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From practice

Book reviews

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From the Editor's desk

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

We commence the April editorial of the journal with a tribute to the distinguished Professor, John Field, who recently died unexpectedly. Professor Field was a well-known and a highly respected figure in the field of adult and lifelong learning. His contributions to the scholarship and discipline of adult learning are monumental, and it's important for AJAL to mark his passing. Professor Sir Allan Tucket recently wrote a tribute to him, which AJAL has gratefully reproduced in full here.

Vale Professor John Field written by Professor, Sir Allan Tuckett.

John Field's sudden and untimely death is a major loss to the adult learning movement, and for me the loss of a dear colleague and friend. He brought warmth, generosity and curiosity to his dealings with everyone – As the flood of tributes on social media following his death testify, John was widely loved and respected by adult education academics and practitioners in the countries of the UK and across the world.

John was a distinguished academic and adult educator who made a very significant contribution to scholarship, through his own writing and collaborations, and through tireless work in supporting the development of the field, inside and outside universities.

He wrote or edited 17 books; had 100 or so peer reviewed journal articles and another 100 chapters, alongside a multitude of papers, reports, pamphlets and occasional pieces in the press.

He sat on a plethora of university committees, played a lead role in research assessment exercises, advised other universities across the globe on lifelong learning. He examined multiple theses in a wide variety of international universities, and sat on editorial committees,

All with a wry smile.

John had a significant impact in policy advocacy to government in the UK and internationally.

He was a member of the Fryer commission advising the 1997 Labour Government; a commissioner on the national independent inquiry into lifelong learning led by Tom Schuller 10 years later; seconded to government for the foresight study on Mental Capital and Well Being in 2008, and again worked with the 2016 Foresight project on skills and lifelong learning.

Internationally he worked with OECD, with the EU and with UNESCO where he was one of the writers of the 4th Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, and an adviser more widely.

His contributions were challenging and sympathetic. John was occasionally contrarian wary of a too comfortable consensus, sniffing out important if inconvenient evidence, but always supportive overall. As a teacher, mentor, supervisor, examiner or evaluator he could make complex ideas accessible, and consistently brought the happy combination of serious intellectual rigour alongside the ability to give confidence and agency to others.

John was fired by a strong sense of social justice, and a commitment to international solidarity.

I met him first in 1984 during the Miners' Strike, when we were both seeking ways that adult education could more effectively support working class men and women, and from 1988 when I was at NIACE he was adviser mentor or project leader for our work in seeking more and different chances for people failed by the system. Later he played the same role with Scotland's Learning Partnership.

Internationally he worked hard at the fall of the Berlin Wall to

strengthen solidarity with scholars in the old Soviet Bloc countries, and had long term alliances in Germany, as well as in Ireland.

John had a glittering career – first at Northern College, the Ruskin of the North, then Warwick – working with Chris Duke and Tom Schuller to set up a distinguished continuing education department, then Bradford to head a department; Ulster and a chair, back to Warwick and the first professorship in lifelong learning. Finally, to Stirling, where for 6 years he was Deputy Principal.

He was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2006 by the Open University. In 2014 he was inducted into the International Hall of Fame of adult educators. He was visiting professor at Cologne, Birkbeck, Warwick, Wolverhampton and was Emeritus Professor at Stirling when he died.

His books, on unemployed adults, education and the state; on lifelong learning in changing times, on social capital, on mental well being, on men's work camps are all impressive, and the core of his international reputation. But I loved the range of his curiosity – his exploration of the Lincolnshire Bat Observation Society, Men's Sheds, MOOCs, his love of twitter, his wonderful blog. He was a serious academic, but more importantly he was great fun.

April 2024 Edition editorial

The April edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) features refereed journal articles on various topics, including multiliteracies and adult learning in the arts, First Nation People cultural heritage work in the Budj Bim cultural landscape in south-western Victoria, successfully supporting students who are parents and returning to study, professional development and Vocational Education and Training (VET) practitioners and empowerment initiatives for Saudi women through VET. Additionally, the non-refereed or practice-based based articles from the field offer reflections on adult learning practices and processes throughout the journey of PhD research supervision.

This edition commences with an article by Susan Holloway and Patti Gouthro titled "Multimodal adult learning through arts-based organisations". The article presents a national study on arts-based adult education organisations in Canada drawing on the philosophical framework of multiliteracies. A multiliteracies approach fosters cultural

and linguistic diversity, encouraging adults to thrive in adult learning literacy practices. The paper draws on a methodology of multiple case studies and constructivist grounded theory. It reveals a range of sites for literacy education, such as an art gallery, a museum and a chamber music orchestra. The importance of using creativity approaches in education has been noted in previous research, such as Dan Harris's (2014), work on creativity and education and in the public pedagogies literature of Jennifer Sandlin (2010) and others, noting the richness in its application and outcomes for learners, communities and society more broadly. As the authors observe, the research findings are considerable: "arts-based approaches can infuse the work of adult educators to engage adult learners in inclusive pedagogy and active citizenship".

The article by Tony Brown, titled "Recognising the Budj Bim cultural landscape as World Heritage: How a socio-material approach bridged the tangible-intangible heritage gap", outlines Indigenous-led heritage work that integrates political struggle, advocacy and history work in the processes of knowledge creation. Acknowledging Indigenous '*ways of knowing*' and some 60,000 years of knowledge regarding land conservation, protection and management of the country is crucial. In recognition of the significant work, in 2019, the Budj Bim cultural landscape was listed on the World Heritage Register. It is a significant achievement for the Gunditjmara People, who regained control of their traditional lands and recognition of the unbroken connection with the and extending back many years. As Brown notes, "It undermines a longstanding distinction made in heritage assessment between tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) categories by instead seeing these as interdependent and 'constitutive entanglements' of everyday life". This article will be of great interest to AJAL readers, particularly those interested in the struggle for self-determination and land rights of Australian First Nations People.

Christopher Ward & Piper Rodd's paper, titled "PD: a professional deterrence? The financial cost and time commitment of professional development for VET practitioners in Western Australia", examines VET practitioner's professional development activities. The Australian VET Industry requires teachers to keep abreast of current practices and policy contexts in vocational education. With the VET system currently teaching more than four million students annually, the importance of maintaining a highly knowledgeable, skilled, and qualified sector cannot

be underestimated. The study tracked the professional learning activities of thirty teachers in the VET sector in Western Australia, which were primarily largely self-funded. The authors use human capital theory to interpret the data and draw the conclusion that the practitioners did not receive a significant return on their self-investment for the personally incurred cost of professional development. The authors argue that "...acts as a deterrent to working as a VET practitioner which has ramifications for training provider operational efficiency, and the wider VET sector".

The paper draws on data to reveal the tensions and contradictions between what the workforce is paid, the impact and the financial pressure on WA VET staff who self-fund their professional development in order to remain in the workforce. This study's findings are important in the current context of skill shortages in the VET workforce.

The paper "Empowering Saudi women through vocational skills" by Sarah Alajlan examines adult learning in a community setting for women in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to discover the extent to which Saudi women were empowered through the vocational skills taught at educated neighbourhood programs during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. Aligned with the Saudi Vision 2030, the government encourages women to participate in the workforce, to address labour shortages and build the country's economy and society. The Learning Neighbourhood Program was first established in 2006, provides free courses in personal interest learning, computers, crafts, as well as literacy and employability skills. Whilst fifty per cent of Saudi women graduate from universities, only twenty-two percent of women participate in the workforce. The Learning Neighbourhood Program provides literacy, vocations, life and self-awareness skills and knowledge. As the author notes:

"These programmes were designed to extend the concept of adult education from literacy to lifelong learning, preparing individuals, especially women who are less fortunate in terms of education, to contribute to society's development; qualifying women for the labour market; providing women with the necessary skills to obtain financial self-sufficiency and to be independent learners; and enriching the work culture for women".

The Saudi Learning Neighbourhood Program is similar to the

personal interest learning that occurs in Australian Neighbourhood Houses, which have been widely cited as empowering for women and instrumental on participant opportunities for volunteering, work, further study and the health and well-being of participants (See Harrison, 2018, for example). The study results revealed Saudi women were empowered with the vocational skills acquired in educated-neighborhood programs. The research uncovered many of the challenges Saudi women faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation, coping difficulties, discontinued activities, safety precautions, and access to healthcare.

Our final refereed article for the April edition is titled "Supporting students who are parents to succeed in Australian higher education", by Szalkowicz Giovanna and Lisa Andrewartha.

The article draws on empirical research in an Australian university and uncovers some of the struggles that students who are parents face while studying in higher education. The authors argue that parents who are students are largely "invisible" in universities, and little is known about the challenges they encounter. However, the authors contend that acknowledging their struggles is crucial and should be acknowledged in university strategic plans and access and equity policy to support underrepresented and first-in-family students. The analysis for this interpretative research draws on eighteen semi-structured interviews. The findings include an analysis of these parents' motivations for studying, their self-identified strengths, and the participant's perceived challenges to success.

Practitioner papers

The practitioner-based section of the journal engages with voices from the field reflecting on current practices in adult learning education. Barry Elsey's paper "Advising senior management leaders on the doctoral research journey by applying traditional adult learning practices for industry contexts". The paper eloquently reflects and explores the dialogical learning processes, emphasising learner-centredness that occurs in the higher degree by research space in the process of PhD supervision. Often underexamined in adult learning literature, supervision in the PhD process is often likened to an apprenticeship model based on master and practitioner ways

of 'knowing and doing' or "front-end loading" teaching and learning. Elsey's paper reveals a contemporary approach PhD supervision, which is holistic, drawing on the expertise of the individual student and situating the knowledge development in the current workplace or industry setting under investigation. Elsey claims his ideas about adult learning and his background in liberal arts education helped to shape his practices. He suggests the PhD process resembles a shared mutual learning journey, where both the supervisor and PhD candidate learn in the engagement process.

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Multimodal adult learning through arts-based organisations

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Funded by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant, this national study examines arts-based adult education organizations involved in dance, music, drama, and visual arts with a philosophical perspective aligned with a multiliteracies theoretical framework. Multiliteracies considers how cultural and linguistic diversity must be fostered to encourage adults to thrive in all learning environments and recognizes that multimodality provides an expanded way to engage in literacy practices. Utilizing Carey Jewitt's four theoretical tenets to characterize multimodality serves to structure the analytical framework for the findings and discussion of this paper. Multiple case studies and constructivist grounded theory were used for the methodology. Some of the sites discussed in this paper include an art gallery; an immigration museum; and a chamber music organization that offers interactive performances. Participants included adult educators and learners who had options around face-

to-face interviews; observations; document analysis of lesson plans or exemplars; or secondary data analysis of original film footage shot in these spaces. This research has found that arts-based approaches can infuse the work of adult educators to engage adult learners in inclusive pedagogy and active citizenship.

Keywords: *adult education, arts-based learning, multiliteracies, multimodality, inclusion and citizenship, community-based learning*

Hearing the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning, we tell stories.

Robert Kroetsch, 1989, p. 64

Introduction

Stories help us to make sense of the world. Our narratives can come from many different sources and are found in a broad range of artistic forms that can fuel the imaginative responses of adult learners to the broader world. Funded by a Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) grant, this national study included multiple case studies of arts-based adult education organisations involved in dance, music, drama, and visual arts with a philosophical perspective aligned with a multiliteracies theoretical framework. Multiliteracies consider how cultural and linguistic diversity must be fostered to encourage adults to thrive in all learning environments and recognize that multimodality provides an expanded way to engage in creative literacy practices.

The paper begins with an assessment of the value of using arts-based learning in adult education contexts to foster literacy, citizenship, and inclusion, provides a short discussion of the theoretical framework, and then overviews the research study. Constructivist grounded theory was used for the methodology. The findings and discussion section has been structured using Carey Jewitt's (2017) four theoretical tenets to characterize multimodality. This research study represents empirical findings from two provinces within the Canadian context. The insights

are transferable to other global contexts in posing questions about how to build capacities for democratic and inclusive approaches to learning literacy.

Literature review

Arts-based approaches can delve into challenging issues such as inequities or discrimination to foster learning and to create opportunities for adult learning within civil society. Butterwick and Selman (2020) argue that participatory arts may be used "as a way of contributing to community ownership, inclusive critical analysis, coalition, and resilience" (p. 35). Similarly, Brann-Barrett's (2011) work with young adults using photo narratives explores issues of identity and citizenship engagement in poorer, rural communities.

Joe Norris (2011) builds on a First Nations circle metaphor to explore the value of the arts in education, noting that there are benefits in having students explore different forms in art, even though they often lack skill and expertise in areas such as writing poetry or performing in live theatre. He states that "we must be pedagogically patient as we witness our students experimenting with form as they create meaning for themselves and others. Through exposure, they are moving towards the arts as dynamic forms of expression" (p. 5). Gaining the ability to articulate or investigate different meaning perspectives through various forms in the arts is valuable learning.

Arts-based learning provides a strong foundation for adult educators and learners to deepen their engagement with literacy and think more broadly about what multimodality might look like through a creative lens. In local communities, arts-based learning provides opportunities to explore complex issues during this time of ecological, economic, social, and cultural change. This type of learning can tap into adults' imaginations in ways that more straightforward, traditional teaching may not achieve. Butterwick and Roy (2018) note that "artistic and creative expression, thoughtfully carried out, can enliven adult learning, promote risk taking and empathy for others, and move toward relations of solidarity (p. 3). Our usual ways of thinking can be disrupted when engaging in art that invites us to think and feel about the world in ways we have perhaps previously not considered. In neoliberal times, which privilege economic growth and advantage certain social and historical

groups who benefit from the status quo, artistic engagement provides a way to articulate alternative perspectives.

Literacy, the ability to communicate effectively, can be learned through artistic approaches to explore the cultural mores, social relations, and personal emotions of adults. As Lankshear (2011) writes, adult educators of literacy are "acutely aware of the power of literacy teaching as a shaper of consciousness" (p. 23). Multiliteracies is like New Literacy Studies in defining literacies from a sociocultural perspective that recognizes language as socially situated and understands discourses are forms of power. Where multiliteracies might enrich our thinking around lifelong learning is in its consideration for how multimodality provides a range of opportunities to foster learning. Arts-based approaches can suffuse the work of adult educators to move adult learning beyond didactic pedagogies (Clover, 2018; Holloway & Qaisi, 2022; Jarvis & Gouthro, 2015).

Theoretical framework

We draw upon multiliteracies to deepen our analysis of ways in which community arts-based learning contributes to broadening adult learners' ability to drive positive change. As we (Gouthro & Holloway, 2015) have argued elsewhere, "as leaders themselves, educators need to think theoretically about the rationalization for why it is important for them to choose curriculum material that deeply engages in larger social issues, such as feminism, power, identity, and citizenship" (p. 253). Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) are similar in their premises to New Literacy Studies (Tett et al., 2012); the latter is better known in the fields of adult education/lifelong learning. Both theories contend that language is always a socially situated, fluid practice informed by larger cultural and political systems that influence how literacy is used in communities as well as shaped through policies. Street (2003) observes that the "original inspiration" for New Literacy Studies was to explore "what literacy events and practices mean to users in different cultural and social contexts" (p 87).

Multiliteracies offer a distinct emphasis on multimodality, which provides further tools to analyse expanded forms of literacy. Multimodality refers to the combination of modes to allow for more powerful ways to communicate. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) argue that

there is an "increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on" (p. 5). For instance, multimodality is evident when an adult learner creates a video using facial expressions and movement (gestural mode) combined with costumes (tactile and visual modes) as well as music (audio mode) to express themselves. Different kinds of modality are often used in arts-based approaches in adult education, that may incorporate, for instance, elements of dance, painting, music, or poetry. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) claim that "to find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy" (p. 6). Multiliteracies perspectives also value cultural and linguistic diversity and affirm learners' identities by using an assets-based approach. Cope and Kalantzis (2020) view agency "as always there, in and through meanings made in text, image, space, object, body, sounds, and speech" (p. 174). Agency and identity can be manifested through multimodal meaning-making. Multiliteracies help provide a rationale for the benefits of using arts-based approaches in a range of different adult learning contexts.

Multiliteracies, like critical literacy, explore the role of personal agency alongside a critical examination of larger historical, systemic barriers. As Janks (2010) contends, "issues of access and diversity are tied to issues of power; to questions of domination and subordination; to processes of legitimation and negation, of inclusion and exclusion" (p. 12). She questions how adult learners may be viewed from a deficit perspective and argues that a critical approach to literacy provides analytical tools to identify hegemonic practices (2010, p. 8-10). hooks (1994) recalls how troubling she found poet Adrienne Rich's observation that "This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you" (p. 169). In recognizing the brutal effects of being forced to absorb the dominant language of colonizers, hooks also recognises the power of the imagination as a form of counterculture:

> *I imagine them [enslaved Black people] hearing spoken English as the oppressor's language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance. I imagine that the moment they realized the oppressor's language, seized and spoken by the tongues of the colonized, could be a space of bonding was joyous. (p. 169)*

hooks sees that any dialogue must then be followed by actions to bring about material changes. Her critical literacy approach is similar to Paulo Freire's (1970/2021) problem posing. Problem posing allows people to have a strong voice in the direction of their learning and use their imaginations to move them toward a more equitable society. Through more critical and creative approaches to literacy, there is the potential for stories that shape our identities in powerful ways to come to fruition.

Research study

This Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded study explores multiliteracies in teaching adolescents and adults and attained clearance by the Review Ethics Board (REB). This paper focuses specifically on innovative arts-based adult education organisations that teach music, drama, and visual arts through educational strategies consistent with a multiliteracies approach including an art gallery; an immigration museum; a government English language learning institute; and a chamber music organisation that offers interactive performances. Participants included adult educators and learners who had options around face-to-face interviews; observations; document analysis; or secondary data analysis of original film footage shot in these spaces.

Research questions

A subset of research questions that have guided the larger SSHRC study are as follows:

1. In what ways does arts-based education promote learning in adult community-based organizations?
2. Does multimodality offer unique perspectives into the value of arts-based learning?

Methodology

We used a multiple case study approach (Stake, 2005) as a part of our research design. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) methodology requires researchers to acknowledge and be conscious of their positionality. We recognize our own positionality as white, straight, middle-class women working as researchers in universities. Charmaz

(2014) comments that researchers must be reflexive about the research process. She states, "We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority" (p. 27). Constructivist grounded theory is an iterative methodology. It involves (1) codes that use gerunds and line-by-line coding; (2) focused coding to create short summary points and make comparisons across the data; (3) memo-writing to develop thick descriptions and analytical perspectives. This methodology was employed in coding the data in our study.

The research included semi-structured face-to-face interviews approximately 1 hour in length; in-depth observation visits of 3-4 hours approximately 4 times over 1 to 3 months; and document analysis of teaching materials including lesson plans or exemplars. Our study also included original film footage of various adult learning spaces that are showcased on our web platform found at www.multiliteraciesproject.com. All participants had options to decide how to participate and to review their transcripts, photographs, or film footage.

Limitations of the study

Giving participants options around how they might participate made comparisons across the data set uneven. The REB put the research on pause during the pandemic, which in some cases resulted in long delays midway through the data collection phase. Another limitation was that the study was carried out in just two different provincial regions in Canada.

Findings and discussion

Although most of the community-based organisations that we studied did not name multiliteracies as a framework for developing their programming, they identified strongly with the main tenets of the theory when we described them in our recruitment posters/letters. Throughout our research, participants discussed the power of multimodality to increase the scope of ways to communicate and showed great awareness of equity, diversity, and inclusion issues. The mandate of many arts-based organisations is to broadly connect with the public who may not feel comfortable in more traditional venues like concert halls or classrooms. Adult education is often situated in community-based

contexts, ranging from centres for literacy and immigration to museums and local recreation halls.

Carey Jewitt (2017) articulates four main theoretical propositions underpinning the concept of multimodality which we use to analyse the data from our study. Since multimodality is a defining feature of multiliteracies theory, in coding and analysing the data, we have paid particular attention to multimodality in our data sources. Jewitt is a leading researcher in the field of multimodality who has worked with Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, who also do some research in adult education in formal and non-formal contexts. These three researchers are credited with developing foundational and evolving contemporary theorizations around social interpretations of multimodality. In what follows, we examine the ways that multimodality offers insight into adult arts-based pedagogy.

Proposition one: Language is only one modality amongst many modes to communicate

Jewitt (2017) expands on this first theoretical proposition underlying multimodality:

> *Language is widely taken to be the most significant mode of communication; this is particularly so in contexts of learning and teaching. Multimodality, however, proceeds on the proposition that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which have the potential to contribute equally to meaning. (p. 15)*

Thus, Jewitt (2017) argues that reading and writing are not privileged as better than other modes in communication practices. One research participant in our study, Linda Lord, is an an adult educator in the organisation Arts Can Teach who believes that arts-based education and multimodality tap into adults' emotions and experiences. She also has her own practice in which she works with adults and youth in recovery programs. Over decades, Linda has facilitated sessions with women who have experienced trauma often due to domestic violence. Linda invites these women to "use expressive writing to bring meaning and understanding to things that have happened to them in their lives that really defy meaning." She explains why multimodality contributes to therapeutic expressive arts-based pedagogy:

> *Just knowing that when you are able to layer modalities, every experience goes deeper into the next modality. So if you and I just did a drama exercise, it would be okay. If I had you listening to music, then you would be able to have a richer drama experience. If I had you doing meditation and movement and then drama, that experience would be even deeper because now I have connected your mind, your body, and your soul. And then we are using everything that we have available to us.*

Linda observes that journaling is greatly enriched when combined with other modalities in reflective learning experiences through drama, music, meditation, and movement. Traumatic experiences require patience and great courage to work through. Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) affirm that the narrative arts, as we see in this example of journaling to work through trauma, strengthens adult learners' ability to reflect: "Individual narratives are how we story our own lives. Personal narratives involve reflection on one's life story and can be empowering" (p. 258). By giving more attention in teaching practice to modes not always traditionally recognized for their value to contribute toward providing adult learners with ways to broach their emotions, these modes might offer learners what Wilson et al. (2021) refer to as "creating as a means of self-definition" (p. 577). In their own critical arts-based method of research as Women of Colour engaged in artistic practice, they reflect, "We assembled media, but we also (re)assembled our imaginations, our self definitions, and histories in an effort to make sense of our multidimensional worlds" (Wilson et al, p. 577). Thus, arts-based learning intertwines spiritual, somatic, and intellectual learning to encourage perceiving our identities wrought anew through exploring our interactions with the broader world.

In adult education, traditional teaching strategies include group discussions or reflections incorporated into academic writing assignments. Arts-based learning draws upon other modalities. Engaging with different media can stimulate imagination and offer alternative forms of representation. Thus, educators can have learners create a collage, write and perform a skit, or generate a piece of music or poetry as an alternative means of fostering reflection and deeper forms of learning.

To return to Jewitt's (2017) point that a multiplicity of modes "have

the potential to contribute equally to meaning" (p. 15), we see that music can be a powerful form of communication across diverse cultures and languages. One of our participants, Amy Ley, is the Director of 4th Wall Music, which is a chamber music group that breaks down barriers, the 4th wall, between audiences and musicians. Amy speaks to the emotional dimension of music. She comments that music has the potential to convey meaning as much, if not more so, than oral or written language in some instances:

> *You can be in a room full of people who do not speak the same language and [are] all listening to the same piece of music, and you can all be crying even though you cannot verbally communicate with one another; you can all experience the feeling that the music is expressing*.

These unique place-based concerts promote an openness to considering possibilities for what arts-based pedagogy can look like in theory and practice. In our field note observations, at one 4th Wall Music concert that took place along a riverbank, the gurgling water as well as birds singing in unison with the opera singer and string instruments invited listeners to engage their senses through multimodality. Magro and Pierce (2016) call for designing curriculum "in meaningful, artful, and socially-relevant ways" (p. 192) to invite learners to develop their creative capacities. In this concert, the focus was on environmentalism and conservation of local nature sanctuaries. If the public is to care about sustainability, they need to feel a connection to the environment itself. Multimodality helps to foster these "socially-relevant ways," and thus may also serve to shift perspectives on being engaged citizens who take action to bring about sustainability.

