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From the Editor's desk

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

The April edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) is being written at a time when Australia is in the middle of a Federal government election campaign. Adult Learning Australia (ALA) the adult learning sector peak organisation is calling for high quality adult education that is assessable for everyone and is responsive to community need. This is significant in the post-pandemic environment where adult learning, reskilling and retraining are important as old industries decline and new industries emerge. Quality adult education that is accessible is particularly important for second chance learners and workers retraining after being made redundant, migrant and refugee learners, learners with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. ALA identifies five key policy areas which they perceive require attention by the party that forms a new government:

1. Adult community education (ACE) provides a 'second chance' to many Australians so they can reach their full potential. Regardless of financial or personal circumstances, we should all be able to access quality adult education when we need it.
2. The Australian government must commit to developing and resourcing a national adult literacy strategy that establishes a framework for increasing the levels of adult literacy by 20% at PIAAC 2031/32.

3. The capacity of the language literacy numeracy and digital skills workforce must be strengthened with access to free high quality professional development that provides them with opportunities to learn in ways that are applicable to their work settings.
4. A lifelong learning policy must be a national priority and a centrepiece for all educational policies in order to unlock the true potential of all Australians.
5. Australia needs a genuine commitment from the Australian government to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and genuine engagement with the ACE sector to ensure they are working towards those goals.

More information on ALA's call for access to quality adult education for all can be found here https://ala.asn.au/election-2022/.

The April edition of the journal has both a national and international focus. The articles are written on some important adult education issues of our time such as therapeutic landscape learning after the COVID 19 pandemic; professional learning in police education; lifelong learning and adult education in Japan; second chance learning in Africa; and adult education and processes of empowerment for people with mental health issues.

The first article from ***Annette Foley, Helen Weadon, Sharon McDonough and Rachel Taylor*** titled 'A gendered therapeutic learning landscape: Responding creatively to a pandemic' explores adult learning, the authors argue ... "crafting has occupied the hands and minds of women over many centuries providing vital connections with cultural skills and with community". The article explores how these regional women were able to remain connected and creative through crafting by establishing a *virtual crafting community*. Drawing on the theory of 'therapeutic landscapes', the paper claims the virtual craft group was able to support lifelong learning and wellbeing by bringing women together in a community of practice, reducing social isolation of individuals and developing new knowledge and skills socially and relationally, including increasing their support network and building friendships. The findings of the research have implications for adult education policy and practices as the authors argue researchers have drawn on therapeutic landscapes as a framework to reveal connections between wellness and place. This is particularly pertinent as individuals and communities have experienced unprecedented levels of stress, mental illness and anxiety about the future as a result of the pandemic.

Anh Le and Stephen Billett's article, 'Lifelong learning and adult education in Japan provides an overview and insight into adult learning in Japan, an area which currently has a dearth of research. Surprisingly, Japan, unlike most developed nations where the focus of adult learning has been shaped by neoliberal reforms regarding work and economic outcomes, Adult learning in Japan focuses on learning and education for wellbeing, social engagement and personal enrichment. Whilst there is some emphasis on maintaining adult employability and the reemployment of retirees, adult education learning focuses on building social connections and health and wellbeing. With a burgeoning ageing population and the electoral power this group represents the authors' claim, "the provision of educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese". This article affirms current research on adult learning that notes the importance of place based adult learning for the ageing population, providing connections to community, personal fulfilment and enrichment and keeping people healthy and active across a lifespan (see Findsen & Formosa (2011); Golding & Kimberly (2016) for example).

Brett Shipton's article on 'Maximising Problem Based Learning (PBL) in police education: Why understanding the facilitator role is a key factor in developing learning for police problem-solving' is written in the context of the new professionalisation of policing in Australia (see Ryan, 2016 for example). The author argues traditional police education has been teacher centred with little engagement and encouragement for students who have limited input into the curriculum and pedagogy used in their education and training. As Shipton notes, *"Traditionally, police academy programs have tended to be teacher-centred and operate in an authority dependent context, which is problematic by inhibiting effective learning and failing to encourage proactive attributes from students"*. Policing is a profession that requires diverse knowledge and skills as new recruits learn to 'become' police. The author argues for problem-based learning informed by Vygotsky's (1978) writing on education and learning. He claims ... *"police educators' professional knowledge and experience of academy teachers remains relevant,* *as they need to expand their awareness of learner-centred practice beyond being teacher-centred, rather than simply switching to learner-centred practice"*. PBL moves beyond teacher centred skills in police education, to pedagogy that is facilitated and an essential strategy in learner-centred methods. The challenge he argues is to bring the teacher centred practices and facilitated PBL together to enact professional learning that is learner centred.

Omar Keita and Ya-Hui Lee's article 'Transforming adult learners: The experiences of participating in the second chance education program'. This study outlines the experiences of second chance learners in an education program on the West Coast of Africa in The Gambia. This qualitative case study research claims learners faced barriers that hindered their full participation in the program. These barriers are both institutional and situational. The institutional barriers relate to an uncomfortable teaching and learning environment; inadequate resources such as teaching and learning materials. The situational barriers included issues of poverty, access to food, transportation, and distance from the learning centre. The majority of research participants engaged in the adult learning program in order to develop both educationally and to develop new skills for work and life. The authors argue that ... *"the participants benefit from the program in improved knowledge and skills, building confidence and connecting socially, taking care of personal issues, and helping others. In other words, the program empowered and transformed learners from improving themselves to helping others"*.

The final article in this edition of AJAL titled, 'Education as change: Liberation from mental illness and self-stigma in favour of empowerment', by authors ***Joel Hedegaard and Martin Hugo*** reveals how adult education can be a changing and liberating process for people with long term mental illness. This important qualitative research draws on semi-structured interviews with 22 research participants in life knowledge and creative arts courses in a Swedish Folk High School. The authors claim in Sweden the Folk High School system, is a part of Popular Adult Education, in the spirit of lifelong learning education, it holds a unique position in the Swedish education system as learning is directed to the whole person, and the knowledge and learning that is provided are related to a persons whole life experience. From the qualitative interviews, the authors argue five themes emerged from the data. The adult learning courses provided a meaningful social context – to undergo change with others; self-awareness via non-violent communication – to change one's self-image; creating as rehabilitation – change through aesthetic learning processes; to function better in everyday life – to receive confirmation of change and finally, opportunity horizons – to change and hope for the future. The authors draw on Freire's writing on liberating education and argue the *"Folk High School's ambition with the two courses in the sense that liberating education is used to change the participants' self-image, reduce self-stigmatisation, and allow them to achieve a sense of empowerment"*. In this context, using teaching pedagogy and methods for recovery and orientation and dialogue based on principles of non-violent communication, in addition to the meaningful social context that the Folk High School offers, specific teaching methods and approaches are used for recovery and re-orientation. Using dialogue based on the principles of non-violent communication, the authors argue liberating processes are developed, built and created, in which self-consciousness has been allowed to bloom as a foundation for change in these participants' conception of themselves. The data in this paper provide an illuminating and powerful insight into the challenges that people with mental health issues face and how adult learning education can provide a conduit by which community connections are made and new knowledge, self-development and insight into mental health issues are able to flourish.

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A gendered therapeutic learning landscape: Responding creatively to a pandemic

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Crafting has occupied the hands and minds of women over many centuries providing vital connections with cultural skills and with community. While the COVID-19 pandemic has isolated women in their homes, it has also provided opportunities for women to reconnect to crafting through virtual spaces. This paper draws on a thematic analysis of a focus group interview examining the experiences of regional women participating in a crafting group and identifies the ways in which they used craft to support their wellbeing. Drawing on the concept of therapeutic landscapes, the paper highlights that connection in a virtual craft group supports lifelong learning and wellbeing, brings women together in support through a community of women's practice and facilitates opportunities for producing meaningful and commemorative quilting projects This finding has implications for a society experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, mental illness and anxiety about the future.

Keywords: *crafting, therapeutic landscapes, women, COVID-19, virtual spaces, lifelong learning, wellbeing*

Introduction

Research into the relationship between leisure activities such as arts and craft activities and links to wellbeing particularly in older people has gained traction over several decades (Burt & Atkinson, 2012; Collier & Wayment, 2018; Corkhill et al., 2014; Gandolfo & Grace, 2010, Pöllänen, 2015a, 2015b; Riley et al., 2013). The association between wellbeing and craft activities points to a complex interplay of factors, such as the all-encompassing aspects of crafting, learning materials and techniques and the sense of accomplishment and recognition by others that is gained through creating objects (Gandolfo & Grace, 2010).

Several ways of conceptualizing wellbeing stemming from crafting have emerged from existing research, with Maidment and Macfarlane (2009) describing how a person "having interests and being interested in craft as a leisure activity has been described as comprising both an emotional benefit and a disposition, which creates flow-on effects to other experiences of well-being" (p. 17). For Pöllänen and Weissman-Hanski (2020), crafting as a long-term pursuit links to wellbeing through the benefits of giving meaning in people's lives.

A notion of community or collective wellbeing has been explored by researchers including Riley (2008), who reported how being a guild member cultivates a collective sense of self, which contributes to quality of life, and perceptions of health and wellbeing. Participating in a crafting group may promote engagement with a community of people who share similar characteristics and values, opening up opportunities for positive social interactions and the benefits of belonging (Riley, Corkhill & Morris, 2013). Court's (2020) research describes how valuable social connections can be forged via knitting circles: "Making friends is not necessarily easy but social knitting, as an accessible and creative activity with regular meeting times, may make it easier to do so" (p. 287). Specifically, leisure activities such as craft are positively associated with mental wellbeing in the elderly with benefits including personal growth, mastery, confidence and social connectedness as well as confidence and personal development (Burt & Atkinson, 2012).

This paper draws on the concept of therapeutic learning landscapes (Gesler, 1992) where community members come together in communities of practice to share skills, learn life skills, develop friendships and in doing so derive health and wellbeing benefits. The community space that is discussed in this paper is deliberately gendered and is located in regional Victoria. Using the concept of therapeutic landscapes as a framework, the paper examines the benefit for women of gendered community spaces and argues that therapeutic learning landscapes can be embodied in and outside of fixed physical locations.

Background

There has been a plethora of research about the importance of community based, situated informal and lifelong learning (Foley & Golding, 2014; Golding, Brown, Foley & Harvey et al., 2007; Golding, Mark & Foley, 2014) for health and wellbeing benefits. Voluntary organisations, community groups, and other informal learning settings have been shown to engage older learners, widen community participation across community activities, benefit individual health and wellbeing, alleviate loneliness, and provide enjoyment and social connections (Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Liddle, Parkinson & Sibbritt, 2013). There has also been substantial research on links between community participation and social capital (Wilson,2006). Traditionally, crafting is viewed as a leisure activity for women, without due attention to its role in their lifelong learning, career development or economic wellbeing (Malema & Naidoo, 2017).

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning has been researched extensively since the 1970s and evokes significant debate as stakeholders contend with the evolving nature of learning across the lifespan. The recognition that lifelong learning is the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process across a lifespan (Longworth & Davies, 1996, p. 22) provides a challenge to rural communities as the population ages and social isolation which is known to be related to poor physical and mental health prevails. Learning is a continuous process for humans (Billet, 2010). It is generally accepted that lifelong learning can only take place if there is a desire and a willingness to learn and incorporates both formal and informal learning. We also know that learning is integral to our everyday lives to enable us to carry out everyday tasks (Billet, 2010). It can occur in a multitude of locations and can be planned or unplanned or even 'incidental' (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). It is well understood that there exists a need for reflexive forms of adult education (Bowl, 2017; Walters & Waters, 2017; Bjursell, 2019) thus the need to be inclusive of opportunities to access both formal and informal learning activities in a variety of settings that are age and ability-friendly (Keating, Eales & Phillips, 2013, p. 319). Moreover, greater participation in everyday activities is linked to successful ageing and a greater sense of wellbeing (Menec, 2003).

Older people living in rural areas can be vulnerable to reduced opportunities and tend to have less access to social networks (Wedgeworth, et al. 2017) thus rendering them more vulnerable to learning barriers. Whilst it is acknowledged that learning takes place continually throughout life as a matter of survival (Billett, 2010), for some the opportunity to access learning to engage with others is hindered by a lack of self-efficacy. Sloane-Seale and Kops (2008) suggested that participation in learning activities fosters positive outcomes but hastened to draw attention to the barriers that many older people experience in accessing such activities, including dispositional barriers of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and lack of emotional support and financial and geographical issues. Such issues are exacerbated in rural areas where accessibility to activities often requires access to public transport (which is not as available in rural areas) or dependence on another person.

Learning and wellbeing

A growing body of research indicates that participation in education, both formal and informal, is associated with greater wellbeing for older adults (Hammond & Feinstein,2006; Jenkins, 2011; Aberg, 2016). Wellbeing is intrinsically connected with success for all learners and is a result of enjoyment, self-satisfaction, and a sense of being part of a greater purpose or identity. Life satisfaction and wellbeing (Tam & Chui, 2016) are key aspects for people as they age, as is the joy of learning with others (Schoultz, Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2020) and it is plausible to reason those older learners become more confident in their ability to acquire new skills and knowledge in a supportive ecosystem of learners (Narushima; 2008; Withnall, 2009). Wellbeing is an enabler of learning, it is associated with increased confidence, a greater sense of self-efficacy and a greater sense of belonging to a learning community.

Learning in communities

Involvement in a community provides a sense of social identity (Haslam et al., 2020), especially in rural areas where the process of ageing occurs within neighbourhoods and communities (Phillips, et. al, 2000). The learning environment in organised groups is attractive to older learners as it provides the bonus of a social experience as well as skill and knowledge development (Sloane-Seale & Kops, 2008). Organised community learning enables older people to interact and to develop skills that are of interest to them.

The setting in which our research interview was based, a women's community-based crafting group, can provide an important avenue for lifelong learning, that has benefits for social health, wellbeing, and learning needs (Merriam & Kee, 2015). Engagement with craft is seen to foster connections within society (Jefferies, 2016) and has been described as providing an avenue for developing personal skills as well as a sense of active citizenship (MacEachern, 2005). In their study, Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) found that women participating in a crafting group identified learning new skills as a critical aspect of their participation in such groups, and this learning was intimately connected to their own sense of wellbeing. Producing artifacts was identified as meaningful when women do crafting activities together, but the process of belonging and "… contributing to the craft group was a major source of personal support for these older women, where reciprocity, friendship, learning and empowerment were derived from being part of the collective" (Maidment & MacFarlane, 2009, p.23).

Therapeutic landscapes: A theoretical framework

Therapeutic landscapes were originally developed by drawing from theories in cultural ecology, pioneered by William Gesler in 1992. They were described as healing places "where the physical and built environments, social conditions and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to healing" (Gesler, 1992, p. 96). The concept was further developed to recognise the potential for deep relationality between people and place as a core basis of therapeutic landscapes, in response to the assumption that certain places were somehow therapeutic in and of themselves (Bell et al., 2018). In this vein, Conradson (2005) put forward the argument that therapeutic landscapes emerge through transactions between people in a broader social and environmental setting.

Therapeutic landscapes are said to include landscapes such as coastal locations, rivers, green spaces, parklands and recreation spaces. Other therapeutic landscape healing places include hospitals, health spas, clinics, community settings, and the home space. Therapeutic landscapes are also recognised to include nonphysical, symbolic, spiritual and online spaces (Bignante, 2015; Winchester & McGrath, 2017; Bell, et al.,2018). Cox et al. (2020) argue that researchers have drawn on therapeutic landscapes as a framework to reveal connections between wellness and place. The concept of therapeutic landscapes is also explored by Doughty (2013), who emphasises that therapeutic landscapes are "embodied and fluid" (p. 141) and arise through a interactivity of health and place occurring within "therapeutic geographies… [comprising] the greater landscape of walking and talking" (p. 141). In this paper, we draw on these concepts of therapeutic landscapes as a framework in order to understand the multiple and fluid ways in which engagement of, and through, community of practice spaces both virtual and face-to-face can be understood in the context of a women's crafting group in regional Victoria.

Context of the study

This study took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic and while the focus of the research was on crafting and learning, the impact of COVID-19 was reflected in the design of the research questions and in the methods of data collection. While the research team intended to conduct a face-to-face interview with the participants, the impact of COVID-19 restrictions meant that data collection occurred via virtual means.

As a research team, we acknowledge that gender does not exist on a binary and we acknowledge that people other than women engage in crafting activities. For the purposes of this research, however, we were seeking to understand the experiences of those who identify as women and their experiences and perceptions of crafting. In particular, this study seeks to uncover the interplay of personal and social processes as women pursue craft making in a group setting, including the factors which motivate them to participate. The notion of craft as gendered, with the act of crafting long-held as 'women's work' (Minahan & Cox, 2007), underscores a rich cultural history of women's crafting; and yet the world of women's craft has all too often been viewed as comprising activities that are simply "'time-fillers', frivolous, and of little intrinsic value" (Gandolfo & Grace, 2010, p. 30). As such, the role of gender in women's crafting groups, particularly as these groups are increasingly popularised in online settings in recent years, has been viewed by some as an important aspect of a resistance movement: in essence, women's craft is moving away from its traditional setting in which it is pursued out-of-view in the privacy of the home, and into an open and shared space (either online or in public settings) as an explicit conduit to connect and learn with other women (Minahan & Cox, 2007). More recent research has also demonstrated how everyday engagement with crafting can be instrumental in the forming of a 'creative identity' for women, which in turn can promote health and the empowerment of women in a collective sense (Elisondo & Vargas, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a period of social ferment which has impacted people's lives in profound ways, and likewise, this ubiquitous contextual factor has shaped this research significantly. With older people experiencing marked levels of social isolation during the pandemic (Armitage & Nellums, 2020), the contextual basis of this study builds upon recent calls for an examination and reframing of the 'technological grey divide' as part of a focus on increasing the digital connectivity of older people during COVID-19 (Weil et al., 2021). In response to stay at home orders and social distancing restrictions which have impacted many of our day-to-day social interactions, a transition to digital platforms – nothing short of a widespread 'migration to digital life' (Weil et al., 2021, p. 644) – has occurred across society to maintain social connectedness. However, with older people utilising these technologies at disproportionately lower rates than the general population prior to the pandemic (Cosco et al., 2021), barriers to uptake have presented a huge challenge for many. Almost overnight, older individuals have faced the reality that these digital platforms are now more critical than ever, in particular for maintaining meaningful connections which may help to counter the rising tide of depression or anxiety due to increased social isolation (Newman & Zainal, 2020).

During this period, many crafting groups have transitioned to a diverse array of online formats to maintain regular connections with members; however, access for older adults within such online spaces is not necessarily a straightforward transition. It is important to understand how older people who are largely marginalised in a digital sense, may be able to successfully harness social support networks as they develop the tools needed to actively engage with technology. Within this framing, the role of craft groups as gendered spaces is of particular interest to this study, as such groups may serve as a demonstration of networks of belonging which blend tangible and virtual learning spaces and which act as newly emerging 'models of virtual relationship' (Chatterjee & Yatnatti, 2020, p. 1395). As older people take active steps to access social learning opportunities online through avenues such as crafting groups, they may also be carving out new possibilities for critical forms of digital literacy to help them stay connected during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

Method

Our paper emerged from a larger mixed methods study combining a Qualtrics survey and a focus group interview of seven women aged between 50 to 70 years of age and based in regional Victoria, Australia. The current paper reports on the qualitative focus group component of the study. The focus group interview questions explored the women's participation and experiences of quilting during a COVID-19 lockdown. The focus group questions were designed to examine what motivates the women to do crafting and any benefits they experience as a consequence of crafting together. The study was also interested in examining the benefits of crafting together during the lockdown. As noted above, due to COVID-19 restrictions the focus group interview was conducted via Zoom. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants involved in the study.

We adopted an approach based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which involves searching across the data set to identify, analyse and report repeated patterns or themes (Baun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke, (2006), a theme is a "patterned response or meaning derived from the data that informs the research question (p.82)".
The thematic analysis process was employed consisting of 6 steps: (1) Familiarising ourselves with the data, (2) Generating initial codes (3) Searching for themes (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining and naming themes, and (6) Producing the report/manuscript (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data was sorted manually which included "a process of sorting and defining the transcripts and defining and sorting of collected data … applicable to the research" (Glesne, 2006, p. 21). The sorting process consisted of reading and rereading the transcripts to identify re-occurring words, ideas, patterns and themes generated from the data. The transcripts were read and reread, and themes were highlighted. Within each transcript,

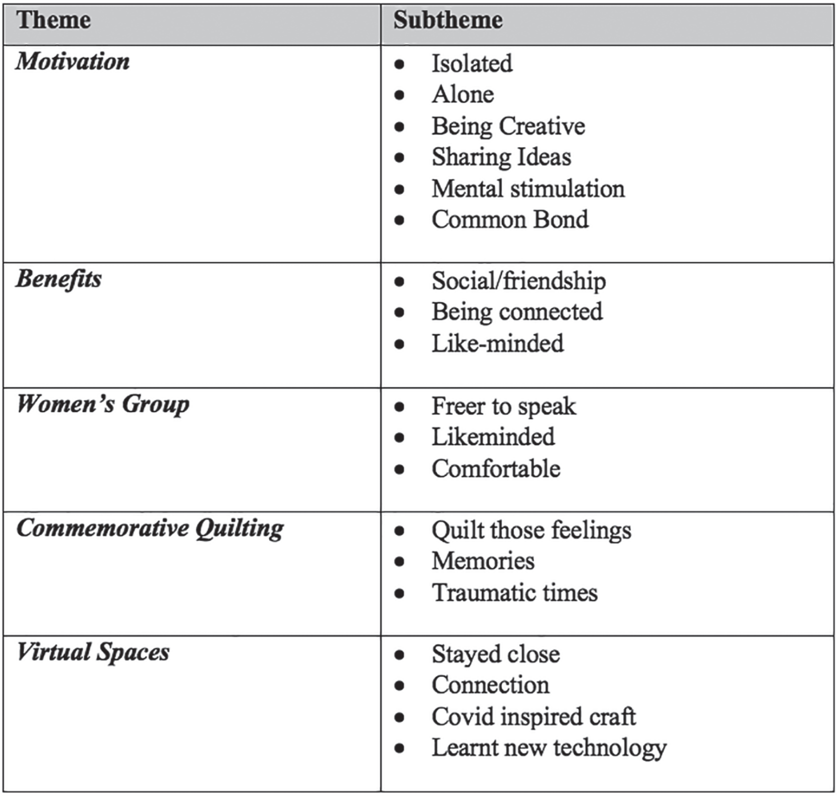
concepts and ideas emerged through re-occurring words, messages and meanings. Corresponding codes were used to identify themes and from this, three categories in the data were identified each with corresponding themes.

