the tutoring process to support a positive teacher-learner relationship. This would also contribute to connecting new knowledge, including reading and writing activities, more efficiently to some of the learner strengths. Several of the tutors asked for increased knowledge of the learner’s disability so that they could research further strategies to use with the learner. For privacy reasons, as explained by the coordinators, information about the adult learners’ health and educational background was not shared with the tutors. However, from the perspective of tutors, further information in this regard would likely

have supported the teaching-learning process, even when more general teaching and learning strategies are used.

Given that the establishment of a positive relationship between the adult learner with a disability and the tutor was reported as significant for learning in this study, more personal sharing activities such as the “I am” activity will help adult learners and tutors get to know each other early in the teaching-learning process. As stated by Becky: “You need to get to know the whole person rather than knowing what they do on Tuesday.” Clearly, interpersonal skills seem to be an important part of the tutoring process yet it has not been a consistent focus in tutor training (Sandman-Hurley, 2008). For adult learners with developmental/intellectual disabilities, positive communication between the educator and adult learner may be even more important for supporting learning engagement. Therefore, as suggested by Belzer (2006) and Sandman-Hurley (2008), there is a need to revisit the role of tutor training considering limited knowledge taught to tutors.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was that connected to a self-report, that is, the risk of socially appropriate responses often linked to this type of data collection. Observational data of adult learners’ everyday practices both before and after class engagement would provide a more accurate understanding of the authenticity of classroom learning. In addition, being both the author and the participant in this research study raises issues of reflexivity (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). As an attempt to offset personal beliefs influencing outcomes, a coordinator in this study was given a copy of the results and was asked for feedback on the findings. Only minor modifications were made following her review. Also, prior to conducting this research, the author did not discuss theoretical perspectives about literacy with the program coordinators, tutors, or adult learners to reduce observer effect on the teaching-learning process.

Another limitation of this study was the small sample size. However, considering the minimal research on how volunteer

literacy classes support the learning of adults with developmental/ intellectual disabilities, this research provided insight on strategies, behaviours, and activities that were reported as assisting adult learning as well as areas for class improvement that may be informative for those designing volunteer programs for adults with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Further information is needed on how authentic activities support the learning of adults with developmental/ intellectual disabilities in order to improve practice in volunteer programs.

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Abridged too far? Credit Transfer: Examining the transition process from TAFE to University

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In responding to a global audience, universities are increasingly bound up in priorities of maintaining viability within landscapes of globalised market imperatives, and with changing paradigms of purpose; universities need to be accessible to all. In Australia, pathways to university provided by Credit Transfer have increased student mobility; the dichotomy however, is that alongside discourses of inclusivity is the need for students to adjust to the often rigorous academic demands of higher education. This paper examines the Bachelor of Communication and Media at the University of Wollongong (UOW), and the Diploma of Communication & Media Studies at the Illawarra Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE). Some of the common challenges transitioning students face in their first year at UOW are discussed, including; adapting to different workloads and the demands of self-directed, independent learning. A potential solution is a pre- university entry induction program for TAFE students.

Keywords: *transition, credit transfer, advanced standing, Mezirow, transformation*

Introduction

As a response to globalisation, the impetus for lifelong learning has resulted in many changes in approaches to access and participation in higher education (HE). The motivation to continue tertiary study is often career advancement, or simply to maintain viability in the workforce. One of the ways HE in Australia has risen to the challenge set by global market and political forces is to diversify entry pathways to university. One approach to achieving this is through Credit Transfer from Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector providers such as institutes of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) to university. Credit Transfer confers various levels of Advanced Standing in some degree courses, a move endorsed by TAFE institutes, which have enthusiastically embraced this burgeoning development. DEST statistics (cited in Watson 2008: 40) show that between 2001 and 2005, the number of students admitted to university on the basis of a TAFE award increased by 46%, while 'the proportion of students gaining credit (or exemption) for previous TAFE study increased from 2.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent [from 1994-2006] (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008: 192).