Adult educators can use dramatic role-play or music to bridge with reading or writing activities to promote creative, reflective learning spaces. For learners who are reticent to express themselves via traditional academic forms such as writing, being asked to express themselves in a more multidimensional and multimodal way can sometimes make all the difference to their motivation and sense of inclusion. Storytelling may come easier for some learners through a variety of modes (i.e. visualizing stages of their lives through drawings or using clay to build a model of their ideal workplace).

Proposition two: Each mode does distinct social communicative work

Jewitt (2017) elaborates on this second proposition that each mode serves its own specific purpose in terms of social engagement and communication. She points out: "Multimodality assumes that all modes have, like language, been shaped through their cultural, historical and social uses to realize social functions" (p. 16). To put it another way, every gesture, spatial design, and visual depiction is embedded in a specific social, cultural, and historical context.

For example, pumpkin carving is a traditional art form Canadians engage in to celebrate Halloween. From a social perspective, pumpkin carving is usually done as a family activity. It's an evening of brainstorming carving designs and taking turns at hollowing out and carving the pumpkin. This inanimate object is imbued with a symbolic significance of being spooky, yet also signals an invitation to children to "Trick or Treat" on Halloween when people are giving out candy. Historically, Halloween is attributed to being brought over to Canada by Scottish and Irish immigrants in the 1800s. The Celtic origins of Jack-o'-lanterns, wearing costumes, and pumpkin carving contests are still very popular today. From a cultural perspective, pumpkin carving is a symbolic indicator of the changing seasons. The pumpkin is a symbol of fall. The fall season is coming to an end when we reach Halloween.

In "The Pumpkin Face Off," Ninia Sotto, a research participant, and an adult educator at the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, asks English Language Learner (ELL) adults to tell the stories of their home countries through carving Jack-o'-lanterns. This arts-based activity merges Canadian traditions with adult newcomers' heritages as represented through visual symbolism. For instance, one learner depicts a panda on the pumpkin to symbolize his Asian heritage. Ninia, in interview found at www.multiliteraciesproject.com, expounds on how the students in her class went from feeling "not keen" on this activity to embracing their own artistry to symbolize their home cultures. It is called "The Pumpkin Face Off" because the other adult educators serve as judges for a contest to determine the best carvings.

Art and adult educators can disrupt stereotypical views of cultural histories. In recent years, Indigenous educators such as Marie Battiste (2013) have argued that there is a need to develop opportunities to learn

about decolonization. One of our research sites, the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, worked in partnership with Eyelevel Gallery, presented a travelling exhibition organised and circulated by Truck Contemporary Art, Calgary, entitled "Taskoch pipon kona kah nipa muskoseya, nepin pesim eti pimachihew/Like the Winter Snow Kills the Grass, the Summer Sun Revives." This exhibition of artistic works was curated by Missy LeBlanc for TRUCK Contemporary Art.

In one of the multimedia exhibitions, a video showed the artist, Tsema Igharas, spray paint on an caribou hide the cut-out word "esghanana" which was the Tahltan word for "reclamation." In English, it translated to "give it back to me." For adult learners visiting the art gallery, it took a moment to realize that this video was being projected onto the actual animal hide. The hide was being used as a screen to display the video. In the video, a stark comparison was set up between nature's gentle sounds of wind and images in the forest of greenery contrasted with the modern, industrial spray paint can that Igharas was shaking. The spray paint made a jarring sound as it was shaken and sprayed repeatedly by the artist. The artwork seemed to point to the uneasy tensions of settler colonizers' tools being superimposed on the natural world of Indigenous peoples and their worldviews.

From a multimodal perspective, we need to interpret the very materiality as well as the symbolism of the animal hide in this work of art. At the end of the video, the artist swung the animal hide onto her back like a cape with the cut-out word "esghanana" emboldened in the centre. The red of the spray paint, the fine hair of the animal hide, the movement and contours of the hide on the artist's back – these modalities only took on distinct meaning because of the word "esghanana," pointing to Indigenous cultures' resilience and strength. Adult learners bore witness to a type of decolonization as visualized by this artist drawing upon her cultural knowledge and traditions. Of course, the experience of each adult learner at this exhibition would be in part shaped by their own cultural experiences, heritage, and prior knowledge. Igharas and the other artists in this exhibition invited visitors to learn about the stories of their lived experiences through their artwork. And in doing so, consider the implications of meaningful inclusion of Indigenous peoples through ecological land reparations, reclamation, and reflective attitudes and actions.

As an element of our document analysis in this research, we quote from a booklet given out at the art exhibition that in part spoke to the heavy, enduring legacy of colonialism:

> *Historically, Indigenous peoples learned our languages from spending time on the land and intergenerationally through our parents, grandparents, aunties, and elders. Stories and teachings would be told about the land of how things came to be. Land based intergenerational learning is still the best way to learn an ancestral language, but this is difficult when you do not live on or have access to the land … How are we expected to survive when we don't have the words to fight?*

We hear echoes of bell hooks' (1994) quoting Adrienne Rich: "*This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you*" (p. 169). Igharas offered an Indigenous vision of reclamation – of "esghanana" – through artistic form.

Adult educators could create an activity or assignment to help learners think about how they, like this Indigenous artist, could combine technology with other forms of representation in multimodal learning contexts. Elements from nature could be combined with images or sounds mediated through technology to raise opportunities for learners to reflect upon the interface of technology with the natural world. Digital literacies may be expanded as learners explore technological resources (ie. video projections, audio recordings, or interactive software) to represent their ideas. Deeper learning may be fostered as students consider cultural meaning as well as historical connections to articulate their ideas to others.

Proposition three: Specific intertwining of modes contributes to meaning-making

A third proposition underlying the theoretical framework of multimodality is explained by Jewitt (2017) in this way: people "orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes. Thus, the interaction between modes is significant for meaning-making" (p. 16). Film maker and adult educator, Kim Nelson, who is one of our research participants, conceptualized the Live Doc Project, which is an interactive, multimodal documentary experience between artists, musicians, scholars, and live audiences. The Live Doc Project

focused on the intertwining of modes to generate meaning. For example, in one of these live shows, the documentary explored local ethnic Arabic foods from Windsor, Ontario that were simultaneously being consumed by the audience in real time while they watched the documentary. As Kim noted, the audience experienced taste as a mode to "consume" the documentary. The storyline for the Live Doc Project focused on food and identity within the local Arabic community that spans across the international Windsor, Canada - Detroit, USA border. Adult learners were directly engaged in a live, communal response to the documentary. The answers were not just verbal – the adult educators on stage responded using a variety of modes tailored to the specific questions or comments made by the audience in that moment. For example, they would play music (audio mode) or show film clips (visual, gestural, or oral modes) chosen in that moment in direct response to the audience members' questions.

Arts-based teaching and learning can offer a radical way to reveal the normalizing effects of hegemony and foster democratic learning. Aesthetics are important to think through what Wildemeersch (2019) articulates in a footnote of an editorial. He states, "Biesta speaks of 'citizenship as outcome', rather than of 'citizenship as status', whereby outcome refers to the result of an educational trajectory" (p. 117). What is important here is that citizenship is seen as an active rather than a static term to bring about democratic change. Moreover, lifelong learning, according to Biesta (2017) plays a crucial role in an evolving sense of citizenship for any adult learner. Similarly, the Live Doc Project insists that conversations must allow for a range of opinions, despite the possibility of contesting viewpoints. As Kim reflected in interview:

> *I am also really concerned about how polarized things are getting, and people just stay in their political group. They tend to kind of dehumanize people who have different points of view, and I think there is a real lack of complexity, and so far, the Live Doc Project has been a very respectful discussion. I mean, even sometimes, when people are pushing back on the way we framed the history or the documentary that we presented, it is respectful.*

The Live Doc Project uses dialogic, multimodal artistic engagement to explore the complexities of inclusion and democratic citizenship. It offers an alternative vision to what Rodd and Sanders (2023) have aptly

identified as one of the more insidious characteristics of neoliberalism, in that it "presents a seductive mythology, nullifying our imaginations and hopes that things might be otherwise" (p. 145). By contrast, the performers/documentarians accept the potential unease in not knowing what the audience will say, or how they might react, in what is a completely live interactive performance in which audience members play a key role.

The aesthetics of the music, visuals, and culinary delights contribute to the audience's multimodal analytical critique of the documentary to envisage its argument in multifaceted ways. This is an artistic way to invite citizens to a public forum to discuss the implications of multiculturalism. Similarly, adult educators can be intentional about incorporating cultural and linguistic diversity into their teaching (a main tenet of multiliteracies practice) to foster inclusion. Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) observe that "storytelling, for example, is often used by African American women to teach about the joys and sorrows of life. When teaching these women, instructors could incorporate storytelling as an important method of learning about the topic at hand" (p. 60). An educator can choose content and arts-based forms of learning that mirror the culture of their students.

Proposition four: Signs within multimodality are socially situated

Social environments play a large role in how people interpret and communicate with each other according to Jewitt's (2017) account of the fourth theoretical proposition of multimodality. Arts-based education often draws upon this principle to teach in innovative ways. For example, at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, which is one of our research sites, we went on a tour as part of our observations. On the tour, visitors/adult learners were asked to role play that they were European immigrants from the early 1900s. They had 10 artifacts in front of them, but they could only pack 5 in their bags. Which ones would they choose? Why? The guide asked these visitors to interact with these historic artifacts through the eyes of immigrants who knew they may never have returned to their country of origin. Accordingly, the visitors attained a more empathetic perspective of how difficult these decisions would have been.

These historical artifacts (objects such as a pair of boots, a musical

instrument, or a favourite doll) are an example of what is called a "sign" in the fields of structuralism and semiotics. Jewitt (2017) explains that signs

> *are shaped by the norms and rules operating at the moment of sign-making, influenced by the motivations and interests of sign-maker in a specific social context. That is, sign-makers select, adapt and refashion meanings through the process of reading/ interpretations of the sign. (p. 17)*

Sign-making is about representation and comprehending the cultural and social significance attributed to objects in the material world. Research within New Literacy Studies (Barton et al., 2000; Street, 2003) contends that literacy is always socially situated. Or, as Street (2003) puts it, "literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (p. 77). The museum visitor in this role play was a sign-maker who made sense of an historical object by understanding its social value contextualized in another time period. The museum visitor tried to infer its personal, social, and cultural significance to immigrants who had decided this object was more valuable to bring than the many other possessions they were forced to leave behind. Arts-based educators create opportunities to engage in learning through artistic practices that include multimodal thinking, interaction, and judgments.

Socially situated practice means also creating an intangible ambience that fosters inclusion to welcome adult learners who have perhaps experienced marginalization in their lives. Ollis et al. (2018)'s research on Neighbourhood Houses in Australia provides a critique of neoliberal policies, and they suggest that Neighbourhood Houses provide an alternative learning space that genuinely engages in Freirean (1970/2021) dialogic spaces:

> *Social learning in the Neighbourhood House environment with others who have struggled in formal education settings, such as school, coupled with the emphasis on learner inclusion and using inclusive critical teacher pedagogies, assists learners to move beyond these negative past experiences and enables them to recognise themselves as successful learners. We claim all adult learning is a project of identity formation. (p. 473)*

Ollis et al. (2018) point to a wide range of features that create this inclusive environment such as an informal relaxed environment, drawing on students' prior knowledge, and maintaining small class sizes (p. 471). Moreover, the focus on inclusion is so important since these adult learners thus come to feel respected for who they are and gain dignity and confidence in their abilities to trust their intelligence and judgement. It is only when a person or a group of people who have been historically or socially marginalized come to slowly feel a sense of belonging that they are truly able to imagine a sense of hope. Furthermore, it is precisely because of their diverse and unique backgrounds that these learners are seen within the Neighbourhood House experience to offer unique perspectives.

In our research, we see a similar approach amongst adult educators at the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County where Canadian Newcomers learn English and their experiences and home culture are welcomed. Jenny Harris, who taught mostly older learners at the Multicultural Council, noted in interview:

> *I find if you [the adult learners] have never gone to school before, they really feel special now and important. And they see that they are learning, so we are building confidence. I mean, this, for some of them of my students, is their only outing for the day. Otherwise, they would be home. So, this is their purpose, and this is where their friends are.*

Jenny reflected on the importance of social dynamics that played a role in building a sense of community in her classroom, which in turn was pivotal in her adult learners' language development – the social and academic went hand in hand. From our field notes written about Jenny's class, it became clear that many of these older learners were the matriarchs and patriarchs of their families. Their viewpoints mattered to their siblings, adult children, and grandchildren. Thus, if these older learners felt welcomed and valued in their local community, it seemed reasonable to assume that would in turn influence their whole families' perspectives on migrating to this new country. Inclusion can potentially have the reverberating effect of whole communities gaining the self-perception that they are engaged citizens in their societies because intrapersonal relationships with adult educators and peers lead them to feel a greater stake in the social transactions transpiring in their own

lives and of those around them.

In adult education, the social aspect of the classroom or learning space is often best augmented through arts-based learning. Simply allowing adult learners to share artifacts that are meaningful to them can teach abstract concepts like symbolism and multimodal representation. Moreover, it can build relationships, which start with people sharing stories.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This research is gathered from arts-based organisations that engage adults in lifelong learning opportunities to explore socially situated literacies and multimodalities learned through artistic forms. Multiliteracies theory asserts that "a theory of transformation or redesign is also the basis for a theory of learning" (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p. 224). Deepening our understanding of multimodality provides analytical tools to critique communicative practices within arts-based educational spaces to challenge what Brookfield (2018) explains are inequitable societal structures "reproduced as seeming to be normal, natural and inevitable (thereby heading off potential challenges to the system)" (p. 56). Arts-based learning as a form of storytelling challenges how we construct our world views and current patterns of expression throughout the life span. In doing so, democratic viewpoints are nurtured even though that may mean more ongoing debate, lively differences of opinion, negotiations of identity, and evolving definitions of inclusion. The stories of our lives are based on real material realities, yet also shaped through socially constructed, culturally permeated perspectives. We can draw upon theoretical tenets to give us analytical tools to critique power relations that, at times, confront us with oppressive circumstances that are hard to see a way out of, and at other times, provide us with emancipatory opportunities for adult learning. We must seek out those opportunities to make the world a more inclusive and equitable place for all. Arts-based teaching and multimodality generate such opportunities to aid adult learners in augmenting their capacities for creative and critical engagement.

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Recognising the Budj Bim cultural landscape as World Heritage: How a socio-material approach bridged the tangible-intangible heritage gap

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In 2019 the Budj Bim cultural landscape in south western Victoria was listed on the World Heritage Register. It is significant firstly for the Gunditjmara people as a culmination of regaining control over their traditional lands and international recognition of their unbroken connection with the land extending back tens of thousands of years. It undermines a longstanding distinction made in heritage assessment between tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) categories by instead seeing these as interdependent and 'constitutive entanglements' of everyday life. The corresponding distinction too often made between the built and the natural environment has resulted in a disproportionate acceptance that associates built environment heritage with European or Western societies and identifies natural environmental heritage with Indigenous landscapes. Introducing a socio-material perspective where these formerly separate categories are seen as interdependent enables a new mode of understanding cultural connection to the land that is potentially transforming. Finally, it is significant as an exemplar of Indigenous led heritage work that brings together political struggle and advocacy, history work, and

in the process creates new knowledge.

***Keywords**: Budj Bim, indigenous knowledge, Eumeralla wars, world heritage register*

Introduction

UNESCO's decision in 2019 to give World Heritage listing to the Budj Bim cultural landscape in Victoria was of historic importance becoming the first Indigenous Australian landscape to be gazetted solely for its cultural values. Other more famous listings such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta (registered in 1987) and Kakadu National Parks (registered in three stages in 1981, 1987 and 1992), had previously been listed for a combination of natural and cultural values (Smith C, Jackson & Ralph 2019)

Its listing is significant because it acknowledged the specific thousands-years old history of Indigenous practices in that land, but also because it was a breakthrough in recognising 'cultural landscapes' as a significant criterion for Indigenous living heritage. Recognition undermined the usefulness of the divide between 'tangible' and 'intangible' categories in examining and understanding Indigenous heritage.[1] which has historically led to an under-recognition of Indigenous culture and practice. In addition, the listing culminated decades of systematic and sustained effort by the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners, which first began with the struggle to regain ownership of their lands.

Budj Bim falls within the country of the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners and the 59 clans of the nation. *gundij* means 'belonging to' and refers to the whole of the environment including nature and culture, and material and spiritual components (Commonwealth of Australia 2017, XVIII).

The account that follows addresses four areas. Firstly, it describes Budj Bim and its historic heritage significance. It outlines the different elements of tangible and intangible heritage and culture that include

1 A caveat is needed here. This paper relies entirely on secondary sources, and my assessment and interpretation of accounts and documents. As a non-Indigenous man I am 'external' to Indigenous experience, heritage and knowledge. Therefore, what follows is not drawn from personal knowledge or contact.

the material - pre-colonial engineering and settlement, eel harvesting and weaving; and the intangible – Indigenous knowledge, practices and traditions. This informs a discussion of the usefulness of the distinction made between tangible and intangible used in heritage categorisation, arguing instead that these aspects are interdependent and inseparable. The third section discusses the history of dispossession and gradual reclaiming of land rights that were the pre-condition for returning the land to traditional practices, and eventual national heritage recognition and native title. The final section discusses the World Heritage nomination and listing.

Underlying this history is the self-direction and active agency of the Traditional Owners as they devised plans and strategies to win back their country and the official recognition that comes with National and World listings. Learning how to work within these national and international frameworks was a critical factor in the Gunditjmara's success. Understanding how the heritage systems worked; the various criteria; and documentation requirements; gathering detailed historical, geographical and cultural recordings; and then recruiting heritage experts to collaborate with while retaining the final say in strategy direction were all critical elements in achieving recognition.

The paper concludes by suggesting that the significance of the Budj Bim listing goes beyond the Gunditjmara achieving global recognition, in that the course they set out provides an important public education role about Indigenous and post-settlement Australia, as well as a guide and inspiration for others to make claims for recognition of their cultural landscapes.

What is Budj Bim?

The Gunditjmara have lived in south-west Victoria for up to 50,000 years, and Budj Bim has existed for over 30,000 years. The aquaculture infrastructure system, which was the foundation of the World Heritage claim, was created around 7,000 years ago (Jones 2011, 131).

Budj Bim is Victoria's youngest volcano and the site of an ancestral creation being of Gunditjmara country. It is a deep-time story, and the ancestral being *budj bim* is integral to the environmental creation. The

rocky outcrop, formerly known as Mt Eccles[2], is Budj Bim's forehead and as the head erupted lava flowed out the *tung att* (teeth). The resultant Tyrendarra lava flow spread for 30 kilometres west and south to the coast and extended another 20 kilometres beneath the sea to the island of Deen Mar (Lady Julia Percy Island). The Gunditjmara witnessed the eruptions and the changed physical conditions that the lava flow created, which provided the tangible and intangible foundation of the cultural landscape. The new terrain of waterways, undulating volcanic plains and native grasslands were cultivated by the Gunditjmara peoples to engineer one of the world's oldest freshwater aquaculture systems to farm and harvest Kooyang (short-finned eels) and other fish (McNiven et al 2012; Jones, 2011, 136).

They created ponds and wetlands linked by channels containing weirs, which were engineered to bring water and young eels from Darlots Creek to low lying areas. Woven fibre baskets were placed in the weir to harvest mature eels. Traps up to 350 metres long, with a sink hole for eel storage were developed, and the eels were then smoked and stored for food and trade and for large gatherings such as marriages, corroborees or to settle disputes (Wettenhall & Gunditjmara 2010, Jordan 2012; see also Tyson Lovett Murray's drone photography of the Kooyang Weir Murray 2017)).

In addition to engineering the water flows and eel traps that ensured a year-round supply, the Gunditjmara clans established villages by building clusters of stone huts using stones from the Tyrendarra lava flow, growing vegetation, processing and storing food, and sharing and trading with other nations. The interaction of land and people created the material and immaterial conditions of the Gunditjmara.

The aquaculture system transformed the society providing a permanent food supply, permanent settlement, food exchange, building and construction and cultural practices to support this. It is an illustration of Henri Lefebvre's idea that every society, every mode of production, produces a certain space, its own space, and its own spatial practices (Lefebvre 1991).

Bruce Pascoe in his survey of the journals and diaries of early European settlers came across 'repeated references to (Aboriginal) people

2 Mt Eccles was named after a British aristocrat William Eeles, but a transcription error meant it became Mt Eccles in 1845. On the tenth anniversary of the Gunditjmara's Native Title victory, Mt Eccles National Park was officially renamed Budj Bim National Park (Mena Report 2017)

building dams and wells; planting; irrigating and harvesting seeds ... and manipulating the landscape' (Pascoe 2018, 2). Peter Beveridge's diary account of his journey to the Murray River in 1843 recorded that 'substantial weirs (had already been) built all through the river systems' (Pascoe 2018, 6). The Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps (*Baiames Ngunnhu*), also listed on the National Heritage Register, is another example and is thought to be one of the oldest human constructions in the world (DoPE).

The archaeological, oral accounts, continuing practices and diaries of white settlers combine to provide rich evidence that engineering and hydraulic engineering existed in Australia long before European settlement.

The Tangible, Intangible and socio-material practices

Budj Bim's successful World Heritage listing recognises both tangible and intangible heritage. However, the intimate link that exists between the two, indeed it is more than a link as they are inseparable, demonstrates that the distinction between the two, in this case, is redundant. It is both together, not either/or.

Foucault's insights in the 1970s exposing the modern/scientific method of categorising, classifying, presenting and ordering objects served an important and necessary political purpose. He argued that these methods rested on a set of false binaries, which privileged one type of knowledge to the exclusion of others and became self-perpetuating (Foucault 2002/1970). Weiss makes a similar claim that at the same time 'heritage discourse enables one mode of conceiving of and potentially celebrating historical persons and events, it also disables other forms and modes' (Weiss 2007, 413). This has particularly been the case in recognising Indigenous practices.

It has been the tangible - buildings and nature - that has dominated heritage recognition. A higher status to the tangible meant that many Indigenous and non-Western heritage values were being overlooked. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century, and in particular with the development of the Burra Charter (ICOMOS Australia 1979 and revised in 1981, 1988 and 1999), that the 'social value of heritage became an explicit component of conservation policy and practice' (Jones 2017, 23). The Charter put the assessment of cultural significance

at the heart of the conservation process on the basis that: 'places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape and to lived experiences' (ICOMOS Australia 1999, 1). Cultural significance is 'embodied in the place – in its fabric, setting, use, associations and meanings' (Australia ICOMOS, 2013, 4).

The Charter acknowledges that for Indigenous peoples 'natural and cultural values may be indivisible', … as they are 'frequently interdependent' (Australia ICOMOS, 2013, 2-3). The accompanying Practice Note explains that Social and Spiritual Value refer to associations that a place has for a particular community, forming part of that community's identity, through meanings developed from long use. The intangible values and meanings, expressed through cultural practices, contribute to spiritual identity, create and maintain repositories of knowledge, traditions and lore and emerge from the community's relationship with the spiritual realm, in Budj Bim's case the creation story (Australia ICOMOS 2013, 4).

UNESCO responded by adding 'cultural landscapes' at its World Heritage Convention in 1992. Its categorising of tangible and intangible heritage was an attempt to redress the imbalance of tangible over intangible by 'bringing in' through official acknowledgement those practices, traditions and knowledges that have historically been ignored, not understood, or under-valued. It also 'marked the new assertiveness of actors from post-settler states in North America and Oceania' (Gfeller, 2013 483).