The study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Federation University Australia (Approval number B20-123).

Findings

As indicated, common themes which referred to important points in the study relating to participants' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about participation in a crafting group were identified in the data (Ely et al., 1997). These themes were categorised into three themes each involving subthemes (Table 1).

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes



Theme	Subtheme
Motivation	• Isolated • Alone • Being Creative • Sharing Ideas • Mental stimulation • Common Bond
Benefits	• Social/friendship • Being connected • Like-minded
Women's Group	• Freer to speak • Likeminded • Comfortable
Commemorative Quilting	• Quilt those feelings • Memories • Traumatic times
Virtual Spaces	• Stayed close • Connection • Covid inspired craft • Learnt new technology

Motivation

Motivation was a key finding in the data. When asked about motivation of joining a craft quilting group, some women suggested motivators included the opportunity to alleviate loneliness and gave the opportunity to fill in their spare time made available to them through retirement.

For Liz feeling ‘alone and isolated’ was the catalyst to join the group. It happened when ‘a neighbour invited me to her little sewing group … and I found it really lonely, and I was looking for some way of getting out and doing something’. Jane explained that she was not as mobile as she once was and a consequence had to give up work so was looking for something to do that she enjoyed and to meet some women, ‘I had some trouble with my hips, and I had to give up work, I was sort of forced into early retirement.’

For others like Sue, the motivation was driven through her interest in creativity. ‘I guess I enjoy the creative side of things, I love seeing what other people are doing, just the ideas, the sharing of ideas, techniques, and skills and the chat that goes on alongside it.’. Similarly, Pam was motivated by the mental stimulation that craft provides, describing ‘that's probably why I got started in it and probably why I'll continue to do it with groups because that's kind of the connectivity and for me it's an artistic outlet’. Karen also commented on the mental stimulation through the need for concentration and what she described as the arithmetic involved with quilting:

> *[It] engages the kind of arithmetic side of it and the abstract notion that thinking through a pattern engages you mentally. Because even though you might have chosen the colours and things, you still have to think through - in our case, patchwork, because it's American based it's inches and everything you buy is metric, so you're constantly thinking through that kind of conversion of, how big is something? that's five-foot square or three inches square.*

Benefits

Friendship was the most common response when asked about the benefits of crafting together. The importance of friendships and social connections along with the common bond and ‘like mindedness’ they shared through crafting together was of significant importance to the women in the group.

Mental stimulation and the social aspect of the crafting group were described by Pam as an important mix for her. Sue described the mix of mental stimulation and socialising with her ‘quilting friends’ as both being beneficial to her:

> *So, there's that kind of mental occupation and then the other thing is social. I would say that my quilting friends are probably the ones who will be at my funeral and my social people that I met through work.*

Similarly, for Ann, friendships were key to her involvement in the group. For her, the combination of making friends and enjoying making something together ‘… benefits me greatly because I feel connected. I'm working on something that is beautiful.’ Ann made it clear, however, that the friendships were the most beneficial part of being in the group:

But basically, it's the connection with the people because if we didn't connect, I'm sure the group would fail. But we've got a thing that links us. I also think, because we're all similar age stages in life, so that's another connection.

Having a common bond was mentioned by Sue as an important way to bring the women together:

> *I am probably one of the oldest people at work and yet I think there's a bit of a bond with everybody because there's a common thread through it and everybody is interested in seeing and sharing ideas and that's terrific to see the creative side coming through, that common thread.*

Women's Group

Part of the common bond spoken about by Sue was the fact that the group was all women. When asked about the group being all women and whether that was an important aspect of the group, the women all agreed that having men in the group would ‘change the dynamic.’

They agreed that the group worked well because it was comprised of all women: ‘it’s definitely an all women group’. For Ann, being able to speak openly about personal things was important: ‘We’re just freer to speak about personal things, relationships, and I guess we respect the opinion of other women’. Jane was also in agreement with the membership of the group being all women describing it as being more comfortable and being with women who were more ‘likeminded’.

There was general agreement by all of the group with Jane’s view and articulated by Sue who suggested that:

> *I think I agree with what you guys said too, I guess it's a likeminded-ness there, some sort of shared experience, I'm more comfortable. But it would be different, the things that you'd discuss, or the - as you said Ann, how men respond and relationships, their point of view, it's different.*

Commemorative Quilting

Several of the women mentioned the importance for them of the commemorative nature of crafting, where the act of making a quilt occurred during times of loss or trauma. This was clearly expressed by Ann when she talked about her father’s funeral:

Can I just say, on that point, often if you've been stitching through a traumatic period of your life, when you pick up that quilt those feelings come back, those memories often come back, I find. You think, oh yes, I took this up for dad's funeral, this is what I was stitching.

The State of Victoria where the women were living at the time of the study had not only been challenged by the current pandemic and subsequent lockdown but had previously been impacted by the Black Summer Bushfires in 2019 and a protracted drought that impacted on regional communities across the State. For Sue, crafting and making quilts:

> *[K]ept my hands busy, particularly during the first lockdown when you really had no idea whether you'd get through it. But also, when you get through this I've got something to show for it. I don't know how many - after the big bushfires there were any number of exhibitions and quilt shows and things that were all inspired by bushfire quilts. I don't know how many things for the next 20 years are going to be COVID inspired. But I'm certainly - I mean I haven't produced a lot but the quilt I have done has all been handstitched and I'm pleased with it.*

Karen also mentioned commemorative quilting where she makes quilts during significant and challenging times, ‘Many of us have actually made quilts at times - I've got one that I made after the Black Saturday bushfires in all reds and golds, so it brings that memory back’. This was echoed by Jane who also had made a quilt during the drought ‘all in water colours’.

Virtual Spaces

As noted in the context section, at the time of the interview the state of Victoria was in a COVID-19 lockdown. The capital city Melbourne had been in a stringent lockdown and regional Victoria, where the women were located (except for one woman who was living in Melbourne in full lockdown) had been subject to less severe regulations, allowing restricted numbers to attend cafés and restaurants. Some of the women had been meeting in a group for a few weeks at a local café for coffee together and all of the women were regularly meeting via Zoom for their craft meetings.

When asked how the lockdown and restrictions had impacted on the group, the women were generally positive and agreed that being able to continue to meet virtually via Zoom was a bonus which allowed them to keep in touch. Sue described how social media had allowed ‘people to share and connect and learn things. It's actually come at a good time, really, COVID-19, technologically.’ Similarly, Liz also agreed that technology had maintained their bond despite not being physically together:

> *It's certainly different, and we have done Zoom, but we don't feel that our bond has lessened any because we haven't physically been together. We're just looking forward to when we can all get back together, so that's been really good.*

Some of the group members indicated their amazement that they were now relying on an online platform such as Zoom to meet with one another, with one participant commenting ‘Who would have thought this time last year we’d even be doing this?’ and another admitting she had ‘Never heard of [Zoom]’ until the lockdowns. Having the opportunity to continue with the group and keep in touch through the technology and work on their crafting projects together was seen by all of the women as important, with Ann describing this as being ‘meaningful’ and helping to relieve their ‘lockdown boredom’.

Discussion: crafting groups as a therapeutic landscape

This research aimed to examine what motivates the women in the study to do crafting and what benefits, if any, they experience as a consequence of crafting together. The study was also interested in examining the benefits of crafting together during a COVID-19 lockdown in Regional Victoria in 2020.

For the women in the craft group, friendships and the social benefits and sharing in a women's group were identified as important. Studies of informal craft groups and other informal groups have identified the social benefits and the sharing of skills as being of significant importance (Flood & Blair, 2013; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Maidment & MacFarlane, 2009).

Little research to date has been done on the very recent impact of COVID-19 on community groups in Australia. For participants in this study, there were some key findings related to a lockdown they were experiencing in September 2020. For the women in the study, technology such as Zoom allowed them to continue to meet together and share their crafting projects. For the women, despite not being able to share a physical space together, their connection and 'bond' was maintained through a virtual space which facilitated 'meaningful' connections.

Therapeutic landscapes have been conceptualised as sites in which environmental, individual and societal factors come together to enhance the healing or therapeutic process (Gesler, 1992). There has been a broad and comprehensive account of the therapeutic landscape through the notion of blue space (Foley, *et al.*,2019), and green spaces, (Lea, 2008) spas, domestic spaces, schools and playgrounds (Spray, 2020; Harris *et al.*, 2010; Dunkley, 2009), virtual therapeutic landscapes (Trnka, 2021) and indeed for this study the women's virtual craft group. The women who participated in the gendered community of practice described their social connections and friendships as being as important as the activities occurring in the craft group. Indeed, when faced with COVID-19 and separation from the physical locations, that of the crafting home shared space, a separate and arguably equally as therapeutic (in a time of great stress during COVID-19 lockdown) in the form of a virtual space was taken up by the participants.

Involvement in a community of practice provides a sense of social identity (Haslam *et al.*, 2020) especially in rural areas, where the process of ageing occurs within neighbourhoods and communities (Phillips, Bernard & Phillipson, 2000). For the women who participated in the craft activities they felt a need to connect in many instances for their wellbeing. Social networks and community ties are important for wellbeing (Looker, 2014) for both the individual and the society in which they reside. Such networks can provide health support as stories and experiences are shared.

The women in this study, due to COVID-19 lockdown, were forced, in many ways, to unify their community physical spaces with an embodied, fluid and dynamic gendered space. Maintaining the group's connections via social media enabled the women to maintain therapeutically meaningful virtual opportunities that in turn supported and even strengthened their relationships with one another during a time when being in the same physical space together was not a possibility. These alternative and fluid therapeutic landscapes provided an opportunity for different ways to connect and communicate and facilitated the continued 'bond' and friendships and kept the friendships going at a time of unprecedented change and upheaval. In addition, the craft group participants' experience of learning to navigate a new virtual platform with its own set of norms and functions, which had been largely unfamiliar before lockdown, illuminates how older people were able to develop a greater sense of agency and resilience through enhanced digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Weil et al., 2021).

Some of the group members indicated their amazement that they were now relying on an online platform such as Zoom to meet with one another and feeling they had learnt how to manage the online system allowing enough to facilitate them to continue with the group and keep in touch and work on their crafting projects together was seen by all of the women as important, with Ann describing this as being 'meaningful' and helping to relieve their 'lockdown boredom'.

Conclusion

This small but significant study provided an opportunity to reconceptualise the benefits of social participation facilitated through virtual connection. A therapeutic landscape, physical or virtual, that provides opportunity for connection, friendship, the sharing of ideas and learning new skills, *matters*. Indeed, for Gesler and Kearns (2002), whether spaces are digital or real-life when it comes to health and wellbeing what is important is the continued connections that allow for social contact.

There is little doubt that COVID-19 has impacted on these social groups, in some cases permanently. Certainly, there has been the uptake of virtual spaces and communication opportunities more broadly across the globe since the pandemic began. There will arguably be many community spaces such as community craft groups, where people have not been able to connect virtually. Many older and less technologically literate or networked people in Australia and globally have little or no access to virtual spaces due to lack of knowledge about the technology or lack of opportunity to own and fund the technology (Weil et al., 2021). Either way, governments will need to consider the importance of availability for all to access, make use of, and navigate virtual therapeutic landscapes to cater for future potential unprecedented events that again force lockdowns and the separating of community groups from face-to-face, real-life opportunities.

Loneliness and isolation from community group activity through a lack of digital literacy and lack of resources has potentially devastating consequences. Older people during the COVID-19 pandemic have been recognised as being particularly at risk of being left behind and left out (Weil et al., 2021), with significant potential flow-on affects in terms of mental health outcomes for this demographic (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Newman & Zainal, 2020). Social isolation and loneliness are linked to mental illness, dementia, suicide, poor health behaviours and physical inactivity (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015) and can cause premature death particularly for older people. The need for further research attention in this area is required.

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Lifelong learning and adult education in Japan

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The purposes and implementation of adults' lifelong education (LLE) has been shaped by two imperatives: i) neoliberal reforms and ii) focuses on employability and economic outcomes. This has led to LLE taking similar pathways across many countries, i.e., away from a focus on personal and cultural betterment, to one associated with promoting individual employability. However, policies and practices in Japan offers a nuanced contrast to the general trend. That is, the overall focus on LLE, particularly for older Japanese is premised on social engagement, personal enrichment and often captured in 'social education'. There is also a focus on sustaining the adult employability, including the re-employment of retirees, in structured ways and tailored to meet their needs and enacted at the local level. This paper reviews the manifestations of LLE in Japan to examine how its goals and educational provisions are being developed, enacted, engaged with and evaluated. Overall, it is suggested that Japan has not wholly embraced the tight economic focus on promoting and supporting LLE associated with employability imperatives. Perhaps through the electoral power of the aged population, the provision of educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese.

Keywords: *adult education, lifelong education, employability, Japan, aged population, social education*

Adult and lifelong education: policy and practice

On 1 September 2021, in launching Adult Learners' Week, the Australian Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business, the Hon. Stuart Robert repeatedly made frequent references to adult education primarily being directed towards the employability of working age Australians. This was no coincidence or exception to the increasingly consistent governmental imperative focusing educational effort on achieving economic goals being its primary objective. Indeed, across countries with both developed and developing modern industrial economies, the purposes and implementation of adults' lifelong education (/LLE) has been increasingly shaped by two imperatives: i) neoliberal reforms and ii) focuses on employability and economic outcomes. This has led to purposes for and processes of LLE taking similar pathways across many countries. Moreover, the origins and distinctiveness of the adult education sector as being that derived from and for members of the adult community premised on their social and economic needs has been eroded as its purposes. That is, moving away from a process on personal and cultural betterment, to one associated with promoting individual employability (Billett & Dymock, 2020). Although, concerns about becoming more employable have long been a purpose of adult education, this has become the primary focus, often at a cost of other purposes. Globally, since the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, and the subsequent two education reports commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Learning to be, known as the Faure report (1972) and Learning: The treasure within, known as the Delors report (1996), there has been a global push for adult education to be primarily aligned with promoting employability. It emphasised the need for ongoing educational engagement across individuals' working lives for them to remain currently competent and employable (Organisation of Economic and Cultural Development [OECD], 1996), and expectations that working age adults would need to actively contribute through their learning to national economic well-being and be prepared to partially sponsor their ongoing development themselves. This emphasis is usually associated with the development of work-related or occupational specific skills to respond to changing occupational requirements and with workplace competence (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). This imperative led to significant changes in how governments across the world came to view and fund adult education, and for what purposes (Billett 2014). This change of emphasis and the associated policy initiatives have transformed views about adults' ongoing learning and educational provisions (Edwards, 2002), and educational provisions primarily about personal enrichment and cultural betterment (Coffield, 2000). These imperatives continue to be exercised across nation states. In many countries, this change is seen its purposes shift towards an employability focus albeit including general educational outcomes associated with enhanced literacy and numeracy.

Singapore with its third most aged population globally and an economy largely based upon its citizens' skills made the ongoing work-related learning of its adult population the first priority for sustaining its economic performance (Economic Strategies Committee, 2010). This has led to a series of national initiatives and incentives promoting ongoing development. Elsewhere, countries established and/or built more systematic approaches to continuing education and training (e.g., Germany), whereas other linked educational programs with occupational and workplace innovation (e.g., Switzerland, Scandinavian countries). In the United Kingdom, for instance, centers and programs in higher education institutions offering non-credit bearing lifelong education were closed, and in Australia the adult education courses offered through the technical and further education colleges were abolished with those institutions' operational mandate to only offer programs leading directly to employable outcomes. However, there are some exceptions to this general trend, and Japan with its aged population presents different orientations to adult education and its purposes. That is, the overall focus on adults' LLE is premised on two purposes: i) social engagement, individual betterment captured by the translated term 'social education', whose titling indicates a quite specific focus and ii) sustaining the employability of older workers and re-employing retirees. Yet, in contrast to the approach adopted in Australia, its approach to both social engagement and employability of the adult population is structured in ways that are tailored to meet the needs of these citizens and organised locally and enacted professionally. Given the aging Australian population and diversity of their educational purposes and needs the Japanese approach is worthy of review and appraisal.

To illuminate and elaborate these differences, this paper provides a scoping review of manifestations of LLE in Japan to examine how these goals and educational provisions are being enacted, engaged with and evaluated. The review includes an illustration of different LLE programs in Japan. Adults' LLE in the Japanese context in this paper refers to learning provisions tailored towards older workers and senior citizens, addressing both economic and social imperatives. Overall, it is suggested that Japan has not wholly embraced the strict economic focus of promoting and supporting learning associated with work and workplace imperatives. Perhaps by dint of the aged population's electoral power, the provision of adult educational experiences is focused on longevity, cultural betterment, further education and reducing the social isolation of older Japanese. It, thereby, emphasizes a direct social focus including accommodating, but not having an overwhelming focus on employability. This approach is particularly relevant for Australia as there is a strong community commitment to adult education that is not always well aligned with governmental mandates about employability. There are, however, real perils in copying policies and practices from other countries without understanding the cultural, social and economic contexts in which they arise and are enacted. Consequently, the discussion here commences with overviewing the Japanese context for and approach to adult education. Then, as educational purposes are central to the kinds of policies developed and practices designed and enacted, particular attention is given to those purposes. Following from these points, the organization governance of adult education is discussed in terms of achieving these outcomes and then its enactment. In conclusion, it is proposed that a broader set of educational purposes of these kinds might be considered to accommodate the interests, intentionality's and needs of the Australian adult community, achieving a balance of economic and social imperatives.

Japanese adult education context

In 2018, the ratio of older Japanese people (age 65+ years) is 27.7%, and their average life expectancy was 81.0 years for males and 87.1 years for females (Statistics Japan, 2018). This makes Japan is one of the most aged-populated countries in the world. Since the 1960s, its national government has sought to provide learning opportunities for older adults with both educational streams and health-welfare streams. Via either stream, educational centers for senior Japanese have been the central place for providing educational opportunities for older people[1]. These centers exist both in small and large communities and across prefectures throughout Japan. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, because of economic constraints, restructuring of government organizations, and/or incorporation of private sectors, these centers have been downsized or abolished or privatized. So, as with other countries there has been cutbacks with provisions of adult education. How these provisions have been positioned and exercised are indicative of specific government imperatives and community priorities, however.

The history of contemporary adult education in Japan stretches back to 1949 when the Act for Adult Education was enacted (Fuwa, 2001), aiming to contribute to the building of a democratic Japanese society and extending the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education (Gordon, 1998). The idea of *lifelong education* was not introduced in Japan until the 1970s then another ten years for the term *lifelong learning* to be officially used in the country (Ogden, 2010). The National Central Advisory Committee for Education (NCACE) released a report in 1990 suggesting to the government to establish promotional systems and administrative divisions for the development of lifelong learning throughout Japan. Shortly thereafter in 1990, Lifelong Learning Promotion Law was established. Then the national government passed the Basic Act on Measures for the Aging Society in 1995 and established the General Principles Concerning Measures for the Aged Society in 1996 and actively promoted the Act from that date. In Japan, the enactment of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act and formation of the Council for Lifelong Learning popularized the term ‘lifelong learning’ to describe education for adults. Subsequently, the policy orientation of the Ministry of Education was directed toward the construction of a ‘lifelong learning society’ (Hori, 2010). During this process, substantial emphasis has been placed on LLE.

Education for older people in post-war Japan began with the Tokiwa Senior Citizen Club in Osaka City in 1950. Also, early on the *Rakusei Gakuen* (i.e., Rakusei Academy) was established as a seniors’ college in the Nagano prefecture in 1954. Subsequently, Senior Citizen Clubs and seniors’ colleges proliferated nationwide as representative organizations for the education of older Japanese. In response to this locally based movement, the Ministry of Health and Welfare initiated support projects for senior citizen clubs and the Ministry of Education began subsidizing senior citizen classes in 1965. To address the social crisis caused by an aging population and economic collapse after 1989, the Ministry of Education modified its policy to support large-scale institutions established by prefectures under a government mandate to promote LLE using private enterprises. Although the original welfare projects for elderly Japanese were primarily intended to address the socially disadvantaged, since 2000 policy shifted toward the construction of a participatory aging society. As a result, under the label of care prevention[2], the groundwork for LLE that supports projects for healthy older living were established. In Japan, the term 'social education' is used, while the equivalent term in Australia, America and Europe is 'adult education' or 'continued education.' 'Social education' is a term combining 'society' with 'education'. It is now an established concept for education that is conscious of society, aimed at society, and involved in society (Matsuda, 2014, p. 23). So, this presents a distinct view from education tightly focused on employability as is the case in many other countries.

