AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

From the Editor's desk
Tony Brown

Welcome to 2017 and the 57ᵗʰ volume of Australia's adult education and learning journal. It's been a start to the year unlike any other in my memory.

Even before 2017 the level of disenchantment with the political process had become more entrenched especially as the inequality gap grew in Australia and in other similar countries. There is a widespread lack of trust, and it goes beyond politics to encompass many institutions some of which were once the most trusted.

Finding solutions to deep-seated and ongoing problems such as extreme climate and the planet's health, indigenous reconciliation,

immigration, security, marriage equality and violence are bogged down in recrimination, point scoring, hostility and a lack of imagination and courage. Confidence in the society being able to discuss these issues in a way that relies on tolerance and is informed by reason and a civil discourse is understandably very low.

Then, on top of this came the US Presidential election campaign and in January the swearing-in of a President unlike any other seen before.

Not surprisingly there is a sense that things are very different, and very unsettling with consequences that are hard to imagine or frightening to imagine. How did this eventuate? Why? What are the causes? These are all questions that many are grappling with.

In thinking about this new environment I was reminded of Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and in particular the concept of the 'disorientating dilemma'. For Mezirow the meaning we each make of the world around us is shaped by what he called 'habits of the mind' or 'habits of expectation', which adults acquire over a lifetime. These meaning structures are 'frames of reference' that are based on the totality of individual's cultural and contextual experiences and they influence how we behave and interpret events.

But what happens when something comes along that does not fit in with these frames of reference that we use to know our world, that we use to guide our responses to everyday events and relations, and help us to understand how things fit together?

When something comes along that can't easily be comprehended by our usual frames of reference it leads to what Mezirow referred to as a 'disorientating dilemma'. Usually these dilemmas are not freely chosen. They are often triggered by an event or a change where what is held to be most important has to be questioned because it no longer fits with what has been previously known and experienced.

Mezirow theorised this with individuals in mind or with small groups of people who shared something in common. But are we today experiencing a collective, or social, 'disorientating dilemma', something that makes it hard for us as a much larger polity to understand what is going on around us? And if so, something that then requires us to

look for new answers and new understandings to explain this different world?

Being taken outside of the norm, of our comfort zone, presents an opportunity to critically reflect, and potentially lead to some sort of change. It is here that adult educators can play an important role in fostering spaces conducive to inquiry, discussion and learning.

Like many I was trying to make sense of the Trump phenomena over the summer holidays. I had been very surprised that enough of the American population would give him their vote after what had been said during the campaign. I was thrown by realising that a new discourse was being created, one where the word 'facts' needs to be written in inverted commas and clarified before continuing. Where we were being asked to consider 'fake news', alternatives facts, and post-truths. These are all problematic terms for educators and for those seeking knowledge.

These things were on my mind while I was also watching some of the big screen films that opened in the new year, three of which are based on important historical events - *Hidden Figures*, *Loving*, and *Denial*.

In the first two, accounts of overt discrimination against African-Americans in the 1960s are shown, firstly for women working in the fledgling space industry at NASA, and secondly through laws preventing the marriage of a black woman and a white man. They show us just how recently this discrimination was legal and also how these individuals' determination and integrity helped overturn it.

Denial is an account of the libel trial that David Irving, the infamous British holocaust-denier, took out against an American Jewish academic Deborah Lipstadt (played by Rachel Weisz) and Penguin books. The trial took place in London in the 1990s and one of the expert witnesses was Richard Evans, a Cambridge Professor and historian. Evans' painstaking research exposed Irving's claims and helped in him losing his case.

Evans says that one of the positives to come out of the film making the case better known to a wider audience is that might convince people watching it 'that there is such a thing as truth and you can discover it'. His 1997 book *In Defence of History*, famously challenged the postmodernist rejection of objectivity that became increasingly popular

from the 1980s especially in social sciences in the Universities.

Towards the end of *Denial*, Rachel Weisz's character argues passionately that there are facts and there is historical truth – 'slavery happened, the Black Plague happened, Elvis is not alive'.

Now that the supporters of Donald Trump, broadly known as the 'alt-right', have managed to make mainstream terms such as 'fake news', alternatives facts and post-truth, it must raise questions about how educators can work to help people analyse, and develop their own critical knowledge that takes into account facts and historical truth.

The times can make it feel that developing a reasoned argument built on accumulating information and acknowledging differing perspectives has become redundant. Yet it is in such an environment that education is even more important, not an education that tells people what to think, or gives ready-made answers to questions, but one that enables people to consider, contest and develop one's own understanding, not a fixed unchanging position but an understanding that remains open to evolution, greater depth and insight and even change.

In somewhat of an understatement for our times Mezirow believed that disorientating dilemmas are usually 'not freely chosen'. He also conceived of the resulting 'perspective transformation' as being one that was positive. Out of the crisis and disorientation came a new perspective, implying a personal development, an improvement, or awakening. Yet the events of the past year show that there is no automatic 'positive' development. For many the US elections pose a dilemma because they fear what might happen as a result. But for many others among those who supported Trump the disorientation had been accumulating for the twenty-five years leading up to last year's election. It was the election that provided the catalyst to 'let out' a pent up dissatisfaction.