However, given that different skills sets are applicable for TAFE and university, some TAFE students' experience difficulties in the initial stages of their degree, particularly as with Advanced Standing, they may bypass first year of university completely. Some of these difficulties and the associated challenges will be discussed here, with particular emphasis on the ways in which pre-emptive measures may realistically be put into place to enable smoother transitioning for TAFE to university cohorts, and in the process help to alleviate negative outcomes some disaffected students experience. As global learning imperatives increasingly assume centre stage in tertiary education, the OECD (2009) points to the need for individual organisations to attend to globalisation in ways best

suited to local needs, that is, a ‘glonacal agency heuristic’ approach is advocated (Marginson & Rohades, 2002, in Vaira, 2004: 486) when implementing global knowledge paradigms in policies and practices at local level. In viewing this issue from a local lens therefore, the Bachelor of Communication and Media Studies (BCMS) at the University of Wollongong (UOW) and the Diploma of Communication & Media Studies at the Illawarra Institute of TAFE will be examined. Reference to the Learning Development Centre (LD) at UOW will also be made as this unit provides academic support where required.

Challenges for transitioning students

Increased and developed pathways to university have seen the emergence of greater heterogeneity of student groups, with concomitantly diverse ranges of skills, knowledge and needs, and with this comes some well documented challenges. Watson (2008) points out that granting Advanced Standing [through the Credit Transfer process] to transitioning students, often results in students facing university expectations of academic literacies equivalent to second year, without the advantage of first year acquisition at university, in which development of such skills is more likely to occur. Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales (2008: xxi) while urging the maintenance of ‘academic standards ‘and ‘quality of education’ also acknowledge there are often problems with academic expectations, which can lead to difficulties for students, especially as they are often expected to know more than they actually do. Insufficient academic literacies include the ability to apply abstraction to writing and to develop a high level of critical and conceptual analysis, and the ability to demonstrate depth of theoretical understanding (Watson, 2008). Similarly, Peter Bradbury, a teacher at Illawarra TAFE (Bradbury, P, personal communication, May29, 2012) when reflecting on his experiences with TAFE students, suggests that because TAFE is largely ‘vocationally’ focused, many students do not have the literacy levels required for university success. This dilemma is apparent in those students who present at Learning Development for remedial assistance, and therefore, a comprehensive and realistic look at the measures which may be implemented for students is needed.

Further exacerbating this lack of academic expertise, are other difficulties, for example; (Milne and Gabb (2007) point to differences in expectations of assessment; while Biggs (2003 in Gabb & Glaisher, 2006) points out the difficulties many students have in using unfamiliar university Information Technology (IT), an issue which is on-going as universities are increasingly engaging in a 'techno-centerist discourse' (Clegg, Hudson & Steel, 2003:48). Arguably, without IT skills in the initial stages of a degree course, inexperienced IT learners are already at a disadvantage compared to other cohorts. Furthermore, the pervasive quality of IT is a development that is increasingly embedded in learning, and therefore likely to be a determining precursor of engagement and success for many learners. In real terms for the BCMS cohort at UOW this means mastery of for example, eLearning, ereadings, postings, chats, forums and SOLS; the primary forms of administrative communications throughout the university. This issue is reflected upon by Peter Bradbury, who confirms that TAFE students often lack these rudimentary skills, as IT is not as extensively used in the TAFE system as it is at UOW (P.Bradbury, personal communication, May 29, 2012).