The community-based governance is viewed to protect citizens’ quality of life during in the harsh living environment, while Japanese society suffers from prolonged economic depression and an aging population combined with a low birth rate (Lee, 2019). In the 1970s, LLE was adopted as a political concept to garners popular support. However, now, rationalization and self-governed administrative and financial reforms were implemented in line with the neoliberal structural reforms. While Japanese society is facing the issues of an aging population combined with a low birth rate, drastic depopulation, and prolonged financial deficit, self-governed reforms and privatization are occurring. Under these circumstances, diverse actors including local governments, citizens, and non-profit organizations (NPOs) are collaborating to reinvigorate local communities. Educational and cultural facilities play a central role in these activities, including *Kominkan* (Sato, 2015; Wang, 2019), schools, community cafes, and NPOs. Yet, this reinvigoration is occurring in distinct ways and for nationally specific purposes.

In Japan, the adult education divisions of the government and the local education authorities have long occupied a major part of LLE. When broadly considering the wide variety of current educational activities conducted under the provision of the adult education divisions in local education authorities, conspicuous trends in their purposes and practices can be summarized under the following four points:

(1) the majority of learners who participate in educational programs held at the facilities for LLE are middle-aged women with no jobs, and the elderly;

(2) a majority of learners are from a middle-class background, and the number of learners from the working class are relatively few;

(3) the educational interests of adults are mainly hobby activities, and recreation and sports activities in leisure time, not contemporary issues in politics, the economy and so on; and

(4) adult education activities have been actively promoted at the *kominkans* (i.e., community centers) in rural areas much more than at those in urban areas. (Kobayashi 2013; Fuwa, 2001).

In accordance with these trends, LLE has been playing significant roles in giving opportunities for participation in educational activities and through offering a wide range of new and interesting information on education to adults in the community.

Apart from these trends, networking activities called *bunka borantia* (or culture volunteers) are considered LLE initiatives aimed to support and enrich the public sphere, i.e., construction of citizenship through volunteering (Ogawa, 2009a). Ogawa (2009a) introduces ethnographic examples of community-oriented LLE activities created by civic groups as well as the nationwide LLE practices and policies. Through networking at these national gatherings, the participants aim to accumulate locally acquired knowledge generated by volunteers through their activities at public educational facilities. This networking addresses the coordination skills of volunteer activities, collaboration techniques with the government at various levels, capacity of involvement in community development as volunteers, and decision-making tools for diversified stakeholders, all of which are practical understandings called ‘civic knowledge’ (*shimin chi*) (Ogawa, 2009a) for active participation in the public sphere. The production of this civic knowledge through volunteer activities at public lifelong education facilities offers a solid foundation for reshaping the conventional discourse on the Japanese state–society relationship. It generates new dynamism and a flow of energy at the grassroots level. Ultimately, civic knowledge production is a crucial part of the construction of citizenship based on active participation in society (Ogawa, 2009a). It is also a very different approach than the top-down prescriptions advanced in countries such as Australia.

Japanese society tends to recognize, value, and respond to group concerns over individual ones (Young & Rosenberg, 2006). This contrasts sharply with the American emphasis on individuality, and perhaps to a degree Australia. These differing cultural values are reflected in the level and nature of the approaches to policy formation in the two countries. Australia has taken a more decentralized approach, essentially allowing each state to develop its own adult education policies and programs, while the Japanese have taken a more centralized approach and developed more inclusive policies that extend standardized LLE opportunities to the entire populace (Billett & Dymock, 2020). This concerted effort to promote LLE opportunities in Japan has helped maintain the status of the elderly against the push of modernization by providing them with opportunities to learn new, salient skills and develop new roles and resources. In doing so, older adults increase their resource base and become more powerful actors in social exchange situations. In an Asian context, China and Japan have different levels of aging, but both face severe population aging problems and massive demand for education and engagement. Compared with China, Japan's development and policy system is more mature and complete, creating favorable conditions for lifelong and vocational education and re-employment for seniors (Wu et al., 2021). So, here there are distinct bases for the premises on which LLE can progress. This extends to the purposes adopted for A/LLE.

Purposes of adult and lifelong education

The formal promotion of LLE (*Shogai-Gakushu*) has enjoyed great success in Japan. At the highest levels, the Japanese government is working to reform the existing educational system to provide learning opportunities at all stages of life. Adults' LLE is viewed as a key avenue for meeting the societal challenges of a rapidly aging population.
As popular interest in LLE has grown, the diversity of learning opportunities available for older adults has also expanded, however as

well. Three specific types of educational opportunities exist for older adults in Japan each with their own purpose: for, about and by the elderly. Education for the elderly includes programs directed toward their specific educational needs. Education about the elderly includes educating youth about aging and older adults. Education by the elderly involves older persons assuming the role of educator to share their knowledge and experience with younger generations (Yamazaki, 1994, p. 453). Diverse kinds of programs have been developed to address each of these purposes.

When compared to England for instance, the neo-liberal policy push was manifested quite differently in Japan. LLE which was positioned to overcome skills shortages in England and *gakureki shakai* in Japan, was repositioned as a new paradigm for the reconstruction of society (Okumoto, 2003). Neo-liberalism was taken over by quasi-communitarianism (i.e., communitarian aspirations in a culture without mature civic participation) (Okumoto, 2008), Adults' LLE has been adapted to rebuild community bonding in society. Both the English and the Japanese governments position LLE as central to the reform policy of the education systems, but the LLE practice diverges between the two countries because of distinct policy agendas. In England, the over-emphasis on skills and the over-simplification of the inclusion policies can be barriers to enhancing 'social connections'; in Japan, the spiritual approach (spiritualism – *seishin shugi*) and the society's inexperience of democratic processes[3] can obstruct 'a public good' aspect of social capital (Okumoto, 2008). So, despite being subject to the same kind of exposure to neoliberal sentiments, the pathway taken in Japan is quite distinct from that of England, and also countries such as Australia.

However, there are also international differences in the adult population and its imperatives that need to be considered. These differences, again, indicate preferences for particular focuses on pathways of LLE. At the individual level, for example, the fear of declining mental ability and loss of memory is common in both Canada and Japan (Hori & Cusack, 2006). In Japan, many adults are concerned about memory and they are buying books and videogames designed to sharpen their minds, stimulate brain cells, and increase blood circulation in the brain. It has been believed that declining mental ability with age was inevitable; but new understandings indicate that individuals can maintain—and even improve—their mental function and memory as they age (Hori & Cusack, 2006). The combined experience with seniors' centers in Canada and elder colleges in Japan suggests that aging is a positive, natural experience (Hori & Cusack, 2006). It is an experience that brings new opportunities for growth, personal development, and contributions to society. To cultivate a productive, empowered, and healthy older adult population, LLE has an important role to play, and that is not always associated with the employability of adults, but their ability to maintain healthy and active lives. Not the least here is that, in this way, they become less reliant upon social and health care provisions. This is a particularly significant resources consideration in countries with ageing populations. Hence, this factor emphasizes a need to ensure that message is reflected in public policy and practice, including the purposes and provision of LLE. Yet, as with many aspects of education, its organization and governance are central to how these policies are enacted. What is evident in the Japanese example is a broadly distributed set of agencies and institutions being responsive to the educational needs of adults, not projecting their purposes onto those adults.

Organisation and governance of adult education

Lifelong education provisions in Japan exist mainly with three levels of organisations: i) public, private and civil (Choi & Hori, 2016). Public organisations exist in two administrations of local government: educational and welfare administrations. The operation of many public education institutions has been contracted out to private organisations. At the civil level, educational institutions for older people frequently exist in the form of civil organizations or groups. In addition to these 3-level organisations, Japanese firms are increasingly opting for LLE for their workers outside the workplace, thus resulting in a remarkable increase in the number of out-of-the-workplace programs to support older workers. Public-private cooperation is considered the key strategic thrust in these programs. So, there is a growing trend in both the public and private provision of LLE being organized through private agencies.

Organisation of adult and lifelong education provisions

The local educational administration system is usually made up of Prefectural Boards of Education (PBE) and the Municipal Boards of Education (MBE) operating independently of immediate governmental control (Koyama, 2008). Board members are, however, nominated by the head of the local government, and the director of the executive office is selected from among these board members. In 1989, the PBE established the Live-Long Colleges Project, which ensured equitable opportunities for the education of older people within a given municipality. However, after peaking in 1999, the number of projects decreased dramatically because of administrative and financial reforms and economic recession. A task of the MBE is to support senior citizen classes at *Kominkan*. Most of these programs were originally available to adults of all age groups; only recently have older people made up most of the learners. Currently, as noted above most large prefecture-level institutions for the education of older people are commissioned by private organizations, such as related organizations, designated administrators, or NPOs, and they are not directly operated by boards of education (Choi & Hori, 2016). The public organisation within local welfare administration is the Prefectural Office to Promote a Prosperous Longevity Society. Forty-seven prefectures[4] have established such offices nationwide according to the Gold Plan, and most of these offices support large seniors' colleges.

The governance of education for older people changed greatly following the introduction of the Designated Administrator System in 2000, which has led local governments to contract the operation of their institutions to the private sector. Previously, this task belonged to the government according to the principle of *Kosetsu Koei*, which translates as the public operation of public facilities. In particular, the large-scale institutions of education for older citizens previously administered directly by the prefectures have been contracted to auxiliary organizations, designated administrators, or NPOs. One well-known example of a private organisation is the Hyogo Association for Lifelong Education for the Aged, which has commissioned the operation of the *Inamino Gakuen*, a famous educational institution in Japan. This association changed its name to the Hyogo Association for Lifelong Learning in 2009, and it has grown into an organization that presently manages not only institutions for the education of older people, but also several other LLE institutions. *Inamino Gakuen*, established in 1969, was the first administration-led seniors' college in Japan. It mainly targets people older than 60 and is a 4-year senior college that offers four majors: horticulture, health management, cultural studies, and pottery.

The most representative civil institutions for older Japanese are Senior Citizen Clubs. The clubs are independent organizations based in local communities and focus mainly on relationship building, volunteering, cross-generational exchanges, and learning activities. These clubs have existed since the 1950s, and over 100 thousand were in operation as of 2014. In 1962, the Japan Federation of Senior Citizens Clubs was founded to promote the activities of these clubs. The Federation is composed of local federations and individual clubs. Sixty-one federations at the prefectural level are in operation, and most of them manage seniors' colleges. However, with the increase in educational opportunities offered in other forms and by different providers, the number of clubs and members has steadily decreased since the late 1990s. In contrast to the declining membership of senior citizen clubs, older people's participation in circles, hobbies, and sports organizations is, however, increasing (Choi & Hori, 2016; Fuwa, 2001). So, there has long been a sustained provision of adult education advanced and supported by a prefectural level of government. Yet, over time and through neo-liberal economic reforms this provision has become increasingly enacted through private sector companies, albeit sustained through the interest and engagement of older Japanese. Yet, whilst primarily focused on sustaining culturally-engage and healthy lives, some of these provisions are directed to the needs of older workers.

Adult and lifelong education for older workers

Lifelong education provisions in Japan have also been designed and enacted to assist older workers to cope with overcoming difficulties and maximizing opportunities to engage in current labour markets. These include change in wage-age profile, impact of the economic and industry restructuring and on-the-job training, job insecurity and increased unemployment and redeployment practices, prolonged mandatory retirement, expansion of irregular workers, and IT-intensive labour market (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). In Japan, there is a shrinking younger working population, because of the declining fertility rate and the rapidly ageing population. Consequently, greater participation of older people in the labour force is becoming necessary and they are being encouraged to stay employed and work longer. To be employed longer, older workers need to improve their employability through LLE (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008; Sato, 2017).

However, whilst policies and laws often provide necessary legal measures, they may lack effective implementation strategies and conditions for advancing LLE for older workers (Debroux, 2020; Sato, 2017). So, further and joint efforts are needed by all stakeholders to support the actual development and practices of innovative LLE programs for older workers (Debroux, 2020; Sato, 2017). The section below describes the main features of LLE programs implemented by Tokyo's neighbour Chiba Prefecture's Government (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008), and the impact of training on the re-employment of older workers after their retirement (Sato, 2017).

Chiba, a neighbouring prefecture of Tokyo and its Department of Employment and Work, organises a 'Chiba re-employment training program' in 13 locations, targeting workers between 45 and 65, especially those wishing to be re-employed. The target group includes women who are dismissed or have quit working for childcare and older workers who are seeking new employment. Priority is given to those who have not attended any public vocational courses over the past year. Eligible older workers must submit their applications through the Public Employment Security Office of the Chiba prefecture. This LLE system offers two- to three-month courses (six hours per day). A daily subsistence allowance and travel fees are covered by public unemployment insurance. There are no specific entrance requirements and courses are provided free of charge. Lectures are given by highly qualified professionals in each field of specialisation. Upon completion of the course, all trainees are assisted in re-employment in cooperation with the Chiba Public Employment Security Office (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008).

High level courses are offered by Chiba center: care and welfare service, personal computer (PC) and networking, medical office work and care service with PC, IT accounting, PC for business management, Internet business, training for care visit personnel, practical training for accountants, IT practices and CV-writing and job interview, general introduction for post-retirement work (seminar). Techno 21 (i.e., Matsudo-City vocational training center) offers a six-hour course in basic operational skills for personal computer *Let's use PC* for workers 60+. This type of computer training program specifically targeting workers 60 and above are still rare, but there is growth in demand (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). The Chiba prefecture also offers university-entrusted re-employment training programs. For example, Jousei International University (specialised in care service and welfare) offers six-month social welfare and care service courses, and the program involves both theoretical and practical training. This type of training course is popular among middle-aged or older workers, especially women, who seek care jobs for older people.

A more recent study, Sato (2017) examined the effect of job-related training on the re-employment of older workers using the Longitudinal Survey of Middle-aged and Elderly Persons, the largest panel data available on the elderly in Japan. It found that the probability of re-employment rises significantly one year and two years after training. Training is, therefore, effective in the case of re-employment as a regular worker. This effect is notable as most re-employed workers are employed as non-regular workers (i.e., part-time and temporary). These findings indicate that training is a useful measure for keeping older workers in work that is meaningful and productive for them. The findings show that such educational provisions when linked to labour market policies can be effective for promoting older workers employability of. Considering the trend of ageing in the future, it is essential to implement support measures to promote the development of capacity for the elderly. While support measures for young and middle-aged workers are being expanded in Japan, capacity development for the elderly is not yet sufficient, and future improvements are needed (Sato, 2017).

So, in these cases, there is a highly integrated approach to sustaining the employability of older and retired Japanese citizens focusing on developing capacities that might be seen as being deficient such as familiarity and competence in the use of computers. This approach integrates education, social service and employment support processes.

Enacting older workers’ development

Adult workers engagement in LLE is largely enacted through in-house educational systems and facilities for their own employees (Ohsako & Suzuki, 2008). These systems are called *Kigyounai kyouiku* and comprise many kinds of work-related programs with various levels and targets organized for employees with different educational and job careers, from newcomers to staff members, and the organized programs are usually put into practice on the job (OJT) (Fuwa, 2001). Although enterprises are retaining older workers who possess highly professional and specialized technical skills, they are often not willing to invest in their training due to modest returns. Thus, older workers lacking specialized skills are compelled to turn to self-directed training in private human-resource development enterprises (Ohsako, 2009).

Another mode of engagement in LLE involves different kinds of information technology like personal computers, television and radio, specialist books that provide access to a range of sources of information (Fuwa, 2001). However, difficulties with technologies and associated perceptions are negatively affecting the lack of attractiveness and success of e-learning at all levels. In the case of adult learners, continuing education itself has been raised as a key issue as it has been asserted that a lack of perceived career reward has served to dampen demand for advanced degrees (Goddard, 2018). The lack of rewards for LLE of adult learners seems to have the greatest influence on the demand for distance education/e-learning. Overall, the diversity of the purposes, provisions and accessibility to these adult education programs is important.

Some cases

To briefly illustrate that diversity, the following are a series of short vignettes about the organisation and enactment of these diverse provisions.

Tokyo Metropolitan Government

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government established the Tokyo *Shigoto* (Job) Center in 2004. It provides older workers (55+) with counselling and consultation services and seminars, and experiences in community work which are jointly planned, organised and implemented by private agencies. The counselling and consultation services are offered as an individualized 50-minute session, and are delivered by career counsellors, lawyers and other professionals. Seminars and courses are given by business managers and executives and presidents of small and medium-sized companies, under themes such as re-employment support lecture; talent enterprises want; personal computer course; new life design, etc. Job-interview training is one of the main services provided. Career counsellors also teach concrete job-interview and CV-writing techniques. Trainees are presented with successful model cases and learn how to present their skills and experiences attractively and persuasively.

The Senior Citizens' Technical College was established in 1997 to provide LLE opportunities for older workers aged between 50 and 65. The college is also open to disabled, single mothers, and people with unemployment insurance. There are 11 senior citizens' technical colleges in Tokyo. Courses are free and no academic degree is required for admission. However, students need to meet some prerequisite skill requirements and pass written examinations (Japanese language and introductory mathematics) and interviews. That is, the senior citizens' technical colleges provide training mainly to well-educated and white-collar older workers (55-65). Senior citizens' technical college grants certificates in different vocational fields. There are two-, three- and six-month courses, run both as day and night classes. What motivates older workers is that senior citizens' technical colleges help their trainees on course completion look for a job in coordination with and help from the Tokyo Public Employment Security Office.

Tokyo Silver human resource centers was founded as a follow-up to the job stabilisation law for older workers (60+). Silver centers support relatively low-skilled and modestly educated older workers (60+). The centers have recently been receiving more and more contracts for offering high-skilled jobs (such as management of public facilities) to older workers competent in personal computer management, accounting and teaching. Employers of Silver centers' registered members pay Silver centers directly, which in turn pay salaries to older workers. Although older workers are temporary and part-time workers, they are eligible for accident insurance. Registered older workers at Silver centers are supported by two training programs: 'employment support course for silver human resource development (HRD)' and 'seniors' work programs', free of charge with no specific entrance requirements. The employment support course for silver HRD offers short (9 to 20 days) and practical courses in: personal computer, house-work support, parking and building management, office and machine cleaning, cleaning air-conditioning equipment, gardening and tree-planting, mounting instruments and techniques, painting, etc. The seniors' work programs offers (approximate duration of one month) both theoretical studies and internships in care service professions.

These LLE interventions suggest that the central principles and practices for implementing education for older workers should feature the: i) locality and accessibility of training provision; ii) public-private cooperation; iii) flexible training provision; iv) inclusiveness of training, and v) life-course perspective and sensitivity towards heterogeneity.

Other important issues include LLE being combined with assistance to job-search training, cost-sharing, training both with and without certification, and high-quality/highly competent trainers.

Osaka Prefecture Senior College

Osaka Prefecture Senior College is a learning center for mainly older people in Osaka Prefecture. The estimated number of participants in this college is 2,800 in 2018, with no geographic or age limitations. The number of open classes is 67, and each student is required to participate in only one selected class per year. Initially, the college was managed by local government, but this management model was abolished in 2008 (Dept. of Lifelong Education, 2018; Hori, 2016). Since 2009, the Osaka Prefecture Senior College has been voluntarily managed by a senior NPO.

Hori, Choi and Park (2018) conducted a large-scale quantitative survey at the Osaka Prefecture Senior College. Findings indicated that learning needs that tend to bloom after age 70 in sample populations, particularly in topics of life review and communication with other seniors (Hori et al., 2018). This phenomenon is also seen in the results of Hori's (2006). Such findings can provide insight into the development of learning programs for people older than 70 years. Inner life enrichment is also an important avenue for the promotion of LLE.

Achi village and Nagano prefecture Kominkan

Various social education activities are provided through *Kominkan* in Japan, and there is strong support for self-governing *Kominkan*, such as the practices in Achi village and Matsumoto City of Nagano prefecture. These two case studies show that the Kominkan's historical spirit in social education remains active and recognizes how residents' learning activates local communities, with Achi village serving as a rural model, and Matsumoto City as an urban model (Wang, 2019). Nagano prefecture's Kominkan learning activities generally present four characteristics: (a) centered on social education; (b) developed by the residents of rural areas; (c) focus on rural issues, such as challenges and issues of farmers' life; (d) coordinated and operated by Kominkan professional and related staff (Iwamatsu, 2016).

These local residents' learning contributes to community development through LLE and action. The meaning of these residents' learning goes beyond learning itself, illustrating a welfare function to activate the whole community. Achi's example made local agriculture produce known to outsiders, and during the process, these residents also developed a new recognition of their community's value. Matsumoto's example made its residents rethink the area they live in and become empowered to bring about changes during the self-learning process. Through these activities, local people build a stronger bond within their neighborhood. These activities can build a safety net for youth and the elderly in the community and contribute to community welfare as well. Also, these learning opportunities confirmed the ownership by residents, and their learning activities connect to the needs of and in the community, which in many ways the government cannot accommodate.

The self-determined learning promoted by Kominkan creates new meanings for LLE, which can be a great reference for LLE in other countries with similar situations. This type of learning signifies that when learning is initiated by residents, related to everyday life, and about community development, it can meaningfully motivate and improve each person's quality of life. Further, this kind of social education will connect to social welfare through learning activities. In summary, the practice of Kominkan infuses new insights into empowering communities while promoting LLE and a learning society at a local level.