In this febrile atmosphere working as an educator to help people understand what is going on around them, to develop their own ways of analysing events, of questioning their own pre-conceived attitudes and beliefs – their habits of mind and habits of expectation – can be a difficult task as there is so much emotion in the air and the default of looking to apportion blame to some 'other' is often so readily grasped.

Mezirow's suggestions for how educators can work in this heightened atmosphere are still worth recalling. He suggested educators should help learners focus on and examine the assumptions that underlie their beliefs, feelings and actions; help them to assess the consequences of those assumptions; identify and explore alternative sets of assumptions; and test the validity of assumptions through effective participation in reflective dialogue. In this way adult educators might 'help others, and perhaps ourselves, move toward a fuller and more dependable understanding of the meaning of our mutual experience'.

Fostering those places where adults can come together to learn and carve out spaces for their own and their community's development becomes ever more important. The papers in this issue of AJAL point to some of the variety of those learning opportunities.

Tracey Ollis, Karen Starr, Cheryl Ryan, Jennifer Angwin and **Ursula Harrison** from Deakin University take up from previous research into Victoria's Neighbourhood Houses by investigating the particular learning spaces in the Barwon and South West regions adjoining Geelong in Victoria. Like many other rural areas of Australia the region has been hit by job losses associated with manufacturing factory closures and simultaneous growth of new industries such as hospitality and tourism providing often less secure ongoing work. The research here points to the possibilities that exist to reconstruct new identities due to the special characteristics of the formal and informal education on offer in the community-based houses.

Second chance education is also a focus of the paper by **Harry Savelsberg**, **Silvia Pignata** and **Pauline Weckert** from the University of South Australia. They have looked at four TAFE programs that set out to provide access and equity pathways for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. The paper focuses on the strategies used to support positive engagement in these second chance equity programs. They found that the programs' participants faced complex and often multiple barriers, which highlighted the importance of delivering programs with sustained and tailored approaches. They argue that while tangible educational and/or employment outcomes were delivered, it was the associated social and personal development that made these programs especially successful.

How higher education institutions can assist adults in their transition to university study is the subject of **Cheryl Bookallil** and **Bobby Harreveld's** paper. Students from groups with low representation in higher education are being supported through a variety of new enabling, or pathway, or transition-to-study programs. What works in helping to retain those students is the focus of this paper. Drawing on the 'insider' perceptions of those students who have been relatively successful with enabling study the paper presents insights into factors behind high attrition from enabling programs and the low rates of articulation into university study.

Feedback from student surveys in higher education is intended to help lecturers improve their subject content and their teaching. However the benefit to current students in undertaking the survey is not so apparent. How can those receive immediate point-of-contact feedback that encourages students to reflect on their own learning is the subject of **Warren Lake, William Boyd, Wendy Boyd** and **Suzi Hellmundt's** paper. They trialled a modified two-factor questionnaire with students and conclude that what was once a researcher-focussed tool can be adapted to be oriented towards current students while retaining its usefulness as a diagnostic research tool.

The final two papers in the refereed section are drawn from overseas teaching and learning experiences. From South Africa **Celestin Mayombe** from the University of KwaZulu-Natal outlines the results of a qualitative study that investigated adult non-formal education and training (NFET) centres in providing post-training support for the employment of graduates. Many adults continue to face long-term unemployment even after completing the NFET programs. The study found that links between the centres and external agencies such as employers, community resources and other services were not strong and that without these links the likelihood of remaining unemployed remained high thus limiting the chances of reducing the chronic poverty that currently exists.

Jen Couch in her paper 'On the borders of pedagogy', uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore the reflections and insights gained while teaching a subject in adolescent development on the Thai Burma border. Drawing on critical pedagogy as an underpinning framework

for her teaching practices this paper outlines the personal changes that arose from the very particular socio-political context of an Australian woman teaching a university subject on the border of Thailand and Burma.

In the non-refereed section of this issue, **Michael Small** provides an interesting practitioner-based reflection on the operations of a U3A in outer Melbourne. The paper looks at the Mornington U3A in both organisational terms and as a loosely coupled system. He poses two inter-related questions - are U3As in Victoria operating as bureaucracies and so need to be loosened up? Or are they run as organisational anarchies and need to be tightened up?

This issue's book review by **Rob Townsend** is of the impressive, self-published *These Walls Speak Volumes: A History of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria*, by Pam Baragwanath and Ken James.

Tony Brown

Call for Expression of Interest–
Editor of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning

The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL) has been published on behalf of Adult Learning Australia for over 55 years and is widely recognised as the leading journal in Australia on adult education. The journal is also recognised internationally in the discipline of adult education, and has received article submissions from leading scholars in adult and community education from the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Africa and the Asia Pacific. In addition, the Journal has an esteemed editorial board of Australian and international academics representing the research disciplines of adult, vocational and adult and community education.

AJAL is published three times each year and promotes critical thinking and research in the field of adult learning as well as the theory, research and practice of adult and community education. Each issue features articles that have been double blind peer-refereed as well as some practitioner articles and book reviews.

We are looking for a new editor for 2018 onwards due to the retirement from the editorial role of our current editor Dr. Tony Brown.