As Fuller and Chalmers (1997) and Gabb & Glaisher (2006) point out there are also the problems associated with different experiences in learning and pedagogical approaches between TAFE and university, which in turn often create different understandings. Cameron (n.d) refers to 'inconsistency in standards' (between TAFE and university work), while Walls and Pardy (2010) found that TAFE teachers were aware of differences in workloads for students, which could be potentially problematic for transitioning students. Similarly, Milne & Gabb (2006) in their study of transitioning 1st year students, noted that students found the different workloads (between school and HE, or TAFE and HE) to be particularly challenging. Cameron (n.d) refers also to the amount of independent study required in HE and the need for students to be self-motivated and autonomous to a greater degree than they have previously experienced [at TAFE]. While Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke da Silva & Brinkworth (2011) in their study into expectations of newly enrolled university students found that students underestimated the amount of time needed for independent study. These are all issues facing students who access LD and which

inform a number of different support programs UOW has in place, but which nevertheless, must be dealt with by students while they are also simultaneously struggling to achieve academic goals within limited timeframes.

On the positive side however, Walls and Pardy (2010) found that while many TAFE to university students were able to identify expected challenges and issues, attitudinal differences about these challenges were apparent and a key factor in success. In his theory of transformational learning, Mezirow (1981: 6) discusses 'perspective transformation' in which learners may be emancipated from their cultural and historical understandings, or previously accepted and assumed ideas of who they are. Peter Bradbury (personal communication, May29, 2012) confirms that many TAFE students lack a belief in their ability to complete a university degree, an issue he sees as a sense of a 'divide' between the assumed identity of a 'vocational' student and that of an 'academic'. In other words, student identity is often bound up in 'limiting' assumptions of self as learner. Mezirow saw this as one of the most important challenges of education, and to this end felt that andragogy could 'reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a 'learner' (1981: 22). Given the andragogical imperative of redefining beliefs and assumptions about learning, it may be argued that while pathways encourage students to step out of their 'comfort zone', in the process they also need to perceive themselves differently, that is, the subjective self as learner may need to be established before success takes place.

Many former TAFE students present at LD with a lack of confidence in their ability to produce academic work, which may indicate that while transition pathways provide the access, transformational learning may provide the means to succeed.

Further, while not necessarily systematised in explicit realms of policy and practice in HE, andragogical assumptions are nevertheless representative of a paradigm of independent learning at tertiary level. Mezirow (1981:21) emphasises the value of 'self-directed learning' for adults and states that andragogical approaches are most likely to facilitate this. However, by adopting a 'proactive' rather than 'reactive'

stance (Knowles, 1973: 14, in Smith, 2002), transitioning students moving from the more 'nurturing' and guided environment of TAFE classrooms into an environment where there is an assumption of independent learning, must also assume greater responsibility for the learning process. This may be very challenging and has indeed proven to be the case for many former TAFE students presenting at LD. Peter Bradbury endorses this view when he describes the university environment as much larger and more impersonal for many former TAFE students than they have previously been accustomed to (P. Bradbury, personal communication, May29, 2012). Embedding the capability of rising to these challenges may be one important outcome of pre-commencement programs.

Potential solutions

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (2011: 19) in acknowledging the vision of UOW supports the implementation of 'first year experience programs and support across the University', and indeed this is the case; LD being just one avenue of this support. Also, in its most recent report, UOW emphasised the need for 'non-traditional' groups to be represented under the umbrella of social inclusion, including domestic students, such as TAFE cohorts (UOW Strategic Planning, 2012). Therefore, in order for Credit Transfer to work to the benefit of students, gaps in equivalencies need to be addressed and strategies put in place to deal with these (Gabb and Glaisher, 2006). The question remains however, of how best this can be done; the answer usually focuses on remedial actions to be taken after commencement of university and includes many well established strategies. For example, successful articulation requires active management of transition (Young 2005 in Gabb & Glaisher, 2006); use of collaborative learning approaches in first year HE units (Milne and Gabb, 2007: v); closer collaboration between TAFE and university regarding different expectations required (Cameron and Cohen et al, in Cameron, n.d); improving 'academic orientation' of new students (Milne & Gabb, 2007) and awareness by academic staff of the needs of such students (Klinger & Murray, 2011). These are all useful and pertinent suggestions, however, through their primarily 'reactive' stance; they also provide scope for a new approach.