'Citizens' University'

There are around 150 citizens' universities all over Japan. They are non-formal educational organizations regularly providing several genres of lecture-driven courses in which citizens of all ages can participate. Their names vary: the City (Town, Village) University, the Community College, the Citizens' Academy, the Citizens' Cram School, the University of Trivia, the Community University, and the Free University, for example. Some of them are organized by local government, but many are entirely citizen run. They first appeared in the early 1970s, when the concept of LLE was introduced in Japan. Background for the development of citizen's universities includes i) firstly, Japanese views about life changed as other changes occurred in their society and as they became richer; ii) secondly, local and national control over the provision of learning has weakened recently due to cuts in the lifelong learning budget; and iii) thirdly, local citizens have been empowered to independently operate their educational organizations.

Sawano (2012), for example, discusses three citizens' universities that are 'recycling knowledge' throughout their communities and are nurturing a 'New Public' striving to improve community life through mutual teaching and learning. The first case of Kiyomigata University Cram School is significant in the sustainability of its evolution, observable in the participation of citizens as civil professors and school managers. The second case, that of Asunaro University, represents an ordinary learning opportunity for elderly people provided by a municipality, but it succeeded in getting rid of passive learning by introducing the self-motivated research of the great voyage seminar. The third case, that of the Shibuya University Network, has elements of the preceding cases, but the school was founded and is run by a new generation of active citizens. The Shibuya University Network was designed to emphasize both individual lifelong learning and the vitalization of the community. In another case study, Maeda (2015) examines Fujisawa Citizens' University which illuminates an approach to promoting senior-centric intergenerational exchange and the effective deployment of senior citizens as leaders.

Considerations for broader adult educational purposes and practices

As can be seen from the case made above and the illustrative examples provided there is a great deal of diversity in the educational purposes and processes for adults in Japan. Moreover, the organisation and sponsoring of these provisions are widely distributed across the national government, prefectures, local organisations and commitments from the community, including volunteer effort and, obviously participation by Japanese adults. In consideration of contemporary adult education role in and its relationship with employability, the case from Japan offers two distinct kinds of approaches that might be helpful for Australia. With its own ageing population, the emphasis on maintaining the health and contributions of that ageing proportion of the population can be supported through adult education focusing on social engagement and focuses on personal enrichment and cultural betterment. That is, education focused on the development of the individual, based on their interests and needs. Yet, there is also a strong focus on employability within Japanese adult education. With its shrinking young working age population, there is a need to sustain the working life of Japanese adults, and also re-engage and re-employ those who have retired. Consequently, policies and practices have also been developed and enacted in Australia to achieve those outcomes. Yet, what is seemingly distinct about the Japanese approach is the integration of those employability efforts with supportive and tailored educational provisions, organised and enacted at the local level within prefectures. Moreover, the approach appears to be premised upon dedicated organisations, professionally supported, albeit enacted through private sector companies. Hence, there is much local engagement and participation that is not only associated with enacting provisions designed and mandated by others but generated within the communities that these programs serve.

Endnotes

[1] In April 2021, the Japanese Cabinet has approved bills requiring companies to retain their workers until they are 70 years old, effectively raising the retirement age from 65 to 70. The move is part of an effort to address the country's falling birthrate and an ageing population, and the consequent labour shortage and rising cost of pensions.

[2] Care prevention is defined as "preventing (delaying) the occurrence of the state requiring long-term care [for] as long as possible, and preventing deterioration as much as possible even in a state requiring long-term care, and further aiming to mitigate a state requiring long-term care" (The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare).

[3] In many cases, 'associations' and 'relations' within volunteer groups or NPOs and with other related institutions are not democratically functioning. In some cases, 'participation' is a mere slogan or a formality, has an element of compulsion or entails conflicts amongst participants due to different values and benefits (Maehira, 1999). Or, people participate simply because of personal interest without any intention of public contribution and political engagement.

[4] The provinces of Japan were historical subdivisions of the island country. They developed and changed from the 7th century until the Meiji Period. In the 1870s, the provincial system was replaced by a new system of prefectures. Japan is then divided into 47 prefectures (todōfuken), which rank immediately below the national government

and form the country's first level of jurisdiction and administrative division. They include 43 prefectures proper (ken), two urban prefectures (fu: Osaka and Kyoto), one "circuit" or "territory" (dō: Hokkaido) and one metropolis (to: Tokyo) (Nussbaum, 2002).

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Maximising PBL in police education: Why understanding the facilitator role is a key factor in developing learning for police problem-solving

Brett Shipton

Historically, police educators delivering academy programs have overused traditional or teacher-centred methods as part of an authority driven command and control culture. In addition to being educationally unsound, this teaching approach has limited the development of the critical thinking skills needed for effective reform in the community policing era. Problem-based learning (PBL), a teaching method linked to social constructivist theory, has been widely advocated in recent years as an alternate teaching method in police academies to promote deeper and integrated learning of content, with the benefit of also developing problem-solving and teamwork skills. However, implementing learner-centred methods such as PBL can be challenging as it runs counter to traditional teaching cultures. Recent research into the teaching and development experiences of police educators by the author has discerned aspects of the facilitator role that can inform and maximise the impact of methods such as PBL. This paper synthesises an understanding of the facilitator role as described in these experiences with the underlying learning theory of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). This theoretical discussion is then applied via a proposed model of police learning to highlight the *facilitation's role in developing problem-solving within a policing context.*

Keywords: *police education, police academy training, community policing, teacher development, problem-based learning*

Introduction

Policing is a profession that requires diverse skills and the application of a wide range of topic areas as recruits learn and develop in their new career. Ideally, these recruits should become self-motivated and independent learners beyond their police academy learning, operating with discretion and making operational decisions in pressurized situations. Traditionally, police academy programs have tended to be teacher-centred and operate in an authority dependent context, which is problematic by inhibiting effective learning and failing to encourage proactive attributes from students (Birzer, 2003; Oliva & Compton, 2009).

This discussion paper initially backgrounds the learning needs for police recruits and the need for change in police education and training to incorporate learner-centred methods such as PBL. The theoretical foundations of PBL in relation to the ZPD, postulated by Vygotsky (1978), are discussed to analysis the application of PBL within the policing context. Attention is drawn to the facilitator’s role in encouraging problem-solving through guided facilitation to extend and apply the research by Shipton (2020) into a practical model and makes explicit the type of facilitation required. As part of this discussion, there will be consideration of how the teacher-centred skills of police educators can be built upon and used to compliment facilitation skills required in learner-centred methods, rather than being considered as diametrically opposed along a continuum of practice.

Learning needs for 21st century policing

Prior to the late 20th century, policing tended to take a narrow and reactive approach to crime. The advent of policing approaches informed by an emerging community policing philosophy, encourage police organisations to become proactive via community interaction and address the underlying causes of crime with relevant stakeholders (Braga, 2002; Peak & Glensor, 1999). This emerging community policing era has seen calls by academics and stakeholders for police to have a more considered approach to cultural diversity, communication, crime prevention and problem-solving in collaboration with their communities when compared to traditional policing (Kelling & Moore, 1988; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990). These values in policing remain relevant considering contemporaneous developments around police misconduct and violence, with McLean, Wolfe, Rojek, Alpert & Smith (2020) emphasising the need for police to adopt a 'guardian' rather than 'warrior' mentality to maintain the public trust so important to effective community policing.

Community policing creates a need for police to have more advanced problem solving and collaborative abilities in comparison to those traditionally fostered among recruits in police academies (Chappell, 2008; Birzer, 2003; Peak & Glensor, 1999). It should also be noted that this transition remains problematic and cannot be considered complete, with more work required to change police structures, culture, and education to facilitate further implementation (Bartkowiak-Théron, 2011; Cleveland & Saville, 2007). As such, police education needs to develop beyond traditional teaching approaches equating learning to filling an empty vessel with water or what Freire (1970) refers to as the "banking" concept of education. However, whilst academy learning programs historically prepared police recruits to undertake the basic mechanics of police work, they do little to help them understand their broader role in a democratic society or the inherent complexities of policing (Dantzker, 2003; Goldstein, 1999; Blumberg, Schlosser, Papazoglou, Creighton & Kaye, 2019).

The overwhelming assertion from the literature is that police teachers are overly teacher-centred in tightly controlled classrooms, leading to student passivity, and inhibiting the development of problem-solving skills and deeper learning (Birzer, 2003; Shipton, 2020; McCoy, 2006; Chappell, 2008; Oliva & Compton, 2010; Basham, 2014). It is suggested that police organisations possess a substantial militaristic or command and control culture that has negatively influenced the educational approach of police academies generally (Chan, Devery & Dorn, 2003; Ryan, 2006; Makin, 2016). As part of a broader reform to policing, a range of authors suggest police education should adopt adult learning principles that encourage learner-centred approaches and promote critical thinking skills relevant to policing duties (Birzer, 2003; Basham, 2014; Cox, 2011; Chappell, 2008; Makin, 2016). A recent systematic review of police recruit training by Belur, Agnew-Pauly, McGinley and Thompson (2019) indicated that learner-centred teaching was more effective than traditional teaching at promoting police recruits' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, whilst adding the police teaching role was crucial with the integration of theoretical and practical skills.

Traditional educational approaches and organisational attitudes in police education align with the dominant but outdated educational philosophy of behaviourism (Birzer, 2003; Cox, 2011; Basham, 2014). Behaviourism is an educational philosophy equating humans to machines, suggesting learning is based upon new behavioural patterns being repeated until they become automatic (Mergel, 1998). This kind of teaching has been the historical norm in police academies, with mechanistic and uniform approaches such as the memorisation of key terms or weapons drills (Birzer, 2003; Doherty, 2012). This is not to say that behavioural learning strategies are never appropriate; they can be beneficial in certain circumstances and provides a useful approach when teaching some aspects of policing (Chappell, 2008; Pearce, 2006), however, it remains a weak foundation on its own for comprehensive education programs (Birzer, 2003; Mergel, 1998; Palinscar, 1998).

It is argued the adherence to behaviourism in police education is exacerbated by a range of factors, including police organisations not having education and training as their primary focus and possessing a militaristic and insular subculture that actively seeks to promote traditional values in ways that resist reform (Chan et al. 2003; Oliva & Compton, 2009). There is also an assumption that policing experience is all that is needed to teach police students, with minimal developmental effort required for teaching skills (Spencer, 2002; Shipton, 2011). Moving beyond traditional and behaviourist assumptions in police education and developing an awareness of how and why learner-centred approaches work is therefore an important first step by police organisations wishing to transform learning programs.

The relevance of learning paradigms and PBL to the facilitator role

Despite the barriers to educational development, there are growing numbers of police organisations and individual educators seeking to expand their awareness of teaching beyond the confines of a behaviourist epistemology to include educational approaches informed instead by constructivist philosophies. Constructivism has underpinned both the developing field of adult education and change within school-based learning over the past century. Constructivists suggest learning should not be simplified or restricted to the transmission of decontextualised knowledge but instead viewed as a social process of knowledge co-construction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Palincsar, 1998; Mergel, 1998). This perspective has been a key factor in developing a range of learning theories, with the more prominent including humanism (Rogers, 1969), andragogy (Knowles, 1980), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, including the ZPD. Each of these theories places the learner and their needs at the centre of a learning situation, encouraging them to be active and self-directed whilst being guided by peers and a teacher who acts mostly as a "guide on the side" rather than limiting themselves to only being a "sage on the stage" (King, 1993, p. 30).

Applied within the classroom, a constructivist approach encourages assisting learners in constructing their knowledge within relevant contextual situations (Biggs, 1999). It could be argued that policing as an occupation provides many practical opportunities that can be transferred to academy learning situations in a constructivist manner. PBL is one of a range of similar constructivist methods that can be used effectively in this situation and is increasingly used in police education (Croal, 2006). Whilst PBL is broadly constructivist, Loftus and Higgs (2005) established a substantive theoretical framework for PBL within this paradigm, based around Vygotsky's ideas and research. Vygotsky's work rests within the social constructivist sphere but is more specifically termed sociocultural, centred on "... his explanation of the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192). This concept emphasises how people construct knowledge in social situations rather than relying upon memorisation, with this process being fundamental to learner-centred methods (Loftus & Higgs, 2005).

Vygotsky's ZPD is a key theory underpinning the facilitation process, including the scaffolding of learning to construct knowledge. The ZPD is defined as,

> *The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86).*

When a learner can easily solve a problem by themselves, they are often working within a zone of current development (ZCD) (See Figure 1 below), however, Vygotsky would advise this kind of activity does not lead to development and that, “The only good learning is that which is in advance of development” (1978, p. 89). In other words, teaching activities should be positioned ahead of students’ development and not lag it. As such, the learning situation or environment is one in which the student is placed in a potentially uncomfortable or challenging situation where they must draw on the support or scaffolding around them to learn. In the context of PBL, scaffolding students within their ZDP requires a skilled facilitator to use a range of contemporary learning techniques such as co-operative groups, guided facilitation, assessment rubrics, metacognition, and problem-solving frameworks. Across all these strategies, a student works with their peers and facilitator to make sense of concepts in advance of their development, they would otherwise struggle with on their own (Loftus & Higgs, 2005).

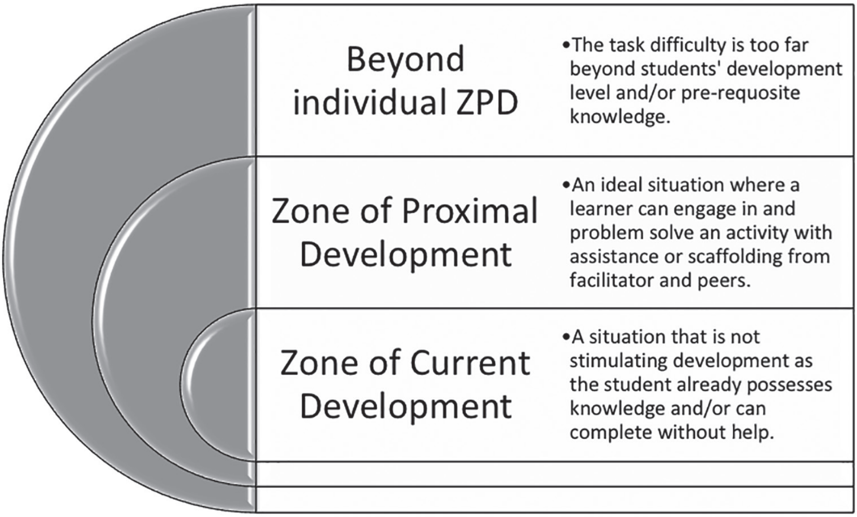

Beyond individual ZPD
•The task difficulty is too far beyond students' development level and/or pre-requosite knowledge.
Zone of Proximal Development
•An ideal situation where a learner can engage in and problem solve an activity with assistance or scaffolding from facilitator and peers.
Zone of Current Development
•A situation that is not stimulating development as the student already possesses knowledge and/or can complete without help.

Figure 1: Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development.

Critical to facilitating PBL within the ZPD, is the role of the teacher, who supports and guides students' thinking about a concrete learning issue to promote deeper learning, where students construct meaning relevant to their professional context and develop transferable problem-solving skills (Biggs, 1999).

The effectiveness of PBL has been established in a range of studies, including a relatively recent meta-analysis (Walker & Leary, 2009) and meta-synthesis (Strobel & van Barneveld, 2009). PBL was designed for use within medical education by Howard Barrows to improve learning beyond the mass memorisation of information evident in traditional programs and to help students transfer clinical problem-solving skills to their medical practice (Barrows, 1996). While PBL has been a method employed to improve learning in police education and assist its application in the workplace, it is also aligned with the problem-solving approaches required for community policing. As such, Doherty (2012), Basham (2014) and Cleveland and Saville (2007) suggest PBL is an improved learning model in contrast to traditional teaching approaches and provides a crucial problem-solving perspective relevant to the application of community policing. Doherty (2012) points out this amalgam between learning theory and police problem solving in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). This move towards PBL has also been encouraged by a range of academics and experts in the field of police education who view it as a more relevant learning model, especially given the transition to community and problem-solving policing (Cox, 2011; Chappell, 2008; Doherty, 2012; Basham, 2014).

Distinctive teaching experiences in policing and their relevance to PBL

In considering how PBL might be applied by police academy teachers as a learner-centred method, it is first important to consider what this method entails and the range of skills underpinning its effective application. This understanding is crucial because there are often misconceptions about what being learner-centred is or is not, particularly when comparing the role of facilitator with a more traditional lecture or direct instruction approach. A naïve perception is to simply view these roles as exclusive or diametrically opposed and that is certainly something I have experienced anecdotally. Certainly, some of these misconceptions have been seen at an academic level, with Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) being critical of PBL, stating it only provided minimal guidance to learners. However, in reply to Kirschner et al. (2006), Schmidt, Loyens van Gog and Paas (2007), emphasised the facilitator role in PBL had scope for significant guidance and scaffolding of learning, including direct instruction where required. The range of these supports in a policing context have been elaborated by Shipton (2009) and agree with Schmidt et al. (2007) that facilitators are significant in evaluating and guiding the learning process. Unfortunately, some police educators have mistaken the term learner-centred, to mean that students are simply handed a problem or learning activity for completion on their own accord, without the facilitator providing answers. Whilst students should ultimately possess the skills and knowledge to do this, the PBL process requires facilitators to initially provide significant guidance and only fade this support once students can take greater initiative in their learning (Barrows, 1996; Cleveland & Saville, 2007).

Consequently, the facilitation role does not mean abandoning traditional lecturing skills or subject expertise many police educators have developed. Rather, this knowledge and skills form a foundation on which effective facilitation can be developed, leading to a more aware and effective teacher. Recent research by Shipton (2020), interviewing 25 teachers across five Australian police academies, provides a broad framework of police educators' teaching experiences that range from less to more sophisticated practice. The categories of experiences described in this research provide a developmental pathway that illustrates how police educators can potentially expand awareness from being teacher-centred to also include learner-centred practice. Essentially, this study emphasises how learner-centred practice is built upon or inclusive of the skills initially developed in teacher-centred practice.

Briefly, the four categories of teaching experiences derived from this research, from less to more sophisticated or learner-centred practice, represent the teacher as a:

1. *Presenter*, passing on policing knowledge and experience, predominantly using a lecture method to get their 'message' across to students who are mostly passive recipients of subject content.
2. *Conversationalist*, establishing a rapport with students via a question-and-answer process checking the transfer of subject content. Students remain mostly passive but feed their knowledge back to the teacher via questioning.

3. *Guide*, helping students to share and discover their own answers from subject content, with students' being more active and collaborative in their learning. Teachers here are beginning to use simple scenarios in group learning situations that promote some student-to-student interaction.
4. *Problem-solver*, engaging students with increasingly complex policing scenarios developing underlying thinking skills in addition to content knowledge. Students' problem-solve and justify their solutions, with the facilitator using their content knowledge to encourage autonomous thinking like police practitioners. They are flexible in their actions based on constant evaluation of students' learning.

These categories are represented below in Figure 2, which highlights the hierarchically inclusive nature of these experiences and the expanding awareness from less to more complete or sophisticated practice. This reasoning is consistent with a range of studies examining teaching experiences utilising a phenomenographic research approach (Entwistle & Walker, 2000; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996).

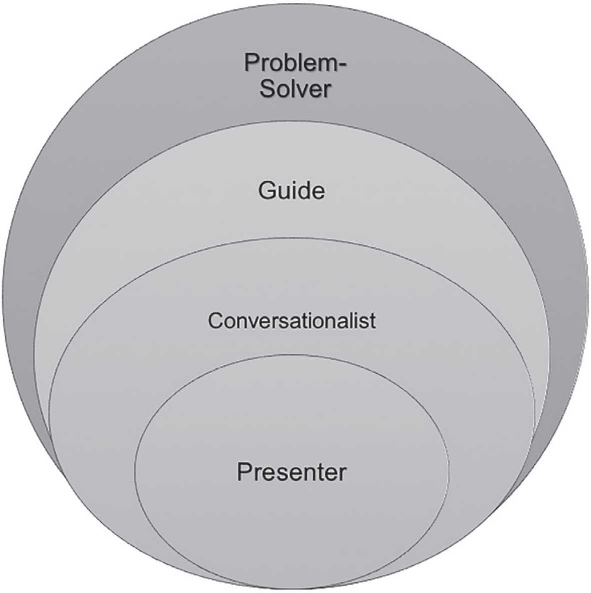


Figure 2: Hierarchically Inclusive police educator teaching experiences (Shipton, 2020).

The first two of these categories are representative of teacher-centred experiences, with the teacher being the centre of attention in the classroom and students being mostly passive in their learning. The second category sees the early development of an interactive process, albeit being limited to a question-and-answer process checking knowledge retention. The third and fourth categories can be considered learner-centred, with the teacher taking on a more facilitative role, with an explicit focus on developing learning and thinking skills in the fourth category. It is crucial to note that each category is built up or subsumes the lower categories in an inclusive hierarchy. For example, a teacher consistent with the *problem-solver* category makes use of the lecture skills of the *presenter*, the questioning skills of the *conversationalist* and the facilitation skills of the *guide*. However, the *problem-solver* is also adept at evaluating the learning situation and is mindful of encouraging critical thinking about content in an operational context.