The role of editor includes:

- Calling for papers, and managing the 'double, blind peer review' process using an editorial board and invited peer reviewers
- Editing, proofreading and formatting all materials ready for printing
- Seeking out contributions where necessary to ensure a strong balance and high quality of articles
- Managing an editorial board made up of Australian and Internationally recognised experts in the field of adult learning and adult and community education
- Supporting a guest editor to edit an issue from time to time on a specialist theme related to Adult Community Education.
- Maintain and further extend Journal impact factors across a range of research measures such as Scopus and ERA.
- The editor works with two sub-editors and an Editorial Board. The new editor may revise and refresh the current Editorial Board.

The position is unpaid, but all expenses of the Editor, related to the journal will be reimbursed.

Sales, printing and distribution of the journal are managed by ALA support staff.

We are looking for someone willing to make an initial commitment of between 3–5 years.

Selection criteria

- A history of publication and research in the adult learning and / or adult and community education fields.
- Proven ability to manage a publishing processes.
- Understanding and networks in the adult and community educator sector in Australia and internationally.

Expressions of interest of no more than 750 words, addressing the criteria above, should be sent to Jenny Macaffer, CEO of Adult Learning Australia info@ala.asn.au by 1 June 2017 for consideration by the ALA Board.

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Second Chance Learning in Neighbourhood Houses

Tracey Ollis , Karen Starr, Cheryl Ryan, Jennifer Angwin
and Ursula Harrison

Deakin University

Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria are significant sites of formal and informal education for adult learners. Intrinsically connected to local communities they play an important role in decreasing social isolation and building social inclusion. The focus of this research is on adult learners and adult learning that engages with 'second chance' learners who participate in adult learning programs in the Barwon and South West regions of Victoria. The greater Geelong region is characterised by declining car automotive and textile manufacturing industries and emerging new industries such as hospitality and tourism. The data from the research participants in the study include career changers, long term and recently unemployed, newly arrived and migrant communities, young people and older adults. This paper focuses on the learning practices of second chance learners who frequently have negative perceptions of themselves as unsuccessful learners, but are transformed through their learning experiences in Neighbourhood Houses. We argue the unique social space of the Neighbourhood House, the support and guidance offered by staff and teachers, the unique pedagogy and small group learning experiences, allows adult learners to reconstruct a new identity of themselves as successful learners.

Keywords: *informal learning, formal learning, adult education, ACE, VET, training reform, Neighbourhood Houses.*

Introduction

This research focuses on adult learners and adult learning that engages with 'second chance' learners in the regional city centre of Geelong and the rural outer south-west area of Victoria. Neighbourhood Houses run adult education programs and are widely known for their impact on social inclusion and community building in local communities. Courses offered include, but are not limited to, foundation studies in literacy and numeracy, language and learning to study skills, information technology courses, health and well-being programs, community events and arts-based programs. Some Neighbourhood Houses are Registered Training Organisations (RTO's) and provide accredited vocational training in youth work, childcare, community services and hospitality. The greater Geelong region, has undergone dramatic economic change in recent years, with manufacturing industries such as clothing, footwear and car production closing and newer industries emerging such as tourism, hospitality, disability services and education. In addition, major employers such as Ford, Shell and Alcoa have recently announced their closure or departure from the region. The research is set against the backdrop of the current project of lifelong learning, which has dominated adult education discourses for more than 30 years (Delores 1998; Edwards & Usher 2001; Chappell et al. 2003). We argue Neighbourhood Houses are well positioned to play an increasingly important role in the education of adult learners. Adult education in Australia is delivered by a number of program providers including Teaching and Further Education (TAFE), Adult Community Education (ACE) providers, private training organisations and welfare organisations. Within Victoria, Neighbourhood Houses are recognised and funded as legitimate providers of adult community education (Rooney 2006 & 2011). The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education (MCVTE 2008) acknowledges the ACE sector has the potential to support the national agenda on skills and workforce development because of its ability to respond to changes in "industrial, demographic and technological circumstances" (MCVTE 2008). The

declaration emphasises the important role played by ACE in building the "knowledge, understanding, skills and values" essential for an educated and just society and its contribution and provision of educational opportunities for 'second-chance' learners (Borthwick et al 2001, p9). Furthermore, programs and activities offered within Neighbourhood Houses contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities, increasing personal satisfaction and community and social capital as well as providing economic and employment benefits (Townsend 2006). Furthermore, the recent McKenzie Review identified the ACE sector as well positioned to deliver flexible training and adult education programs to local communities (MacKenzie & Coulson, 2015).

Throughout this paper we explore the formal and informal learning that occurs in Neighbourhood Houses and the rich context for understanding adult learning that occurs in the space of Neighbourhood Houses. Presently, there is a dearth of research on the educational trajectory of 'second chance learners' in Neighbourhood Houses and the possibility for transition to programs into higher education. In the vignettes of Allan, Marta, Joy and Lesley, and their case studies outlined in this paper, we uncover the benefits of adult education in these places of ACE. This is in line with Nechvoglod and Beddie (2010) who cite Pittham's (2009) research, which claims hard to reach learners are those learners who do not readily self-refer or seek engagement in adult education learning programs.