However, establishing this new distinction between tangible/intangible relies on replicating a methodology of identifying, classifying, listing and installing a new binary of material/immaterial; tangible/intangible that Foucault and others aimed to dispense with. Karen Barad challenges the simple distinction between material and immaterial suggesting that some 'intangibles' are material. 'Hauntings are not immaterial, and they are not mere recollections or reverberations of what was. Hauntings are an integral part of existing material conditions' (Barad 2017, 107). Greer too questions the idea that Indigenous heritage is exclusively (my emphasis) intangible noting that archaeological remains are material elements of people/spirits (Greer 2010, 53).

These two values, the tangible and intangible, are created by the

social relations and the social practices that sustain them. Heritage is more than an object, or a place, rather, it is a social construct, one in which a material artefact, a monument, a site, or a cultural practice is endowed with meaning (Gfeller 2013, 484, see Smith 2007, 2). And social practices are more than nature, buildings and artefacts. A way of understanding how this divide may be broached is through a socio-material approach which recognises the interdependence of the tangible and intangible as it attempts to understand 'the constitutive entanglement of the social and the material in everyday organisational life' [Orlikowski 2007, 1435). It examines how humans, spatial arrangements, objects and technologies are intertwined with language, culture and social practices (Leonardi & Barley 2010). Knowledge emerges out of this interaction of material elements, practices and the environment, and 'an either/or perspective is transformed into a both/also point of view' (Zeichner (2010, 92).

While some critique the UNESCO process as a project of cultural legitimisation, through its power to recognise, authorise and validate certain cultural expressions as 'heritage' (Smith and Akagawa 2008, 4) the Gunditjmara identified it as a process to use for their interests deliberately and strategically.

Winning back Country

Dispossession and White occupation.

First contact was made with sealers and whalers around Portland and later pastoralists spread out from Melbourne in search of new land. Skirmishes and guerrilla raids followed, and 28 massacres of Aboriginal people were recorded between 1833 and 1859 (Clark 1995, 135–139). The conflict became known as the Eumeralla Wars. Eventually, the Indigenous people were dispossessed and many forcibly dispersed. Reserves were set up for those who refused to leave most notably the Lake Condah Mission in 1867, which was close to the eel traps and within sight of Budj Bim. The Mission housed the Indigenous people who remained on country, but it also separated 'half-caste' children from their parents becoming part of the Stolen Generations (see also Partland 2013).[3]

3 Deb Rosa, a Senior Ranger on Gunditjmara land for the Windamara Aboriginal Corporation, and her mother, Thelma Rose-Edwards, a Gunditjmara Elder, describe growing up on Lake Condah Mission ABC Radio - http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/southwestvic/201305/r1115468_13601969.mp3

The following century of white settlement, pastoral development and grazing stock, uncontrolled fire and significant alterations to the water drainage of the Lakes, including re-directing water flows away from Lake Condah, meant that the Gunditjmara's aquaculture systems were damaged, and the landscape altered.

The Mission was closed in 1919 and a parcel of the land returned in 1984 (see Weir 2009, Gunditj Mirring 2020). In 1987 the Victorian state government attempted to legislate the transfer of Lake Condah to the Gunditjmara people but was unable to pass the bill through its Upper House. The Commonwealth intervened using its constitutional powers arising from the 1967 Referendum to vest land to an Aboriginal community and enacted the Aboriginal Land (Lake Condah and Framlingham Forest) Act 1987, returning 457 hectares to the Traditional Owners. Using the 1967 Referendum powers in this way had never occurred before and this unique process was recognised as 'outstanding heritage' in 2004 (Jones 2011, 134). During the 1990s the Gunditjmara set out to return water to Lake Condah and a first sustainable development management plan was prepared in 1993 (Bell and Johnston 2008).

National Heritage Listing

In 2004 a new Australian Heritage system was introduced, and the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape was one of the initial three listings approved for the National Register. Budj Bim was declared under four of the nine criteria for outstanding national values. Those criteria considered both tangible and intangible features:

- Indigenous tradition in which ancestral beings revealed themselves in the landscape, through the creation story
- The extensive aquaculture systems that enabled Gunditjmara society to develop
- The organised resistance to European expansion known as the Eumeralla Wars
- The continuity of connection of the Gunditjmara with their country (Bell and Johnston 2010, 3-4)

Since then, other Indigenous landscapes have been added including

the Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps (*Baiames Ngunnhu*), Kakadu National Park, *Ngarrabullgan* (Mount Mulligan), Quinkan Country, the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Wave Hill Walk Off Route, Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape, Wilgie Mia Aboriginal Ochre Mine, and Wurrwurrwuy stone arrangements (DAWE 2020).

Native Title 2007 & 2011

The most significant step in the Gunditjmara regaining control over their traditional lands came with the awarding of Native Title by the Federal Court in 2007. The Court recognised the Gunditjmara's 'strong and unrelenting connection to this area' from before European settlement to the present. It further recognised that 'their ancestors farmed eels for food and trade, at the time of European settlement and back through millennia', and that traditional knowledge and management practices had been retained, continued to be transmitted and also adapted to incorporate new materials (Smith 2019, 291). Gunditjmara Elder Daryl Rose explained that 'We actually managed the eel. We just didn't come out here and hunt and fish. We actually came out to collect and manoeuvre and farm and move these eels into places where we wanted them to go so we could then pick them up when we wanted to pick them up' (cited in Bell and Johnston 2008).

In 2011 the Federal Court extended Native Title (Part B) over Crown Land between the Shaw and Eumeralla Rivers, from Deen Maar island to Lake Linlithgow, and brought in the Eastern Marr peoples who are also Traditional Owners (Gunditj Mirring 2014). Owning title to the land was a critical breakthrough because it meant that the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) was now able to direct the cultural, economic and natural resource management of the land, and control access' (Parks Victoria 2015, 22). Exercising their new autonomy, the Gunditjmara commenced restoring the landscape, bringing back its pre-colonial water system and cultural landscape (Jones 2011, 131). They engaged archaeological, engineering consultants and academic researchers to collaborate and work on developing ongoing land management strategies (Gunditjmara with Wettenhall 2010), including partnering with the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation to establish the Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project in 2012 (Gunditj Mirring, 2020b). Other Management Plans were also developed for different parts of the land to cover future

development, water management and employment programs such as the Budj Bim Ranger Program. Indigenous rangers are now employed full-time and are mentored by Gunditjmara Elders who provide them with cultural knowledge and support. As well as cultural heritage management they are responsible for weed management, pest control, maintaining visitor facilities, revegetation, fencing and livestock operations (Parks Victoria 2015, 22).

Consultations and partnerships produced specific working Plans, laying the groundwork for preparing the detailed World Heritage nomination. Most importantly they proceeded under the direction of the Traditional Owners in a way quite unlike the more usual heritage submission process which Greer describes as the 'reactive' method. Under that process heritage experts too often take the lead in an 'expert-driven agenda' and the applicants respond to the expertise ideas and methods (Greer 2010, 46).

External recognition of their successful progress began in 2010 when the Lake Condah Restoration Project was awarded the Civil Contractors Federation Earth Award. It acknowledged three attributes including 'the engagement of the local Indigenous community in all aspects of construction, training, recruitment of Indigenous workers in construction and administration; and an exhaustive community consultation program' (Park Watch 2019, 13). The following year Engineers Australia awarded the Budj Bim works with an Engineering Heritage National Landmark (Jordan 2015, 68).

After Native Title was extended in 2011 the Traditional Owners set a goal of satisfying the criteria for World Heritage Listing. In an example of 'defining, valuing and protecting their own intangible heritage' (Deacon and Smeets, 2013, 129, 132) the Gunditjmara carefully considered which criteria they would most likely satisfy, settling on criteria (iii) and (v). Criterion (iii) referred to 'a unique cultural tradition or civilisation which is living, or which has disappeared' and criterion (v), considered to be the most relevant, required an 'outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use which is representative of a culture…, or human interaction with the environment'. Worth noting is that criterion (vi), which required evidence that 'directly or tangibly associated (the place) with events or living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs', was also considered but rejected because it would have required

opening up and documenting cultural beliefs and dreaming stories that the Gunditjmara decided should not be put in the public domain (Jones 2011, 138-140).

Table 1: Budj Bim timeline

30,000 BCE	Budj Bim erupts
5,000 BCE	Aquaculture system exists since
1810	First contact between Gunditjmara and Europeans
1833-1859	Eumeralla Wars
1867	Lake Condah Mission established
1886	'Half-Caste' Act passed leading to many expulsions, reducing the population by half
1919	Lake Condah Mission closed
1951	Victorian government reclaimed land for Soldier Resettlement
1984-1987	Mission lands returned to Traditional Owners
1996	Native Title Claim launched
2004	Budj Bim listed on National Heritage Register
2005	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC) established by Gunditjmara Traditional Owners
2007	Gunditjmara win Native Title Rights (Part A) through the Federal Court. Achieve recognition of their heritage and identity[4]
2008-2010	Lake Condah area returned to the Gunditjmara by the Victorian government
2011	Native Title Extended (Part B)
2017	Mt Eccles National Park renamed Budj Bim National Park
2019	UNESCO lists Budj Bim on the World Heritage Register

World Heritage Recognition

The World Heritage Convention was adopted by UNESCO's member states in 1972 and was developed to ensure the 'identification, conservation and presentation of the world's heritage' (UNESCO 1972).

4 The ruling totalled 140,000 hectares, covering national parks including Lower Glenelg, Mt Richmond, Budj Bim (Mt Eccles), Discovery Park Coastal Park, and Cobboboonee, Dunmore and Hotspur State Forests. The 2011 Determination added another 4,000 hectares when Native Title was granted over Deen Marr island.

Around ten percent of the 1092 listings on the World Heritage Register included Indigenous peoples' territories at the time of the Budj Bim submission, and less than forty had been inscribed for their Indigenous cultural values (Smith A, et al, 2019, 286).

A detailed comparative analysis of cultural landscapes on the World Heritage List was undertaken to inform Budj Bim's nomination. It concluded that 'Indigenous knowledge, use and management of natural resources are rarely considered as cultural values' but argued that that is what they are. The analysis further contended that the disparity between recognising the significance of natural values and the representation of these as cultural values reflects the 'continuing legacy of the association of Indigenous peoples with the 'natural' world' (Smith A, et al 2019, 285, 302). At the same time a convergence of new approaches to fieldwork in anthropology, archaeology and heritage management, what Gfeller (2015) referred to as the 'Indigenous turn' in world heritage, also highlighted shortcomings in the requirements for nomination.

Smith et al (2019, 288-289) argue that there has long been a recognition that 'both the conceptual framework of the World Heritage Convention which distinguishes between natural and cultural values and places, and the central concept of 'Outstanding Universal Value' are not necessarily relevant or appropriate to the values of Indigenous peoples'. While they outline a number of structural problems embedded within the World Heritage system that contributes to under-recognition, they also note changes that have been made that seek to address those shortcomings. Significantly, the changes opened new avenues for Indigenous voices to develop new policy. Two examples illustrate this impact.

Firstly, in 2003 UNESCO adopted the Convention on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICHC), which recognised the interdependence between intangible and tangible cultural heritage, and which took effect in 2006. Its definition of intangible cultural heritage included practices, representations and expressions, associated knowledge, and necessary skills that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage. Changes were made to criterion (iii) and 'cultural landscapes' was added as a category of site to 'reflect the interrelationships of people and their communities', with the aim being to bring together 'biological and cultural diversity expressed at a landscape scale and to provide a vehicle' … for 'intangible values' to be

recognised in nominations. Head (2010, 7) argues that the UNESCO process has highlighted 'the way the cultural landscape concept has been mobilized to, at least in principle, include Aboriginal voices and values in the land management process'. Secondly, in 2018 the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on World Heritage (IIPFWH) was established and in the same year its Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples was released (Smith et al 2019, 288-289).

The nomination and listing

The nomination of Budj Bim was completed in 2018. For sites to be included on the list they must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one of ten criteria. The nomination emphasised that the aquaculture system is an expression of Gunditjmara knowledge and traditional practices (Commonwealth of Australia 2017), and that a key dimension of the Budj Bim cultural landscape is that 'local ecologies are not radically altered but selectively and strategically enhanced. … Manipulating local ecologies for resources for human use give rise to cultural landscapes … [that] are patterned by tangible evidence of these practices' (Smith et al 2019, 293-294). The Traditional Owners insisted that commonly used terms such as 'hunter-gatherer', and 'complex hunter-fisher' not be used as they were 'outdated and colonialist concepts' (Smith et al 2019, 293; see also Graeber and Wengrow 2022 for a more detailed historical/anthropological exposition supporting the Traditional Owners views based on examples from around the world in particular Indigenous settlements in north America).

At its 43rd session in 2019 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape on the World Heritage List becoming the only Australian World Heritage site to have been listed exclusively for its Aboriginal cultural landscape and values and the twentieth Australian property on the World Heritage List (Context n.d.; Park Watch 2019, 12).

UNESCO's listing recognised that Budj Bim met the two criteria that had been submitted, acknowledging the mix of tangible (stone-walled facilities) and intangible (traditions, practices and ingenuity) characteristics. Criterion (iii) recognises 'cultural traditions, knowledge, practices and ingenuity of the Gunditjmara' …. including associated storytelling, dance and basket weaving, (which) continue to be

maintained by their collective multigenerational knowledge'; and criterion (v) as an outstanding example of 'human interaction with the environment', exemplified by the 'dynamic ecological-cultural relationships evidenced in the Gunditjmara's deliberate manipulation and management of the environment' (UNESCO Cultural Landscape, 2020).

That dynamic relationship of Gunditjmara and their land is nowadays carried by knowledge systems retained through material culture, oral transmission and continuity of cultural practice illustrating the ways multiple systems – social, spiritual, geological, hydrological and ecological – interact and function.

Conclusion

The Budj Bim World Heritage listing is the culmination of a series of historic initiatives and firsts. It reflects a new understanding of cultural landscapes and lays the ground for others to follow. UNESCO assessed that the evidence of construction and farming at Budj Bim 'challenges the common perception and assumption of Australia's First Peoples as having all been hunter-gatherers living in resource-constrained environments' (cited in Carey 2019; Budj Bim IPA p.22, see also Pascoe 2018). It acknowledges that Budj Bim as a cultural landscape rests on an intimate connection to community, landscape and lived experiences which form identity and which in turn create repositories of knowledge, traditions and lore. The World Heritage process, like the national listings before it, explicitly recognises the enduring importance of Gunditjmara knowledge and practices. The international recognition process is itself the product of new ways of understanding. The theoretical foundations of the 'Indigenous turn' in heritage assessment and recognition with its new approaches to fieldwork in anthropology, archaeology and heritage management can also be seen in the 'practice turn' in educational theory and socio-material approaches to knowledge.

World Heritage Listing has already had a number of impacts. At the local level, it consolidates recognition of the cultural landscape within Australia, it strengthens the autonomy of the Indigenous led management plan and direction and affirms the employment strategies and future development that the Gunditjmara are following. Most importantly it offers an example of an Indigenous led process with

its goals and objectives identified many years ago and systematically pursued using traditional knowledge along with engaging other external expertise in support of the objective.

Today the site is now co-ordinated by the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape World Heritage Steering Committee comprising Traditional Owners and state heritage and environmental agencies. It has attracted new, additional government support with the Victorian government committing $5 million for the development of a Master Plan and tourism infrastructure in anticipation of an increase in global attention that a world heritage listing will bring (Carey 2019). Public education for visitors via interpretive signs, pamphlets, online materials, ranger talks, and walking tracks, will mean increased opportunities to understand millennia-old Indigenous society; conflicts and dispossession following European settlement, and the struggle to regain land ownership and autonomy in driving national and international recognition.

Its 'rights to recognition' especially for those who have 'fallen on the wrong side' of globalisation (Weiss 2007, 414) offers hope for achieving recognition for Indigenous people and their cultural landscapes within and beyond Australia. Acknowledging global significance provides a pathway for future nominations of cultural sites and shows the potential that when considered from an Indigenous cultural landscape perspective rather than a typology of tangible evidence many other sites will be recognised.

The case of Budj Bim demonstrates that heritage recognition is not just always a question of how community groups create a sense of belonging and attachment to the historical and archaeological locales, memorials, protected areas, and landscapes they live in and around. The Gunditjmara do not need to create that sense as they have lived it for so long. They do not need to create meaning and maintain identities through heritage places because that meaning has existed far longer than any attempts to construct criteria and registers to identify such places. What the National and World Heritage Registers do achieve is to officially recognise the living history, connection, and meaning of the Gunditjmara lands.

The importance of listing means the recognition of social practices, oral traditions, the knowledge and the skills to produce food, buildings, crafts, and living with the land. This is an important recognition of

history, cultural diversity and, intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for the ways of life that have existed in Australia for millennia.

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PD: a professional deterrence? The financial cost and time commitment of professional development for VET practitioners in Western Australia

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Vocational education practitioners must participate in professional development (PD) activities so they may implement contemporary teaching practices to support their students. Long-term, social types of activity are best because they benefit individuals and groups of practitioners and the training organisations for which they work. However, training provider managers often favour short and individual activities which are cheaper to resource. Not much has been previously known about the financial and time costs incurred by individual practitioners which may act as a deterrent for practitioners to continue in the sector. Our research addressed that gap for Western Australian VET practitioners by examining data collected from an online survey. The survey collected quantitative information from 30 volunteer WA VET practitioners about their activities in a twelve-month period. Using human capital theory underpinning data analysis, we show that at no stage of a VET practitioner's career was

there a positive return on investment for the personally incurred cost of PD. We argue that acts as a deterrent to working as a VET practitioner which has ramifications for training provider operational efficiency, and the wider VET sector. There appears to be a misappropriation of pay scales based on applicable employment conditions which indicates sectoral underpayment.

***Keywords**: VET practitioners, professional development, VET working conditions and pay*

Introduction

The Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector has been responsible for teaching an average of more than four million students per year since 2017 (NCVER, 2021). Those students usually go on to participate in work that requires industry-relevant skills and knowledge or on to further higher education. VET practitioners assist these students to achieve their employment or educational goals through a variety of activities that are not limited to teaching and assessing. To ensure a continued ability to support their students, VET practitioners must keep abreast of contemporary industry standards best practice and teaching methodologies appropriate for a varying student cohort, ensuring their industry knowledge and teaching capabilities continuously improve. The imperative for continuous professional development is supported by legislated regulations that govern Australia's VET sector (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 19).

Maintaining and developing proficiencies comes at a cost, for example, direct expenses for courses and equipment, and indirect costs such as travel costs and time taken away from performing other professional duties. Little is known about the cost of PD activities for VET practitioners in Western Australia (WA), with scant empirical research done on PD and VET sector generally. The bulk of the literature about PD has dealt with perceptions of the most beneficial PD activities. There is a paucity of empirical data to inform decisions about resourcing PD and how to adequately remunerate VET practitioners who incur PD costs. This paper addresses this gap in knowledge about the relative value of PD for VET practitioners. It asked thirty practitioners a series

of questions aimed at identifying their perceptions of the relative value – and accompanying explicit and implicit or unintended costs – of engaging in PD in the VET sector, providing insight into the overarching question emerging from literature as to whether VET practitioners are adequately remunerated by RTOs for the costs associated with necessary PD.

Our research also sought to better understand the types of PD undertaken and valued, extending previous work arguing that social types of PD activity, such as mentoring, validation and moderation, and industry are the most beneficial because practitioners and employers regard knowledge gained through these means as readily compared, shared and enacted in workplaces (Jin, Li, Meirink, Want & Admiraal, 2021; Francisco, 2020). Social PD interactions between VET practitioners facilitate knowledge sharing, contributing to group and individual teaching practice. At the organisational level, RTOs that implement systems to manage PD activity and the collection of knowledge can use what is learnt to improve VET products and procedures to improve operational efficiency. For the wider VET sector, practitioners who participate in professional networks and engage in collective PD and sharing of knowledge can improve the VET sector. However, literature has also shown that when RTOs insist that VET practitioners undertake PD without material employer support, there is an increased likelihood they will leave that employer (Preechawong, Anmanatruakul, Pinit & Kould, 2021; Annelies, Rosenauer, Homan, Horstmeier & Voelpel, 2017). When VET practitioners change RTOs, unless PD has been managed by the RTO, the knowledge gained leaves with the individual. On the other hand, RTOs that do meaningfully support PD are more likely to retain skilled and experienced VET practitioners and the knowledge they bring.

VET practitioners tend to identify the importance of PD as concerned with professional identity and educational value (Tyler & Dymock, 2021b). Given the inherently unequal power dynamic between VET practitioners and RTO managers (Simons & Harris, 2014), actions regarding PD are usually determined by managers who exert authority over those they employ. The national award does nothing to materially recognise the personally incurred costs of PD, and while the WA Technical and Further Education (TAFE) agreement does provision some hours in lieu of PD hours (Department of Training & Workforce

Development, 2020, pp. 38-39), failing to consider the potential financial costs of PD activities that VET practitioners could incur. Substantiating the opportunity and cost of VET practitioner PD assists in forming a common language that can bridge the apparent gap of communication between VET practitioners and RTO managers. In this paper, we argue for improved dialogue about the significance of PD, resolving something inherent in the power imbalance between RTO managers and practitioners. The following section outlines the methodological approach taken in conducting this research, followed by a literature review contextualising this study. A discussion of the findings concludes the paper.

Methodology

The research on which this paper is based involved a structured electronic survey to collect data sent to VET practitioners and RTOs in WA, inviting participation. Requests to individual VET practitioners were distributed via relevant social media channels. Email requests for voluntary survey participants were also distributed to WA RTOs identified using publicly available contact details on the training.gov.au website. Requests for participation in the research emphasised that responding to the survey was voluntary and that respondents would maintain anonymity. Participants were unknown to the researchers, eliciting randomised data from self-selecting volunteers. It can be presumed that relatively few practitioners will respond and therefore that the responses received are indicative and representative of the sector in which they work.

A quantitative approach allows for a comparison of the variable cost and perception of the relative value of various professional development activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 30-31), analysing specific and limited parameters through which discussion of data might be viewed (Burton-Jones, 2009, p. 451). For example, this research analyses data collected to determine if there is a social-justice issue between the dependent and independent variables (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013, p. 29), remedying a gap in quantitative data in research about VET professional development, asking respondents a series of questions using a Likert scale to explore perceptions, inviting practitioner reflection of their own positions (Pickard, 2017, pp. 213-214), enabling this quantitative research to be linked with existing qualitative research. We asked

questions to determine the strength of respondents' beliefs about PD activities to compare to quantitative data about actual activities, enriching the quantitative description by applying constructivism to the data, and measuring social beliefs (Suter, 2012, p. 344).

Quantitative data collected via surveys limit participants' responses, restricting respondents from providing additional information to qualify responses (Converse & Presser, 1986; Ercikan & Roth, 2006 p. 17; Ayiro, 2012, pp. 24-25). Discussion can be limited or biased in its representation of respondent data because the applied paradigmatic lens may not reflect fully the respondents' views (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 303). Hatch (2002, p. 14) and Haig (2012, pp. 8-10) suggest quantitative surveys are suitable for connecting with 'humanistic data' provided questions are suitably and ethically structured. Survey questions were designed to provide a contextual understanding of their purpose without leading respondents to a preordained response (Converse & Presser, 1986).