A pre-commencement induction program - TAFE to HE

With vision, flexibility and the adoption of a different way of viewing the transition process, there is scope for a pre- commencement induction program of study skills for TAFE students about to enter university for the first time. According to Professor Stephen Brown, Sub Dean of the Faculty of Arts at UOW (Brown, S, personal communication, May29 2012) one of the issues facing staff is that there is no explicit information on which students have articulated from TAFE, as such staff are often unaware of the challenges these students face in their daily academic lives. Professor Brown stresses the need for on-going research regarding the progress of this particular cohort of students, with a view to establishing protocols of awareness of potential obstacles for such students. Also, given the often evident 'knowledge gap' of Credit Transfer students, a pre-commencement approach is supported by Watson (2008) and Tickell and Smyrnios (2005) who advocate development of 'dedicated orientation programs'. From experience in LD is apparent that such programs should include orientation to HE academic literacies such as critical thinking, analytical writing, use of theoretical rigour and depth, independent research skills and IT skills. Walls and Pardy (2010) found that some TAFE courses were attempting to include elements of preparation for HE but these elements were not systemic or particularly prominent. Peter Bradbury (Bradbury, P, personal communication, May29, 2012) points to the Access Employment Education and Training (AEET) Framework Reaccreditation document produced by TAFE (2011), which aims to diversify articulation pathways, so that future TAFE courses will be divided into two strands: vocational and further study. As a teacher at the 'coalface' at TAFE, he advocates a core compulsory induction program for intending further study students to be managed from TAFE but which should include elements of university on-site orientation.

If a pre-university induction program is to be considered, there can be no doubt that it must include the applications and recognition of characteristics of adult learning including Knowles' (1973, in Smith, 2002) notions of the principles of self-directed learning; the potential for adult learners to use experiential learning; and as Smith (2002)

asserts, they need to be ready, oriented and motivated to learn. Peter Bradbury (Bradbury, P, personal communication, May29, 2012) believes that under such circumstances TAFE students may begin to adopt that identity so elemental to a sense of engagement with university life, and by applying these concepts, essentially, students' ideas of self as learner may be developed in ways which engender dialogues of success rather than struggle. A pre-commencement program is one way of assisting in this endeavour.

Conclusion

Although this has been a small example and divergent issues may be identified in other courses, while different institutes may have different challenges, unarguably, the interconnectedness of tertiary educational institutes in this age of globalisation means that the reality of the challenges for transitioning students needs to be accommodated. If institutes such as Illawarra TAFE and UOW in their efforts to rise to the global knowledge paradigm, enable learning bridges to be built, then it is incumbent upon them to implement transparent measures, which facilitate successful student transition, while remaining competitive, current and market viable. Innovative enabling strategies in terms of pre-university learning for transitioning students would go some way towards engendering paradigms of success in ways which provide a win- win outcome for all stakeholders.

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Following ten years' experience working as a teacher at TAFE Illawarra, Theresa gained a Master's degree in TESOL at UTS, after which she began working in Learning Development at the University of Wollongong, where she still works. Theresa is currently a Doctoral student researching the challenges facing TAFE transitioning students in their first year at university, and the strategies they use for success in their studies.

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Outside the box:
The Danish Folkehojskole as educational innovator

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170 years on, the Folk High School continues to supply Denmark a valued educational and social service. Does the modern Folk High School system offer Australian educators a model of relevance?

Other goals, other systems

Travelling between various Scandinavian adult educational institutions in 1978, I picked up a couple of hitchhikers, Danish students returning to their school after a short vacation period. As we neared the Funen Island harbour village, which was their destination they invited me to visit their school. What I saw there thirty-five years ago continues to energise my ideas of what constitutes a good education and to yield fresh insights into what is possible and desirable about organised learning activities.