Methodology

This research into learning in Neighbourhood Houses draws on qualitative research to explore issues of lifelong learning in the context of Neighbourhood Houses (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2009). Using a critical pedagogy lens, case study methodology and methods are engaged to uncover the rich stories of the research participants (Stake, 2013). This research is subjective and constructivist. Central to this research is the exploration of adult learners' education experiences. To date 44 interviews have been conducted with learners across 12 Neighbourhood Houses. Access to the research site was gained through a partnership with the Barwon Network of Neighbourhood Centres and in collaboration with the South West Network of Neighbourhood Houses. Those interviewed come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, they

are young, unemployed, sole parents, and older retrenched workers. A few participants came from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and one participant had a disability. Some interviews raised strong emotions for a small group of the participants as they recounted their stories of early schooling, education and work participation. Only eight of the 44 people interviewed were men, and this is broadly representative of the Neighbourhood House sector overall, where the participants and staff are predominantly women (Clemans & Hartley 2003; Golding et al. 2008). This research project gained ethics clearance from Deakin University's Faculty of Arts and Education ethics committee. All of the participants who were interviewed were given the opportunity to review their transcription for validity and correctness as the in-depth case studies were being drafted. Participants were allocated a pseudonym in order to protect their identity.

Neighbourhood Houses in Australia

The first Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria were established in the early 1970s. Many of these early houses focussed on providing community based education opportunities for women returning to study (West 1995; Ducie 1994). They also played an important role in reducing social isolation and increasing social inclusion, particularly for mothers at home with young children (Golding et al. 2008, p240; Ducie 1994; West 1995). The most important distinguishing feature of Neighbourhood Houses is their neighbourhood-based models of community development practice that encourages communities to initiate recreation and education activities, which address local needs (Golding et al. 2008; Rooney 2011; Foley 1993; Kimberley 1998; Permezel 2004). Neighbourhood Houses offer local community based programs close to where people live. Houses operate as generalist services which are inclusive, flexible and responsive to their local communities (Thompson 2015; Humpage 2005).

A further distinguishing characteristic of Neighbourhood Houses is their relatively small size in comparison to other educational settings. Small class sizes and creative pedagogy offer substantial opportunities for the establishment of supportive learning relationships between class colleagues and between learners and their teachers. This creates

a mutual process of engagement between learners and teachers, with learners being able to initiate short course programs and curriculum (Freire, 1972). There is a particular focus on the inclusion of people who are typically under-represented within more formal educational settings - those who are marginalised or disadvantaged through social, economic, educational, or cultural circumstances or who are living with a disability (Rooney 2004; Ducie 1994; Townsend 2009; Permezel 2004; Thompson 2015).

Many houses use community development practices in their delivery of adult education programs (Kimberley 1998). They use multi-layered approaches to learning, social engagement, personal and social change. Neighbourhood Houses seek to empower and support individual participants and their local communities (Rooney 2004; Townsend 2009). The pedagogy is based on adult learning principles, acknowledging that adults are frequently self-directed leaners and have insight into their own learning needs and their preferred styles of teaching (Ollis & Hodge, 2014). In an era of lifelong learning policy, houses typically tailor their programs to respond to the needs of learners across a whole lifespan (Kimberley 1998; Rooney 2011; Thompson 2015; Townsend 2006; Humpage 2005; Golding et al 2008; Branch 2012; Kenny 2006).

In Victoria, there are more than 390 funded Neighbourhood Houses, servicing 372 communities. They are funded through a complex array of funding sources. Core funding for the community development work comes from the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria, through the Neighbourhood House Coordination Program (ANHLC 2003). In Victoria 367 houses (almost 97% of houses) are funded under the NHCP, although their funding has declined in recent years.

Second chance learners

There is limited literature on second chance learners and what is available tends to focus on immigrants and literacy (Twao et al 2007). Some adult learners who frequent Neighbourhood Houses have had negative educational and learning experiences and outcomes in their lives. Sometimes described as vulnerable learners, or disengaged learners, they have also been described as hard-to-reach learners.

> Hard-to-reach learners are those learners who do not self-refer or readily seek to engage in adult learning programs or courses. They are difficult to recruit, to the extent, that if there are softer targets available locally, little effort is made to make contact and connect with the hard to reach and thus their voices can remain unheard and their needs and wants largely ignored. (Nechvoglod 2010, cited in Pittham 2009, 12).

Some caution must be exercised when using this term. Some of the literature appears to place the responsibility upon the learners for not taking the opportunities education offered them (Twao et al 2007). However, learners may be hard to reach due to inadequacies of the education system and its ability to meet students' learning needs, rather than the learners possessing negative attributes. Second chance learners encompass those who have been unable to continue with and complete studies in formal school or tertiary settings and who have returned to learning later in life in order to gain employment. Second chance learners often find themselves in an occupation or employment that is different from what they initially planned (Twao et al 2007).

Descriptions and segmentations of learner cohorts are frequently organised around identifying levels of disadvantage, which can result in negative assumptions and stereotyping of particular groups (Nechvoglod 2010). These terms have been applied to various groups such as those listed in the report by Nechvoglod & Beddie (2010, 12):

- Indigenous Australians;
- people with a disability;
- early school leavers;
- vulnerable or low-skilled workers;
- under-employed and unemployed people;
- culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD);
- under-represented learner groups;
- disengaged young people;
- socially and economically disadvantaged people;
- people isolated and marginalised from the community and
- some older people.