A survey was appropriate for collecting samples due to the population size and geographical distribution of potential respondents. In sociological education research, it is common for quantitative data to be collected using surveys (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p. 2), enabling the collection of quantitative data exploring compared variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 57-58). Data are analysed using a quantitative discussion approach underpinned by a critical analysis of responses as illustrative of flaws inherent in human capital theory when applied to contemporary workplace conditions and circumstances. It is important to differentiate between traits and attitudes in human capital theory because traits can be considered fixed aspects of individual humans, while attitudes can shift based on, for example, context, timeliness and social connection with what is being surveyed (Barnes, 2022). Human capital theory postulates that the financial benefits of learning are greater than the input costs (Lopez & Cerpa, 2021). That might be true for organisations benefiting from the mobilisation of employee learning, but a similar benefit might not be realised by individual employees who input costs. Survey data collected as independent variables are compared to employment awards and agreements as the dependent variable (Martin, 2012, p. 63). Ethics approval was obtained from the supporting institution.

Literature review

RTOs must provide VET regulators with evidence that VET practitioners in their employ have participated in adequate PD (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 19). This compliance measure has become an increased priority in the VET sector in the past decade, a response to concerns about quality problems of VET teaching and training. Regulatory control retrospectively applied in the sector are a response to problems plaguing the sector as a result of deregulation and privatisation (Rodd, 2021, p. 62). Tran and Pasura (2021, p. 19) suggest that regulatory scrutiny of PD burdens RTOs with additional costs for the administration of that evidence. However, they fail to mention that most RTOs transfer the burden of administering evidence to individual VET practitioners. Types of professional development, opportunities and standards differ significantly despite guidance in the regulating legislation for example, participation in courses mentoring research moderation industry release schemes (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 11). RTOs often direct VET practitioners to develop and keep up-to-date trainer matrix documents detailing individual PD activities. Developing trainer matrices can take considerable time depending on the extent of individual VET practitioner qualifications, PD activities, and relevant industry experience, creating a situation of gross discrepancy of opportunity and outcome, with practitioners operating as individual contractors while others are allowed time and payment to support their development. While regulations govern the professional standards and skill set to practice as a VET trainer, no comparable standards exist to ensure these regulations are the responsibility of RTO management.

RTOs can provide trainer matrices to VET regulators on request as evidence of ensuring all trainers and assessors have been undertaking professional development (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 19). This implies that it is each RTO that should provide the necessary resources for VET practitioners on their staff to undertake relevant professional development opportunities. However, RTOs apply only limited responsibility, protecting themselves from adverse regulatory action as cheaply as possible, serving legal obligations and reducing operating costs. The risk faced by RTOs that fail to comply with regulations is deregistration (Tyler & Dymock 2017, pp. 40-41). Instead of managing the risk by supplying resources,

RTOs mitigate it by transferring the risk to VET practitioners. Indeed, enquiries into management views of PD found that around 70% of RTO managers believe PD is only necessary to satisfy regulatory compliance, placing less emphasis on the importance of increasing VET practitioner capability (Tuck & Smith, 2017, p. 8).

RTO Managers who opt to provide professional development opportunities tend to select inexpensive options due to their primary interest in the immediate financial position of the RTO. Metrics used to reconcile financial output and value include, for instance, data on student completion and enrolment frequency (Mahon, Kemmis, Francisco & Lloyd, 2017, p. 158). Most managers are concerned with the impacts that regulatory compliance can have on fiscal performance, preferring short and cheap PD activities that do not have ongoing resourcing components (Tran & Pasura, 2021, p. 19). Determining the cost of production is easier than calculating benefits derived from professional development (Billett et al., 2014, p. 28). The cost of ensuring VET practitioners undertake adequate PD to the satisfaction of VET regulators can be measured against the cost of delivering VET products. We argue that this quantification of work value is imperative to understanding the under-valuing of PD in the VET sector. It is easy, for example, to measure if a VET practitioner has all the requisite qualifications according to regulatory requirements by comparing them to a list, while less simple to assess how attitudes and values affect the financial viability of providing VET products despite knowing those aspects have an influence (Relly, 2021, pp. 712-713). Chuan and Ibsen (2021) propose that social skills can be measured by assessing the frequency of activity and attitudes, consistent with employing a Likert scale to measure attitude strengths and comparing those data with measures of frequency.

A TAFE manager, interviewed by Schmidt (2021, p. 155), remarked on the need to ensure a return on investment using funding. In contrast, research examining the experiences of Victorian TAFE workers found that those who worked in the public TAFE system felt strongly that the institution should not be for profit, instead emphasising quality educational experience (Rodd, 2021, pp. 64-65). Although VET practitioners have argued that TAFEs and private RTOs operate on different financial models, both operate in a contemporary environment where they must all focus on financial performance as a core indicator

of operational success and sustainability. The allocation of resources for professional development is measured by cost-benefit projections (Billett et al., 2014, p. 28) accounting only for finance, revenue and profit (Law & Chuah, 2004, p. 178) failing to encompass more holistic pedagogical concerns. Compounding the issue, VET practitioners have varying years of experience and require different PD experiences to enhance their practice (Villegas-Reimers, 2003, pp. 128-129). RTO managers face pressure to resource different PD activities for individual VET practitioners, which can be viewed as an inefficient use of organisational resources. Without a way to substantially project the benefits of resourcing PD, management is unlikely to do so (Smith, 2004, p. 233). That narrowing view towards financial measures ignores that policy should maintain consistency with its human capital basis to also consider social benefits (Holden & Biddle, 2017, p. 553), RTOs managed from a singular view of cost-benefit fails to meaningfully consider myriad benefits to VET practitioners.

RTOs benefit from VET practitioner PD by capturing what has been learnt and integrating it into organisational systems, policies and procedures for delivering VET products. Knowledge derived from PD becomes a resource leveraged by RTOs (Eraut, 2011, p. 11), improving competitiveness in the marketplace and enabling them to tout innovative teaching practices. VET practitioners' ability to meaningfully introduce new teaching methods that could improve students' educative experiences is limited by what RTO management deems valuable to their business (Caves, Baumann & Renold, 2021, p. 108). The benefits from PD are not necessarily encountered by those participating in the activities but are, instead, received by other stakeholders like RTOs. The intent of such comparison, however, was so that human capital theory could account for external factors contributing to the cost-benefit analysis of education (Holden & Biddle, 2017, pp. 563-564). That aspect appears increasingly ignored by RTO management resourcing decisions, therefore we consider WA VET practitioners could apply a similar view to determine a cost-benefit analysis about resourcing PD.

RTOs implement management systems to capture knowledge as a resource and to ensure VET practitioners are undertaking adequate PD. Points are accumulated for PD activities completed and made measurable by a weighting scale (Dymock & Tyler, 2018, p. 203). RTO managers who implement a point system set a target number of

points that VET practitioners must accumulate during a defined time as a performance condition of remaining employed, not necessarily resourcing PD activities beyond collecting evidence to satisfy VET regulators that the RTO has been compliant with PD regulations (Tyler & Dymock, 2017, p. 31). RTOs that view PD primarily as a regulatory compliance activity perceive little active interest in resourcing PD that has a measurable improvement on VET practitioner teaching aptitude.

For the systematic management of PD in RTOs, a holistic approach to improving the quality of VET is needed (Tran & Pasura, 2021, p. 19). Quality should not be limited to easily measured financial capacity and instead include measures considering teaching and learning, procedures and outcomes. Santa (2015, p. 268) provides a helpful definition that links quality improvement with financial capacity whereby the quality of output increases and the cost of doing so reduces. The problem, however, is that the allocation of resources for professional development is likely to cease when production cost achieves breakeven with the cost of professional development resources. When that happens, RTO management is likely to reduce resourcing PD because there is a financial benefit.

Methods for substantiating costs associated with organisations resourcing PD for VET practitioners have included a cost-benefit analysis using the Kirkpatrick model (Smith, 2004, p. 234). The model aims to make a learning process measurable and realise how learning becomes implemented behaviour. A problem with using it as a decision-making tool for determining PD resources is that it does not account for PD activities that the organisation does not direct. VET practitioners tend to participate in PD activities outside the work environment, particularly when RTOs are reluctant to provide PD activity opportunities. Without measuring VET practitioner personal PDs financial and time costs outside of work, the Kirkpatrick model is a limited measurement tool.

Smith (2004, p. 232) argues that RTOs resourcing PD must manage direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include, for example, formal programs, trainers and subject matter experts, and administration. Indirect costs are those that support the execution of aspects that have direct costs, such as travel and accommodation, and opportunity costs related to doing or not doing PD. Hoekstra and Crocker (2015, p. 357)

suggest four aspects to consider for managing PD a nurturing learning environment, self-evaluation to promote learning, examination of core and implicit values and assumptions underpinning institutional practices, and the availability of knowledge management systems to leverage resources and staff expertise. While the four aspects may help implement an organisational system to manage PD to benefit the organisation, it does not seek to understand the impacts of VET practitioners undertaking PD of their own volition. An earlier idea for determining cost-benefit by Kluge and Schilling (2003, p. 34) has the same problem of not accounting for VET practitioner resourced PD, suggesting the cost-benefit of PD can be measured by calculating the change in cost over time, assuming costs for PD are entirely controlled by the organisation, failing to consider resources provided by VET practitioners which, as our research shows, is common.

VET practitioners develop experience over time and can increase their value proposition to other training providers. The risk of staff turnover can be reduced by improving staff intention to stay (Annelies et al., 2017, p. 584). When essential human resources leave an organisation, additional costs must be outlaid for rehiring and retraining. That is particularly difficult when VET practitioners who need to be replaced also leave with institutional knowledge and experience. Organisations and managers who provide professional development opportunities and recognise and reward (Annelies et al., 2017, p. 593) VET practitioner improvement is directly correlated to an increased likelihood that staff will remain. Human capital theory postulates that PD directed by managers reduces employee satisfaction, and when staff are self-directive of their development and managers are supportive, there is an increase in job satisfaction (Solomon, Nikolaev & Shepherd, 2022).

Continued benefit from retaining staff is made possible by organisations that lead learning by using structured approaches for managing knowledge and professional development (Farhan, 2018, p. 18). Absent from Farhan's explanation as to why organisations can benefit from implementing systematic professional development is the word 'should', suggesting it is acceptable for management to view resourcing professional development as discretionary. By legislative standards governing the Australian VET industry, it is acceptable for training organisations to adopt the position that the responsibility to develop professionally sits entirely with VET practitioners, the burden

of financial and time costs of PD are mitigated by the organisation, effectively reducing the cost of 'product' delivery, failing to consider the potential costs of staff turnover. Further, the Educational Services (post-secondary education) Award 2020 (ESA) and Western Australian TAFE Lecturers General Agreement (TLGA) used by private RTOs and TAFEs do not require organisations to resource professional development activities. At best, they suggest managers should consider providing resources for VET practitioner professional development, but they are not compelling.

The TLGA (Department of Training Workforce Development, 2020, pp. 38-39) provisions that time may be accrued towards professional development time so long as their employing college approves it. Management can approve or disallow the requested professional development time. VET practitioners who wish to accrue time to undertake professional development must perform additional hours of work or access other leave entitlements while high rates of casualisation in the sector (Tyler & Dymock, 2021a) mean that practitioners are unlikely to be eligible for any paid leave. The employment agreement requires colleges to 'provide opportunities for lecturers to participate in appropriate professional development' (Department of Training Workforce Development, 2020, p. 115) providing no indication of how those opportunities are resourced, specifying only what professional development opportunities are appropriate (2020, pp. 143-144), thus limiting VET practitioner agency. Collectively, that enables employing WA TAFE colleges to compel VET practitioners to undertake professional development benefiting the college at the cost of individual practitioners.

Most private RTOs employ under conditions of the ESA which fails to clarify who is responsible for implementing or resourcing professional development, only noting professional development being an aspect of movement between pay points (Fair Work Commission, 2022, p. 66). The ESA and TLGA provision for incremental increases to pay based upon years served with the employer, qualifications and performance-based measures. Whether or not incremental increases are applied on the anniversary of VET practitioner employment is decided upon by management. Despite provisions for incremental pay increases, Tyler and Dymock (2017, pp. 31-40) suggest that RTOs can use the fact that most VET practitioners are only required to have a certificate four

qualification for vocational teaching as the basis for not incrementing pay. However, RTO managers do not have to agree to increase pay beyond those stipulated at Certificate Four teaching qualifications (Fair Work Commission, 2022, p. 48). Should RTO management determine that qualifications other than the minimum required by legislation governing VET are irrelevant to the function of VET practitioners, they may use that argument to nullify pay increments. In the ESA, employers may consider a VET practitioner in question has not acquired or utilised increased skills and knowledge that could reasonably be expected to be acquired and utilised (Fair Work Commission, 2022, p. 48). Managers may consider skills and knowledge gained in higher level qualifications are not utilised for the employment role and not provide incremental pay increases. Nevertheless, professional development activities must still be undertaken to meet VET compliance requirements. VET practitioners remain vulnerable to management decisions that avoid resourcing professional development. Ethical activity favouring VET practitioner professional development is not mandated by professional membership bodies as, contrasting with compulsory PD for those teaching in the school sector (Tyler & Dymock, 2021b).

Findings and discussion

As with similar survey-based research, the self-selecting nature of those who choose to engage is a significant factor to be considered when interpreting the data. While data are randomised via respondent self-selection, it is acknowledged that self-selection can limit the ability to extrapolate on the significance of the findings. Our findings broadly indicate the disparity of experiences of those working in the VET sector. Pay, conditions (limited in this data set to the relative support workers are given to engage in PD) and qualifications vary widely and appear to be largely haphazard in their application. Our research found that some practitioners are paid below the ESA and TLGA minimum remuneration requirements, responding WA VET practitioners earn, on average, around 17% above the calculated average minimum award. The act of averaging, however, masks the fact that some WA VET practitioners are not being paid at least the minimum legal wage. Indeed, 33% of respondents reported earnings beneath the award when accounting for years of experience and qualifications that identify the entitlement. Of the ten respondents who reported being paid less than the minimum

entitlement, four had less than three years of experience, two had between four and seven years of experience, and four had at least ten years of experience. None of the respondents with less than four years of experience reported being paid at or above minimum entitlements. VET teaching qualification levels did not appear to factor in being paid less than the minimum entitlement.

By contrast, for respondents who reported being paid at or above minimum entitlements (n=20), the mean average pay was 32.15% above the corresponding minimum entitlement. Individual pay ranged from 13.82% and 55.09% above minimum entitlements. Again, VET teaching qualification did not appear to factor into being paid more than the minimum entitlement. The single highest beneficiary, earning 55.09% above minimum entitlement, had a Certificate IV teaching qualification and between six and seven years of experience. For comparison, the single most underpaid respondent, earning 16.3% less than the minimum entitlement, had a Diploma teaching qualification, though less than two years of experience. VET practitioner PD comes with financial and time costs incurred by individuals when employers do not adequately resource it. The common argument is that individual employees should be responsible for their own PD, despite RTOs being the primary beneficiaries (Avis 2021:167). In effect, WA VET practitioners are offered employment at a particular rate and then directed to pay, by personally incurring costs of PD, to remain employed. Formal qualifications do not represent all PD activity types, but they can be used as an indicator of development and pay (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: VET qualifications held at each reported pay interval

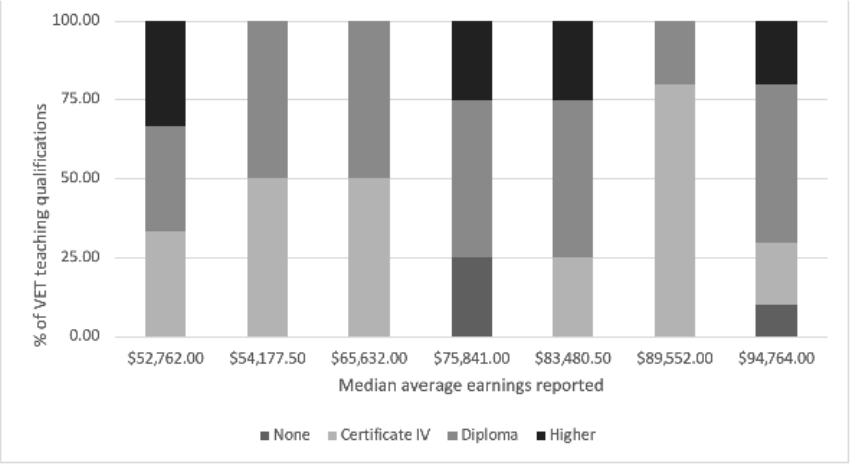
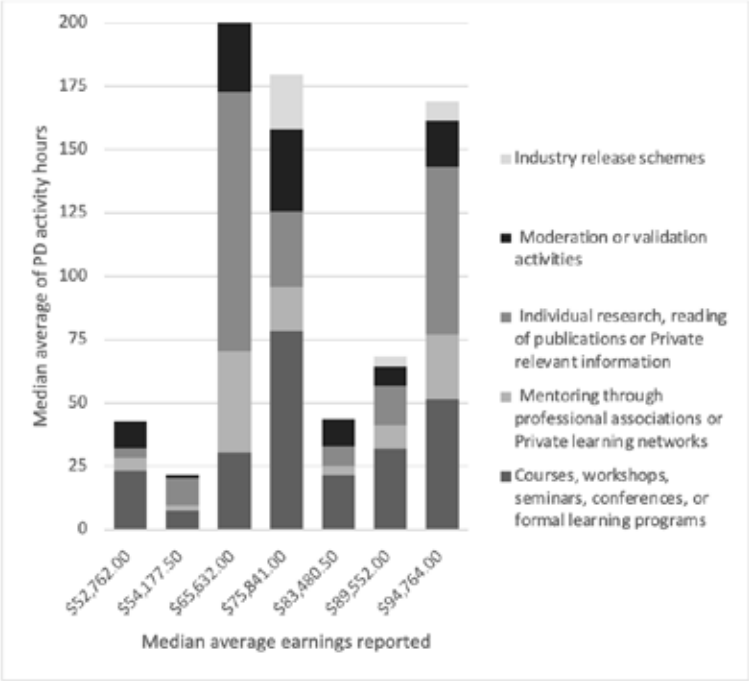


Figure 1 represents the percentage of respondents reporting VET teaching qualification levels at the indicative pay intervals. It might be assumed that as qualification levels increase, so too would pay increments, but that is not the case. Instead, there is a higher concentration of the lowest VET teaching qualification in the second-highest pay interval, and the highest concentration of higher qualifications is in the lowest pay interval. The evidence suggests that there is no clear financial incentive for WA VET practitioners to achieve higher than the minimum Certificate IV teaching qualification. This lack of direct correlation between teaching qualification and pay ultimately degrades the relative standing of the VET profession (Atkins & Tummons, 2017, p. 360). It is important to note that this does not mean that WA VET practitioners are not participating in PD activities that do not result in higher qualifications, only that there is unlikely to be any clear positive financial benefit and that other factors are evidently at play.

An indication of the types of PD activities WA practitioners participate in at different pay increments is formed by graphing data in Figure 2. Each column represents an earning increment, and the total height of each column displays the median average hours of PD undertaken by all survey respondents at the corresponding pay increment. There is some evidence that the amount of PD activity increases as pay increases, however, it is not a linear transition. The lack of linearity is

seen from the middle to high-income increments, where there is a drop in PD activity hours before an increase. Interestingly, participation in individual research activities is much higher at $65,632 and $94,764 pay increments. Pay increments are not a predictor of types of PD activity participation since the median average of participating hours does not present an obvious pattern or progression. The only thing it suggests is that higher rates of PD activity do not correspond to higher earnings. WA VET practitioners participate in an unequal number of PD hours at different pay increments, meaning there is no standard amount of PD activity between individual practitioners at the same or different pay increments. The different amounts of time practitioners participate in PD activities can be considered an individual cost to maintain employment. It is therefore important to understand how much time is being spent during work and outside of work time, allowing time to be calculated as a cost-per-hour proposition and consider that resultant figure as part of the individual financial cost of doing PD for WA VET practitioners.

Figure 2: Hours of PD activity type by pay interval



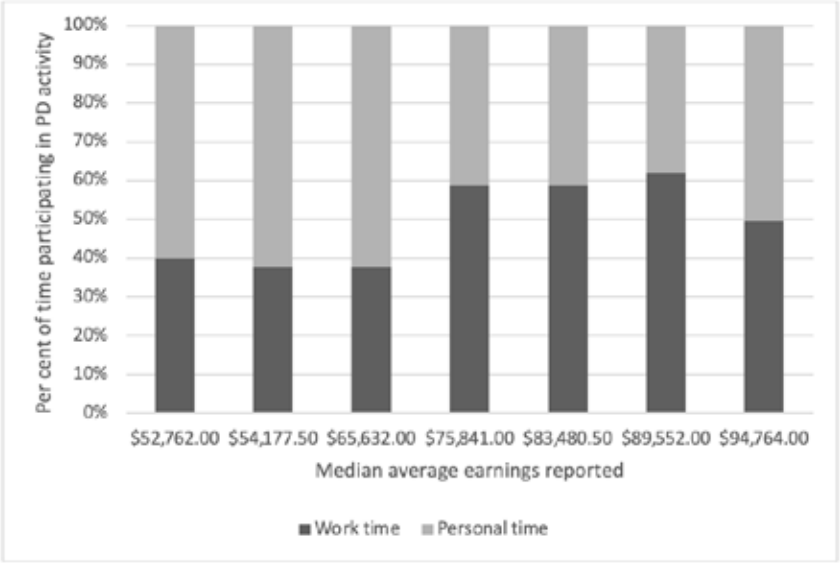
The survey asked respondents what proportion of PD hours they apply outside of working hours. Responses were converted to an estimated percentage to determine how much time was used for PD during work and personal time. For example, respondents who indicated they participate in PD activity in their personal time about half the time were assigned a 50% portion of total PD hours as being undertaken during personal time. Proportions of time spent doing PD during those times are graphed in Figure 3 for each indicative pay interval. WA VET practitioners who receive lower pay participate in PD activities more often in their personal time than during paid work time. Higher paid WA VET practitioners have a more balanced portion of time expended for PD during work and personal time. That time balance does not mean higher paid practitioners are less disadvantaged than lower-paid practitioners as higher paid practitioners are represented by a higher total number of PD hours. Practitioners receiving middling pay undertake similarly high PD hours. Data suggest there is no reliable correlation between hours of PD undertaken during work and personal hours with pay increments.

Our data show that WA VET practitioners participate in more PD activity hours in personal time than the TLGA provides. The TLGA provisions 37. 5 hours of entitlement (Department of Training Workforce Development, 2020, p. 38) compared to the median average of 69.2 hours of participation in PD. Illustrating how that disadvantages WA VET practitioners, those hours are multiplied by the median average pay rate finding disposable income is reduced by $2,464.61. Put another way, the price incurred by WA VET practitioners to remain employed is around $2,464.61, in addition to the opportunity cost of the time that financial cost represents. Opportunity costs can be intangible, such as spending time with family and friends and participating in social activities. Requiring VET practitioners to give more of their time to meet employers' regulatory obligations in addition to the time and skill they have already traded for agreed pay contravenes the spirit if not the letter of the legislated award.