The “school” my hitchhiking acquaintances attended was in fact an old Greek inter-island ferry. The students had decided, in negotiation with their teachers and the school authorities to purchase the vessel. When I arrived they were busily learning ship-wrighting skills in order to make it seaworthy and capable of housing a crew of twenty. Their next step was to learn motor maintenance, sailing and navigation skills because they had decided to sail the boat to a third world country (Venezuela) to take part in developmental projects for several months. They would then sail the boat back to Denmark where it would be sold.

On their return to Denmark students were expected to arrange their own “public examinations”. A public examination consisted of each student hiring a community hall in their home community on a specific evening. They would advertise the fact that they had recently returned from several months abroad and believed they had learned something of benefit to modern Danish society. Members of the public were invited to attend the community hall to interrogate the student and to assess if there was something of value in the student’s experience they could take away from the encounter.

The Danish government subsidised this educational enterprise to roughly 85% of its capital costs and up to roughly 80% of its operational costs. Various local government bodies often provided scholarships to support local youths to attend courses. Banks loaned funds to students to cover costs of attendance. Unemployed students were allowed to continue their benefits while attending such schools.

In the process of involvement in their school the students gained no qualification but learned important skills in communication and negotiation, living in co-existence, and of course many areas of mathematics and geography and various trades. They also learned an awful lot about themselves. They were caught up in a group project and learned to plan, to execute and revise plans. They emerged from their educational experience with runs on the board, confident of their ability to learn, and more respectful of others and themselves.

The “school” I first visited on Funen Island was one of 110 Folkehojskole (literally, people’s universities) in Denmark at the time.

This one was organised by the Tvind organisation, which was later to withdraw from the association of folkehojskoles. Other schools were run by church organisations, political parties, sporting associations, local government agencies, or industry groups. The institution of the folkehojskole had been a significant part of the Danish educational scene since the 1840s and had been exported with varying degrees of similitude to other Nordic and northern European countries and after 1878 the USA where it played a proud part in the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1993 the world's largest folk school was founded in Nigeria.

In May 2012 I had an opportunity to revisit Denmark and to speak with officials of the Danish Folkehojskole Association. In 2012, there are about 75 folkehojskole across a nation with a population roughly equivalent to Sydney's. Most folk schools are found in smaller rural communities where they make a valuable contribution to district economies. Some folk schools specialise in computing, others in sports, politics, various expressive and performing arts/crafts such as music or dance or theatre, ecology, literature, international studies – or a host of other activities. For all of them however at least 50% of the syllabus must be on activities the school can defend as "general, liberal, mind broadening" education.

Many if not most folk schools begin each day with a general assembly of students and teachers. Commonly there will be community singing and administrative announcements. In many schools discussion will be invited on current events in the wider national or international political scene. In most schools students are rostered to assist with cooking, serving and cleaning duties.

Every folk school is publicly funded to about 50% of its operational costs on certain conditions. Those conditions make interesting reading for an Australian, for our post school edutraining system has been subjected increasingly to performance quality management controls and audits and standardising procedures that threaten to sap the essential spirit of learning from our teachers and their students. For the modern Danish folk school to qualify for funding, no vocational skills are to be taught and no marks or grades are to be

awarded. The folk schools must be residential – schools range from 35 to 200 bed capacity -- and must operate for at least 32 weeks of the year, during which they must conduct at least five courses of 4 weeks duration. Students of the folk schools must be 17.5 years of age on entry. School buildings and statutes and regulations must be approved by the Ministry of Education. That is pretty much the regulatory framework. Compare that to the Australian Quality Training Framework if you dare!

In fact, most schools run courses of 12 to 32 weeks each year, with shorter courses of one to two weeks during the summer period. Annual registrations are around 50,000 per annum. This equates to roughly 2% of the nation's adult population.

Teachers in the folk school system require no formal qualifications. Many have university degrees and may have substantial teaching qualifications or experience in other educational institutions such as secondary schools or universities but none is required by legislation governing the institutions. The minimum teaching salary for a folk school teacher is equivalent to the starting salary of a teacher in a mainstream school. Beyond that School Boards may pay what is necessary to attract the teacher they seek.