Neighbourhood Houses and the VET sector are well known for their provision of second chance education (Robertson et al 2011). Second chance learners are described as those learners who are returning to study because their current qualifications do not equip them for promotion within their workplace, or facilitate a move outside their current workplace to find equivalent or higher level positions (Robertson et al 2011). The term can also be used to refer to those learners who are re-engaging with education and training after leaving school early or disengaged from traditional education settings such as schools, TAFEs and university. Nechvoglod and Beddie (2010) claim hard to reach learners may experience barriers to participation arising from previous negative educational experiences. They also recognise that other exclusionary factors such as the financial cost of courses, as well as social barriers such as lack of confidence and low self-esteem, may also operate to exclude particular learners. In addition, Robertson et al (2011) argue that second chance learners have a negative perception of themselves as learners having not acquired the same successful learning milestones as other learners. For many of these learners this results in having poor literacy and numeracy skills due to non-completion of their secondary education (Robertson et al 2011). Second chance learners are usually motivated to learn because they wish to enter or re-enter the workforce or improve their position within the workforce (Robertson et al 2011). Hoare (2012) and Pyvis and Chapman (2007) describe the experiences of second chance learners as both transformative and positional. In addition to improved job satisfaction and other employment related rewards, learners were at times surprised to realise their increased levels of confidence and personal agency, which is often manifested as overcoming a hesitancy to speak up and voice their opinions. Pyvis & Chapman (2007) describe transformative outcomes as a means of changing learners' professional and personal identities. Hoare (2012) also found that learners reported a new-found independence and ability to seek out "authoritative resources" and that they were "learning how to learn" through critical questioning rather than accepting theoretical positions and points of view (p276). This is supported by Pyvis and Chapman's (2007) study that found learners who experienced transformation were more confident engaging in new educational experiences.

Second Chance Learners: their challenges and transformation

The Geelong and South West region of Victoria has been traditionally noted for providing employment in car manufacturing, oil refining, and chemical engineering. Rising unemployment and the continued disappearance of full time jobs is of particular concern in this region of Victoria (Tyler et al 2013). As previously stated, large numbers of workers have been made redundant due to manufacturing flight at the same time as eligibility for welfare provisions are tightening up. Working-age individuals bear the risk and responsibility for assuring their employment and employability. Adding to this context, the Commonwealth government's changed social policy rhetoric from 'entitlement' to last resort 'safety net' has heralded stricter eligibility requirements for welfare aid and support. Delayed entitlement and work for the dole schemes, reductions in child support eligibility and payments, along with tougher assessments for government supported 'carers' have forced many adults back into the workforce. Rising fees in an increasingly deregulated higher education and training sector compound these issues (Tyler et al 2013).

Long-term unemployment hits many different sectors of the economy. Frequently, the first retrenchments fall on individuals who have been early school leavers, have no post-school qualifications and have worked in relatively insecure settings all their working life. However, a second layer of retrenchments has recently hit the City of Greater Geelong, with major cut backs and the closure of some of the last major manufacturing industries, such as Alcoa and Ford. Now, more highly skilled and qualified workers are finding themselves out of employment for the first time in their working life. Many are at a loss as to where to begin to seek career change, or the direction they might choose to go. Data from this research revealed that many of the learners in Neighbourhood Houses:

- are early school leavers;
- face equity issues in terms of access to skill development, courses and learning opportunities including access to computers, technology and the Internet;
- often have negative perceptions of themselves as learners due to negative prior learning experiences;
- are assisted to build their confidence, develop new knowledge, skills

and networks in order to become successful learners and workers;

- learn, but also volunteer in Neighbourhood Houses, gaining further skills and knowledge through social learning opportunities;
- successfully transition from education programs in Neighbourhood Houses into work and further education;
- envisage a future in further formal learning, including acquiring higher education degrees.

Case study vignettes - Allan, Marta, Joy and Lesley.

The case studies of the four research participants listed below chronicle how learners describe the benefits they derived from engagement in Neighbourhood House programs.

'It's that community thing.' - **Allan**.

Allan is 54 years old and has lived in the area for 23 years. He is a fully qualified experienced aircraft mechanic, who was retrenched after 37 years. '*I got retrenched ... and decided to change careers...and this is pretty much where I end up, doing training.'*

Allan was looking at the TAFE career book, when he saw a full-page advertisement for the Neighbourhood House in the local newspaper and noticed that they were offering the same course, a Cert IV in Youth Work. At that stage his understanding of a Neighbourhood House, like many people, was limited. '*I thought they did arts and crafts, drop-in centre, bingo. That's what I thought the Neighbourhood House was because I didn't know anything about them at the time.'*

Allan is an early school leaver, who left without completing year 12 in order to take up an apprenticeship. He was concerned that he might not be able to succeed with more academic learning, as he had always seen himself as a *'hands on learner'*. He was concerned that he would be lost in a big, impersonal setting, with large class sizes. '*I've said to (the tutor)...at my age and at my learning skill level if I had been in a class of twenty people I wouldn't have been able to handle it!'*

Allan found the learning environment suited him because the class had few participants, and was able to offer a far higher level of support to each individual re-entering accredited programs.