The teaching attributes of the *problem-solver* are ideal when utilising a method such as PBL. In any PBL situation, students are asked to learn from an integrated and ill-structured problem relevant to their learning (Barrows, 1996). In policing, this problem may relate to any number of scenarios, but it should not be overly simplistic and could have multiple approaches or levels to the problem. For example, we could have a situation where police attend an assault at a licensed premises. It could be complicated by the fact an offender is not readily identified, there is a crowd hostile to police or potential witnesses may be intoxicated. Overlaying this job may be issues relating to ongoing problems with these premises and community tensions that have never been adequately resolved. Whilst asking the students to address the immediate problem, there could also be expectations to address the broader issue evidenced in this situation. Therefore, the scenario is an integration of content areas because the students need to consider and learn about a range of issues including, communications, law, policy, investigations, community issues, ethics, and officer safety. It is ill-structured because there is no easy up-front solution and the scenario needs to be worked by students, with guidance from the facilitator and peers, before one or several solutions might be understood and presented by the learning group.

The limitations of teacher experiences when applied to PBL

To scaffold students in their ZPD during PBL, students are guided through several steps. These steps may vary depending on the context but a common one recommended by Cleveland and Saville (2007) in policing programs is:

Ideas – students brainstorm a range of *potential* actions and solutions.

Known facts – students outline what is known to consider what they need to know.

Learning issues – is a list of topic areas the students learn to address the problem.

Action plan – based on their learning, students propose and justify key actions.

Evaluation – students consider the effectiveness of their plan and learning process.

Students often take several attempts at using this model before they become comfortable with it, particularly as they step into their ZPD, so course designers and facilitators will also need to provide additional scaffolds until their students become more skilled with their learning (Schmidt et al., 2007). There is also the expectation that each PBL case and the content learnt, will build upon previous learning. For example, before undertaking the ill-structured problem described above, students would have likely learnt some basics about communications, legislation, note taking and policing powers. Additionally, supporting tutorials could also be provided throughout the PBL process, which may take place over a week, to provide just in time learning of content related to the case. However, none of this preparation of curriculum or support for students will work without a facilitator possessing the correct skills and understanding of the method. Returning to the four teaching experiences outlined above, we can consider how each might facilitate students through the PBL steps described.

When facilitating the ideas step, there is a need to encourage students to brainstorm a range of ideas about what the problem is and they as police, might go about dealing with it. For our *presenter* and *conversationalist*, who prefer the transmission of information, there may be some uncertainty around facilitating this step. It is up to the students, in their groups (usually four to five is a good number) to generate these ideas based on the scenario and their previous learning. Therefore, these teachers would need to refrain from giving their own ideas, with the *conversationalist* needing to encourage lateral thinking rather than questioning for recall. The guide and *problem-solver* would be more effective because they are used to not simply handing over information or ideas. In particular, the *problem-solver*, would tend to focus on prompting students to think critically or broadly about the problem. For example, the students may ignore ideas relating to communication and instead focus on investigation so our facilitator might prompt what communicating effectively with potential witnesses might do in encouraging new avenues of investigation through rapport building. Essentially, the facilitator wants to encourage the students to think like police but give only enough guidance for the students to rationalise their answers.

The known facts step tends to be more straightforward, with students highlighting key facts stated in the case. This is where good curriculum design is important because there needs to be enough detail for students to identify key learning issues and solve the problem. The teacher needs to be aware of not simply directing the group/s of students to these key facts but prompting their thinking. For our *presenter* or *conversationalist*, this step may again be difficult for them as they are used to imparting information rather than guiding students' thinking about subject content.

The third step of students identifying learning issues is crucial, as it will determine what the students' learning before constructing an action plan. The teacher will likely have a model list of learning issues, but they should only guide this self-directed activity. Developing this skill is important because police need to be independent thinkers throughout their career. Our *problem-solver* would be the only teacher from the four categories to fully appreciate the importance of developing their students' skills in this area. Conversely, our *presenter* may be tempted to simply tell the students what to learn because they view students as blank slates to be filled (Cleveland & Saville, 2007). Students can become quite adept at generating a good list of learning issues, however, if they are not generating all possible learning issues, the facilitator should resort to skilful questions to prompt thinking. For example, whilst the students might consider topics around the interviewing of an offender, they may not fully consider their intoxication and what impact that could have on any interview process. Again, some careful questioning may prompt students to now consider and explore this issue. As our *problem-solver* understands, the facilitator is modelling critical thinking skills and teaching students *how* to think like like police. Simply giving students information does not encourage the development of problem-solving skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Managing the group work process is a key facilitator skill in helping students develop their communication and teamwork skills.

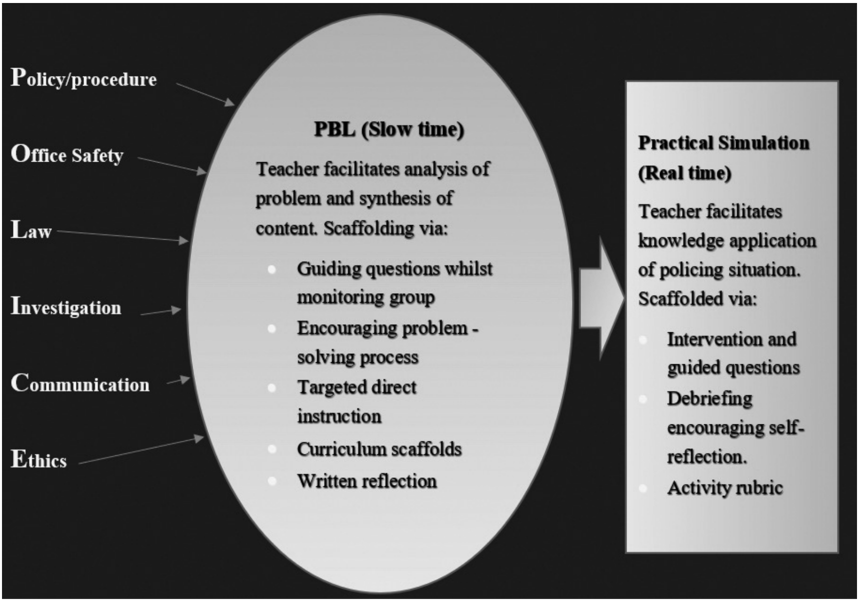
The learning issues step now continues as the students embark on learning relevant content, involving scaffolds such as supplemental resources, online tutorials, or revision of previous classes. The facilitator remains an additional resource for students, who may provide specific content knowledge or point students towards resources based on their evaluation of the students' progress. Certainly, there are times when a facilitator can provide answers, however, it is ideal if students arrive at answers for themselves. In this regard, the skills of our *presenter* remain useful, but lecture skills alone are certainly inadequate in properly facilitating this step of PBL. Certainly, the *problem-solver* has the skills to constantly evaluate students' learning and make appropriate decisions about teaching to keep learning focussed. In this sense, the facilitator is problem-solving the learning process, adjusting teaching actions to ensure scaffolding within the ZPD.

The penultimate step of the *action plan* sees students presenting and justifying their proposed actions to address the problem. As with the preceding steps, responsibility is given over to the students to manage their presentation, assisting in the development of their organisational skills and initiative, which are important for any police officer. In this step, the facilitator needs to evaluate their students' presentation and debrief with constructive feedback. If multiple groups are presenting, the facilitator also needs to draw together the learning of all groups but crucially, by drawing these insights from the students themselves, in a way that encourages reflection on learning. Again, our *problem-solver* and to some extent the *guide* should be familiar with these skills but may be quite challenging for the *presenter* and *conversationalist*.

The teacher should be constantly evaluating the students' progress and learning to provide feedback but crucially, they should develop their students' reflective thinking, perhaps through the use of a reflective journal.

Reflection can be supported by providing pointed questions and modelling constructive feedback on their written work. The problem-solver is best suited to facilitate this task because of their strong focus on promoting underlying thinking skills, including metacognition, towards the problem.

In summary, Figure 3 below highlights key teaching actions to promote learning as part of the guided facilitation process. The POLICE acronym is used to represent the range of policing topics integrated into an ill-structured problem used to stimulate learning. This acronym serves as a guide for both students and facilitators to ensure a holistic response to the problem. The facilitator is required to skillfully provide a level of guidance or scaffolding to maintain students within their ZPD as they work through the problem in what is described here as Slow-time or appropriate time and space to learn and give a considered response. Once the PBL process is complete, students in a police academy context could be asked to transfer or operationalise their learning to a practical simulation or a Real-time policing task, for example, attending a licensed premises in pairs, replicating operational practice, to investigate an assault. The facilitator observes the activity, which may be subject to intervention if learning goes off track and is debriefed to provide formative and/or summative assessment.



PBL (Slow time)

Teacher facilitates analysis of problem and synthesis of content. Scaffolding via:

- Guiding questions whilst monitoring group
- Encouraging problem - solving process
- Targeted direct instruction
- Curriculum scaffolds
- Written reflection

Practical Simulation (Real time)

Teacher facilitates knowledge application of policing situation. Scaffolded via:

- Intervention and guided questions
- Debriefing encouraging self-reflection.
- Activity rubric

Figure 3: Police PBL facilitation model

Conclusions

As described by Schmidt et al. (2007), a PBL facilitator should provide substantive guidance as they constantly observe and evaluate their students' learning and interactions to gauge teaching decisions and interventions. As such, the teaching role is not one of following a script or simply relying upon direct instruction, which Vygotsky criticised as only leading to memorisation, without promoting deeper conceptual understanding (Bakhurst, 2007). Instead, the facilitators' role is multifaceted, using a variety of tools to scaffold learning in a dynamic and fluid environment. The *problem-solver*, when compared to other police educator experiences, has a wider range of skills to evaluate and manage this situation and draw on the right tool at the right time, which may include some direct instruction if required, particularly given the need to develop autonomous learning and practice beyond the classroom.

Implementing PBL, therefore, requires careful curriculum planning and teacher development in addition to what traditional academy programs provide. However, the benefits of more effective learning and improved problem-solving, teamwork and communications skills are potentially significant, so the additional effort should be considered by academy managers. The learning model outlined in Figure 3, with PBL as its centrepiece, can integrate disparate content areas into an authentic learning situation that promotes "functioning knowledge" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p.81), which is vital for vocational professions such as policing. Whilst police academies have increasingly made use of simulation or scenario-based training for students to practice their policing skills in a controlled environment, these kinds of learning activities can be overly linear, requiring students to simply mimic actions they do not fully understand or appreciate (Pearce, 2006). PBL can provide a bridge between the range of relevant content areas and simulation training, assisting police students to understand key concepts and develop functioning knowledge specific to common policing tasks. This functioning knowledge in turn becomes a scaffold for students' application of this learning to a real time policing scenario and ultimately policing practice.

When considering how police academies can maximise this kind of PBL model, it is essential to invest in appropriate teacher development, particularly given the traditional and teacher-centred nature of police academies. However, from the range of police educator experiences, the *problem-solver* experience demonstrates promise as a teaching model given its inclusive range of teacher and learner-centred skills (Shipton, 2020). One limitation of the qualitative nature of this study was an inability to generalise the proportions of each experience across the field of policing, however, the *problem-solver* experience likely only represents a relatively small number of practitioners based on research on similar categories across the broader field of adult education (Gonzalez, 2011). Regardless, the *problem-solver* experience demonstrates the range of skills to ensure the appropriate degree of facilitator support within an interdependent learning environment so important to maintaining students within their ZPD. Importantly, these skills include an ability to evaluate a dynamic learning situation and apply appropriate teaching strategies, whilst also complementing the learning of subject content with the development of critical thinking skills so important to effective community policing (Doherty, 2009; Cleveland & Saville, 2007).

Crucially for police academy managers, it is not a matter of simply prescribing a new method to teach, as teachers are reluctant or unable to utilise novel approaches that do not correspond with their current conceptions of teaching (Entwistle & Walker, 2000; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996). As such, it is important to realise that police educators' professional knowledge and experience of academy teachers remains relevant, as they need to expand their awareness of learner-centred practice beyond being teacher-centred, rather than simply switching to learner-centred practice (Shipton, 2020). As part of the development process, a focus on learning theories like the ZPD and associated scaffolding are important in assisting police educators to understand the reasoning behind learner-centred practice and how it should work. To underpin this learning approach, academy managers must be willing to encourage greater student autonomy in the learning space rather than defaulting to an authority dependent environment.

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About the author

Brett Shipton is a former police officer with the NSW Police, with a career in police education across several organisations spanning the past 30 years. He has been a lecturer with Charles Sturt University (CSU) at the School of Policing studies since 2006, during which time he completed his doctoral study in police educators' experiences of teaching and teaching development. Brett also has a particular interest in authentic and practical teaching methods such as problem-based learning and other signature police pedagogies. He has only recently been appointed to the position of lecturer in policing and justice studies at the CSU Centre for Law and Justice Studies.

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Transforming adult learners: The experiences of participating in second chance education program in the Gambia

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This study explored adult learners' experiences of participating in a second-chance education pilot program in The Gambia. The study examined learners' motivation for enrolling in the program, barriers they faced, and their benefits from attending the program. The participants consist of 13 learners from a second chance education centre in the Lower River Region of The Gambia. Six of the participants were male, and seven were female within 19 to 31 years. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that the primary motivations for participants enrolling in the program are to complete education and undertake further education, be employable, and acquire knowledge and skills. The study also indicated that learners faced barriers that hindered their full participation in the program. These barriers are institutional and situational. The institutional barriers include uncomfortable teaching and learning environment; inadequate teaching and learning materials. The situational barriers include domestic chores, personal engagement, access to food, lateness, transportation, and distance from the learning centre. Finally, the study showed that the participants benefit from the *program in improved knowledge and skills, building confidence and connecting socially, taking care of personal issues, and helping others. In other words, the program empowered and transformed learners from improving themselves to helping others.*

Keywords: *adult education, transformative learning, second chance education*

Introduction

The Gambia is the smallest country in mainland Africa, located on the West Coast, with approximately 1.8 million people (GBoS, 2013). The country gained its independence from Great Britain in 1965 and became a republic in 1974. The concept of second-chance education might be new in The Gambia; however, it has existed in other parts of the world for two decades or more. In 1995, the European Commission adopted a White Paper on education and training entitled 'Teaching and Learning: Toward the Learning Society, with five main goals, the third of which was 'Combating Exclusion (Commission of the European Communities Brussels Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2001). An experimental scheme for second chance schools was recommended under this goal by the European Commission. This experimental scheme provides education and training opportunities to young excluded people who lack skills and qualifications to enter further education or job markets. After the publication of the White Paper, many countries expressed interest in the project. After a series of consultations, 13 second chance schools were established in 11 countries, all in Europe. These projects were confirmed between 1996 and 1999, but some did not start operation until 2000 (Commission of the European Communities Brussels Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2001) (Commission, 2001). However, before adopting the White Paper on second chance school by European Commission, Inbar and Sever (1989) wrote about second chance education. Recently, (Keogh, 2009; Nordlund, Stehlik, & Strandh, 2013; Ollis, Starr, Ryan, Angwin, & Harrison, 2017; Ross & Gray, 2005; Savelsberg, Pignata, & Weckert, 2017) are among scholars who wrote about second chance education. In the 1990s towards 2003, few African countries were engaged in second-chance education in the form of community schools as in Egypt, Mali, and Zambia; school for life in Ghana; complementary schooling in Ethiopia; and village-based school in Malawi (DeStefano, Moore, Balwanz, Hartwell, & Academy for Educational Development, 2007). Several countries, including countries in Africa, are now engaged in second-chance education, aiming to provide second chance opportunities to school dropouts (Bakalevu, 2011; Ross & Gray, 2005).

In The Gambia, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary education initiated the second-chance education program. The program was launched on 20th February 2018 at Regional Education Directorate Four in Mansakonko. The program aims to provide "second chance education opportunities for school dropout and out-of-school children and youths in The Gambia to attain basic education, life, and livelihood skills" (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, n.d., p. 1). This great initiative has come when it is most needed because 44.7% of the country's population had no formal education, and females formed the largest illiterate population (GBoS, 2013). Additionally, 30.3% of primary school-going-age children are not in school; 29.8% and 42.8 of junior and senior high school-going-age children, respectively, are not in school (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, n.d.; Universalia, 2018). Due to the factors such as poverty, poor performance, early and forced marriage, and teenage pregnancy, many students drop out of school or cannot continue their education. The program is in two pilot phases. Currently, phase one is being implemented across the country with one thousand learners. The learners consist of students who completed junior high school education but could not continue to the next level of education, i.e., senior high school. The learning contents include the four core subjects – English Language, Mathematics, Science, Social and Environmental Studies. The selection criteria for the program include: the applicant must complete an admission form, provide a statement of Gambia Basic Education Certificate (GABECE) result or transcript, parental consent letter, and birth certificate or clinic cards (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, n.d.). After completing the program, the participants can proceed to senior high school to continue their education. The second phase of the pilot program will allow one thousand students who completed senior secondary school but could not proceed to tertiary institutions to obtain the qualification to further their education in Colleges and Universities. The importance of this program cannot be overstated because it would complement government efforts in providing accessible, equitable, and inclusive quality education to all. The policymakers also adopt the program as one of the strategies for planning education in The Gambia. Despite the importance attached to the program, there are challenges for its successful implementation, such as the funding of operational activities like payment of facilitators' salaries and training, the building of centres, and the provision of teaching and learning materials (Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2016).

Several results have been generated from the past studies on what motivates adults to learn, for example, (Lee, Wei, & Hu, 2014; Palmieri, 2017; Ross & Gray, 2005; Villar, Pinazo, Triado, Celdran, & Sole, 2010); barriers to adults learning (Akyeampong et al., 2018; Brady, Cardale, & Neidy, 2013; Ekstrom, 1972; Eze, 1999; Han, Takkaç-Tulgar, & Aybirdi, 2019; Houle, 1961; Rothwell, 2008); and the benefits learners gained from participating in adult education program (Lee & Yeh, 2019; Ross & Gray, 2005; Rothwell, 2008; Villar et al., 2010). These prior researches focused mainly on adult and professional continuing education around the developed countries. However, in many countries engaged in providing second chance education for out-of-school youths and dropouts, there is insufficient research to establish what motivates learners to enroll in the program, the barriers the learners faced, and the benefits gained from the program. Therefore, this study examines adult learners between the age of 19 and 31 experiences of participating in the second chance education pilot program in The Gambia, exploring the following research questions: 1. What motivated learners to enrol in the second chance education program? 2. What are the learners' barriers? And 3. What benefits do the learners gain from the program?

Literature Review

Studies have shown many benefits of second-chance education (Hargreaves, 2011; Keogh, 2009; Nordlund et al., 2013). The second chance education program is among the terms used in literature to describe a program through which individuals can access and re-engage learning outside of the mainstream education system (Savelsberg et al., 2017). It provides the opportunity to move back on the track one has dropped out of or missed altogether. For second chance education to be realistic, it must fulfil three criteria: accessibility, effectiveness, and the end product of the program should provide equal opportunities to that of first chance education (Inbar & Sever, 1989). Second chance education facilitates social inclusion, and equality, and serves various purposes in all countries, including compensating for learning not previously achieved, preparing individuals for the next level of education, and raising the skill levels of the program participants (Keogh, 2009).

Creating an opportunity for adults to continue their education is one thing; motivating them to seize the opportunity to learn is another thing. As Cookson (1989) put it, there will be no program unless an education or training program successfully attracts adult learners and motivates them to stay with the program. Adult learners faced numerous barriers. Some of these barriers are internal, external and program-related, and vary among learners depending on their age, gender, knowledge, skills, and the context they study (Kara, Erdogdu, Kokoc, & Cagiltay, 2019). Among the barriers that hold adults back from learning include lack of time, money, interest, scheduling difficulties, life responsibilities, care of others, and transportation (Rothwell, 2008).

Furthermore, (Brady et al., 2013) reported inadequate space, inadequate staff, ill-health, and low attendance, as barriers to adult learning. Ekstrom (1972) classified barriers into three broad themes: institutional, situational, and dispositional, that exclude women from participating in postsecondary education. The institutional barriers include admission practices, financial aid practices, regulations, types of learning content, services adopted by the institution, and the attitudes of the faculty and staff members. The situational barriers that prevent their participation in further education include family responsibilities, financial needs, and societal pressure. At the same time, the dispositional barriers affecting their participation in continuing education include fear of failure, attitude toward intellectual activity, role preference, uncertainty about educational goals, level of aspiration, inaction, and lowliness. Among other factors that demotivate students from learning include: the attitudes of their peers, staff, personal issues, class features, test anxiety, failure experience, and the education system (Han et al., 2019). In addition, domestic tasks are a barrier for female student learning and farm task for male student learning (Akyeampong et al., 2018).

Therefore, "effort to motivate learners will work best when they are tied to the appropriate reasons that attracted the learners to participate in a learning situation" (Rothwell, 2008, p. 46). In order words, the motivation must link to the interests and benefits of the learners. Adults want to learn because they want to get their first job or a new career, get a promotion at work, upgrade old skills, and adapt to current community developments (Abedi & Badragheh, 2011; Ghorbani, Khodamoradi, Bozorgmanesh, & Emami, 2012). In her study, Palmieri (2017) found that the critical motivators among adult Australians of non-Italian origin to learn Italian in continuing education contexts in Sydney were affiliation with the target language-speaking community, the community of learners in Sydney, and an ideal self-image of a competent language speaker. Furthermore, adult learners are also motivated by their desire to acquire beneficial knowledge and solve life problems (Lee et al., 2014). Knowledge acquisition and learning for the joy of learning are crucial to an adult joining a program (Villar et al., 2010). Adair and Mowsesian (1993) established that motivation for adult learning could be instrumentally or expressively oriented. Instrumentally oriented motivation enables them to take care of their basic needs and maintain a sense of personal effectiveness.