Invoking human capital theory, a workers' value to an employing organisation relates to their skill and time given as a service for an agreed price (Lopez & Cerpa, 2021, p. 140). WA VET practitioners are being taken advantage of to provide their skill and time for free to enable employing RTOs to meet their regulatory obligations The RTO ensures

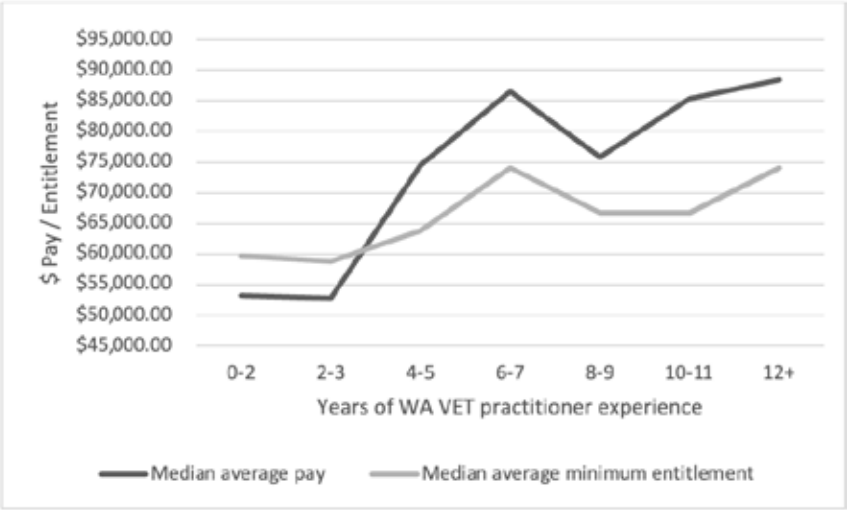
that all trainers and assessors undertake professional development (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 19). The regulation ensures PD remains the responsibility of RTOs. However, RTO management can use the clause to transfer responsibility to VET practitioners as a condition of employment. Doing so, RTOs transfer the financial and time PD burden to individual practitioners, creating a coercive culture whereby VET practitioners accept the burden of unpaid time and incurred costs, the implied threat of termination of employment looming.

Figure 3: Per cent of time spent participating in PD activities during work and personal time by pay interval



Graphing time in years of experience and pay intervals reported by respondents gives a clearer picture of how years of VET practitioner experience is a better predictor of pay increments (see Figure 4). Three distinct VET practitioner groups become visually represented: Early career practitioners with less than three years of experience, mid-career practitioners with three to eight years of experience, and late-career practitioners with more than eight years of experience.

Figure 4: Median average pay reported by experience versus median average minimum pay entitlement



It might have been expected that a linear increase to pay would accompany WA VET practitioner experience increases, but that is not the case. Responding early-career VET practitioners reported being paid below minimum ESA rates. Failure to pay staff adequately negatively affects VET practitioners' intention to say (Annelies et al., 2018, p. 584). Human capital theory suggests that low pay can cause poor performance, increasing the likelihood for worker attrition (Hartog & Brink, 2007, p. 199). Mid-career WA VET practitioners appear to receive better pay than their minimum entitlement. However, those data are skewed by outlier responses that earn significantly above minimum entitlements. Two respondents in the mid-career group reported earning less than their minimum entitlements, while the remainder earned from 13.67% to 55.01% more than their minimum entitlement.

This sample data indicates a concerning trend in sector underpayment. Highlighting that problem, our evidence suggests great disparities and irregularities in pay based when factoring in other relevant employment variables. One respondent, who was a mid-career practitioner with four to five years of experience, with only a Certificate IV VET teaching qualification reported earning 155.09% of the award. Conversely, the two mid-career respondents who reported earning less than their

minimum entitlement had diploma-level VET teaching qualifications. As noted, participants self-selected to engage with the research. The survey was sent to those in management positions, with the intention that they might distribute it to their workers. Based on the responses, it may be hypothesised that these practitioners themselves chose to complete the survey. This would account for the relatively high income levels recorded.

Late-career practitioners are those with eight or more years of VET practitioner experience paid more on average $71,497, compared to $53,115. 88 and $70,110 for early and mid-career groups respectively. It appears that more years of experience beyond eight years does not include a relative pay increase similar to fewer years of experience. That is not particularly compelling because the financial value of work undertaken by VET practitioners needs to be limited so public and private RTOs can provide training and education services at accessible prices. What is telling, however, is the ongoing cost to individual VET practitioners to maintain their employment.

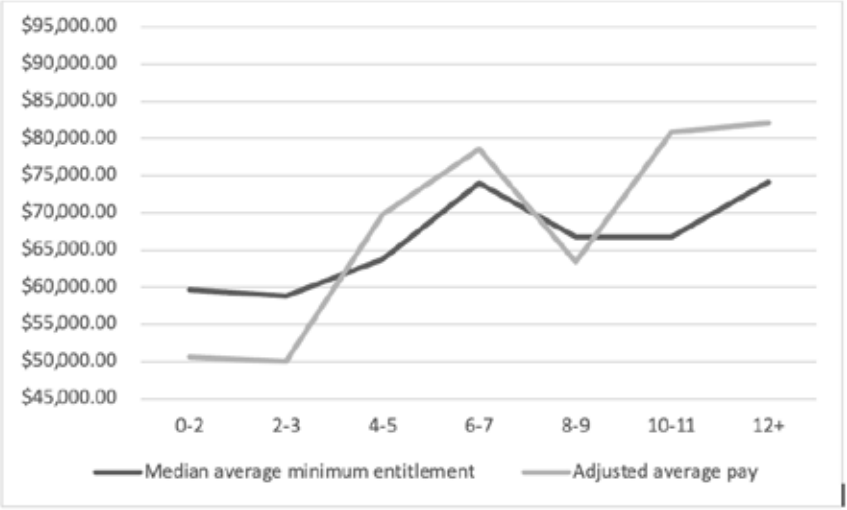
Survey data collected about the time and financial cost of PD incurred by WA VET practitioners provide insight into how those costs impact income from employment, providing more accurate insight into the disposable income of WA VET practitioners. Reported annual income for VET practitioner work is divided by 1950 hours, representing the most common hours per year for full-time work in Australia, multiplied by the number of PD hours participated in external to employment hours. For example, a respondent reported earning $83,480.50 annually, a financial cost of $4,538.50 for PD, and 91. 8 hours of PD external to employed hours:

- 83,480.50 annual pay / 1950 working hours = $42.81 per hour for work
- $42.81 per hour X 91.8 PD hours = $3929.96
- $3,929.96 cost of PD time + $4,538.50 financial cost of PD = $8,468.46 total individual cost of PD
- $83,480.50 annual pay - $8,468.46 incurred individual cost = $75,012.04 disposable income

Figure 5 shows what happens to WA VET practitioner earnings when the total individual cost of PD is subtracted from annual reported pay

and compared to minimum pay entitlements. It reveals that WA VET practitioners can receive inadequate pay to support the personally incurred cost of remaining employed. Effectively, the number of WA VET practitioners receiving pay below the award increases from 33.33% to 36.67% when adjusting for the incurred cost of PD. The respondent who reported the lowest adjusted pay compared to their minimum entitlement was 27.13% below the entitlement. The respondent who reported the highest adjusted pay compared to their minimum entitlement was 43.91% above the entitlement. That comparison is necessary to view how wide a gap exists between disposable pay received for work by WA VET practitioners, our sample data indicating that more than one-third of WA VET practitioners are not paid adequately. Further research is needed to test the accuracy of that assumption since this research did not differentiate between VET practitioners who had additional managerial duties.

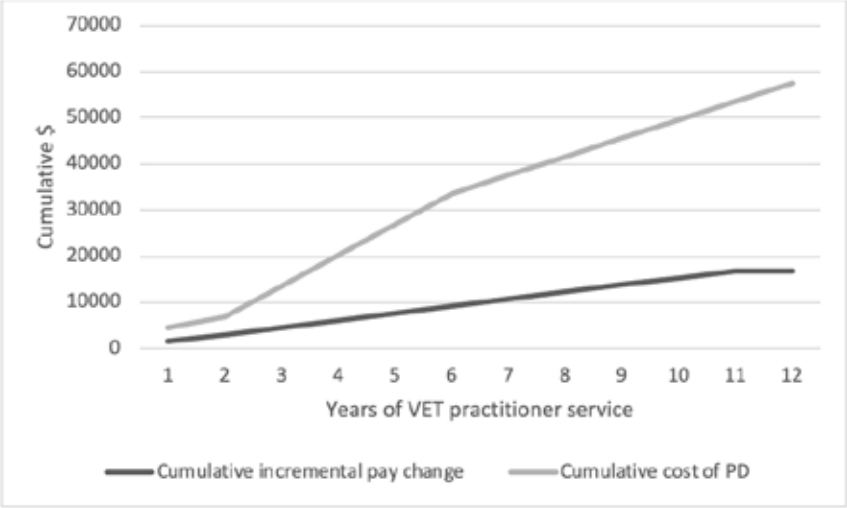
Figure 5: Median adjusted pay reported by experience vs median average pay entitlement



Data indicate that the cumulative individual cost of PD over time does not offer a positive financial return when WA VET practitioners progress from early to late careers. Assuming the reported median average individual cost of PD for each career stage is representative of each year over twelve years, an estimate of the financial value of

WA VET practitioner work is calculable. The cumulative individual cost of PD compared with the cumulative pay increment changes over twelve years as illustrated in Figure 6, charting the accumulative individually incurred cost of PD outpaces the accumulative incremental pay benefits at all stages of career progression. WA VET practitioners are increasingly disadvantaged as they participate in longer periods of service as VET practitioners. Beyond twelve years, incremental pay increases reduce, but the costs incurred by individual practitioners are unlikely to decrease because of the continued need to undertake PD as a condition of continuing to be employed.

Figure 6: Comparison of cumulative individual cost of PD to cumulative incremental pay increases over 12 years



There appears to be no financial benefit for WA VET practitioners compared to the time and financial cost of doing PD other than for maintaining employment. While not an insubstantial benefit, employers receive a greater advantage viewed through a human capital theory lens. Human capital theory concerns human productive output, a result of efficiencies derived from education and training. It suggests that an employee provides increased productive benefits to organisations when their human capabilities are increased (Lopez & Cerpa 2021, p. 136). The theory also suggests that any activity undertaken by individuals for gainful employment can expect to receive an increasing benefit

as their productive skills increase (Lopez & Cerpa, 2021, p. 135). On the other hand, employers may assume an up-or-out perspective that PD is only beneficial for employees' external opportunities in the job market and that rewarding PD will ultimately cost the organisation (Hartog & Brink, 2007, pp. 124-125). Our findings suggest that this transactional, supposedly free-market theory is not only inadequate but deeply flawed. Simply, the VET sector benefits unevenly from practitioners undertaking PD at their own expense, while failing to pass on the rewards of the development of professional skills and knowledge. The assertion that VET practitioners are the only beneficiaries of PD is invalidated by legislative regulation that RTOs must ensure VET practitioners undertake PD (Standards for Registered Training Providers (RTOs) 2015, 2019, p. 19). Resourcing adequate PD protects RTOs from negatively impacting regulatory action. That means that as RTOs encounter VET practitioners with higher level qualifications and who have participated in regular PD, the RTO stands to gain increased productivity or reduced cost due to potential regulatory sanctions. Other productivity benefits that are more difficult to measure are the potential for increased student numbers and improved student assessment success. None of those benefits are likely to be attributed to individual employee skill and productive input while division of labour approaches are used to measure the financial performance of discrete actions, similar to machines on a production line (Livock, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings are consistent with qualitative literature that broadly suggests that VET practitioners continue to teach because of personal beliefs concerning the value they place on their assumed professional identities and love of their discipline. The collective evidence suggests that the motivating factor for most VET practitioners is not a financial reward but rather a deep engagement with their industry knowledge and a desire to communicate that to others. Incremental pay for work does not adequately compensate for the personally incurred costs of PD required for continued employment or as justification for incremental pay increases. This research finds evidence to indicate that the incremental pay scale increases according to the relevant award are not in practice being implemented consistently, indeed providing evidence that at each identified career stage, there is a detrimental financial

impact on WA VET practitioners to undertake PD.

The Australian Productivity Commission, which rejected recommendations for establishing a national VET practitioner scheme that would ensure adequate quality PD undertakings, was concerned that a national scheme would be too expensive and would act as a deterrent for people to become VET practitioners (Dymock & Tyler, 2018, pp. 205-206). Perhaps because there is a negative effect on VET practitioner pay due to personally incurred costs of PD, there is already a deterrent to new practitioners entering the sector and for experienced practitioners to continue practising. This has real potential implications for the ongoing quality and sustainability of the VET sector. The research on which this paper is based indicates that WA VET practitioners are not only inadequately remunerated, in terms of pay for employment, to sufficiently balance the individually incurred cost of PD, but that there appears to be sectoral underpayment based solely on the award.

Declaration of interest statement

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

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Empowering Saudi women through vocational skills

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This study aimed to assess the level of empowerment experienced by Saudi women through the vocational skills taught in educated-neighbourhood programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the research sought to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in empowerment levels based on marital status and the number of courses under-taken. The research uncovered the challenges faced by women during the pandemic, utilising descriptive statistics to collect data. The sample consisted of Saudi females enrolled in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The results indicated that Saudi women experienced empowerment through the vocational skills acquired in educated-neighbourhood programs. Furthermore, the findings revealed no statistically significant differences in empowerment levels among women based on marital status. However, there were statistically significant differences in the empowerment levels of the participants based on the number of courses taken. The results illustrated that the various challenges faced by women during the pandemic, included isolation at home, psychological coping, dis-

continued economic activities, adherence to safety precautions, and access to healthcare.

***Keywords**: educated-neighborhood programs, vocational skills, Saudi women, COVID-19, empowering women*

Introduction

Currently, Saudi Arabia has a great desire to be a developed country and to attain a considerable number of achievements. Therefore, the Saudi government invests in human capital development for future economic growth. Saudi Vision 2030 focuses on continuous learning and training, and it provides a chance for people to improve their abilities and skills to contribute to society's development. In line with Saudi Vision 2030, a fundamental principle of sustainable development is the empowerment of women. A first step for women's empowerment is to use teaching methodologies that are most suitable for the majority of learners in the class and to have curricula that are designed to enable people to become more independent learners (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016).

Moreover, according to Saudi Vision 2030, the female participation rate in the labour market will increase from 22% to 30% by 2030. Over 50% of Saudi women graduate from universities (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). To reduce unemployment, these graduates need lifelong training, allowing them to develop a high-performance work team and to improve sustainable skills to build the country's society and economy. Several research studies (Aldossari, 2020; Alfarran, Pyke, & Stanton, 2018; Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002) indicated that there is a lack of Saudi women' participating in the workforce, especially in the private sector.

One of the most significant courses that offers various skills is the Learning Neighbourhood Programme. These proficiencies include vocations, life, self-awareness, and reading and writing skills. According to Shah (2020), vocational training is an essential measure to develop an individual's skills; this instruction can create a better future, reducing unemployment and migration to other countries. Therefore, this study aimed to answer the following research questions: How much are Saudi women empowered through vocational skills at the Learning

Neighbourhood Programme during the time of COVID-19? Is there a statistically significant difference in marital status and the number of courses, for Saudi women's responses about their empowerment through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19? What challenges have adult women faced to practice vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2012a) stated that funding for vocational-skill development must be adequate to meet the demands of citizens and socio-economic growth as well as to avoid waste in education. Therefore, Saudi Vision 2030 strove to expand vocational training in all cities and regions of the kingdom. In this study, vocational skills, which were taught by the Learning Neighbourhood Programme, were the focus. These skills included painting and decor, fashion technology, establishing entrepreneurship and small projects, beauty and hair care, the food industry, repairing computers and mobile phones, and using computers.

In 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for these vocational, sustainable skills appeared because the situation created a global crisis across every aspect of society, including the economy, security, education, the labour market, and health. This crisis was a challenge for everybody, particularly women. According to the United Nations (2020), the shutdown of many educational systems and the effect of the economic sectors put additional stress and demands on women. For example, the demand for childcare and family care increased. As a result,1.52 billion students and over 60 million teachers were not at their schools.

Learning Neighbourhood Programme

The Learning Neighbourhood Programme is lifelong-learning project which was created by the Saudi government to achieve a positive effect on economic, social, and cultural factors. The classes are informal education and are under the adult-education department. The first programme was established in 2006; the pilot project was in Jeddah City's communities which had poor environmental, educational, and economic conditions. After the pilot phase, the Learning Neighbourhood Programme was rolled into all regions of Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education engaged people through television, the internet, newspaper

advertisements and publications, and advertisements at mosques and health centers so that citizens could benefit from the classes. Over 1,000 learners enrolled not only in literacy-skills training courses, but also in other courses, including computing, English, sewing, photography, cooking, flower arranging, and crafts, that were offered by the programme. All the courses were free, and anyone in the community could attend. These programmes were designed to extend the concept of adult education from literacy to lifelong learning, preparing individuals, especially women who are less fortunate in terms of education, to contribute to society's development; qualifying women for the labour market; providing women with the necessary skills to obtain financial self-sufficiency and to be independent learners; and enriching the work culture for women.

The Learning Neighbourhood Programme also aimed to link the relationship between adult-education programmes and development plans through training, rehabilitation, and development opportunities by spreading the culture of volunteer work among society's members. The programme was designed to help learners advance their cultural, health, social, and economic levels as well as provide people with the skills that qualify them for the labour market. The project was a model for sustainable development and the path to lifelong education. The Learning Neighbourhood Program has received full, ongoing support from numerous government sectors. The Ministry of Education's division overseeing women's education is in charge of the programmes' primary management. The programme also has backing from several other government ministries and departments as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charitable organisations, and private-sector organisations. These groups support the programme by awarding prizes to trainees and by contributing training materials and other resources. The NGOs provide volunteers and give talks on life skills while the Red Crescent offers training for first aid. Other alliances have been created with business leadership organizations (providing non-profit loans and project management support to trainees who complete the programme) and an investment bank (providing low-profit loans) (Alsuker, 2015).

To be accepted for the Learning Neighbourhood Programme, individuals should be at least 15 years old and want to develop their skills. Trainees are only awarded a certificate if their absence rate

for the courses does not exceed 20% of the total hours. The Ministry of Education is responsible for hiring qualified teachers, such as individuals who work at public schools or adult education centres, as well as people who are retired. All the teachers are trained by the Department of Adult Education so that they know how to deal with adult learners in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2018).

According to the Ministry of Education (2018), the criteria to implement and to select the appropriate training programmes are as follows: fulfilling the needs of the labour market and the participants' needs for each department, benefiting from community institutions and the volunteers' experience as a community partnership, and achieving the programmes' goals. Adult learners attend class 4 hours in the evening for 5 days per week. The training programmes have many variations, including educational programmes, life skills, awareness skills, and vocational skills. For example, educational training helps individuals to improve their writing and reading as well as to learn a new language. For life skills, trainees receive a set of abilities, such as critical-thinking skills, that enable them to deal with and to adapt to different life situations. For the awareness skills, individuals improve their religious, cultural, health, security, and social levels; an example is maternal and child health. For vocational skills, the programmes are tailored to the labour market's needs, giving trainees the required level of competence. In this study, the vocational skills that were taught at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes are examined.

Vocational skills

The Learning Neighbourhood Programmes' vocational-skill training prepares women for the labour market and provides them with sustainable skills. These programmes enrich the women's work culture, including values such as enthusiasm and sincerity. The programmes' objectives are to take advantage of free time and to invest it for the benefit of the participants and their families; to promote a positive view of occupations, especially manual ones; to support economic and social growth as a factor that contributes to society's development; and to decrease unemployment. Vocational skills include painting and décor; buffet preparation; fashion technology; establishing entrepreneurship and small projects; beauty and hair care; the food industry; repairing computers and mobile phones; and using a computer for programming,

web design, marketing, and photography (General Department of Continuing Education, 2018).

With the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, developing individuals' skills has become an urgent need for governments around the world. Any country's prosperity and growth depend on having a skilled workforce. There is a relationship between quality training and the labour market. Quality training empowers individuals to continue their training, to develop their full skills, to seize job and social opportunities, and to enhance innovation (International Labour Office, 2010; UNESCO, 2012b). According to Langer (2013), vocational skills are needed for specific professional tasks. For instance, the French Development Agency conducted a qualitative survey with a group of 110 association leaders from central Africa. The survey's result showed that 60% of the students who completed their higher education joined the labour market by enrolling in informal vocational training. Additionally, vocational programmes support active labour-market policies by supplying the necessary skills that help individuals to find a job or to generate job opportunities (Acevedo, Cruces, Gertler, & Martinez, 2020). In addition to improving economic development, vocational programmes are closely related to human needs such as freedom, justice, participation, and empowerment to develop potential skills. The goal of a vocational skill is to help people take control of their lives and achieve a better quality of life (Nuttavuthisit, 2017).

Several studies confirm the important effect of vocational skills on people's lives (Johnson, 2015; Langer, 2013; Olagbaju, 2020; Wu, 2019). Johnson's (2015) study showed that vocational training programmes have an essential role in empowering rural women to obtain new income and eradicate poverty. In the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is significant for individuals to have vocational skills to empower people to deal with crises. According to the International Labour Organization (2020), during crisis and epidemic situations, there are some recommendations when the labour market faces challenges. One suggestion is that institutions should provide more training programmes. People should also seek to create income-generation opportunities by developing their skills. During these complex circumstances, learners, especially women, have to be self-reliant to benefit from their skills to obtain opportunities and to take advantage of the resources and possibilities which are available within their families.

The United Nations (2020) said, "Emerging evidence on the impact of COVID-19 suggests that women's economic and productive lives will be affected disproportionately and differently from men" (p.4).

When women attain knowledge and vocational skills, that training will not only help them to be employable but will also strengthen their empowerment. For example, women who obtain vocational skills improve their social and economic status; therefore, they will be self-confident and financially independent. Vocational skills empower women to have a job and to increase their income for sustainable development and a sense of self-esteem (Ahamad, Sinha, & Shastri, 2016). According to the results of Acevedo et al's study (2020), after women attended vocational training programmes, they became more optimistic and reported higher self-esteem. Boahene (2021) also confirmed that vocational skills promote women's empowerment and decrease poverty.

Theoretical framework

Female empowerment

The term "empowerment" has been used in many studies to denote different meanings. For example, Cox, Pawar, and Pawar (2006) stated that empowerment is an individual transformation that consists of consciousness-raising, self-reliance, and fulfilment. Kabeer (2001) defined women's empowerment as "an expansion in the range of potential choices available to women so that actual outcomes reflect the particular set of choices which the women value" (p. 81). In this study, empowering women is known as achieving a significant change in their lives by integrating women into the workforce to increase financial support, manage community affairs, participate in development activities, be self-reliant, and have time for themselves as individuals. Therefore, empowering is known here as "power" and consciousness-raising.

According to Freire (1973), empowering people helps them to develop a critical conscience. The consciousness results from people's knowledge about themselves as well as their potential and ability to make changes for the reality that is best for them. This consciousness is a gradual and complex process that begins with the acquisition of skills. With

Freire's approach, empowerment consists of three steps. The first step is personal empowerment, which means moving away from inferiority complexes and acknowledging one's own strengths, intelligence, skills, and knowledge. The second step is collective empowerment. It has to do with a person's group affiliation, in particular with how people interact and organise. The third step is community change. People will become more "aware" of their situation, gain access to knowledge and skills, and be able to transform their situation towards sustainable solutions (Stacki & Monkman, 2003). Therefore, when women organise themselves as a group of learners to acknowledge their strengths, intelligence, skills, and knowledge, they will change their situation towards a sustainable solution. Women who are empowered through vocational skills usually become more aware of themselves as well as being able to discuss and express their thoughts and to exchange experiences with others. Then, they can make a plan that helps them to change their lives.

Self-directed learning

It is necessary to acquire and apply vocational, sustainable skills in life and in crisis situations; this need is particularly important for women because they are more responsible for their families. The United Nations (2020) points out that the closure of childcare services and schools puts an additional strain and demand on women. These responsibilities require people to have self-directed learning that helps them to continue improving and to apply their skills in daily life.

According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is known as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p.18). Garrison (1992) stated that control and responsibility for the adult's education are essential with self-directed learning. At the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes, female adult students should have self-directed learning because the women have self-autonomy to select and to plan their courses as well as to continue learning. Many adults' motivation to learn is self-directed, leading them to meet their needs and to achieve lifelong learning (Knowles, 1975; Mezirow, 1985). Mbagwu, Chukwuedo, and Ogbuanya's (2020) study showed that self-directed learning is a positive predictor of lifelong-learning tendencies.