> *…it's a much more relaxed learning experience for me … So because it's that community thing it makes it easier for me to talk to the other ladies that work here. It doesn't have … what I would perceive to be a sterile learning environment that maybe a university or a TAFE would have. … That's the single most enjoyable part of being here was to have a teacher and a group of people that you can interact with and get along with.*

Since requalifying, Allan has been able to secure fulltime work in youth residential care and gone on to complete a Diploma in Community Services at Ocean Grove Neighbourhood House. He now views himself as a successful learner, in a setting where he feels confident and supported, and has since completed a recreation short course on photography.

'We all began to care for each other' - **Marta**

Marta is 37 years old, a single mother with two children at home. Marta left school half way through year 10 and has never managed to access ongoing employment.   She had experienced long-term unemployment, and was encouraged to undertake a certificate in warehousing, with another education provider, a course well beyond her at that stage. She came to the Neighbourhood House where they managed to assist her to withdraw without penalty, she then enrolled in a preparatory program at the house prior to commencing a Certificate II in Warehousing. She gained some credentials in her first course, including a First Aid certificate and a Forklift Licence. Getting her forklift licence was one of the most enjoyable and meaningful aspects of the course for her.

> *I reckon that was my happiest day of the whole course I must admit, that was even better than anything because that was the first time I've actually gone for a test, like a test, a test and passed! My kids were all giving me well wishes that morning so I was really nervous thinking if I fail I have to go home and tell the kids I've failed. I was so happy I ran out and high-fived one of my classmates.*

From feeling as if there was no hope for her, no life and no job, since coming to the house and completing two courses Marta feels that she has a grip back on her life. Her confidence has grown and she has learned that she is also a leader.

> *I'm a leader and that's the way I am and I didn't really realise that I just thought I was mum... I didn't realise that in my everyday life that I could use that in the workforce and it could be an advantage and I think that was very surprising to me because I just didn't think motherhood would come into it. I thought to have a job you've got to have credentials and I don't I only have cooking and cleaning.*

The course has brought about changes in her life. As she has grown in confidence this has had a positive impact on her children. Her children can see that no one is telling her how to live her life now, and her son tells her how he is happy about the woman she has become.

> *I've got a fourteen year old son...he says 'mum I'm happy with the woman you are now' he goes 'nah' referring to my partner, 'he'll never stand over you again mum,' and I go 'yeah you are right, I won't let him!'*

> *It's actually taught me that I'm a leader too, when I'm with people they tend to follow with me.*

Marta believes the social environment of the neighbourhood house provided her with encouragement and support.

> *So we all began to care for each other, which was awesome because a lot of the people didn't have people that cared, there were a lot of the young blokes that didn't have family or anything and they actually felt loved.*

Marta's identity changed from thinking that at 37 she couldn't learn anymore to discovering that she could learn from and be inspired by the younger students in the class.

> *If doing this (giving support to young people in the Neighbourhood House) if I can help one person, I'll achieve want I want to achieve. I'll do it ten times over...because if I had that person sitting on my shoulder at 16 I would have been grabbing it.*

Marta believes her learning has changed her life in a significant way, this is evidenced in the quote below:

> *My life has just got better and better and I've grown as a person, my confidence and everything has grown and my kids can see me flourishing which in turn makes my children happier. I'm happier and my partner's happier. So I'm really looking forward to what I'm going to learn in the future, and whether I'm going to learn anymore.*

'Without a facility like this I'd be lost' - Joy

Joy is 24 and a single mother of two pre-school aged daughters with clear aims about where she wants to get to with her education. She experienced considerable disruption in her early years of secondary schooling when her mother passed away. For the next few years she lived either on her own or in foster care in different towns in Victoria. The instability of her living arrangements led to her dropping out of school after completing year 10 because she had nowhere else to go. Although she had earlier enrolled in a certificate course, she says of herself, she was too young and disengaged to gain anything from them.

> *I was young then and I had to do schooling of some form so I enrolled in the course that I thought was going to be the easiest.*

She came to the Neighbourhood House when she decided it was time to do something about her dreams and for the sake of her children. Whilst her current course might not lead to employment she realises that she is gaining valuable skills toward her long-term goal to work in animal welfare.

> *So for me to be able to do that (design a web page) and then look at the finished product and go 'I'm really proud of that' is giving me back a bit of confidence and I think that to me is worth a lot.*

Joy has found the social environment and the facilities at the Neighbourhood House helped her to learn. She is able to come in and use the internet, access space and computers on other days of the week to do her homework and also to meet up with other students. The learning environment is easy-going and very supportive and the timetabling fits in well with her parenting responsibilities.

> *I don't have internet at home so to be able to come here even on*

> *days I don't have school and do it, it makes it a hundred times better than any general schooling.*

Joy lives in a small town and the courses that are offered at the Neighbourhood House are somewhat limited. This is compounded by limited access to childcare, and limited free time, so she is not certain what she will be able to study in the future, given her current family arrangements.

> *I've always had a dream of actually opening up an animal rescue. My basic knowledge of what I needed to know was limited...and doing this course I hoped to broaden my knowledge on the subject base and give myself that push forward that I needed to actually go through with opening up a small Animal Rescue and providing something that the town really doesn't have. ... So for me to be wanting to do this course as I know it's my passion and it makes me a better learner because I want to give it my all.*

'I've grown so much here' - Lesley

Lesley is 43 years old and has two daughters. She left school at the completion of year 8 and worked in fast food settings until she had kids.