In contrast, expressively oriented motivation allowed them to satisfy their needs and goals related to identity, affiliation, competence, and engagement in meaningful and purposeful activities. Moreover, Rothwell (2008) identified six motivators assumed to be why adults are motivated to learn. These include: building a social network, meeting expectations, advancing their careers, helping others, and learning for the sake of learning. Ross and Gray (2005) posited that the key motivating factors for second chance education are completing secondary education and embarking on further education. Houle (1961), as cited in (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010), categorized learners into three groups based on their motives for participation, namely: goal-oriented learners – those who want to achieve specific goals; activity-oriented learners – those who want to be engaged but are not necessarily concerned about the learning activity; learning-oriented – those who want to learn for the sake of learning.

Studies showed that benefits attached to adult education programs are instrumental in motivating adults to participate in second chance learning from all indications. Adult learning benefits include taking greater charge over their lives, developing social skills, confidence, and friendships with program mates and staff (Ross & Gray, 2005). Furthermore, Hargreaves (2011) asserted that the second chance education program offers two-fold benefits to learners, i.e., providing learners with the necessary skills for employment and helping them overcome barriers they once encountered in their past training or education. Adult education provides learners with greater social and political confidence, good health, and employability (Iñiguez-Berrozpe, Elboj-Saso, Flecha, & Marcaletti, 2020). Moreover, adult learners get happiness from learning and maintaining positive attitudes towards life (Lee & Yeh, 2019). Other benefits of adult learning include building individuals we can work and live with, discovering the unsatisfied needs and wants of adult life, and opening the learners' minds to a more soundly conceived future (Berle Jr, 1935). Opportunity to make more friends and live a good and joyful life (Villar et al., 2010). Adult education also served to facilitate social inclusion and enhance economic growth (Panitsides, 2013). Sloane-Seale and Kops (2010) found that continuing education leads to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of successful aging and positively impacts participants' mental and physical activity, resulting in good health and well-being and connection to the larger community and a good self-image.

The essence of adult education is to empower learners to become independent thinkers by learning to negotiate their values, meanings, and purposes instead of accepting others' opinions without condition (Mezirow, 1997). Research has shown that the way adults learn is quite different from the way children do, and as such, they should not be treated like school-going kids. Adults are people with many experiences which they can use to facilitate their learning. Andragogy as an adult learning theory was proposed by Knowles (1968) and defined as 'the art and science of helping adults learn,' is based on the assumptions that an adult learner has an independent self-concept and can direct their learning; has many life experiences which are a rich resource for education; has learning needs closely linked to changing social roles; is problem-centreed and interested in immediate application of knowledge; is inspired to learn by internal rather than external factors; and want to know why he needs to learn something (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Hence providers of adult education should bear this in mind for effective implementation of their programs.

Method

This study used a qualitative research approach (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011) to explore transforming adult learners: the experiences of participating in a second-chance education pilot program in The Gambia. A second chance education centre in the Lower River Region, which has 17 learners, was selected for this study. The participants for the study were purposively selected based on the criteria that the person must be enrolled in a second chance education program for at least two years so that he or she can provide accurate information and voluntarily fill out an interview consent form to approve his or her participation. Out of the 17 learners in the centre, 13 fulfilled all the criteria. Therefore, 13 learners (six males and seven females) between the age of 19 and 31 were interviewed as participants of this research.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). After getting their approval to participate in the study voluntarily, the researchers sent each participant the interview questions through email and WhatsApp and scheduled an interview with each participant. Each interview lasted for 25 to 30 minutes using WhatsApp phone calls. The interview questions targeted the understanding of the participants' motivation to join the second chance education program, the barriers they faced, and the benefits they gained from the program. During each interview, questions were asked based on an outline that was kept flexible to encourage free and exhaustive answers (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded for analysis. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), the data were constantly analysed as collected and compared to find similarities among participants' responses to identify themes and subthemes on their motivation for enrolling in second-chance education program, the barriers they faced, and the benefits they gain from participating in the program. This approach of data analysis is used to capture participants' experiences as narrated by them. For ethical consideration, each of the interviewees' consent was sought by the researchers to voluntarily participate in this study by signing a consent form sent to them via email and WhatsApp. In addition, for confidentiality, the researchers assigned a pseudo name to each participant to conceal their identity.

Limitations

The study was carried out in the Lower River Region of The Gambia. Therefore, the findings may not apply to other second chance education centres in different regions across the country, particularly in urban areas. Every region has its unique characteristics. Region 4 is located in rural Gambia, where learning facilities such as computers, the internet, libraries, and other services are not easily accessible. Due to resource constraints and the centres' location, the study is limited to the most prominent centre in the region.

Statement of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. The researchers in this study are independent. Thus, the study was conducted independently without any sponsor from any institution. However, one of the researchers worked as a senior education officer and a focal point for the second chance education pilot program in the Lower River Region of Gambia before leaving to pursue his PhD in Taiwan.

Results

After analyzing the data, the following themes and subthemes emerge as the study's findings, as shown below.

Theme 1 Motivation for enrolling in second-chance education program

The primary motivation for participants to join the second-chance education program is to complete their junior school education and undertake further education (senior secondary school education); to be employable and acquire knowledge and skills.

1.1 To complete education and undertake further education

The principal motivation among participants in second-chance education is to complete their education and undertake further education, as indicated in their responses.

> *"To complete my education was the primary motivation for me to join the program. It has always been my aim to complete my education" (Pateh).*
>
> *"When I heard about second-chance education, I was delighted because I did not complete school. So if I complete school, I can go and find a 'job or continue my education to senior high school. I want to be a banker" (Nyima).*

1.2 Employability

Being employable is another reason that motivated participants to enro in second-chance education, as stated in their responses below:

> *"Most of my friends who were in school with me have completed their schooling, and they are now working, so when I heard about second-chance, I applied to join it. I want to complete school so that I can have a job and take care of my family" (Mary).*
>
> *". . . I miss my first chance, and most of the people I started going to school with before dropping out are now working, and I was just sitting, so I join this program so that I can complete my school and have work" (Dicko).*

1.3 Acquired knowledge and skills

Acquiring knowledge and skills are also reasons for participation in a second-chance education program, as illustrated by the participants.

> *"I wanted to re-sit to exam on some of the subjects I failed in grade 12, but later I realized the program is for junior high school. Nonetheless, the program serves as refreshment and capacity building for me" (Sampa).*
>
> *". . I was sitting doing nothing but housework, so I heard about second-chance education, but I was informed that program is about tie & dye and sewing so then I apply for admission" (Teneng).*

Theme 2 The barriers faced by the learners

The barriers faced by learners are institutional and situational. The institutional barriers they faced include:

2.1 Uncomfortable teachings and learning environments

Participants identified unconducive teachings and learning environments such as broken desks, bad blackboards, and untiled classroom floor as barriers affecting their learning, as indicated below.

> *"Also, most of our desks are broken, and we have to manage to sit and write. Some of us use two benches for sitting and writing" (Nyima).*
>
> *"The classroom we are using is not good. We don't have enough seats. The sit I use is not good. The blackboard is also not good; when tutors write on it the words are not legible" (Dicko).*

2.2 Inadequate teaching and learning materials

Participants have lamented that inadequate teaching and learning materials are a problem they are grappled with, as stated below.

> *"We also don't have enough graph books for mathematics. The place our learning materials are kept there is no cupboard, and the learning materials are just lying on the ground" (Nyima).*
>
> *"Learning equipment is also a problem. We still need materials like Brighter grammar, laptop and if we can also have another English teacher that would be great because English is a subject that if you want to teach once, is difficult" (Lalo).*

The situational barriers faced by learners in participating in second-chance education include the following:

2.3 Domestic chores

Domestic chores are barriers that affect participants, particularly female participants, from concentrating on their learning, particularly the female participants.

> *"Before I go to school, I have to prepare breakfast for my children and prepare them to go to 'Dara,' and as a result, sometimes I am late for classes" (Teneng).*
>
> *". . . I have children. When I wake up in the morning, I have to prepare breakfast for them and take care of their other needs before I go to school. So most of the time I am late for classes" (Dicko).*

2.4 Personal engagements

Other engagements of learners hindered their full participation in the second chance education program. Some of the participants are breadwinners of their families. They, therefore, engaged in other things to make a living as narrated by them.

> *". . . I used to engage in petty works to earn some money for myself, but since I started this program, I have to stop all that, which is a big challenge for me" (Pateh)*
>
> *"I am a senior staff of . . . community radio, so I find it very difficult sometimes to attend classes, especially on Sundays regularly" (Sampa).*

2.5 Access to food

Access to food is a challenge that many participants faced at the centre. Especially on Saturdays and Sundays when no food vendors come to the centre to sell food. As a result, participants have to go into town to buy food, as pointed out by participants.

> *". . . food is one of the challenges I faced at the centre, because most of our classes are conducted during weekends and as result food vendors or sellers do not come to the centre to sell food" (Anna)*
>
> *"Food is also a problem because food vendors come only on Friday, so Saturday and Sunday we have to go out of the centre to buy food. You know it would be tough to concentrate in class with an empty stomach" (Lalo).*

2.6 Transportation and distance

Transportation to and from the learning centre, and distance from home to the learning centre are barriers learners face, resulting in missing most of the lessons or arriving late, especially on weekends.

> *". . . Transport is a problem, a taxi cost one hundred dalasis which is very expensive, and our transport allowance is not enough to cover that" (Mary).*

> *Transportation is a challenge which affects three ladies that I travel with to the centre, which is about five kilometres away from our village. Sometimes we walk on foot to the centre, and sometimes we buy fuel for us to be transported to the centre by Motorbike owners (Yorro).*

2.7 Lateness

Arriving late at the centre due to delays in getting transport and distance is a hurdle that confronts participants.

> *Sometimes when my Motorbike has a problem, I arrive late at the centre, and sometimes I miss the whole of first lesson or a large part of it (Pateh).*
>
> *Sometimes we miss morning classes because some of us travel from the surrounding villages and sometimes we are late, which does not go down well with some of the tutors. . . (Teneng).*

Theme 3 The benefits learners gained from the program

The benefits learners gained from participating in second-chance education programs include:

3.1 Improved knowledge and skills

The second chance education program has broadened participants' knowledge and skills in the learning content, as indicated below.

> *I now know how to use personal pronouns such as he, she, it, etc., properly as well as write a letter on my own. If I speak English to English students at the college, they get surprised about how come I can speak good English when I am an Arabic student (Karafa).*
>
> *Then my English was not that good, but now praise is to God, my English language has improved a lot. I left school in 2008, but when I joined this program, it helped me a lot (Dicko).*

3.2 Build confidence and social connections

The program has empowered participants to believe in themselves and created opportunities to connect and interact, as expressed below.

> *". . . I can use English to chat with people and write a letter on my own without anyone's help" (Mary).*
>
> *"I made friends with classmates. We communicate and share ideas" (Anna).*
>
> *"Since joining this program, I know how to use tapelines more, making my work easier than before. I work as a carpenter" (Galloh).*

3.3 To take care of personal issues and help others

Being able to take care of personal issues and helping others solve their problems are benefits that participants have gained due to their participation in the second-chance education program.

> *". . . What I am coming to do now, I calculate to know what will favour me and what will not favour me, and how many workers and laborers I should take. My English has improved; I can read and write text messages to friends" (Lalo).*
>
> *". . . We learn about how to preserve food and prevent it from bacterial infection, how to take care of ones' body, and keep the environment clean. So I use this knowledge and skills to take care of my children, myself, my food, and my environment" (Teneng).*

Discussion

This study explored the adult learners' experience in participating in a second chance education pilot program in The Gambia. Looking at their motivation for enrolling in the program, the barriers they faced, and their benefits from the program. The study revealed that completing education and undertaking further education are the main reasons why participants enrolled in the second chance education program (Ross & Gray, 2005; Rothwell, 2008). In addition, the participants were also motivated to join the program to be employable and acquire knowledge and skills, all geared toward personal and family development (Lee et al., 2014; Palmieri, 2017; Villar et al., 2010). These findings indicated that the participants of this study are goal-oriented learners (Houle, 1961; Kasworm et al., 2010). They want to achieve specific goals, including their motivation to join the program, as mentioned above. It is these specific goals that warranted their participation in the program. They are not in the program just for the sake of learning, which the second chance education provider and policymakers should note down. Bearing in mind that the success of a program depends on how relevant it is to the learners' interests and how motivated learners are to stay in the program. The barriers faced by participants in this study include uncomfortable teaching and learning environments (Han et al., 2019), such as broken desks, bad blackboards, and untiled classroom floor. Also, inadequate teaching and learning materials (Brady et al., 2013; Ekstrom, 1972), such as graph books, supplementary reading materials, and equipment for conducting experiments (Brady et al., 2013; Ekstrom, 1972), are among the barriers highlighted by the participants.

Furthermore, domestic chores, cost of transportation, distance (Akyeampong et al., 2018; Ekstrom, 1972; Rothwell, 2008), lateness, access to food, and personal engagement, were also lamented by learners as constraints seriously hindering their full participation in the program. These barriers are institutional – uncomfortable teachings and learning environments; inadequate teaching and learning materials; and situational or multiple role characteristics – domestic chores, personal engagement, access to food, lateness, transportation, and distance. In order not to demotivate participants and as well as to have a quality second chance education program, these barriers, particularly institutional barriers, require urgent solutions. However, that does not mean the program providers should ignore situational obstacles and other issues hindering learners' participation as their presence would contradict the assertions of quality second chance education. Some of these learners have missed school for years. Therefore their learning environments should be conducive to adequate and relevant teaching and learning materials at their reach. With laptops, for example, participants can learn online from their homes, which will solve the issue of transportation to and from the learning centre, broken desks, bad blackboards, food, and lateness. With the internet on their laptops, they can easily access relevant learning materials and information about their subjects. Adult learners are people with a wealth of experience that can serve as a rich source for learning, have an independent self-concept, and are capable of directing their learning (Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The participants of this study are no exception. They are adults with experiences that they can use to direct and facilitate their learning with support from tutors. Hence the program providers should be aware that the way adults learn is quite different from how children do, as confirmed by studies. Thus building tutors' capacities on appropriate adult teaching methods are necessary to ensure quality teaching and learning. Domestic chores (Akyeampong et al., 2018), for example, cooking for the family and getting children ready for school, seriously affect learners' participation, particularly females. Other personal engagements such as work and petty business or trading to make a living are also barriers that affect the full participation of learners in the second chance education program. The program providers can solve these problems by having a flexible class timetable made in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, particularly learners. Also, giving the learners stipend or allowance would motivate them and help them to focus more on their learning.

For the program's benefits, the study showed that participants apply what they have learned by taking care of their problems and helping others (Ross & Gray, 2005; Rothwell, 2008). Likewise, improved knowledge and skills, building confidence and social connection (Ross & Gray, 2005; Villar et al., 2010), are other benefits participants claimed to acquire through the program. These benefits and commitment to attain their goals are strong motivators of learners to stay in the program, despite the numerous challenges they encountered. Transforming adult learners from being dependent to independent in taking charge of their life, is among the main goals of adult education (Mezirow, 1997). Thus, this program empowered learners with knowledge and skills to rely upon for their daily tasks and survival, even though they have not completed the program. The program has also boosted participants' morale, social connections and transformed them from caring for themselves to helping others without seeking support from outside. However, for the program to be sustainable and realistic, it must attract and motivate learners, be accessible, effective, and create equal opportunities provided by the first chance education (Cookson, 1989; Inbar & Sever, 1989). This study's institutional and situational barriers findings indicate that providers have lots to do to implement quality and sustainable second chance education programs successfully. Hence the need to address these barriers.

Conclusion

This study used a qualitative approach to explore Adult learners' experiences of participating in the second-chance education pilot program in The Gambia regarding learners' motivation to join the program, the barriers they met, and the benefits they obtained from the program. The study revealed that the learners have a genuine reason to partake in the program. They want to make up for the missed first chance to assume their rightful position in the mainstream education system and the larger society by being employable and acquiring knowledge and skills. However, in doing so, they encountered barriers that hindered their full participation in the program. These barriers include uncomfortable teaching and learning environments, inadequate teaching and learning materials, domestic chores, personal engagements, transportation and distance, lateness, and access to food. Empowering adult learners to be autonomous in taking charge of their lives is one of the main objectives of adult learning (Mezirow, 1997). Hence, despite the constraints, learners benefited greatly from the program in improved knowledge and skills, confidence and social connection, solving personal problems, and helping others. These benefits, including participants' determination to achieve their aims of continuing their education, acquiring knowledge and skills, and being employable, are the main reasons learners stay in the program despite the barriers.

The second chance education program should be accessible, relevant, and efficient. The end product should provide equal opportunities for the first chance education (Inbar & Sever, 1989) to be a success story. Thus the program providers should ensure that the program is easily accessible and that relevant teaching and learning materials are provided to all learning centres. There can only be a program if the program successfully attracts learners and motivates them to stay in the program (Cookson, 1989). Henceforth, the providers should take the opportunity of the learners' motivations, noting that the effort to motivate learners works best when it caters to their wishes and aspirations for joining the program (Rothwell, 2008) and work on the barriers learners face to reach quality and sustainable second chance education programs. In others, this study requires immediate solutions so that learners can successfully proceed to their next level of education or career stage at the end of the day. In addition, tutors should be motivated and trained on appropriate teaching methods for adult learning to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, there should be effective monitoring to ensure that the program achieves its goals. Policymakers have adopted second chance education as one of the strategies for planning education in The Gambia. Hence there should be no room for inefficiency, which could compromise the quality and purpose of the program. Thus all the relevant stakeholders must work to ensure that the program is successful and sustainable. On that note, the researchers would recommend further research to explore how learners cope with the barriers they encountered and the professionalisation of the second chance education in The Gambia.

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Education as change: Liberation from mental illness and self-stigma in favour of empowerment

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The purpose of this article is to describe how education can serve as a changing and liberating process for adults with long-term mental illness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants in Life-knowledge and Creative courses at a Swedish Folk High School. Five themes emerged in the interviews: (i) A meaningful social context – to undergo change with others; (ii) Self-awareness via non-violent communication – to change one's self-image; (iii) Creating as rehabilitation – change through aesthetic learning processes; (iv) To function better in everyday life – to receive confirmation of change; (v) Opportunity horizons – to change hope for the future. The conclusion is that the Folk High School environment and the educational courses can contribute to an increased sense of well-being in the present. The liberating process primarily impacts the participants' self-stigma positively as long as this takes place in environments where the participants have experience of not being exposed to social stigma, either at home or at the Folk High School. The participants do not entertain future life plans that extend beyond the context of Folk High School, but when examined in the light of their situation before they *enrolled at Folk High School, the liberating process is still noticeable.*

Keywords: *empowerment, Folk High School, liberating education, mental illness, self-stigma*

Introduction

This article focuses on the Folk High School and its role in the recovery of adults who suffer from long-term mental illness and their increased participation in society. Mental illness is a generic term that includes mild psychological illness and psychiatric disorders. Irrespective of the nature of the mental illness, it often entails that the person who suffers from such illness experiences difficulties in functioning in their everyday life, especially concerning their relationships and work-life (Tudor, 1996). In the EU, it is reported that, on average, 11 per cent of the population suffers from a psychological illness. The same figure of 11 percent is reported in Sweden, too (OECD & European Commission, 2020). Conversely, 87 percent of the Swedish population claimed that they enjoyed ‘good’ or ‘very good’ psychological health in 2020 (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2021). In addition to the suffering that this level of mental illness or lack of psychological well-being entails for individuals, the social cost incurred by psychological illnesses in 2010 was 10,900 billion Swedish Krona (direct and indirect costs included) within the OECD. This cost is expected to rise to 26,400 billion Swedish Krona in 2030 (Bloom et al., 2011).

At the Folk High School studied, they offer so-called *Livskunskaps- och Skaparkurser* [Life-knowledge and Creative courses], which are aimed at adults with long-term mental illnesses. These people are often on sick leave during extended periods and find themselves isolated from the rest of society and experience great difficulty in re-entering the labour market. In each course that is offered, 16 places are allocated for participants, and when a participant leaves the course, the vacant spot can be immediately filled by a new participant. Consequently, enrolment in a particular course may not be constant during the duration of the course. The courses are time-tabled for a couple of days per week. Creative activities of various types are offered in the Creative courses, including image creation, drawing, sculpture, painting, paint mixing, and ceramics. In the Life-knowledge courses, we find various activities that include philosophy, existential questions, and the participants' self-awareness. For example, scheduled activities include group conversations about psychological illness, healthcare, non-violent communication (Rosenberg, 2015), and *rounds* – a 'salutogenic' activity (Antonovsky, 1987) where participants report to each other what is positive in their lives at that moment. For these courses, continuous attendance is obligatory for the scheduled activities and for partaking in lunch with one's classmates and the teacher. The two other criteria that must be met before a candidate is accepted to these courses are: (i) the participant must hold documentation proving that they are free from drug misuse for at least one year, and (ii) they have access to a professional therapist outside the school. The aim of these courses is that the participants' work that they do on these courses will function as a pathway to recovery from mental illness.

Many educations aimed at people with mental illness have their basis in psychiatry such as Supported Education (Anthony & Unger, 1991; Waghorn et al., 2004). Other educations aimed at promoting mental health often have individual educational profiles such as art/creativity (Potash et al., 2018; Spring et al., 2017), coping and self-awareness (Lean et al., 2019; Whitley et al., 2019) and liberation (Riemer, 2020). In the present article, the previously mentioned profiles coexist within one and the same education at the Folk High School. Moreover, as the Folk High School is a school form that focuses on building and a sense of community (Andersén, 2011; Paldanius, 2007), it offers a complex educational environment for studying recovery from mental illness. Thus, the purpose of this article is to describe how education at the Folk High School can serve as a changing and liberating process for adults with long-term mental illness. The description is primarily based on the participants' perspectives and experiences.