The main attributes required of a teacher are possession of a skill in line with the particular school's curriculum, willingness to negotiate syllabus with each new cohort of students, and enthusiasm for the teaching enterprise. Classes need not follow a standard timetable. Folk schools, being residential, may have classes extending beyond midnight if the occasion demands. It is not uncommon for tradespeople, craftspeople, professionals or even politicians to commit to occasional teaching stints in a folk school to syncopate and embellish their workaday careers.

Principals are selected by each folk school's board in an open market. They may be in their twenties without previous educational experience, they may be career folk school principals or they may have distinguished themselves in one or other line of achievement. They tend to be hired on limited term contracts, perhaps renewable by mutual consent. The work of a principal is demanding and even the

very successful often seek no more than one or two contract renewals. One serendipitous outcome for Danish society is that the community has scattered through it people who have been principals and who understand the educational process, who know how to operationalise it, and who contribute to a high level of intelligent political and industrial discussion and debate.

Students enter a folk school for various reasons. For some sections of Danish society it is the “natural” thing to do between secondary school and university, much like the Australian gap year experience or the surfing safari or the trip to Bali. The folk school stint is used to help clarify career or other goals and to allow some unpressured maturing to occur. For some families there is an intergenerational attachment to certain folk schools. Others decide to enrol following a crisis or trauma of some kind – bereavement, personal illness, unexpected unemployment, divorce or empty nest. These students tend of course to be older, raising the average age of the folk school student to about 23 years. (Four folk schools cater specifically for senior citizens over 55 years of age.) A month or two in a folk school can help the person with changed status clarify who they are and can offer new goals and social and other skills to allow them to get on with their changed lives.

Some professions such as nursing or law enforcement tend to favour applicants with a folk school background because of their maturity and confidence and grounding in Danish social heritage and aspirations.

What lessons do the folk schools offer to Australian educators? The first Danish folk schools were a response to socio-political issues of their time, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Astute educators and enlightened politicians have redefined and adapted that initial response to maintain its currency through successive and massive changes in Danish society. The fact that they remain in rudimentary form outside Scandinavia, even in countries such as the USA that borrowed the concept early in its history, warns us that there is something about the folk schools as a whole that is quintessentially Nordic. In fact, even in Sweden and Finland the folk schools have

developmental trajectories quite different to those in Denmark and Norway. Any attempt to adopt the folk school concept in a country like Australia, if it were somehow to succeed, would create an oddity, a creature of educational and cultural incongruity. Given population relativities, one simply cannot imagine 500 such institutions scattered across the Australian educational landscape, accepting annual enrolments of over 300,000 mostly young adults.

That the system of Danish folk schools provides no nationwide model for our mimicking does not make them irrelevant to Australian educators, however. As a system, they serve to remind us that what is, is not all that is conceivable. For an important component of education systems in any country, they serve as a “light on the hill”, expanding notions of what is educationally possible. They remind Australians in particular that state- or nation wide, centralised systems are not the only or necessarily the best way to conduct all of our educational business and that localised control has much to be desired.

They also serve as incubators for new ideas of teaching and learning. There is much to be learned from the experience of enthusiastic amateur teachers who are given resources (by the state) and encouragement (by their principals) to try to impart their knowledge and skills in ways that engage and inspire their voluntary students. Like some of our home grown experiments, such as the Boys From the Bush Project, “outside the square” schemes developed by those with fires in the belly and unencumbered by established educational reputations or invasive audit practices, provide sturdy platforms for questioning line of sight bureaucrats and others devoted to maintaining the doctrines and dogmas of current orthodoxies.

About the Author

John Collins *became interested in the Nordic folk high school first in 1978. He has taught in a Danish school and visited folk schools in other Scandinavian countries. A recent visit to Denmark reignited his admiration for the system, its administrators and teachers.*

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