According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning promotes responsible and collaborative study as well as helping people to manage their time. For example, individuals share and discuss their opinions and ideas with others to develop skills. People are responsible for their learning; therefore, they manage their time by setting priorities, goals, and plans. Moreover, learners will be more effective, and they usually retain and benefit from training materials efficiently. Also, individuals are self-motivated to learn, which promotes social integration, personal development, competitiveness, job opportunities, and lifelong learning (Knowles, 1975; Peen & Mohammad, 2014).

Methodology

The study was designed to answer the following research questions: How much are Saudi women empowered through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programme during the time of COVID-19? Is there a statistically significant difference by marital status and the number of courses, for Saudi women's responses about their empowerment through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19? What challenges have adult women faced to practice vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic? This study focused on female, adult, Saudi learners who enrolled in Makkah, Saudi Arabia's Learning Neighbourhood Programme in order to gain vocational skills. Makkah is the capital of the Makkah region and is the holiest city in Islam. Makkah is the third-largest city in Saudi Arabia. Vocational skills are the knowledge and skills, practical competencies, and attitudes which are necessary to perform a certain trade or occupation in the labour market or as part of people's lives (African Development Bank, 2008). Vocational skills help female students to become self-directed lifelong learners. The United Nations (2020) pointed out that, during COVID-19, women would be the backbone of a community's recovery because they do a large amount of care work that is unpaid and invisible. Saudi women also have a lot of responsibilities for their family, work, and life. Therefore, this study aims to discover how much Saudi women were empowered through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19.

Instrument and processes

Descriptive, exploratory quantitative research was used and was dependent on a self-administered questionnaire. The instrument was designed through a review of related literature and by looking at the content of the vocational courses at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes. Some statements were modified to correspond with the COVID-19 pandemic. The instrument was divided into two parts. The first part was the respondents' demographic information related to marital status (married, single, or divorced) and the number of courses (1-2, 3-4, and 5 or more courses). Marital status and the number of courses were selected to understand if these variables affected the participants' opinions.

The second part had 23 statements to discover how much the Saudi women were empowered through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19. This part had a personal and family scale (items 1-12); for instance, "In the time of COVID-19, my vocational skills empower me to become a self-directed learner, a better person during the crisis, and provide my family members with the appropriate digital tools (open Microsoft programs or online search . . .)." There was also an economy and labour-market scale (items 13-23); for example, "In the time of COVID-19, my vocational skills empower me to contribute to my family's expenses, continue upgrading my skills through online courses in this pandemic, and build a small business even staying at home."

The responses were measured with a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The third part was an open-ended question about the challenges that women faced in practicing vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic. The instrument was developed in English, and then, it was translated into Arabic by two bilingual individuals with educational backgrounds. They independently translated the English instrument into Arabic, and then, the researchers joined the copies into one Arabic translation. The Arabic copy was translated back to English and reviewed in order to ensure consistency and accuracy. After the review, the final Arabic version was given to the participants.

Sample and Data Collected

The population was comprised of female learners who attended vocational-skill courses at Learning Neighbourhood Programmes in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The vocational courses had similar content and organisation. As a result of these similarities, the large number of learners, the limited research resources, and the situation during a pandemic, the study was focused in Makkah. The total population was 759 women, and the study sample had 525 participants.

The study's data were collected by using the online instrument that was distributed to all female learners who were only taking a vocational-skills courses at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes in Makkah. The link to the instrument was sent via an email message and a WhatsApp message. Participation was anonymous, confidential, and independent. The data were collected between May 20 and June 30, 2020.

The limitations for this study were the city (Makkah) where the sample was conducted and the lack of previous studies about this subject. Furthermore, the difficult communication/ lake of face-to face interaction with stakeholders due to the Coronavirus pandemic created another limitation; this action would have allowed the researchers to collect more information about the population.

Reliability and Validity

The instrument was reviewed by a panel of education experts. As a result, minor instrument modifications, such as adding items to each scale, were considered. The questionnaire's test-retest reliability was examined with a pilot test that had 70 participants. Those individuals were excluded from the study. The pilot test's validity coefficient had a mean of 0.90. The time interval between uses was 2 weeks. The correlation coefficient between the items and the entire questionnaire was 0.49-0.88. The correlation coefficient between the items and each scale was 0.57-0.88. Therefore, the correlation coefficients had acceptable degrees and were statistically significant. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), the acceptable values for Cronbach's Alpha range from 0.70-0.95. The result of using the Cronbach Alpha's coefficient to determine the instrument's reliability was 0.92, indicating

high values of instrument reliability. Table1 clarifies the reliability value for Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1: The value of the reliability of Cronbach's Alpha

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Personal and Family Scale	0.89
Economy and Labour Market Scale	0.83
Total	0.92

Data analysis

The data were examined by using SPSS for the descriptive analysis, including means and standard deviations. Additionally, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess differences based on the respondents' demographic' information related to marital status and the number of courses. Post-hoc Scheffe tests were also utilised for multiple comparisons.

Demographics

The study's respondents were female learners who only attended vocational-skill courses at Learning Neighbourhood Programmes in Makkah. Data about the demographic information's statistics are summarised in Table 2. The majority of the sample (62.3%) was married, and 41.7% of the participants were taking 1-2 courses.

Table 2: Demographic information's statistics

Demographic Information		N	%
Marital Status	Single	155	29.5
	Married	327	62.3
	Divorced	43	8.2
Number of Courses	1-2 courses	219	41.7
	3-4 courses	115	21.9
	5 or more courses	191	36.4
Total		525	100

Results

Findings for research question one

How much are Saudi women empowered through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programme during the time of COVID-19? To answer this research question, the means and standard deviations were determined. The total mean for the vocational skills that were obtained by Saudi women during the time of COVID-19 was 3.84. This statement indicated that women were empowered by using vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic. The highest-ranked skill scale was personal and family, and its total mean was 4.01. The practice level was high, and the means ranged between 4.37 and 3.80. The second skill scale was the economy and labour market. The total mean for this scale was 3.60, and the practice level was medium. The means for the economy and labour-market scale ranged between 4.00 and 2.93. Table 3 presents the vocational skills that Saudi women obtained during the time of COVID-19.

Table 3: Saudi Women's Vocational Skills During the Time of COVID-19

Rank	Scale of Vocational Skills	M	SD
1	Personal and Family	4.01	.628
2	Economy and Labour Market	3.60	.664
Total Score		3.84	.599

Findings for research question two

Is there a statistically significant difference by marital status and the number of courses, for Saudi women's responses about their empowerment through vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19? To answer this research question, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to see if there were a statistically significant difference based on marital status. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences (alpha = 0.05) among the women's perspectives based on their marital status for both scales (personal and family, and economy and labour market) and the entire instrument. Table 4 summarises the result of the one-way ANOVA for marital status.

Table 4: The Result of the One-Way ANOVA for Marital Status

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Personal and Family	Between Groups	.231	2	.116	.292	.747
	Within Groups	206.419	522	.395		
	Total	206.650	524			
Economy and Labor Market	Between Groups	.569	2	.284	.644	.525
	Within Groups	230.330	522	.441		
	Total	230.898	524			
Total Score	Between Groups	.184	2	.092	.255	.775
	Within Groups	187.747	522	.360		
	Total	187.931	524			

Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was employed to discover if there were a statistically significant difference based on the number of courses. The results, as seen in Table 5 and 6, indicated that there were statistically significant differences (alpha = 0.05) for the scales (personal and family, and economy and labour market) and the entire instrument. To understand the differences among the arithmetic averages, post-hoc tests were utilised. The post-hoc analysis showed the existence of significant differences (alpha = 0.05) between 5 or more courses, and 1-2 and 3-4 courses. The benefit of the direction was for women who took 5 or more courses.

Table 5: The Result of the One-Way ANOVA for the Number of Courses

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Personal and Family	Between Groups	16.138	2	8.069	22.110	.000
	Within Groups	190.512	522	.365		
	Total	206.650	524			
Economy and Labour Market	Between Groups	10.670	2	5.335	12.646	.000
	Within Groups	220.228	522	.422		
	Total	230.898	524			
Total Score	Between Groups	13.593	2	6.797	20.350	.000
	Within Groups	174.337	522	.334		
	Total	187.931	524			

Table 6: Post-Hoc Comparison Results by the Number of Courses

Post-Hoc Comparison Results by the Number of Courses

		Mean	1-2	3-4	5 or more
Personal and Family	1-2	3.88			
	3-4	3.88	.01		
	5 or more	4.24	*.37	*.36	
Economy and Labour Market	1-2	3.51			
	3-4	3.48	.03		
	5 or more	3.79	*.28	*.32	
Total	1-2	3.72			
	3-4	3.71	.01		
	5 or more	4.05	*.33	*.34	

* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Findings for research question three

What challenges have adult women faced to practice vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic? The findings for research question three are as follows. After coding the data to determine the categories, the researchers identified common themes. These themes were isolation at home, psychological coping, down economic activities, safety precautions, and healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of staying at home, the participants stated that self-isolation affected them; for example, they avoided their family and friends, and they could not travel or enjoy outdoor entertainment. One female learner said, "The biggest challenge is to persuade my children to stay at home. They always insist and want to go to an outdoor to play or to buy a happy meal."

In terms of psychological coping during a pandemic, the participants suffered from several things, such as fearing and adapting to changes in their personal, family, and financial life. Also, the women could not manage their time, and they were bored by the home isolation. Some female learners indicated that they faced a challenge to complete their personal and household work. They also felt anxiety and tension to go and buy their necessities, such as food, or to see their parents. The participants were worried because it was unclear how long the crisis would last. Additionally, a participant said, "I cannot control my children's inconvenience." Moreover, when economic activities, such as

restaurants, movie theaters, and malls closed, the participants faced a lot of difficulties. For example, their personal businesses closed, so they became unemployed. An adult learner illustrated, "When stores had shut down, I could not buy supplies for my personal business in order to serve customers." Another person said, "It is difficult to pay monthly rent."

For safety precautions and healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants stated that they faced challenges when committing to sterilising all things and applying preventive precautions, especially for children. People were to stay away from infected COVID-19 patients, including family members. The participants cancelled doctor appointments due to the fear of injury. One woman asserted, "It is difficult for me to physically contact people during this crisis." Another participant stated, "Some members of society did not follow and restrict safety precautions, so this situation makes us more worried."

Discussion

The study's results indicated that Saudi women were empowered through their vocational skills at the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes during the time of COVID-19. This statement conforms with Saudi Vision 2030 and the aim of the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes that focus on empowering women to benefit from the skills in their lives. Stromquist and Monkman (2013), confirmed that women could be empowered and could produce change when they attend educational, training and community-development initiatives. The respondents showed that they practiced vocational skills which were related to self-directed learning. According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning presumes that individuals learn when they are required to perform life tasks or to cope with life problems. When women become self-directed learners, they may foster conscientisation; consequently, they will be able to improve and practice their skills as well as participate in community development (Freire, 1973; Mezirow, 1985).

For the personal and family scale, the total means and the means for all items were high. Therefore, women practiced these personal and family skills often. Diwakar and Ahamad (2015) stated that vocational training makes a big difference in many women's personal and family lives. For

example, the training helps women to improve household productivity, to enhance food security, and to promote environmentally sustainable development and livelihoods. The participants confirmed that, during the time of COVID-19, their vocational skills empowered them to pay attention to their beauty and personal care, to improve their cooking skills when restaurants were shuttered, and to use technology to keep in touch with family members during home isolation. This result stressed that, during the crisis, women obtained self-sufficiency and achieved family bonding. According to Ahamad et al.'s (2016) study, developing vocational skills is essential to empower women to improve household productivity, handle their domestic work and care responsibilities, and enhance sustainable development and livelihoods.

For the economy and labour-market scale, the total means were medium, and the means for all items ranged between the high and average levels. Therefore, for the economy and labour market, women practised these skills for an average amount of time. During this difficult time, women focused more on their family requirements. According to UNESCO (2020), during the pandemic, when schools were closed, parents missed work to take care of their children, leading to negative productivity. This study's participants confirmed that, during the time of COVID-19, their vocational skills empowered them to continue upgrading their skills through online courses, to share their skills with others, and to encourage others to take the initiative to develop skills during this difficult time. These findings concurred with Knowles' (1975) thoughts about adult learning. Knowles emphasised that, if social institutions and associations are concerned about adult learning, that interest will help advance the general level of the local culture. Moreover, the findings agreed with the essential goal of the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes and Saudi Vision 2030. This goal supports women to continue lifelong learning and to be self-directed learners. Also, the vision emphasises a culture of volunteering and cooperation; to illustrate, the Saudi government seeks to have one million volunteers each year (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Stacki and Monkman (2003) confirmed that women may act to change their lives when they have awareness of their situation, acquire skills that enable change, and work together to create change.

Furthermore, the second question illustrated that there were no statistically significant differences among the women's responses

due to marital status. This result emphasised that all women (single, married, or divorced) were empowered through their vocational skills during the pandemic. According to Saudi Vision2030, the government supports and gives everyone particularly women, the chance to obtain equal opportunities to improve their skills. This encouragement may have motivated women to practice their vocational skills. However, there were statistically significant differences among the women's responses based on the number of courses that were taken. The benefit was for women who took 5 or more courses. This result was logical because, as Knowles (1980) mentioned, adults' experiences are rich resources to motivate people to learn and to practice what they learn. Cervero, Wilson, and Associates (2001) indicated that adult education programmes aim to help maintain, develop, and empower women's knowledge and skills. For the open-ended question about the challenges that learners had regarding the practice of vocational skills during the COVID-19 pandemic, the results showed that women faced challenges with isolation at home, psychological coping, having few economic activities, safety precautions, and healthcare.

Conclusion

Learning Neighbourhood Programmes contribute to more community participation and empower women with the necessary skills to achieve Saudi Vision 2030. These opportunities are implemented in the neighbourhood to provide women with sustainable skills that help them raise their awareness level about the economy, society, and education (Ministry of Education, 2018). One of these abilities is vocational skills, which is the focus of this study. Vocational skills are designed to get unemployed women into the labour market and to help them become self-directed learners and active members of society. Therefore, this study is important because it may give decision-makers insight into how to reform the programmes. As far as the researchers know, this study is the first one about COVID-19 and women's vocational skills at Learning Neighbourhood Programmes. The study is consistent with the direction of Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasises participation by members of society in order to improve themselves and their country.

According to the findings, the items that participants mentioned least were "achieve self-actualization needs" and "contribute to their family's expenses." Therefore, the women's needs should be considered

when designing vocational skills for the Learning Neighbourhood Programmes. Decision makers should have created more online, vocational-skill courses during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to help female learners face their challenges, continuously improve their skills, and finish their work with high quality. Also, psychological counselling services that help to reduce women's pressures should be established.

It was also obvious that, in the labour market, women's participation was at an average level, so vocational skills should be designed in a way that can encourage and empower women for the 21st Century's labour market. For example, Government officials should create training programmes that help adult women to practice their vocational skills during difficult times. This study suggested that qualitative research should be done to obtain in-depth information about women's utilization of vocational skills in their lives. In addition, periodic interviews should be conducted with the female learners to understand their experiences and to improve the training programmes.

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Supporting students who are parents to succeed in Australian higher education

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Students who are parents are largely invisible within the Australian higher education sector. We know little about the particular views and experiences of this group at university. This article explores the motivations, perceived challenges to success, and self-identified strengths of students who are parents. Our analysis is based on eighteen semi-structured interviews conducted with students who are parents at one multi-campus Australian university. The article contributes new insights to identify university strategies to better support under-represented groups to succeed at university.

Keywords*: students who are parents, higher education, student experience, student voice, student equity*

Introduction

While students who are parents bring a range of valuable skills and

perspectives to their studies, they can be at increased risk of financial difficulties and time pressures due to their competing demands (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; 2012). For the purpose of the article, we define students who are parents as domestic university students who care for at least one child who is under 18 years of age. There has been little research into the motivations and perceived university challenges, and the self-identified strengths held by students who are parents who are studying at Australian universities. Little research has been conducted in Australia about the experiences of this group, partly because the existing national student equity framework does not identify students who are parents as an equity group (Harvey, Burnheim & Brett, 2016). Most of this research focusses on the experiences of postgraduate students who are parents (Bosch, 2013; Corkish & Shaw, 2018; Hook, 2016) or, more broadly, on mature-age students (aged 21 years and over). Indeed, parental status is generally not referred to as an essential dimension of students who are parents' experiences, but as background information (Moreau & Kerner, 2012). To address this gap, we sought to explore students who are parents' unique motivations, perceived challenges to success, and self-identified strengths. It should be noted that our research was conducted before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, the challenges identified in this study have been exacerbated by the crisis, as the pandemic has created additional challenges for people who have children or other caring responsibilities (Cruse, Mendez & Holtzman, 2020).

We begin this article by providing a brief context based on the small number of studies focussed on the experiences of students who are parents at Australian universities. We then provide an international comparative context, with a focus on the United Kingdom (UK), particularly England, where there is a larger body of connected research and policy around this group. Subsequently, we explore the findings of our research, encompassing eighteen interviews with students who are parents at one Australian multi-campus university, and a desktop analysis of existing support for students who are parents at Australian universities. Our interview findings underline the unique experiences, strengths, and challenges of this group. We conclude by arguing the need for more targeted policies, strategies and programs to support students who are parents to succeed in Australian universities.

Context

In Australia, the student equity framework does not identify students who are parents as an equity group (Harvey, Burnheim, & Brett, 2016). The equity groups identified by the framework include people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds; people from regional and remote areas; people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (also referred to as Indigenous peoples); people with a disability, and women in non-traditional areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1990). Australian universities collect longitudinal data on access, participation, success and retention of these six equity groups (Bradley et al., 2008). In contrast, Australian universities generally are not aware of how many students who are parents are enrolled in their institutions, as they are not required to collect this information. Given the dearth of data on the demographics of students who are parents enrolled at university, this group is relatively hidden in the Australian higher education space.

There is little research focussing specifically on students who are parents in Australian higher education, particularly at the undergraduate level. Several studies have focussed more broadly on mature-age students (aged 21 years and over). In one study of mature-age students, Stone and O'Shea (2013) found that mothers felt it was difficult to find enough time to care for their children, keep up with domestic responsibilities, and meet study demands. Likewise, Willans and Seary (2011), found that female mature-age students can feel especially 'bombarded' when trying to integrate study requirements into existing family and domestic routines.

A small number of studies have focussed on the experiences of postgraduate students who are parents in higher education (Bosch, 2013; Corkish & Shaw, 2018), including sole parent postgraduates (Hook, 2016). Bosch's (2013) qualitative doctorate thesis, which included fourteen interviews with postgraduate mature age mothers in Western Australia, found that this group lacked support to succeed at university and cited childcare and timetable issues as some of their main challenges. Hook's (2016) study on sole parent postgraduates highlights that this group experiences further disadvantage because 'everyday parental care-work' is not 'shared or divided'. Relatedly, the Australian

National University Postgraduate and Research Students' Association, which surveyed postgraduate students who are parents, found that this group would benefit from more flexible institutional arrangements, better academic and financial assistance, and support networks (Corkish & Shaw, 2018).

Similarly, in England, students who are parents and students with other caring responsibilities have been relatively absent from the widening participation agenda (Moreau & Kerner, 2012; 2015). Mature age students have been a target of these policies, and there is overlap between the two groups. As Moreau and Kerner (2015) argue, however, 'all student parents are not mature students, nor are all mature students parents' (p. 218). Indeed, the lack of explicit consideration of parents leaves this group largely invisible in higher education and means their specific strengths and needs are marginalised (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau & Kerner, 2012; 2015). Moreau and Kerner (2012, p. 11) further explain that the parental status in higher education is not generally described as a 'key structuring dimension of individuals' experience', but as a 'sort of contextual information'. A study conducted by the National Union of Students (2009), which includes a survey of 2,167 students who are parents across the United Kingdom, found that 60 per cent of these students thought about discontinuing their studies, and highlighted that this group might be more likely to leave their course than their peers. The study also shows that attrition is higher for sole parents (65 per cent) when compared to their student parent peers and describes some of the particular struggles faced by this group.

Research shows that students who are parents can be a diverse group, however, the literature highlights a number of recurrent challenges faced. These struggles include: time-related difficulties due to juggling the demands of being a student, a parent and, in some cases, undertaking paid work; financial difficulties; timetabling, placements and deadline difficulties as a consequence of scarcity of institutional flexibility or 'family unfriendly' institutional policies; limited capacity to participate in extra-curricular activities, group work activities, and to socialise with other students; and a paucity of childcare facilities on university campuses (Alsop et al., 2008; Brooks, 2012; Marandet & Wainwright, 2009; Moreau & Kerner, 2015; National Union of Students, 2009; Osborne et al., 2004).

Financial difficulties have been reported as one of the pressing problems faced by students who are parents (Moreau & Kerner, 2012; Osborne et al., 2004), particularly for sole parents from low socio-economic backgrounds (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2008). Nevertheless, Alsop et al. (2008) highlight the need to look beyond the financial costs of caring and also look at the broader aspects of caring:

> *'Central to a more effective approach to facilitating the participation of student carers is a conceptualisation of care that recognises its pervasive and multidimensional nature and how it shapes students' experiences in financial, temporal, emotional and identity terms' (Alsop et al., 2008, p. 633).*

Osborne et al. (2004) also explain that students who are parents experience guilt as a consequence of their dual status, 'those who are parents feel guilt if they deprive their children of material resources or quality time now in order to provide for a possibly better future' (p. 305). Other studies found that students who are parents lack the time to participate in extra-curricular activities and, as a consequence, have expressed the feeling of missing out on, or not fitting with, the 'traditional' student experience at university (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; National Union of Students, 2009).

While most of the research focusses on the challenges students who are parents face in higher education, some studies outline the benefits of their dual status (Moreau & Kerner, 2015). Among this group, the most common motivations for attending university include improving their financial security, changing careers, being a good role model for their children, and interest in their studies (Brooks, 2013; National Union of Students, 2009, p. 20; Osborne et al., 2004, p. 301). Brooks (2013) found that children were one of the main motivations for these students to access and remain enrolled at university. Likewise, the study conducted by the National Union of Students (2009) outlines that students who are parents are hard-working, have a passion for study and want to set a positive example for their children. Indeed, research shows that students who are parents view their university enrolment as a way of providing good role modelling for their children (National Union of Students, 2009).

While there is a growing body of international research that explores the experiences, challenges and motivations of students who are parents,

we know little about the challenges and motivations of this group in the Australian context. In our research, we sought to interview parents who were studying at an Australian university to explore their experiences, motivations, strengths, and challenges.

Method

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture the perspectives and experiences of students who are parents at one multi-campus Australian university. The eighteen interviews were conducted between May and August 2018 and were 30 to 45 minutes in duration. Participants were recruited via a range of student communication channels, including institutional websites, news updates, posters, social media, and word of mouth. Interviews covered the following topics: demographics; university and course details; pathway to university; experience at university; support for students who are parents; university outcomes and aspirations; and recommendations for university support programs and services. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has disproportionately affected people from disadvantaged backgrounds – with severe health, social, educational, and employment implications – and created additional challenges for this group (Cruse, Mendez & Holtzman, 2020).

The interviews were transcribed and analysed for content and themes using an interpretative phenomenological approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This approach allowed us to draw on the interviewees' personal perspectives, reflections, and narratives to examine how they made sense of their own experiences. Given participation was voluntary, it is possible that the sample may exclude those who had explicitly negative experiences. Table 1 presents a summary of participant characteristics.