The Folk High School

Popular Adult Education in Sweden is characterised by a heterogeneous system of *operations* where the Folk High School and the Adult Study Association constitute the framework. Despite having different approaches and content, the actors within the Popular Adult Education system demonstrate a broad conception of a shared set of values and a collaborative perspective in their operations (Bjursell & Nordvall, 2016). This shared set of values includes voluntary life-long learning for every individual that is based on a holistic perspective of human beings and the context in which they find themselves. Knowledge and education have their own intrinsic value and emerge in cooperative action that supports people’s participation in democracy, nationally and internationally. The Folk High School system, an important part of Popular Adult Education, has been described as holding a unique position in the Swedish education system due to its social and meaningful dimensions, through which the interest is directed to the whole person, and the knowledge and learning that is provided are related to a person’s whole life situation (Andersén, 2011; Paldanius, 2007). Personal development and the individual’s experience of what is considered to be meaningful are thus central (Paldanius, 2007). At the Folk High School, the students are called ‘participants’, and not, as is usually the case, ‘students’, ‘pupils’, or ‘learners’. This nomenclature is based on the Folk High Schools’ principles of freedom and voluntariness, where participants are viewed as co-creators in processes that are based on people’s equal value (Andersén, 2011). Because the Folk High School is not regulated in the Swedish Education Act, it avoids much of the control that many other school forms are exposed to and this is shown, for example, by the fact that they do not have grades but instead an overall study assessment (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2020). All in all, the Folk High School differs from many other forms of education, which may be a reason why the participants prosper so well and are reluctant to leave but continues to study at other Folk High School courses. Hugo and Hedegaard (2021) have described it as a kind of institutionalization, that leaving the Folk High School may be associated with uncertainty.

Folk High Schools have existed in the Nordic countries since 1844 and the first two Folk High Schools in Sweden started in 1868 (Runesdotter, 2010). Currently, there are 156 Folk High Schools in Sweden, with approximately 150 000 participants each year. These schools are operated by ideal-driven organisations, local government, associations such as County Councils, folk movements including the sobriety and labor movements together with religious movements, and foundations (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2019; Sveriges Folkhögskolor, 2020). Half of the Folk High Schools’ funding is covered by government grants, whilst the remainder is funded by other organizations, foundations, and municipalities. Approximately 57,000 participants are enrolled in general courses, which corresponds to upper secondary school and approximately 54,000 participants are enrolled in specialized courses that have aesthetic content, or are vocational courses, which corresponds to university (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2018). One third of all participants enrolled in the general courses have a functional impairment (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2017). The Folk High School has a long tradition of arranging courses to include and promote education for people with different needs, for example, people with disabilities, seniors, and people who did not succeed at school. According to Skogman (2015) and Nylander et al. (2015), the Folk High School is characterised by openness and accessibility, which facilitates the learning of participants with different types of needs. For example, we note that the proportion of participants with disabilities and psychological illnesses has increased during the 2000s at the Folk High School (Folkbildningsrådet, 2018).

Education and health

The connection between education and health or well-being is significant and has been the subject of numerous studies for many decades (Bremberg, 2016; Fuchs, 1979; Jorgenson, 1967; Leigh, 1983). Not until the 1980s were the direct and indirect effects of education on health first researched and it was then claimed that indirect effects, in terms of a person's lifestyle and career choice, have the most influence on a person's health. By engaging in education, the individual can use the resources that are made available to them because they enjoy better working conditions and higher social status, for example, which, in turn, can promote health. These circumstances cause the individual's "health efficiency" to increase (Bremberg, 2016; Leigh, 1983). The Commission on Social Determinants of Health, World Health Organization (2008) has recommended that member countries focus on increasing levels of educational attainment, primarily for those who have the lowest levels of attainment. However, even though educational attainment levels have generally increased during recent decades, the importance of education for health/well-being has increased even more (Mackenbach, et al., 2016). This increase suggests that opportunities to behave in a "health efficient" manner have primarily been exploited by the highly-educated and by those with good access to resources, whilst those who do not have access to resources or enjoy only limited resources find it more challenging to achieve “health efficiency”. As emphasised by Bremberg (2016), it is not sufficient to merely increase the general level of education when both the resources which are made available through studying and the social status that an education endows upon a person remain limited and thus pass on only to those with the highest levels of education. Thus, there is value in offering educational programs which are aimed at individuals who lack resources and whose health has already suffered because of this.

The fact that educational programs can possess clear rehabilitative, habilitative, and preventative effects have been previously demonstrated, for example, with respect to people with high-functioning autism (Hedegaard & Hugo, 2017; Hedegaard et al., 2021; Hugo & Hedegaard, 2017; 2021), the incarcerated (Bazos & Hausman, 2004; Chapell, 2004; Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Wells, 2000), children and young people who demonstrate risk behaviours (Hugo, 2013; Vinnerljung et al., 2010), and seniors (Bjursell, 2019; Hedegaard & Hugo, 2020). These studies include educational programs with educational content which is explicitly aimed at achieving rehabilitative/habilitative effects or where the whole educational program itself is intended to constitute rehabilitation/habilitation or have a direct effect on the health of the participant (see Bremberg (2016) and Leigh (1983)). These studies also show how schools and their culture, classmates, and informal learning (learning that is not related to a specific subject) can also contribute to a person’s rehabilitation/habilitation and an increased sense of well-being. Irrespective of whether the goal is to (i) create a safe, well-adjusted and socially accepting school environment for young adults with high-functioning autism, (ii) improve the individual’s conditions so that they enter the labour market, thereby reducing the risk of recidivism, (iii) strengthen solidarity for children and young people who engage in risky behaviour, or (iv) provide meaningful activities for seniors, under the right circumstances education can be part of an environment that promotes health and prevents illness. Whilst many of the studies mentioned above were conducted at Folk High Schools, note that this form of education differs from the rest of the education system in Sweden. The Folk High Schools’ focus on relational perspectives and experience-based learning contributes to making the Folk High School a place where the content of specific rhetorical and didactic models is not foregrounded in the same way they are in traditional school systems.

In cases where these aspects need to be highlighted, this does not occur at the expense of the relational aspects (Colliander et al., 2020). This approach informs a somewhat different school culture that has been successful in terms of inclusion and the provision of an education to people who have various needs (Kindblom, 2016; Nylander et al., 2015; Skogman, 2015). However, how education in general, and the Folk High School in particular, functions for people with mental illness has not been researched in-depth, hence the present study.

Conceptual framework

In this section, we present the three concepts which instantiate the article's conceptual framework. 'Stigma' is the first concept and is used to describe what people who have mental illness often suffer from (Ferarri et al., 2020; Tyerman, Patovirta & Celestini, 2021; Wikman, 2017), namely a form of social exclusion that is the result of an assessment of a person's social role or position in society (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is usually divided into different types and in this article, it is *social stigma* that originates from individuals and groups and *self-stigma*, that emerges when an individual incorporates the stereotypes and prejudices which other individuals and groups hold and express (Goffman, 1963; Link, 1987; Wikman, 2017), which are in focus since our study is focused on the participants' experiences of their studies and how their studies influence their self-image in the Life-knowledge and Creative courses offered by Folk High School.

The second concept that we employ is 'liberating education'. To enable rehabilitation/habilitation from mental illness and to strengthen the participants' self-reliance and self-awareness, the Folk High School employs several different methods and approaches, for example, non-violent communication, which, in some sense, operates in the spirit of liberating education. According to one of the founders of liberating education, Paulo Freire, if dialogue is to be practised, this demands that self-knowledge and a consciousness of one's surroundings be present. Freire argued that people must live in and with the world as active co-creators and that they should not be merely passive and dependent objects (Freire, 1978). From this, the development of 'critical consciousness' can be seen as essential to this program. This consciousness enables people to question the nature of their historical and social circumstances with the aim of changing their life conditions.

Liberating education is a pathway to achieving ‘empowerment’, our third concept. Heaney (1995) claims that Freire developed the notion of ‘empowerment’ via his theory of liberating education since empowerment is an immediate consequence of this approach. Liberating education and empowerment thus mutually support each other. Empowerment refers to the individual’s abilities and the opportunities that are provided to the individual to practise self-determination. Consequently, empowerment is comprised of three essential components, namely power, control, and self-esteem (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is also founded on a view of other people where the point of departure is that every person possesses resources and the capacity to define their problems and develop strategies to solve these problems. The individual is viewed as an agent and a person capable of taking control of their own lives. A person’s acceptance of taking more control over their lives entails striving towards a particular way of thinking about themselves which is informed by trust in themselves and others. Empowerment can be viewed as both a process and a goal (Zimmerman, 2000). In the following study, we focus on the process and thereby direct the reader’s attention towards educational aspects that positively affect the participants’ self-image. However, we will also relate to empowerment as a long-term process (Wallenstein & Bernstein, 1988), beyond the participants’ Folk High School studies, and thereby to some extent also pay attention to the importance of the wider environment (Archibald & Wilson, 2011).

By referencing the above concepts, we can understand the Folk High School’s ambition with the two courses in the sense that *liberating education is used to change the participants’ self-image, reduce self-stigmatisation, and allow them to achieve a sense of empowerment*. How this takes place is addressed below.

Method

This study is inspired by the theoretical approach employed in ethnographic studies (Geertz, 1983, 1993; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), where the researcher is present with the participants of the study in the environments and situations in which the researcher wishes to gain knowledge of. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Bengtsson (2005), a person’s behaviour can only be understood in terms of the context in which they find themselves. Through participating observations, and by listening to what is said and asking questions, the authors have come to understand the teaching and the participants' experience of the teaching *in the context in which it took place*. Note that the context of this study was limited to the teaching of the Life-knowledge and Creative courses at a Folk High School during the Spring and Autumn terms of 2020. We focused on the participants' experiences of how the content of these courses can help them in their recovery, rehabilitation, and achieving a changed self-image.

During the Spring and Autumn 2020, we conducted semi-structured life-world interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with eleven participants and two focus-group interviews (Halkier, 2010; Wibeck, 2010) with the eleven participants who had completed the two courses. The length of the interviews was between 35 and 87 minutes, and they were conducted with assistance from a semi-structured interview guide (Lantz, 1993) which included pre-determined main topics of conversation. However, the respondents were given a great deal of leeway in freely describing their experiences and opinions of the courses. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interpreting the collected data

The results of this study are closely informed by the empirical data that was collected since we aimed to provide a rich description of the respondents' experiences. In our interpretation of the interview transcripts, we identified the themes that were present in the material. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), research must provide an as accurate and complete description of the material as possible, or as Bengtsson (2005, 53) explains 'The empirical material should be allowed to express itself in its own terms within the framework of the question one wishes to answer'. In order to verify the transcribed interviews, the preliminary results of the study were reported and discussed at an open research seminar with the participants.

The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) at a latent abstract level where the researchers could interpret their content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Our purpose was to provide a detailed but succinct description of what emerged in the participants' reports (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The analysis was done in three steps (Creswell 2014; Larsen, 2009; Tesch, 1990). First, the interviews were transcribed. Next, we conducted a thorough reading of all of the interview transcripts and coded them with keywords. Third, the interviews were re-read, and content categories were created from the previously identified keywords. Five themes emerged in the interview materials: (i) A meaningful social context – to undergo change with others; (ii) Self-awareness via non-violent communication – to change one's self-image; (iii) Creating as rehabilitation – change through aesthetic learning processes; (iv) To function better in everyday life – to receive confirmation of change; (v) Opportunity horizons – to change hope for the future.

Ethical considerations

The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and they provided their consent to participate in the study. The respondents' right to integrity entailed that they were treated and described confidentially. Consequently, the participants are referred to in this article as D1, D2, D3, and so on. In summary, the study follows the ethical requirements to which research in the humanities and social sciences are subject (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

Results

Our results are presented in terms of five themes regarding the participants' experiences of the Life-knowledge and Creative courses and how these courses influenced them with respect to their recovery, rehabilitation, and their achieving a changed self-image.

A meaningful social context – to undergo change with others

Most of the participants reported that they had previously been isolated at home without socialising with other people for several years before they enrolled in the Folk High School courses. What was apparent in the interviews with the participants was that most of them had experienced (for the first time in several years) that they had become part of a meaningful social context when they enrolled in the Folk High School courses. This is apparent in the following extract:

> *I've been at home for many years because of mental illness…just this thing of having a social context outside home…that you are*

> *someone…it gives you a little better self-confidence…just getting out…and there is a very welcoming atmosphere…we are all different ages, but still there's a community…irrespective of the different types of people and ages. (D7)*

Meeting with other people who are in a similar life situation and with whom one can feel a connection and sense of community was experienced by the participants as something positive and safe. Several participants reported that the new, meaningful social context was a positive influence on their whole identity. For the first time in a long time, they felt they were someone in a context with other people:

> *All of a sudden, I was in…a social context. It was really lovely…I felt good being here. Self-awareness and a context…of course, this school has contributed a lot to…or those courses…because when you end up on sick leave…exhausted…then you lose a lot of your identity. You lose your professional role…perhaps you lose a lot of friends…lots of things happen and this drags on your self-confidence and self-awareness, of course…then you end up being isolated…you don't have the energy to do anything, and you don't have a social life any longer. When you start here, you get some of that back. (D14)*

A meaningful social context also involves the experience of being seen, your existence is confirmed, and you are even missed by others:

> *Instead of going into a constant decline…and there were a few times when I didn't attend because I didn't have the energy to do so…and then they had someone call and send SMS messages and ask where I was…so it became a totally different thing when you realise that you had people who wanted you there. If you don't come, then there are people who ask…people who wonder…people who care. (D21)*

Self-awareness via non-violent communication – to change one's self-image

The participants reported that they had poor self-confidence, a negative self-awareness, and a lack of self-understanding when they initially enrolled in the courses. Most of the participants stated that the courses had helped them the most in the area of constructing a perspective of themselves where they had become more conscious of their feelings and needs:

> *I'm a bit more comfortable with myself now [...] I have a better self-awareness...especially since I've got the tools to find out how I feel or what I need. (D4)*
>
> *It has helped me because I must find ways to understand myself...I feel that I've learnt a lot. I understand myself in another way today compared to earlier. (D2)*
>
> *I've realised that I can cope with more than I thought. To strengthen my self-confidence. Dare to believe in yourself more [...] I already feel that I've coped with more than I could've previously thought or imagined. I've discovered in myself that I dare to speak in front of a group when I don't feel forced to...you practice, of course, and you realise things about yourself. You think differently now. (D9)*

This new self-understanding, and development of better self-confidence, as described by the participants, indicates that they dared to do more and believed in themselves and their abilities. One component of the courses that the participants claimed had helped them with this improvement was *non-violent communication*. In this component, the concept of 'self-consciousness' is central. The participants described how their self-consciousness had increased as a result of participating in these activities:

> *To understand why I have poor concentration...because if you don't even understand that, then you feel almost stupid. I now understand that I must rest...I understand why I am what I am, so it's much easier [...] What's been good is that they have conversation groups with non-violent communication...they've really got me to see...what my needs are...why I behave this way...or what I actually need to do. To take yourself seriously...that your needs are important and you perhaps don't know what needs you have...if you are angry, then there's, of course, a need behind it. (D3)*
>
> *You learn...you get tools to think with [...] so that you're able to come back...it's healing...you see patterns in yourself. You might perhaps end up in a line of thought which isn't good for you. It's a big thing to dare to do things which you wouldn't have dared to do in another*

> *context […] This is something that I've forgotten about on my life journey. To ask yourself: What do you need right now? (D14)*

Many participants also experienced that their increased self-awareness had contributed to them not being so hard on themselves. Instead, they could clearly see what strengths they possessed:

> *I thought that the non-violent communication was really good because it taught me a lot about how you interpret signals from others and how you deal with your own emotions. […] To not tell yourself that you are completely nuts or to be mean towards yourself […] I hadn't thought about that or known about that before…that the body is influenced in the same way as if you're to tell me that I'm stupid…I say the same thing to myself, so then my body reacts in the same way…and this is like a learnt behaviour […] I've benefitted from not scolding myself so much anymore…and I've also benefitted from thinking that I do certain things correctly. (D1)*

> *To understand what went wrong and then try to prevent it from happening again. Now, I have the energy to do those things which I have problems with…that you perhaps view everything as being so negative…it was also like a switch was tripped…you often focus on the wrong things, of course…but you never focus on what you've managed to do. It's like a new way of thinking that I learned here. (D11)*

Creating as rehabilitation – change through aesthetic learning processes

Several participants stated that the activities where they created something had a calming and rehabilitating effect on them:

> *It's also really rehabilitating just to work with clay to create…in itself, it's rehabilitating, you know. (D15)*

> *Went to medical rehab at [XXXX] and it wasn't much help…but the creative course helped a lot…it contributed a great deal to my medical rehabilitation. (D14)*

Two other participants related how the creative activities that they were engaged in were relaxing, which made them feel good and contributed to their recovery:

> *Since I started, I've felt happy being here…this particular course I also felt it would be a good fit because I've been drawing and painting since I was small…and I always thought that it was really great and really relaxing…that there's a course that's aimed at recovery. (D4)*

> *I don't view myself as a creative person, but I absolutely understand what it can do for recovery now…for example, with clay or painting…you get stuck in and enter into some kind of flow which made me feel really good. It's done a lot for how I feel just to do something. (D6)*

Another participant informed us that the creative activities they had engaged in had strengthened their self-confidence and their self-awareness. She now dared to accept new challenges and activities:

> *Sometimes you get a kick out of it. I got a kick from feeling that I'd succeeded with things that I had no idea that I would be able to do…and then you dare to do something else later…it's like a staircase…your self-awareness is built up again.*

> *[…] When you start with the idea that you can't do anything and then you notice – Wow! I can actually do it! It's never too late to learn again and the dare to try something new […] for me, this has been great to dare to do something entirely different…you know, like to completely disconnect from negative patterns and what previously ground you down. Now, I dare to start a project without being terrified of making a mistake. (D13)*

To function better in everyday life – to receive confirmation of change

Participants at the Folk High School follow a time-table for their courses and attend the school several days per week. This structure is experienced as beneficial by many participants since they could establish routines and a structure in their daily lives. Many participants mentioned that their attendance at the courses became a kind of duty, which, notably, prevented them from staying at home and sleeping throughout the week. They became part of a context at school which was vital to them. Having demands placed on them for the first time in a long time was something they aspired to live up to:

> *If you have nowhere to go to and no duty…duty is perhaps the wrong word…but no context. If you already feel that it's pretty meaningless to carry on living, well it becomes even more meaningless if you don't have anything…like, why should I get up…I've nowhere to be…then you can sleep for the whole day. (D20)*

By practising and getting used to coping with new structures and routines when one has been home alone, without a job, for a long time was described by the participants as the first significant challenge:

> *I've worked on being on time and attending…it's just three days a week but it feels burdensome anyway because I still feel tired all the time…but it's gotten better…those days when I don't have class, I lose all the routines all at once…if you don't do anything, you destroy the whole day…but when I attend the course, I'm forced to have routines and function and get started…and force myself to meet people. […] I've started to sleep well, and so I feel very proud about that…and happy because I've got a good daily rhythm and I don't come late every day. (D8)*

Several participants reported that because they had entered into a meaningful social context and had acquired routines and structure in their lives, it became easier for them to interact with other people in their daily lives in society:

> *I feel more comfortable in all possible contexts…just going out shopping could've been paralysing before…to interact with people…was a nightmare. But today, I go out and meet people… that's really cool…to get to know new people. I've totally got back my passion for trying to understand how people function…and try to care about others and help out…and be involved. I've lost so much…you forget what it's like to be human when you aren't one for so long. So to get back part of yourself which you valued so very much when you were younger…it feels like you get back something which you thought you'd lost forever. (D21)*

Other participants stated that everyday activities and their family life had improved after attending the Folk High School courses for some time:

> *The big difference for me doesn't actually have to do with work because I'm not ready for vocational training…but with me being*

> *actually able to do the laundry at home…make sure that the kids are fed and get out of bed in the morning. My husband can go off and lecture…he does not need to be at home and do everything. This makes a huge difference for life at home. (D15)*

Opportunity horizons – to change hope for the future

The participants expressed a sense of resignation towards what they perceived as *very limited opportunities in life* before they enrolled at the Folk High School. For some of the participants, their life situations had not changed at the time of the interviews. Several other participants reported that the courses had helped them in the present moment and that they now, for the first time in many years, were able to function normally in their daily lives and could perceive new opportunities in the future. Another participant stated that the courses had opened up a new world for her; a world with broadened opportunity horizons:

> *I was on sick leave for six years before and was really just at home and felt really bad…then I started in January… everything was still really difficult…but then things got easier and easier…it felt as if someone had blown new life into me again. Everything we had to do was practical at the school…all the people you got to know. It opened up a world where it was ok to be a bit different…so I started to live again. The people in my surroundings said that too, that I'm a completely different person. So, it meant everything to me. (D18)*

Being isolated at home for many years without being part of a meaningful social context was described by one participant as if he had lost some of his human value. He was able to recover from this negative feeling during his years of study at the Folk High School:

> *I come from quite a long history of being self-isolated during the ages of 15 to 20…then I came out of my shell a little bit when I was around 20 and 21…and then I hid myself away again to the age of 26, approximately. Just being able to come here and be allowed to take your time to become social again and remember how it was to be human…you can forget that when you've been self-isolated for such a long time. Just to be allowed to come here and remember that I'm actually a person besides all the problems I*

> *have…so I'm still a person…and then there's space for that person to emerge again…I thought that that was quite nice. (D20)*

The remarks above illustrate that most of the participants felt that the Folk High School courses had helped them function better in their daily lives and together with other people. The courses helped them come to understand themselves and made them feel better *at that moment*. However, many participants remain somewhat fragile and have devastatingly low levels of self-confidence, which takes a significant amount of time to build up again before they can cope with higher demands within the context of education and work-life. This was apparent for the participants who had completed the courses sometime in the past. A little over half of the participants had enrolled in new courses and activities at the Folk High School; the rest were unemployed, in vocational training, or worked part-time. Many of the participants' plans for the future remain vague and uncertain regarding future opportunities outside the safe environment of the Folk High School:

> *Then I thought, try it…I don't know if it'll work…but to try and get a job…my old job was at a lousy company…then I worked in a care home for the seniors. But I'm a bit tired of providing care itself. I want to work during the day so I can socialise and play games and do fun things with the seniors. And if I don't get that job, then I want to work at a pre-school and see whether I'm happy with that. But I don't believe that I'll be able to cope with working five days a week for the rest of my life. But I have to make a plan and do some vocational training. (D8)*

Some of the participants described somewhat more precise and explicit plans for the future, which included studying different vocational training programs, such as becoming a social pedagog or deacon. One participant related the following:

> *During these past three terms, I've come up with a plan for the future. I'm thinking of applying to the church's foundation course. That's my goal…and, step-by-step, I've decided to become a deacon. In the Swedish Church…it's a very important role…it's a social role to help people and be a contact for conversation…I want to help people who are in some kind of difficulty. (D5)*

Notwithstanding the participants’ sometimes vague and uncertain plans for the future, most of them reported that the courses at the Folk High School had strengthened their self-awareness and had given them hope for a better and more functional life. One of the participants made the following observations:

> *I’m always afraid, you might say, because I always set really high demands on myself…and I know that, in a job, things are different compared to here…you can’t really say ‘I pass’ at a job. Instead, you have to do your work. However, I think that I’ll be able to deal with it better than what I did earlier. I think that I’ll dare to do more. I think so. I wouldn’t say that I dare to do it hundred percent now…it’s not like I’ve gotten better in a second. But I have more hope. And I believe too that when I’ve finished up here, then I believe that I’ll have even more hope. (D9)*

The section above shows how the participants' opportunity horizons have been expanded and that their hopes for the future have been strengthened. However, two of the participants requested an opportunity to be able to work train during the time at the Folk High School. They believe that even if the courses help them to function better right now, they do not give them real preparation to be able to function outside the Folk High School's safe environment.