> *I only completed year 8. When I was younger before I had kids I was in retail, milk bars and take-away food.   The only thing is I didn't really last too long in those areas, because I didn't know what I was doing so I didn't exactly get the experience that I needed back then, not the experience that I have now.*

Lesley came to the Neighbourhood House to do voluntary work to make up her hours while she was on income support. Many things have changed since she began volunteering in the community café.

> *I've been here for about four and a half years now and I'm a totally different person. I had no confidence at all when I started but now I've learnt and grown. Working with customers, I wasn't much of a cook when I started here but now I do desserts, I do lots of different meals, things that I never thought I would be doing.   I've learnt how to make the coffees, so*

> *yeah I've grown so much since I've been here I was so shy and withdrawn when I first started.*

Her daughters love her for working at the café and bringing home some of the leftover desserts that she makes. She sees herself as a much better cook and the family is much happier all round with her new self-confidence and sense of achievement.

> *Yeah it's just been a big confidence booster here and it shows at home as well, I'm a lot happier.*

The positivity and encouragement of the people at the Neighbourhood House have helped her to do different things. Describing herself in the past as a learner who lacked concentration and was easily distracted she says that now she can concentrate on what she is doing. She has the confidence to sit there and block things out when she needs to. She has completed several hospitality units at the Neighbourhood House and has transitioned to study at the local TAFE.

> *I've got a Certificate for Food Handling and Coffee Making, it sort of entails the money handling of the cafe, food prep, cleaning the coffee machine, packing that up, I've learnt a lot since I've been here. The confidence boost, which was the biggest problem, so yeah I've learnt quite a bit since I've been here. Between the centre I'm doing a course at TAFE it's just the Adult Education which is Computers and Maths. I'm nearly finished doing the Maths, I'm doing well in the Computers as well. Last year I started at Level 1 and I've moved to Level 2 Maths and Level 1 Computers.*

She has become more confident and is less shy and withdrawn since starting work. The day of her interview was the last day of volunteering at the café. Lesley plans to complete her course at TAFE and wants to find a job.

> *Well before I started here I was like a scared little kid, I wouldn't speak to anybody, wouldn't involve myself in activities or things like that. But since I've been here I'm more outgoing, once you get me talking I won't shush.*

> *I'm hoping after I finish this course I'm ready for the workforce.*
> *I'm actually ready now so the sooner I get a job the better off I'll*
> *be.*

The vignettes from the data outlined above offer insight into the learning experiences of Allan, Marta, Joy and Lesley. All were early school leavers and found a sense of support and connectedness in the social environment and smaller class sizes of the Neighbourhood House courses, all were changed in some way because of their learning, with renewed confidence about their knowledge, skills and abilities. Allan, Marta and Lesley are older learners who have returned to study or to reskill in mid or later life after being retrenched. Significantly, Marta had experienced long term unemployment. Lesley has successfully transitioned from Neighbourhood Houses to further study at TAFE. Joy's early family upheaval ensured her secondary schooling was disruptive, she is now slowly starting to build her learning skills. All of the participants outlined here have had a significant change in their identity formation that has enabled them to reconstruct previously held negative views of themselves as learners.

All learning is a process of identity formation, we learn to become a doctor, a teacher, or an electrician and an identity is formed along the way (Chappell et al 2003). For many of the research participants in this study, learning in a Neighbourhood House has been transformative, it has assisted them to change their long held views and self-doubt of being unsuccessful at school or education – these learners are starting to believe in themselves, they are learning to become successful learners.

The local impact of Neighbourhood Houses

Low skilled workers who have lost their jobs or those wishing to enter the workforce have often had limited access to skills training programs and suitable adult education programs. This problem is further exacerbated by a lack of access to close-by TAFE colleges and costs associated with further education and training programs. Neighbourhood Houses have proven to be well positioned to take on an increasingly important role in transitional education. The major themes emerging from this research are inextricably linked, highlighting that adults succeed in achieving their goals given a 'second chance' in learning through the flexibility and inclusivity of Neighbourhood Houses. The data revealed

in the case vignettes show the impact of leaving school early and the subsequent challenges people faced in terms of re-engaging with education. This is bridged by the supportive and inclusive social space of the Neighbourhood Houses. Major themes include the high level of satisfaction of neighbourhood house users; the importance of flexibility for Neighbourhood Houses to respond to local needs; local decision-making and consultation; and the importance of Neighbourhood Houses in building stronger individuals and communities. Through their involvement, adults are able to develop useful knowledge and skills at their own pace. Participants appreciate flexible learning environments with non-hierarchical relationships, individualised and small group programming, learning and social support networks, and the personal benefits associated with work placements, training and employment opportunities.

Neighbourhood Houses help adults to move from welfare or reduce their dependence on welfare. Neighbourhood House personnel develop relationships with local industries to offer participants traineeships after completing compulsory placements and specified internal learning requirements. They organise work placements for individuals, develop employability skills such as application writing and interview practice, and demonstrate high success rates for many learners in gaining employment. In the Barwon region, for example, Neighbourhood House participants have obtained employment in varying industries including aged care, youth work, warehousing, early childhood services, and administration.