Table 1: Participant characteristics (N = 18)

	Number of participants	Proportion of participants
Gender		
Male	2	11%
Female	16	89%
Age range		
18 - 25 years	2	11%
25 > years	16	89%
Role		
Parent	15	83%
Parent and carer	3	17%
Number of children		
One child	4	22%
Two children	9	50%
Three children	4	22%
Four children	1	6%
Main language spoken at home		
English	17	94%
Other	1	6%
Relationship status		
Married/Partnered	13	72%
Divorced	2	11%
Single	1	5%
Unspecified	2	11%
Living with significant other		
Yes	13	72%
No	2	11%
Unspecified	3	17%
Working while studying		
Yes	13	72%
No	5	28%
Course location		
Metropolitan	11	61%
Regional	7	39%
Course type		
Undergraduate	13	72%
Postgraduate	5	28%
Primary study mode		
On campus	17	94%
Online	1	6%
Study load		
Full time	7	39%
Part time	9	50%
Unspecified	2	11%

From Table 1, it can be seen that the 'typical' participant was a mother, aged over 25 years, who was married/partnered, spoke English at home, was studying an undergraduate degree on a metropolitan campus, and was working while studying.

We also undertook a desktop analysis of support targeted to assist students who are parents at Australian universities by searching universities' webpages. We then selected examples to illustrate the nature of support provided by institutions.

Findings

What motivates students who are parents to attend university?

The most common motivations for attending university, reported by nearly 90 per cent of students who are parents, were career related. Most respondents were interested in changing careers and/or improving their future career prospects. For example, an interviewee explained: 'I just wanted to really create more career possibilities, it was the driving force' (Participant C). Another participant claimed:

> *'[I] was never able to move higher in position or get a better opportunity in the workplace. I thought maybe this is my time now. It's either now or never, that I return to obtain that degree' (Participant K).*

Setting a positive example for children was also motivating factor for some interviewees to attend university. The interview participants explained:

> *'I think being a mother has helped me greatly, because I've grown up and I wanted to set an example to my children. Now my daughter's coming in, and I'm just grateful that she followed in the example that I'm living. I hope that my son will continue to soar. Part of it was to set an example for my kids, to remember that it doesn't end at high school' (Participant K).*

A different participant highlighted: 'I want to show my son the importance of education' (Participant E).

In several instances, the decision to attend university was made while

taking time out of the workforce when children were young. A student remarked:

> *'It was realising that I didn't want to go to my former area of work with four children, so once I was off on maternity leave with my first job I realised I really didn't want to go back to what I was doing before which was really just administration' (Participant P).*

Entry into university was often planned to coincide with reduced family responsibilities when children reached school age. For example, a participant explained:

> *'I've basically been a shift worker for 15 years. Also, when I had the kids, I did a lot of night shifts. And the work that I was doing, I wasn't really going anywhere. So once both my children got into primary school, it was a case of alright, well if I'm gonna do anything, I have to do it now' (Participant F).*

Overall, the majority of interviewees were highly motivated by their children to attain a higher education qualification, and generally outlined that their decision to enter university was influenced by career and employment advancement. The desire to set a positive example for their children and families was also identified by this group.

What challenges do students who are parents face at university?

An overarching theme of the interviews was that time pressures, due to competing responsibilities, impacted students who are parents' ability to perform well at university. Almost all of the students described the challenges of 'juggling' or 'balancing' their time and energy between parenting and studying. The following comment was representative:

> *'It is often a juggle to make sure that I can attend the compulsory components like the tutorials and the laboratories and the workshops in the time that all the children are in care or at school' (Participant P).*

Consistent with other studies of students who are parents (Osbourne, 2004), three interviewees noted feelings of guilt around juggling parental responsibilities with study:

> *'As a parent you feel guilty if you're not paying attention to your children, but you feel guilty because you're not paying attention to your studies' (Participant O).*

Nearly three quarters of participants were undertaking paid work, typically employed in either part-time or casual positions. Working, in addition to parenting and studying, was an added time pressure. For example, one student said:

> *'I think it's that juggled parenting, studying, working. You've got multiple hats on, and it's time ... I'm always time poor. I'm always rushing around' (Participant G).*

Just over one third of interview respondents reported limiting sleep to fit in study, including studying into the late hours of the night and early morning, which negatively affected mood and physical health. Approximately one third of respondents reported times of stress associated with competing responsibilities. A student claimed:

> *'I basically give up my sleep to study. I'll put everyone to bed and even tidy up the house a little bit. And then start studying from nine o'clock and I will go to sleep at 1:00am...And so that's one part of my sleep pattern which I don't like but it's become part of my sleep habit regardless of whether there's a semester going or not. And two, the headaches, the digestive system, everything's just slow and sluggish. And I just feel generally yucky all the time. So that's just something that I've lived with just as a by-product basically of not finding time' (Participant Q).*

Others highlighted the stark contrast between their study experiences and those of students who were not parents:

> *'Juggling of multiple needs is quite difficult. I guess that's something you don't have to do, when you don't have dependents so it's a lot easier. It really is. And you don't have to worry about everything to budget, food, groceries, feeding them all and often as other people do things as well as your own. So, a week's worth of time for a student with no dependents looks quite different to my week's worth of time' (Participant P).*

Respondents noted that they generally did not have time to socialise

with other students, which they felt resulted in a narrower and less enjoyable student experience. The following comment was representative:

> *'I feel like I'm missing out on campus life. It's very difficult to participate in any of the extra-curricular stuff going on.' (Participant P).*

While some students were financially secure, others, especially single parents, were under considerable financial pressure as they were studying and caring for their children. As an interviewee explained:

> *'There's a lot of financial pressure... I'm not just looking after myself and paying the bills and feeding myself. I've got another four to feed as well. I've got to get that money from somewhere, which is yeah, really hard' (Participant G).*

Approximately half of the participants were receiving some form of financial support from the Government while studying, including the parenting payment, family tax benefit, childcare rebate, and Austudy. These forms of financial support were viewed as helpful but insufficient without additional income or savings, with one student remarking that:

> *'I do get some family payment... It's not enough to cover the rent, I will point out, but it's enough to help with food, and bills, and petrol. Then I have to use savings' (Participant R).*

The cost of childcare was an important factor in decisions about scheduling and attending lectures and tutorials on campus. One interviewee claimed: 'Because my school offers up some before school care and after school care. So, ideally, I try to get classes that fall between the school time to save money' (Participant F). Another student noted:

> *'I'm not going to schedule daycare for an hour lecture. Otherwise, it's going to cost a fortune...So, I'm just going to have to stay home and hope that they remember to record it' (Participant L).*

Only one participant had received financial support from the university, a part-time scholarship unrelated to her parenting role, which assisted with some study expenses:

> *'I applied and I've been granted the Honours part time scholarship… It's helpful in that it's a kind of money coming [in]. I bought some of my books and, to be able to photocopy your articles and resources, it's helpful. It's better than nothing' (Participant E).*

Many of the challenges resulted from an incongruity between the needs of students who are parents and the traditional and rigid design of course structures and requirements, including timetabling, extensions and special consideration, and placements. Indeed, several participants noted that their timetables were confirmed a few days before the semester started, which made it difficult and stressful to organise childcare. One participant said:

> *'I think that the university is not really set up for parents. There's sort of an assumption that everybody is there is available to be at university nine to five, Monday to Friday, and so they do things like … they don't release the timetable until a couple of weeks before the semester starts, which means that it's impossible to get childcare because you have to arrange that months in advance. They sort of have this assumption that nobody has any other responsibilities in their life other than studying' (Participant M).*

Similarly, another participant highlighted:

> *'I don't find out my final timetable until two days before semester starts. If we are putting our kids into care, that is insane. I've got my kids in care Tuesdays and Thursdays on the assumption that I'm going to get those days at university but there's no guarantee. So two days before I'm due to start university, I might be on the wrong days or their care might be on the wrong days and I might not be able to get care. It's a really big stress' (Participant L).*

Dealing with competing responsibilities meant some students who are parents requested extensions, to obtain additional time to complete assessments, and/or special consideration. University policies outline the formal processes for obtaining extensions and special consideration. In practice, however, the process seemed to vary depending on the lecturer or subject coordinator.

Some participants s found that supporting documentation was required to substantiate each extension or special consideration request, and separate requests were required for each assignment and subject. Repeatedly having to submit requests was considered unnecessarily burdensome. The special consideration process was viewed as particularly tedious and confusing. For example, one student highlighted:

> *'The majority of the time, if you're asking for an extension, you know, it's not usually just for one thing…So yeah, it is a bit of a pain. It would be nice if you could just say, "Right, I need an extension for all my subjects"' (Participant S).*

Another interview participant noted:

> *'It's quite traumatic for someone to have to fill out this [special consideration] form every single time. I mean, there's a reason why people aren't using it. They're not using it because it's a nuisance. I looked at the form and I said, "No, I'm not doing that." … Do I only get special consideration once, or? It's a bit consistent. I think the university needs to be consistent if they're going to support people…' (Interview H).*

In some cases, formal processes could be avoided by contacting a lecturer or subject coordinator directly. One student received 'blanket extensions', which was seen to be helpful:

> *'I went straight to my coordinator and emailed her and said, "Look, hey, this is happening. Is there any special consideration that I can receive? She gave me those blanket extensions for the three major assessments for the next six weeks… It gave me an extra week on the last assessment or two, which meant that I got it done the day before the extended due date. But I had that time, and then I was able to submit it and get a good mark' (Participant A).*

Willingness to ask for an extension, and the comfort level in doing so, also varied depending on the lecturer or subject coordinator. Participants spoke about feeling comfortable asking for extensions from lecturers who seemed understanding and had broached the subject of extensions early in the semester. In other cases, however, participants

were 'put off' applying for extensions from certain lecturers. The following comment was representative:

> *'Most of my lecturers, two specifically that I needed extensions from, were really great. Right from the get go. They were like, "If you need it, just apply for it. You'll get it". One was not so great with that and I didn't bother applying for one where I probably should have. That was one of my assignments that I actually handed in a day late. I felt like she wasn't as open and receptive to my situation as I would have expected perhaps' (Participant I).*

Participants who had to do a placement as part of their course noted that sometimes placements were hard to coordinate, particularly with childcare. With one student saying that:

> *'I think the hardest thing has been coordinating ... Well, probably the hardest thing has been coordinating the childcare, particularly with placements. But not only with placements ... So, obviously, when you go to university, things change every semester and childcare doesn't work that way. So that is quite difficult, and it's financially been quite difficult to do placements because obviously I have to pay for childcare, but I'm not being paid while I'm on placement' (Participant M).*

A different interviewee remarked:

> *'It would be great to have a bit more support about getting the graduate placement likely as a priority, because unfortunately, you can't just pick up your children as easily as when you're younger and you can go to a different city' (Participant T).*

Overall, most participants perceived they lacked the time and support to juggle the competing demands of being both a student and a parent. Indeed, this was further evidenced in the interview process; with the interviews sometimes interrupted while participants attended to their child/ren. Participants also highlighted that inflexible study arrangements – particularly around timetabling, extensions, special consideration, and placements – and financial pressure made it challenging to succeed at university.

Discussion

Our findings reveal that students who are parents place a high value on university study and are motivated by their children to access, and succeed at, university. Consistent with other studies (Harvey & Mallman, 2019; Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005), the interview findings also suggest that students who are parents' different perspectives and insights can enrich the learning experience of other students. Yet, students who are parents often face unique struggles when studying at university, including time pressures due to competing responsibilities. They also face a scarcity of institutional flexibility or 'family unfriendly' institutional policies, including late availability of timetables, difficulties coordinating placements, and complex and onerous special consideration and extension processes. Our study also suggests that students who are parents face financial pressures, and that working cand be an added time pressure for this group. Interviewees explained that they generally lacked the time to socialise with other students and participate in extra-curricular activities. Overall, our findings highlight that students who are parents face a number of unique temporal, social, financial and practical challenges while engaging in higher education. Yet, little targeted support is commonly available for this group while studying at university. Therefore, we argue that there is a clear need for a range of targeted support to better assist this group to succeed at university.

Consistent with our findings, international research highlights the need for institutional flexibility to ensure parents can succeed at university (Marandet & Wainwright, 2009; National Union of Students, 2009). Several studies from the United Kingdom have shown the impact that institutional policies and strategies have on the success of student parents in higher education (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau & Kerner, 2012; National Union of Students, 2009). The National Union of Students' (2009) report highlights that there is 'mismatch between traditional course organisation, including timetabling, holidays, deadlines, placements and group work and the needs of students with children' (p. 10). Moreau and Kerner's (2015) study, which includes interviews with 40 students who are parents enrolled at university programs across England, found that some institutional policies are unfriendly for parents, such as the late availability of timetables. Further, Brooks' (2012) study, which includes interviews with university

staff across the United Kingdom, shows that institutions sometimes find it hard to accommodate periods when students are unable to attend class or submit an assignment as a consequence of their parenting responsibilities. Relatedly, Marandet and Wainwright (2010) found that several parents struggled to attend classes as they were occasionally scheduled at times that would clash with family commitments.

A small number of Australian universities provide some type of support for students who are parents. Table 2 outlines examples of initiatives provided by Australian universities to assist students who are parents. These initiatives include targeted bursaries, webpages, allocated parking bays, study spaces and meet up groups. However, our analysis of Australian university websites would suggest that little targeted support is specifically dedicated to assist this group. Also, supports for students who are parents vary considerably between institutions. Moreover, Australian universities generally do not provide dedicated information packs or financial support beyond what is provided centrally. Members of staff are usually not employed to provide targeted support to this group. Our findings confirm that students who are parents have been given limited consideration in Australia.

Table 1: Selected support for students who are parents provided by Australian universities.

Institution	***Initiative***	***Description***
University of Southern Queensland	Webpage for students who are parents	Designed to guide students who are studying at university and outline resources to help students who are parents succeed.
Australian National University	ANUSA Parents and Carers Grant	Designed to assist undergraduate students who are carers.
Edith Cowan University	Parking bays for parents	Reserved car parking bays for students who have morning 'drop off duties' before coming to campus.
The Queensland University of Technology	Study space	Private study space for parents who have children with them on campus and need to study.
La Trobe University	Meet up group for students who are parents	Support network for students who are parents and carers.

Source: Information from university websites – www.qut.edu.au, www.ecu.edu.au, www.ecu.edu.au, www.usq.edu.au, www.anu.edu.au, and www.latrobe.edu.au.

Our findings also reveal that existing data on parents who are studying at university is limited. It is difficult for higher education institutions to provide targeted support to students who are parents, as universities do not identify this group. The collection of nationally consistent data is essential to inform higher education policy and practice. Future research could capture the geo-demographics of students who are parents and investigate the ways in which variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background influence their experiences. Examination of the course profiles and graduate outcomes of this group could be particularly helpful in the design of appropriate support measures.

We found that there is a clear need for a range of support programs specifically targeted to students with parenting responsibilities. Firstly, there is a need for the provision of targeted financial support measures, such as scholarships or bursaries, for students who are parents. Secondly, universities could examine the impact of institutional policies and practices on students who are parents and consider

providing preferential access to university timetables, flexible study arrangements to increase attendance and engagement among these students , and increased transparency of mainstream institutional policies (e.g. assignment extensions, special consideration). Thirdly, institutions could develop resources for university staff and students who are parents. These initiatives could potentially include a webpage specifically targeted to students who are parents, which directs this group to the most up-to-date resources available. The webpage could also provide information for university staff that highlights the particular challenges and strengths of this group of students. Finally, higher education institutions could develop social networks for students who are parents to enable them to socialise with their peers.

Conclusion

Our research confirms that students who are parents face unique challenges when studying at university. The study also shows that parental status is an essential dimension of students who are parents' strengths, motivations, experiences and perceived challenges to success. Given the limited data available on students who are parents studying at university, this group is relatively invisible in the higher education space. Therefore, there is a need to collect data on higher education access and outcomes for this group. Relatedly, we found a need for more flexible institutional policies and practices, and further provision of targeted support for students who are parents to better support this group to succeed at university. Overall, further research is needed to better understand the experiences, challenges and strengths of this group at a national level.

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Advising senior management leaders on the doctoral research journey by applying traditional adult learning practices for industry contexts

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Many years of lived experience supervising PhDs and other research-based higher degrees provides the contextual background to reflections on practice and conceptual underpinnings to a specialised branch of adult continuing education for professional managers within industry contexts. Special Attention is focused on the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) as a research education experience for adults occupying senior management roles. Their seniority and underlying motivation combined with extensive knowledge and practical experience required a different approach from supervising mainstream PhD students. Much that was learned advising them was readily transferred to younger PhD students, to confirm the validity of approach. The research education process was dedicated to extending the boundaries of knowledge in the long tradition of the PhD. One important difference, however, was more emphasis on practical application of research outcomes. This key difference will be explored further.

Attention is focused on the key features of a practical approach to advising such adult learners with strong industry backgrounds. It was very much a learner-centred, customised approach focused on what

they wanted to know and their explanatory rationale. In addition to being academic scholarship it was also about how new knowledge was to be applied in workplace and industry settings.

The antecedents of my approach to advising senior-level adult learners are also explained as conceptual background. My approach was informed by ideas about the adult learning process rather than as a subject discipline specialist. A background in liberal adult education shaped my practices advising doctoral researchers. The agreeable metaphor was to approach the PhD research process like going on a mutual and shared learning journey.

***Keywords**: senior management level research education, adult continuing education, adult learning theory, higher research degrees, the doctoral research learning journey*

Introduction

Many years of lived experience supervising PhDs and other research-based higher degrees provides the contextual background to reflections on practice and conceptual underpinnings to a specialised branch of adult continuing education for professional managers within industry contexts. Special Attention is focused on the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) as a research education experience for adults occupying senior management roles. Their seniority and underlying motivation combined with extensive knowledge and practical experience required a different approach from supervising mainstream PhD students. Much of what was learned while advising them was easily transferred to younger PhD students, confirming the validity of the approach. The research education process was dedicated to extending the boundaries of knowledge in the long tradition of the PhD. One important difference, however, was more emphasis on the practical application of research outcomes. This key difference will be explored further.

Attention is directed towards the key features of a practical approach to advising adult learners with strong industry backgrounds. It was fundamentally learner-centred and customised, focusing on their inquiries and explanatory rationale. Beyond academic scholarship, it also emphasised the application of new knowledge in workplace and

industry settings.

The antecedents of my approach to advising senior-level adult learners are also elucidated as conceptual background. Informed by ideas about the adult learning process rather than specific subject discipline expertise, my approach was shaped by a background in liberal adult education shaped my practices in advising doctoral researchers. A fitting metaphor was to approach the PhD research process as embarking on a mutual and shared learning journey.

Profiles of doctoral research students

The doctoral research adult students were senior leaders and managers in a variety of business enterprises, corporate entities, and public sector agencies. Some were successful entrepreneurs and owners of large-scale enterprises. Taken together, they represented both Australian and international students, the latter drawn mainly from Asian and Middle Eastern countries, with a few expatriate Europeans. They exemplified continuing, professional education, with an emphasis on adaptive learning as a driver for comprehending and managing organisational change. More follows later.

They shared extensive lived experience and knowledge of various kinds of industry backgrounds. They were experts in their field of professional practice. Their motive was clearly expressed by one of them as seeking to 'intellectualise working knowledge' and reflect on selected issues that had long interested them as industry practitioners.

They could reasonably be described as lifelong learners as they had continued their professional development through various levels of formal education since their undergraduate years. Ambition combined with intellectual curiosity produced capable, focused, and disciplined adult learners. They typically thought in terms of business and performance outcomes using new knowledge as a tool for managing organisational change. Generally, they had less interest in academic journal publication, except after completion of the doctoral requirements. Their research and knowledge motives were primarily about application and action. In that significant way, they were unlike mainstream PhD students usually learning outside the workplace. Senior managers used their PhD research to drive and manage a workplace change agenda drawn from their lived experience.

Connecting doctoral research learners to adult education theory and practice

There have been three consistent sources of background influence on my approach to doctoral research learning and advising. In various ways, they inspired my sustained effort to support PhD students on the long journey by being their 'guide, philosopher and friend' in a mutually shared research learning experience.

The first is largely a romantic ideal drawn from what was once known as the 'Great Tradition' in liberal-humanist adult education. My hero adult educator was R. H. Tawney, notably his teaching and learning work with working-class people willing to submit to the rigours of university tutorial classes (UTCs) for an extended period of systematic study (Elsey, 1987). Tawney used the term 'Fellowship of learning' for its open, knowledge sharing approach to adult education that I valued in spirit and applied in practice in doctoral research advising. Expressed in a condensed way, the term embraces a strong focus on the learning process, making it enjoyable without compromising academic standards, reaching out to know the learner as a person and creating a positive climate for sharing ideas in a group setting in support of individual effort.

A second influence is an approach to adult learning, rather awkwardly called Andragogy, distinguishing from pedagogy, the learning and education of children (Knowles, 1998). The theory of adult learning that is represented by Andragogy is still a matter of academic debate. Despite the misgivings of others, my application of its leading ideas has largely been an uncritical feature of working with adult learners in the doctoral research domain. It had everything to do with converting the industry knowledge and experience of the doctoral student into a research idea and plan. It was a negotiated process designed to ensure that the research could be made operational and address both practical, evidence-based data quality concerns and a theory-building process through an extended discourse with the extant sources of knowledge. A deliberate learner-centred approach worked effectively, which was what mattered most for all doctoral-level students. The driving learning motive was typically to apply new knowledge. They were new to the rigours of the PhD but far from being apprentice learners at the foothills of career-building.

My task was to listen carefully and actively to their learned knowledge and expertise and translate the ideas into doctoral-level research. The process took the doctoral research and supervisor(s) into the heart of education as a learning experience. Tawney's idea of a learning fellowship was an applied, continuous, and shared process.

A third source of personal practice in doctoral research supervision comes from social theory, notably leading ideas of A. Schutz. There is a useful German term verstehen, meaning an understanding of social life through the thoughts, actions, lived experiences and subjective interpretations of life meanings by individuals. A current term used to encapsulate this level of social action is phenomenology, the descriptive study of everyday experiences, sometimes referred to as micro-sociology.

The essence of this social theory perspective has played a big part in forming and sustaining the 'meeting of minds' in the long learning journey that is typical of doctoral research. Getting to know the adult learner was partly about understanding the person and what made them 'tick', describing the industry context and working knowledge that had shaped their motivation and learning agenda driving the research process. It was a practical approach to translating the lived experience and subjective interpretations of senior level learners into applied research with theory-building potential.

The synergy produced was essential to mutual understanding and successful completion. The research process that was integral to achieving new knowledge and practical application outcomes was phenomenology in action. The emphasis on conversation and discussion throughout the learning journey enabled the working partnership to produce its own organic synergy and make progress through the many twists and turns of the research thinking process. The PhD is very outcome driven but needed frequent lubrication through good conversations and problem-solving discussions.

The nature of the doctoral learning journey

The PhD is an arduous and special learning experience. It is an exhausting journey with endless demands on thinking capabilities combined with rigour to research and write in keeping with the exacting requirements of academic scholarship and administrative regulation.

Success and survival rates have traditionally been low, although the current university environment is designed to get better completion results than before. It is now a tightly regulated process.

In addition to the demands described above, the doctoral learning journey is essentially about becoming an independent, self-directed researcher, in preparation for a career making funding applications and eventually supervising others, as well as academic research publication. Universities are good at training their own kind, regardless of whether the students intend to pursue an academic career.

Most of the business and corporate class were not so aspired, although they accepted the idea of self-directed learning as an experience to be managed. Their challenge was to manage usually very demanding workloads with the need to do desk research and the numerous other tasks that comprise the everyday reality of the learning journey. They had no problems with embracing independent, self-directed adult learning. Their mindset was conditioned by years of getting things done by going operational. It provided a special kind of advisory challenge, of which more in due course.