Discussion

This article has described how education can serve as a process of change and liberation for adult participants with long-term mental illness by referring to the participants’ perspectives and experiences. We have been inspired by the ethnographic methodology and our participation together with the participants has been important in understanding the context that the participants described in the interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Our role as researchers is similar to Schütz's (1944/1976) description of the researcher as a "stranger" in unusual and specific environments. Crucial to data collection is, according to Schutz, the researcher's ability to be accepted by the interviewees. Our participation was also crucial to be able to be accepted by the participants and create trusting relationships that made the interviews possible. During the interviews, we were already known to them, and they felt safe talking to us.

The participants' stories and reports have highlighted the health benefits that are associated with the courses provided by the Folk High School. However, this process is not limited to the classroom and the teaching that takes place there. In fact, it also encompasses the whole of the Folk High School culture and the meaningful social context in which the participants have the opportunity to partake. These components make significant contributions to the improvements that the participants report on, as shown in previous studies (Hedegaard & Hugo, 2020; Hedegaard et al., 2021; Hugo & Hedegaard, 2021). Whilst participants must have access to a professional conversational therapist outside of the school, the educational programs and the school culture at the Folk High School also offer a form of education-based group therapy. During class teaching hours and outside the classroom, the participants can test and apply the lessons they have learnt during the courses in a tolerant atmosphere. In this way, they are able to change *along with other people.*

In addition to the meaningful social context that the Folk High School offers, specific teaching methods and approaches are used for recovery and re-orientation. Using dialogue based on the principles of non-violent communication, liberating processes are created, through which self-consciousness has been allowed to bloom as a foundation for *change in the participant's self-image*. In conjunction with this, creative activities, including image production, drawing, sculpture, painting, paint mixing, and ceramics, are used so that they can try out different materials and techniques. Participants can use what they create to reflect on their feelings, making it easier for them to articulate how they are feeling. Providing the necessary circumstances where participants can learn and understand things about themselves and their respective situations in a somewhat different light than previously also reduces their self-stigma. We thus speak of a *liberating process* (Freire, 1970) where the previous focus on the limiting influence that mental illness has on an individual's opportunities and prospects is successively replaced by a hope that the future has something positive to offer. When the participants feel that their education produces positive results, for example, they begin to function better in their everyday lives with their family and in other social contexts; then self-stigma decreases and feelings of self-confidence increase. When the participant's feelings that (i) they cannot cope with anything and (ii) they are not productive members of society (but are a burden on society, instead) are reduced, this becomes part of the liberating process away from self-stigma and towards a sense of empowerment since they receive *confirmation of change* in their everyday lives. Empowerment provides additional power, control, and self-reliance (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000) and can thereby contribute to believing that the future can change for the better, i.e., *to change towards hope for the future*.

The Folk High School seems to be an educational form that is successful at improving the conditions for groups of participants who are not particularly rich in resources. In addition to cohorts of individuals with high-functioning autism (Hedegaard et al., 2021; Hugo & Hedegaard, 2021) and the seniors (Hedegaard & Hugo, 2020), we can now include people who suffer from mental illness. It should be noted that to "improve conditions" is not equivalent to saying that the participants achieved "health efficiency" (Bremberg, 2016; Leigh, 1983). Half of the participants who had taken the Life-knowledge and Creative courses had remained enrolled at the Folk High School on different courses, and among the other half of the group, we note that only a few had entered into gainful employment, and even then, only on a part-time basis. Regarding the participants who are currently enrolled in the Life-knowledge and Creative courses, their future prospects remain somewhat vague, despite the apparent liberating process that they had experienced. In those cases where specific plans for the future were articulated, it was not uncommon for these plans to be linked to continued studies at the Folk High School. In other words, there is a risk of institutionalization even in this context (Hugo & Hedegaard, 2021). This can be understood in the sense that the liberating process primarily impacts the participants' self-stigma positively as long as this takes place in environments where the participants have experience of not being exposed to social stigma (Goffman, 1963; Link, 1987; Wikman, 2017), either at home or at the Folk High School. Thus, the empowerment process becomes isolated in this regard (Archibald & Wilson, 2011) and as a result of the structure of the present study, characterized by short-termism. The participants do not entertain future life plans that extend beyond the context of the Folk High School, but when examined in the light of their situation before they had enrolled at the Folk High School, the liberating process is still noticeable.

The educational programs that the participants were enrolled in primarily focused on self-stigma. Fortunately, this self-stigma was subject to change for the participants. The social stigma that exists outside the safe environment of the Folk High School (or the home) is more difficult to influence; but with reduced self-stigma, it is increasingly possible that the participants will not be similarly negatively influenced by social stigma as they were in the past. In other words, it seems that the first step in the process of empowerment with its associated components of power, control, and self-reliance (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000) is concentrated on the present. Furthermore, it is primarily the direct health effects (in combination with new ways of thinking about oneself) that the educational courses have achieved thus far. Regarding the indirect health effects (Bremberg, 2016; Leigh, 1983), the Life-knowledge and Creative courses at the Folk High School which are aimed at people with mental illness hardly contribute to access to improved working conditions or a higher social status in the near future. Instead, we note that a liberating process of empowerment only begins in the educational courses, where resources for dealing with daily life and looking after themselves are made accessible to participants. Exactly how this liberating process of empowerment develops in the future is difficult to predict, but it is quite clear that the participants received several new tools that they can use to maintain power, control, and self-reliance, and thereby resist self-stigma.

Conclusion and future research

This article has focused on the Swedish Folk High School system and its role in how adults with long-term mental illnesses can recover and achieve increased participation in society and social life. Our study concludes that the Folk High School environment and the educational courses can contribute to an increased sense of well-being in the present. The participants described that, in the safe and meaningful social context which the Folk High School environment instantiates, their self-awareness was strengthened and that they had more trust in their abilities, experienced reduced levels of self-stigma, and entertained hope for a better future. The participants reported that a liberating process of change had begun in their lives which entailed “remembering how it is to be human” after years of being isolated from meaningful social contexts. The liberating process of change made resources available to the participants that allowed them to function more effectively in their everyday lives. The process had also increased the participants’ sense of empowerment so that in the future, they could practise power, control, and self-reliance in multiple contexts that extend beyond the home and the Folk High School environment. Future research in this area should thus shed light on the next step in the process of change and liberation described in this article. Such research would examine what educational programs and support structures can support the rehabilitation/habilitation of individuals so that they can enjoy a functional work-life and/or continue their studies outside the Folk High School, where the components of empowerment and resistance to self-stigma are exposed to different challenges. In this respect, a longitudinal study that follows educational programs aimed at individuals who lack resources and whose health has already suffered because of this, but also the subsequent transition to work, would be particularly interesting.

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Book Review

Justice and the politics of difference

Iris Marion Young
Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2011
286 pages

Reviewed by Dr Cheryl Ryan
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Deakin University, Victoria

The first edition of this book was published in 1990. This is the 2011 edition with a new foreword by Danielle Allen. The author, Iris Marion Young, died in 2006 aged 57 years. From 2000 to 2006, Iris Young was Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. She was an American political theorist and socialist feminist. Allen writes: '… Young engaged social ontology, epistemology, social psychology, feminist theory, critical theory, and discourse theory as well as political philosophy in what is still a dazzling display' (p.ix). My interest in this book stretches back to 2004 when I was introduced to her work. My copy of her 1990 edition has a well-worn cover, penciled notes in some margins, and sticky-note tags: the vestiges of regular use.

The focus of Iris Young's research and writing over the years was on social difference, justice, and inequality beyond the distribution of material goods to one that sought to explicate the invidious interplay of the social, the personal, and the political, and conceptions of domination and oppression. Reflecting on the twenty-first century, contemporary societies, and disruptive events, some of Iris Young's arguments present an idealized or visionary, or perhaps a hopeful, notion of individuals, institutions, and an egalitarian society. She admits to making assumptions that others might not agree with. For example equality for all is a 'moral value'; 'deep [societal] injustices' require 'institutional changes'; 'structures of domination wrongfully pervade our society' (p.14). A particular feature of her work centres on five forms of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence – that stand the test of time.

The book comprises eight chapters. The Introduction gives the reader clear insights into Iris Young's conception of political philosophy and notions of justice. Her definition of politics comprises 'institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decisionmaking' (p.9). Feminism and her commitment to and participation in social movements are central to Iris Young's work in this field. Her involvement in social groups provided the impetus and the lens through which to rethink and rework the concepts of difference, oppression, and (in)justice.

The first chapter establishes the premise of Iris Young's argument and work in this field, providing a compelling critique of the distributive paradigm with reference to Rawl's (1971) distribution of "rights and duties" (p.25), for instance, and questioning what it means to distribute a right. She argues the inherent (in)justices of institutional contexts and structures responsible for distributing material resources, power, income, and wealth, are often taken for granted and not evaluated. Iris Young draws on other theorists – Agnes Heller (1987), Charles Taylor (1985), and Seyla Benhabib (1986) – in defining injustice in terms of domination and oppression.

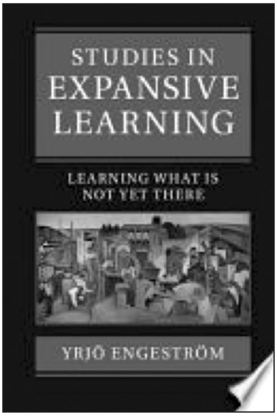
This provides the basis for chapter two and the five 'faces' of oppression. Iris Young's 'enabling conception of justice' (p.39) sees injustice in terms of domination and oppression. She begins the chapter with a critical discussion of oppression with reference to social movements and groups from the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, and proposes a structural conception of oppression. She argues it is not possible to have one definition of oppression, given the multiple factors at play. Instead, she offers the five faces as a means of capturing the essence of oppression. The first three ‘faces’ – exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness – reflect the institutional and structural power relations that determine people’s access to and participation in society’s social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Cultural imperialism encompasses the impact of society’s dominant discourses and meanings that establish the norms to define who belongs or not, who is visible or invisible, who is “Other”. Iris Young quotes Du Bois’ (1969, p.45) “double consciousness” that involves “… always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p.60). Her work with the fifth face of oppression, violence, is based not so much on ‘the particular acts [of violence], but rather ‘the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable’ (p.61). She describes violence as a social practice; a ‘social given that everyone knows happens and will happen again’ (p.62). Iris Young justifies her application of the five faces of oppression to groups to enable comparisons of oppressions, without essentializing them or declaring one more significant than another.

In chapter three the premise of Iris Young’s argument hinges on the nexus between democracy and social justice, and the realization of this through participation in democratic processes and consultation. She focuses on the welfare capitalist society as the social context for further critiques of the distributive paradigm and (in)justices. She argues that the ‘depoliticization of public policy development and decision making’ removed from the public domain obscures the ‘institutional rules, practices, and social relations’ that perpetuate domination and oppression and therefore inhibit the possibility of challenge and change (p.75). Reference to the welfare capitalist society reflects the era of Iris Young’s writing, but parallels can be drawn to the depoliticization and imperviousness of structures of policy and decision making in today’s neoliberal society.

Chapters four, five and six extend discussions on aspects of cultural imperialism. Iris Young argues, ‘that modern political theory and practice wrongly universalize dominant group perspectives’ (p.65). For instance, chapter four explores the ‘ideal of impartiality’ (p.96) in institutions, structures, and processes. Impartiality denies or constrains difference through the creation of universal rules and principles that assume and treat everyone in the same way. In chapter five, Iris Young focuses on the body and identity and the ways in which the categorization of bodies according to a “normative gaze” ‘constructs some kinds of bodies as ugly, disgusting, or degenerate’ (p.11). There is much in this chapter to consider and apply to contemporary contexts with regards to ageism, sexism, racism, unconscious fears, and consciousness raising. Then chapter six explores social movements and difference including a call to alter the meaning of difference from one that denotes ‘absolute otherness’ (p.170) to an understanding of difference as ‘relational’ with a contextualized, encompassing, and inclusive notion of difference (p.171), one that recognizes and accepts group differences.

Chapters seven and eight focus on the faces of exploitation and powerlessness. Within the context of institutions, workplaces, and education. Iris Young explores assumptions that underlie notions of merit and affirmative action. Of particular note are the taken for granted hierarchical divisions of labour and associated inequities, and the interplay of competition, merit, and the measurement of performance. In the final chapter, she critiques the duality of individualism and community. She explores the notion of an ‘ideal community’ and depicts ‘an ideal city life’, one that reflects ‘a being together of strangers in openness to group difference’ (p.256). Iris Young views ideals as integral to emancipatory politics, dislodging existing assumptions of structures, institutions, and social relations and creating opportunities for critique and exploration of alternatives.

Iris Young’s theoretical and philosophical contributions to this field are far-sighted and enduring and are touchpoints for examining contemporary structures, institutions, and social relations. This book is an excellent resource for students, researchers, lecturers, and adult educators exploring conceptions of power and social relations, domination, oppression, (in)justices, social justice, and the politics of difference across numerous fields and disciplines.



Book Review

Studies in expansive learning: Learning what is not yet there

Yrjö Engeström
Cambridge University Press, 2016
288 pages

Reviewed by Dr Stuart Hawken
Faculty of Arts and Education
Deakin University

The book's author, Professor Yrjö Engeström, is the Director of the Centre for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE) at the University of Helsinki. He is widely known for the development of what is known as third generation Cultural Historic Activity Theory (CHAT) and the Theory of Expansive Learning. According to Google Scholar, his seminal book which explains the theories, *Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research* (Engeström 1987, reprint 2015) has been cited in 13976 pieces of scholarly writing.

This book under review, *Studies in Expansive Learning: Learning What Is Not Yet There*, consists of ten journal articles either authored or co-authored by Engeström. It is a very useful companion to *Learning* *by Expanding* as it adds knowledge of Expansive Learning in action through practical examples of empirical research designed to initiate transformation in organisations. Engeström writes:

> *A complex theory is made alive by its empirical applications and further conceptual and methodological developments. This book presents a representative set of such work which I have conducted together with my colleagues and students. It might be read and used as a companion volume and substantive extension to the new edition of Learning by Expanding (2016:vii).*

I was drawn to CHAT and Expansive Learning as a theoretical lens for my PhD thesis *Innovative Applied Learning for School Completion: An Activity Theory Perspective* (Hawken 2019) by my supervisor at Deakin University, Professor Damian Blake. The theories provided a structure for me to analyse the learning action in my research into an alternative, sports-based education provider for senior high school students. I was able to analyse the development of the learning model and its reception by education bureaucrats through the eyes of the school founders, management and teachers, and the program's hands-on applied learning through the eyes of the students, parents and other stakeholders. I was fortunate in 2013 to attend a summer school at CRADLE in Helsinki for a three-week workshop with Professor Engeström and other notable CRADLE scholars, some of whom are co-authors of the papers in this book. The experience has had a lasting effect on me. I was also fortunate to meet him and hear him speak at two later conferences, as well as read most of his research writing. He has certainly been an inspiration to my thinking about learning, not just classroom learning but learning in the wider world of community and social organisations and business.

CHAT and Expansive Learning Theory are built on early twentieth century research into learning in the Soviet Union by Lev Vygotsky and colleagues but did not reach the West until the late 1960s. Engeström reconceptualised the findings of that early research to develop his theories as a practical way to instigate social and workplace change. In the 2015 edition of *Learning by Expanding* he cited his motivations for developing CHAT and Expansive Learning Theory. He wanted to find a new way to understand cognition and learning that was not isolated from the cultural context. To do this, he set out to develop a research methodology based on practical, empirical studies rather than those based on the traditional means of observation and analysis. Lastly, he believed that ‘research needs to be actively involved in making the world better’ (p xiii) and wanted to develop a practical framework to achieve that goal.

With colleagues at the University of Helsinki, he developed a methodology initially named Developmental Work Research (DWR) ‘for applying activity theory and the theory of expansive learning in the world of work, technology, and organisations’ (Engeström, 2015: xiii). DWR became commonly known as the Change Laboratory (CL) in the mid-1990s.

At the 2013 Helsinki Summer School, I was introduced to the CL methodology of ‘formative interventions’ and observed the process in action in a range of organisations. I saw first-hand some of the research written in this book and met some of the co-authors and researchers. I was also introduced to some of the papers that are included in the book and which subsequently I cited quite extensively in my thesis. The book comprises three sections: Part One – Setting the Stage; Part Two – Elaborations and Applications; and Part Three – Future Perspectives.

Part One provides information that places Expansive Learning in the learning sciences and goes some way to explaining Activity Theory and Expansive learning. The first chapter explains Activity Theory and its conceptualisation as a triangle graphic that provides a guide to examine the ebbs and flows in any form of human activity, and between different activities. It then explains the role of challenges or problems (contradictions) to inspire new learning or new ways of doing things. The second paper introduces and discusses some other theories of learning, then introduces the expansive learning cycle and the structure and process of Change Laboratory interventions. I found the third paper particularly helpful in my understanding of formative interventions and expansive learning. It provides an extensive explanation of how expansive learning is manifested and depicts examples of different Change Laboratory interventions.

Part Two includes chapters four to eight and contains in-depth empirical studies of the Change Laboratory in action in organisational settings including a bank, a school, a medical centre, a hospital, a hi-tech manufacturing company, and a library. Each of these brings groups of stakeholders together in a workshop scenario where a series of discussions are promoted and recorded by CRADLE researchers to collectively create a new and better way of working or operating.

I was able to meet the researchers who were involved in the library project. It was an attempt to improve the University of Helsinki's library services for twenty-first century students. The three existing libraries were grouped into one, with the construction of a new modern building. Emphasis was given to the inclusion of digital technologies and facilitating research groups in library services. The new library is magnificent. I had the opportunity to speak to the researchers and library stakeholders to learn how they went through the change process to determine a new set of goals and procedures. There were many hurdles along the way, which is the same for most change labs. It was interesting to read each of the contexts and their findings. These almost provide a how-to guide to conducting a Change Laboratory intervention.

In Chapters Nine and Ten (Part Three) the author looks to the future. How interventions can be employed in major new challenges and possibilities arising from rapidly spreading 'wildfire' activities such as global warming or disaster relief. He looks at how the methodology of formative interventions aimed at triggering and supporting expansive learning can be employed and improved to create positive change in society. The ongoing expansion in CHAT research and thinking is clearly within the spirit of 'creating something new together' or 'learning what is not yet there'.

The appeal for me is that while I found a theoretical framework on which to base my research analysis, it is not 'set in concrete'. There is flexibility in CHAT and Expansive Learning applications according to context. There is always the possibility of adding something new. This book attests to that and opens a world of possibilities for future learning in organisations and workplaces. This book is an excellent resource for researchers and practitioners in education and community settings. It offers a toolkit to help with interventions in workplaces, schools, and communities.

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