Supervising doctoral research comprised several approaches (although I prefer the term advising). The first step was to recognise 'where they were coming from' and use their inside knowledge and expertise as a starting point leading to the core research question. Typically, they thought in terms of problems and strategy, usually related to business and organisation activity they regarded as 'room for improvement'. The majority thought in terms of using research-based knowledge as a tool for change and getting outcomes. There was a learned inclination to think in terms of systems and large conceptual frameworks that had a distinct deterministic quality. This was understood and formed part of my own learning journey to familiarise myself with their worldview. From the outset there was much shared learning to be had through conversation, discussing information and ideas that formed the bedrock of the research going forward. As stated previously, the process was phenomenology in action.

'Telling the story': a starting point on the learning journey

The point was to enter their world and encourage them to 'tell the story', a narrative about what they thought was happening, drawing from their

subjective perceptions and industry experience. This conversational process helped highlight and explain the research problem. Everything needed to make sense to both sides of the mutual learning journey from the outset. Well before getting into doing literature searching and review, as much as the research method, it was important to create the habit of conversations that talked around the research problem and emerging questions. It was rarely a linear process as it was often necessary to range back and forth over emerging research ideas and proposed practical actions. The agreeable term used was 'cognitive click' in which the student and supervisor(s) all agreed that the research problem was realistic, manageable, and likely to produce a new knowledge contribution.

The unconventional aspect of the process was to set aside the literature review until it was clear and mutually agreed what was the purpose of the research, that is, what the learner wanted to know and the intended application of the new knowledge back in the context of the workplace. In that sense, the study desk (really the mobile laptop) and the workplace were integrated into the research process from start to finish. This meant that the research process was not usually driven by the idea of a 'knowledge gap' to be found through extensive literature review and analysis but originating from an industry specific problem as perceived and interpreted by the researcher. It was an intellectual gamble but strongly motivational for the researcher. Once data had been collected there was ample opportunity for a discourse with the received knowledge in the research-based literature and the theory-building process could begin.

Conversations about the inner workings of industries such as electronic defence technology, the movie business, intellectual property protection in the international pharmaceutical industry, strategic focus group consulting, health system management, food manufacture, integrated pest management, disaster management in emergency services, sporting and leisure events, 're-tooling' for change in the mining resources industry, supply chain logistics management, thought leadership in the university sector, SME commercialisation and the enabling role of polytechnics in Singapore, and many more topics required attention to understanding the contextual background, current issues of organisational change and other matters as an integral part of identifying the core research question.

Above everything else, it was the description of the underlying problem and feasibility of the research idea originating from the senior managers that mattered most, whatever the industry context and what was already known in the topic-related literature. The intellectual challenge was to synthesise the various kinds of working and research-based knowledge through the research process as a learning journey.

Conversations as the main method

In my own case, I was learning about the specific industry and its context, usually within a political economy and cultural setting. For instance, working with people from Singapore it was useful to invite them to consider the uniqueness of the garden city state for it often shaped the nature of business management and organisational activity. Much the same could be claimed about such contexts as China, Iran, Japan, and other countries with distinctive characteristics. It was equally important to understand the specific nature of the business organisation and its management and whatever features of the industry needed to be grasped. It was a steep learning curve but stimulated my own curiosity and questions for conversation. The same approach worked for public sector organisations. For instance, it would have been baffling to design the research instrument without a sound appreciation of the unique nature of Iran's health system and teaching hospital management. Such background briefings increased the mental synergy in conversations about the research in progress.

The rationale behind the conversational approach with the researcher was twofold. First, was to acknowledge the importance of their lived experience and expert industry knowledge as central to identifying the main research question. The implicit purpose was to boost self-belief in undertaking the long learning journey, with the expectation of successful completion by freely drawing on their knowledge and lived experience. It was important for them to believe that the time and effort required to complete the journey was a worthwhile investment given that they lived with many competing pressures to perform and achieve results. A strong sense of 'ownership' of the research was fundamental to eventual success.

The second purpose was more instrumental. It was about converting a raw research idea into an operational plan. Conversations were

essentially a balancing act between a learner-centred approach and concentrated attention to the subject knowledge. In all cases my own subject knowledge was never enough to adopt a teacher-centred approach, handing down my learning. It was normally the other way around, leaving me free to concentrate on the doctoral learning process. My attention to the phrasing of the research questions and other aspects of the research method and implementation plans was where my expertise counted. Long experience of the research process also helped to steady my nerves.

Conversations focused on the topic as a project management task, which made immediate sense to practically minded managers and the like. This meant delving into the sources of knowledge through the academic research literature and related aspects of the chosen topic. The literature review stage was often challenging as some were impatient with the searching and most were challenged to think and write as if holding a conversation with a room filled with subject experts. It was a truly educational experience discovering what was already known and how the research had to make a new knowledge contribution.

Balancing the pragmatic and operational mindset with 'being philosophical'

Many senior people approached the research idea from their well-known pragmatic and action-orientated experience, rather than pure intellectual curiosity and abstract-conceptual thinking. The challenge to build theory through abstract generalisation and other features of philosophical speculation was regarded as a novelty, but it had to be faced. The matter increasingly formed part of conversations, taken in the spirit of being on a new learning journey. The tactic was to approach theory-building initially through conversations about practical implications, strategic thinking and policymaking, the essence of their action-orientated world. Students were invited, after data had been gathered and analysed, and implications discussed, to boldly generalise the new-found knowledge by creating abstract models and then to theorise from these condensed representations. This challenge was a fruitful source of many conversations, often replacing the weary feelings that come from the long research journey. To clarify, the actual process of conversations about theory-building started much earlier and was never lost sight in dealing with the more immediate tasks of research

project management.

The shared nature of the learning journey

The point is that conversation and active listening were the discourse qualities that made the learning journey a truly shared experience, facing the various challenges that frequently arise in the research process together. The journey metaphor was readily understood and valued by people used to having powerful positions but dealing with a new learning experience. My tactic was to emphasise that the student sat in the driving seat while I was the co-pilot sharing responsibility for direction, speed, and eventual destination. Having a strong sense of 'ownership' of the research project at every stage was essential to maintain momentum. It was important to ensure that the learning process was always developmental and never about making adults feel inadequate to the challenge.

A case study illustration of leading ideas

A single case illustration is useful as a way of bringing the leading ideas together. For several years the managing director (MD) of a large, multi-family-owned food manufacturing company in Hong Kong (HK) struggled to introduce and implement an organisational change management (OCM) agenda. He bravely chose to use the PhD as the vehicle to make things happen, much attracted to Action Learning & Action Research (ALAR) as the method of bringing about long overdue transformative change. Business performance analysis determined that the company was stuck in the past since the multiple family owners escaped from mainland China after 1949. He decided that nothing less than wholesale transformative change was required if the company was to survive a more competitive future. His comprehension of the business and organisational change management problem was from lived experience, which made for easier access into the realms of OCM literature and selecting a transformative approach as the best way of subsequent theory-building as the thesis took shape. First, though, the ALAR method had to be designed and implemented before conversations about theory-building could seriously begin. In that way the research process and many conversations found a comfortable way of working together.

Using the bakery as a case study of the need for change, after much haggling with the Chinese 'old guard' senior management, the MD was reluctantly permitted to design and implement a change management agenda. The traditional mooncake, eaten at Chinese moon festivals, became a special focus as it was produced by hand labour, based on recipe knowledge held only by the master baker with the workers simply expected to do their jobs without asking more. Workplace learning was a slow process based on imitation with no knowledge sharing. The company was slowly going backwards, with few besides the MD having awareness of future business performance problems.

Over five years, the MD slowly introduced ALAR and incrementally the bakery started to learn together and share recipe knowledge that diversified the range of mooncake products using modern machinery to increase output volume. In various other ways, the MD transformed the workplace and the mindset and behaviour of workers, now collaborating as a democratic team, although still under an old-style Chinese management. Fortunately, the MD acted effectively as a 'go-between' and the bakery was grudgingly given freedom to invent and innovate on all fronts.

The bakery department, now formed as an ALAR team, went on to enter and win a product quality assurance award in HK. This did much for team building and morale. More significantly, from a business and profit perspective, the company was allowed to rent shop floor space in the new airport to promote and sell its many food products, in addition to the wider range of mooncakes. The company's retail outlet was so successful that they were gradually given prime trading locations in the airport. Many years later the company still has an ALAR team working on innovation and change management. Altogether it is a remarkable success story, made sweeter to experience the role of research and academic conversations with the MD through the years that he laboured on his PhD on top of long working days.

Undoubtedly the PhD served a pragmatic, business and organisation change management agenda, serving the company well for many years into the future (the research was conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s). It was the prime motive of the MD. My role, however, was to steer the research gently along the pathway of building theory, in keeping with PhD aspirations. It was the stuff of many conversations

about the integration of change management models and theories into the thesis. It was a new learning experience for the pragmatic-minded MD. Success was achieved when one of the thesis examiners commented positively about the ample use of theory to interpret the outcomes of the several ALAR cycles that were mutually designed and assessed through our many conversations. Several journal publications flowed after the PhD was completed.

The description in the paragraphs above condenses the essence of my approach to doctoral research advising, which was more like a coaching role than a directing and controlling one. Intelligent and informed conversations kept track of progress and resolved research and writing issues as they emerged on the mutual learning journey. The synergy between the business and academic minds assured progress in a balanced way while making sure that the MD felt he was 'owning' the research process and firmly in the driving seat. The research process was not a linear pathway. Many times, we had to adjust thinking and return to past iterations to make sure that the review of the literature and ALAR evidence base was aligned with theory-building. It was always a stimulating learning experience and, above all else, a shared journey.

Being 'guide, philosopher and friend'

The approach was applied in the same spirit and form with younger PhD students, not yet in the CEO and MD class identified above but heading in the same direction. A term used to express the approach was acquired from a conversation with a senior figure in the Chinese Communist Party many years ago, with him calling my kind of adult education a 'Guide, philosopher and friend'. It neatly captured my own intentions and beliefs and adopted them ever since. It has two sides, one the cognitive and intellectual and the other side the affective and interpersonal, or what I prefer to call head and heart. Within the context of adult learning such a holistic approach made sense as we were equals through age and maturity, which transcended differences in role and status. More pointedly, on occasion the human vulnerability we all experience from time to time made an appearance even with those in high-level and powerful positions. The learning journey sometimes becomes an emotional rollercoaster ride. It was important to be onside and supportive beyond the demands of the research process.

Important ideas behind the practices of doctoral research advising

My previous adult education experience provided the foundation for a conversational and discussion-based approach to working on a shared learning journey basis with people who knew much more about the subject-matter from their lived experience in various industries. It was about having equal respect for each other and producing synergy in the meeting and sharing of minds to achieve outcomes. It was the 'fellowship of learning' in action.

In addition, the leading ideas of andragogy were used to structure and process the research learning journey, notably that adult learners want to be self-directed and have 'ownership' of the topic was paramount. Doctoral research learners welcomed guidance and advice, but not being controlled through micro-management. They wanted to explore their thinking through a problem-solving approach to discussion. Going further with what Knowles wisely called key assumptions about his understanding of adult learning, tallies closely with my experience. For example, the need to know why new learning is required usually dovetailed with professional career development and change management plans. For some it was an opportunity to reflect on years of learning and extend their own boundaries of knowledge. Occasionally the need to know was driven by intellectual curiosity 'for its own sake', which would have accorded well with 'Great Tradition' education values. The goals for most were predominantly instrumental and vocational. Everyone was a volunteer for a demanding learning journey with awareness of what lay ahead.

Another key assumption was what Knowles called self-concept, which is the need to have 'ownership' and independent, self-direction of the learning process. The starting point was to draw on lived experience and inside knowledge. For doctoral students this meant having the freedom to undertake research that was meaningful to them and have control in the management of the process. Anything less would be dis-empowering, even for those holding senior positions. Hence the key role of supervisors as 'guide, philosopher and friend' during the shared learning journey. Trusting in the capability of the doctoral student had to be ever-present and whatever differences arose about the research process had to be resolved and mutually agreed through conversation. The intention behind research advising was to empower the student on

the long and sometimes difficult learning journey.

The leading ideas of Knowles about adult learning were the most practically relevant in creating an effective learning partnership in the research process between student and supervisor(s). Much of the practical application was done intuitively and without a script. The first rule of supervision is to promptly identify methods of working closely with research students that align with their expectations and needs. It was not necessary to consult Knowles.

Social theory that informed adult learning and doctoral education practice

The social action theory perspective that was most relevant was phenomenology. My understanding formed around the leading idea that people learn to navigate and continuously adjust their personal and social lives from the 'inner self' as a conscious action. They perceive things and subjectively make sense of lived experiences to shape attitude and behaviour. It is conscious and intentional social action (think, do, act) at the micro-level of everyday interactions in social relationships of all kinds and an endless process through life. It perfectly applied to adults doing doctoral research and the long learning journey requiring constant thought and deliberate action. Conversation was the natural way of guiding the researcher to take 'ownership' of their own self-direction.

It made sense as a way of talking with professional people, or anyone with a story to tell about their lives or some significant aspect of it, such as working life, doing business, being an entrepreneur, or managing others in various kinds of organisational settings. In the world of senior managers and enterprise owners in all kinds of industries their lived experience, that is, their perceptions and subjective interpretations of the roles they played, with the sources of knowledge and action provided an ideal starting point for entering intelligent conversations. It was about what they wanted to know, why it was worthwhile researching and related matters that comprised the full story. It led naturally to who they were as individual people and the roads taken to become what they were and how doing doctoral research made sense to them in their life journey.

Through these intelligent conversations, the whole person emerged and

the basis of yet more shared experiences, whatever the cultural context and different roads taken in life. It was at the very heart of higher education and adult learning. Certainly, at doctoral research, it was clear that engagement with such a demanding and long learning journey was regarded as an educational experience with the power to shape the future of the individual. It was more than acquiring knowledge and skills, important as they were, rather it was an important inner-directed lived experience that mattered. In my view, it was at the core of what we mean by adult education.

The adult learning aspect of the doctoral journey with senior leaders and managers in industry contexts

During the long learning journey educare, as a 'duty of care' of supervisors works by giving both practical (academic) and emotional support. It blends easily with educere, 'drawing out' and facilitating the necessary research competencies and intellectual development that drives the creation of new knowledge. It is difficult to separate the expressive nature of learning new knowledge as a personal outcome from the professional with its instrumental use within the paradigm of change management. A unifying idea is that of empowerment. In these dual ways, the adult learning experience is truly educational taking the person to new knowledge, higher levels of competence and self-confidence, and the acquisition of new forms of adaptive intelligence in changing times.

As an ideal-type model, the educational experience guides toward cosmopolitan citizenship, fostering critical capabilities, appreciation and analysis, essential for thought leadership.

It transcends national and cultural identity. It is essentially a person and learner-centred ideal of adult education, serving as a building block for creating a better society for all, irrespective of class, gender, race and other identities that divide us. In short, and as an ideal-type model, the reach of the PhD goes further than personal and professional, organisational and management goals to a vision of an adaptive citizenry capable of meeting societal and global challenges we are living through by contributing high-quality thought leadership, competence, and commitment to a sustainable future. This lofty vision may not be shared with equal enthusiasm with the adult learner as their preferred outcome.

They might settle for a more pragmatic and instrumental idea of what having a doctorate means to them.

What matters is to regard each learning journey as important to the adult undertaking it as their means of freely making life choices. The learning journey is their unfolding story, their future, and a significant way of making sense of life. Everyone has a story and choosing a learning journey is a practical application of knowledge, skills, competence, and other outcomes of adult education. In that way, adult learning is the 'ground floor' of society as a vast network of relationships that make human life possible.

Conclusion

The emphasis of the paper has been more on practice than theory, with the latter only as a general guide to the doctoral learning journey and the related advising role and responsibilities. To conclude, it makes sense to suggest some active principles that could be applied by other doctoral research advisors persuaded by the approach outlined in the paper. They are noted below.

1. The doctoral research student is a high fee-paying customer and should have plenty of say about the learning process they are required to follow.
2. Their personal motives and professional goals together with industry-based knowledge and lived experience amount to a huge resource for crafting the research agenda. What they want to know comes first.
3. Advisors should listen to them as industry experts and learn from their perspectives and experiences taking a learner-centred approach.
4. Make sure they have early 'ownership' of the research process and occupy the driving seat from the outset. You are the co-pilot on the journey with some navigational responsibility but not from the driving seat.
5. Everyone should be encouraged to approach doctoral research as a learning journey to be shared as a mutual experience on an equal basis.

6. Advisors should embrace being 'guide, philosopher and friend' as a solid way of supporting the student on the learning journey. It is best regarded as a holistic experience including both the cognitive-intellectual and socio-emotional domains of life.
7. The learning journey is best approached as a continuous conversation and discussion on a partnership basis.
8. The research project needs to be understood as both a linear and 'back and forth' thinking process requiring managing uncertainty and occasional self-doubt.
9. The guidance given should be a blend of clear and structured learning pathways and open-ended exploratory thinking through frequent conversation and discussion.
10. Doctoral research that is embedded within industry contexts is best approached through whatever might be their problem-driven, organisational change management agenda. Academic journal publication may not be a high priority.

Finally, and back to the learner-centred and individual level, adult education should be about empowerment, transferring the tools of learning through good communication and personal support. It is the essence of good teaching and learning for any age. My building block of a theory of adult education is centred on access to, and the experience of high-quality learning facilitated by teachers and others with a human heart. If it empowers adults through the learning journey, then education continues to serve a wider socio-cultural and economic purpose for the whole society. That is what my well spent years advising doctoral research adult learners have taught me.

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About the author

Dr. Barry Elsey has divided his adult education experience between two universities in the UK, leaders in the Great Tradition of liberal studies, and two South Australian universities. In the Australian context he became well-known for his work in doctoral research supervision, both onshore and in several international settings, notably with senior leaders and managers from many industry backgrounds. The paper reflects his long experience in various kinds of adult education, which has been successfully transferred to professional continuing education and doctoral level research within the business and management domain.

Dr. Elsey has published extensively on various kinds of adult education since the early 1970s. He was recently awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for his contribution to tertiary education in the 2024 Australia Day honours.

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Book review

Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19

Roy Chan, Krishna Bista, Ryan Allen, London & New York, Routledge, 2022, 266 pp., ISBN 978-0367647155

Reviewed by Lei Xia

Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19 is a compilation of research done by individuals from faculty and students and highlights the impact it had nationally and regionally in general but in particular the higher education sector. Its 17 chapters reflect the resilience of faculty, students, and administration. It further reflects the problem-solving of administration, the efficiency of policymakers, the commitment of all relevant stakeholders, to ensure that the academic program continues, and lastly, it reflects the student's discipline to continue their studies. Further research to be done also forms part of the book. More importantly, it provides insight into the widening gap in digital online education between countries and specifically the education institutions, and their capacity to render optimal digital learning and teaching services.

The book consists of 16 short reviews from professors, directors of institutes, researchers, and lecturers. It is followed by a foreword that highlights the book as a symbol of hope to manage future epidemics,

setting the context and tone of the 17 chapters. Chapter 1 gives a summary of each chapter and here the editors ask the question, 'Are online and distance learning the future in global higher education?'

Part 1 consists of 5 chapters that discuss the effectiveness of learning, assessing, and teaching, during and after the pandemic. Chapter 2 examines how training in designing online courses and pedagogy was the starting point when COVID-19 occurred, while Chapter 3 shows the disparity in the effectiveness of remote teaching within universities. Here Linda Dam uses social media as a method and discusses the important debates for qualitative analyses. In my view, this qualitative method is important because emerging themes besides the main themes give more in-depth insight into the social variables of disparity in remote teaching. Chapter 5 uses a methodology similar to Chapter 3 by exploring the narrative inquiry to discuss challenges the authors came across in their research about students working from home while using different multimedia tools to interact. Chapters 4 and 6 unpack the assessment methods. Methods such as live chat and video conferencing as strategies for online testing were added for the effectiveness of assessments. My question here was whether the outcome was successful and in chapter 6 the authors investigated whether the authentic assessment was better or not at RMIT University in Vietnam. However, there is a gap in this chapter and it is a comparative study of assessments with a university in a developed country. The strength of this part is pointing out, after extensive research by all the authors, the positive and negative variables in an innovative form of the phenomenon of distance learning and online teaching. For instance, the book points out how these trends will be more successful in the future in the long term given the normalization and adaptation of various methods and strategies being applied in higher education globally.

Part 2 emphasizes the impact distance education had on students, access for students to online teaching and learning, and how students were socially inclusive during COVID-19. This part is the most important part of the book to me because it speaks to very pertinent global social issues about online higher education. For example, in chapter 7 the authors highlight the limited access to remote learning in developing countries and indicate how the use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms narrowed the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Chapters 8 and 9 explore limitations on international

students, vulnerable students, and underrepresented students. Chapter 10 is the highlight of this part. A developing country in Africa, Botswana, is at the centre of this study because of the use of ICTs which might have contributed to social exclusion and digital inequality in higher education during the global pandemic. The study about Russia and inequality in technology in Chapter 11 is a phenomenon in various countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. Africa is the continent with the most social problems and technology is one of them. Houses are overcrowded in some parts of each country and studying at home is a challenge like it is in Russia. Furthermore, in Russia, there is poor internet connection but in parts of Africa there is no internet at all, so online learning is an impossible phenomenon. However, there is a paradigm shift post-COVID-19 in developing countries and this is the availability of the internet, technology, and more resources for online teaching and learning.

The third part includes case studies about teaching and learning remotely during the pandemic and long-term lessons. Various countries' studies are included in this part, for instance, Hong Kong, India, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. Chapter 13, about autoethnography, provides readers with a better understanding of diversity within narratives in online communities. A paradigm shift is discussed in Chapter 14, from face-to-face teaching to a rise in virtual teaching in Hong Kong. It could have been more insightful if this paradigm shift could have been compared with a developing country. All this could have shown the implications of these paradigm shifts in developed and developing countries. Chapters 15 and 17 examine public universities and private universities. The example of an Indian private university analyses the data surveyed from 106 students to document the pros and cons of mainstream online learning during COVID-19. The author concludes this study and argues that the norms of lockdown and social distancing might change the methods of higher education in the future. The public higher institutions discussed in Chapter 17 include a theoretical framework where the author uses diffusion innovation theory. The author concludes that the method which is a blended learning model is ideal for higher education in the UAE. An elaboration on the reimagining of teacher education in Australian universities highlights hindrances and benefits post-COVID-19. The authors argued that these changes were reimagined and necessary in the online sphere.

An epilogue follows the 17 chapters where the editors indicate five commonalities and overarching variables. A few questions among others, which guide the book are, how do we support students in general, but vulnerable ones in particular for intercultural learning, how do we continuously engage alumni, staff, faculty, and students in enhancing online relationships, and lastly, how are field base and experiential learning remote courses design?

The compilation of studies contributes to the knowledge capital to empower administrations, families, policymakers, educators, researchers, and practitioners. The advice, new ideas, and principles could be implemented in the academic years to come. Likewise, readers benefit tremendously from this relevant book during COVID-19 and will continue to benefit in the future. While the book focuses on a few countries, a few studies from Sub-Saharan Africa could have given more insight into the social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena of online education during COVID-19 in higher education institutions. I view this omission as a huge gap within this book because it could have given more insight into unequal access to communication technologies, especially affordability. What also should have been highlighted more is the transformation in digital and institutional culture and the investment in it. In my view, access to online teaching was and is still unequal.

A few changes could be made to this book. Add chapter 18 as a chapter with statistics about Sub-Saharan African access to online teaching. Another chapter should highlight how the West is negatively impacting education in Africa by having conditions attached to aid that is not at times benefitting education. Indigenous communities are especially disadvantaged by the West. Other variables include age, gender, race, ethnicity, minority groups, and lower-income groups. These further studies should include action plans on how to design courses online that could be free and without the requirement of Wi-fi usage and to enhance students' social and emotional development.