Neighbourhood Houses reinforce the view that everyone can learn successfully irrespective of age or past experience, with many participants declaring that as a result of their involvement with houses they had reconceptualised themselves as learners. These positive findings were perhaps surprising, given that many learners also reported they had been enrolled to fulfil their requirements as job-seekers. As locally run social spaces, Neighbourhood Houses are unique in their practices, habits, discourses and dispositions to welcome all comers. Participants attest to the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Houses in "getting them in". Participants are welcomed for who they are without judgment while finding connections with others who are "just like them". A factor that makes Neighbourhood Houses so successful is their

connection to schools and childcare facilities – and often they are closely located to these other community assets. Adults can talk, have a coffee, borrow a book, access a learning program. Individuals and communities benefit. Individuals feel socially connected and communities are strengthened by using and linking the talents and interests, knowledge and skills of their members. Communities determine their needs and social priorities and apply for funding, which is allocated on a needs and demand basis.

The adult education programs in Neighbourhood Houses adapt and change to meet local community needs. Staff, volunteers and Committee of Management members in Neighbourhood Houses have access to regionally prepared professional learning programs that meet their professional needs in context. Examples include responding effectively to mental health issues, using social media, health and wellbeing, and ensuring good governance. The peak body, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and Adult Learning Australia also develop regular and useful webinars to enhance management capacity within the houses.

Neighbourhood Houses in the national policy context

The interviews, observations and literature review conducted for this research disclose a range of common themes and issues confronting learners, educators, and those charged with leading, managing and governing Neighbourhood Houses. Globalisation and technological change have intensified international economic competition, motivating governments to increase national growth, productivity, efficiency and innovation. Training and education are seen to play a major role in enhancing national competitiveness and productivity in a global marketplace by increasing knowledge yield and ensuring a well-educated, effective workforce and citizenry.[1] Governments of all persuasions have instigated ongoing structural reforms to align national education, training and employment agendas with the demands of intensified global competition. As a result, education and training policies throughout the developed world have increasingly subsumed economistic imperatives to achieve national objectives. Current policy is, therefore, heavily influenced by the needs, values and underlying philosophy of global market economics and neo-liberal political agendas (Tyler et al 2013).   As the nation rapidly moves away from mass

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[1] (see for example, Productivity Commission, 2013).

production, inflexible employment conditions, and social democratic agendas in social service and welfare provision, education and training policy emphasis on increased worker productivity, organisational efficiency and innovation. Being a contested and highly controversial realm of social life, education and training policy reforms are deeply political, raising questions about fundamental purposes. The global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007-2008 reinvigorated and fortified a *laissez-faire* economic and neo-liberal policy hegemony, which has changed the operations and behaviours of education, training and employment programs and institutions over the past three decades. Hence the relationship between education / training and national economic fortunes has assumed primacy over individual, civic or social benefits (Reid, Gill & Sears, 2010).

The way we envisage, experience and conduct learning, training and teaching are no longer resting on assumptions that have guided governments and populations for centuries. Neighbourhood Houses are altering previous conceptions, highlighting how local communities are coming to grips with policy disruption, incongruities and inconsistencies.

The research findings expose the enormous complexity, challenges and opportunities facing Neighbourhood Houses as they shape and respond to change. To survive in the new economy, individuals must constantly learn and adapt to the demands of the market (Beck 1995). Neighbourhood Houses help reduce or move adults away from welfare dependency whilst providing local support structures to connect learners with the realities of the current economic environment. Neighbourhood Houses are learning organisations. Emphasising the need for a knowledge economy and productivity, Neighbourhood Houses provide skills development and training to those who, in the past, have often been left behind. They reinforce lifelong learning and personal 'agility' and risk responsibility to cope with workforce reforms.

Conclusion

This research on learning in Neighbourhood Houses connects the personal and the political, the social and cultural. It speaks to localised responses to macro and meso policy decisions by governments, multi-national companies and social agencies. It provided an opportunity for

"situated theorizing" (Fraser 1989), as participants in Neighbourhood Houses collaborated by expressing their views and describing their experiences. The research raises many questions and challenges about the future of these important providers of ACE. It suggests a need for further research across Victoria and the Australian states. Being introduced only over the past four decades, Neighbourhood House programs are still an emerging and evolving form of education delivery, a new type of educational institution, and their successful but unregulated practices could portend further policy opportunities.

In the current dynamic policy environment it is important the possibilities associated with Neighbourhood House programs be documented and noted by instrumental players such as governments, policy-makers, skills development and training leaders, governing trustees, researchers and analysts. It is notable that there is a dearth of research in Neighbourhood Houses, which is surprising given they have operated in Australia since the 1970's. These complex spaces of formal and informal learning, offer significant learning experiences for second chance learners, for individuals to further their skills, qualifications and provides opportunity for further study transitions to higher education or employment. They are sites of social inclusion and community building for individuals who are reframing and rebuilding their lives. We argue they are significant spaces for people to reconstruct previously held negative views of themselves as learners, a result of not having finished secondary school and taken the traditional pathway to higher education.

In an era of lifelong learning with declining manufacturing industries and workers having to retrain and develop new knowledge and skills, Neighbourhood Houses offer significant adult learning opportunities and intensive individualised support so that learners can be successful.

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Second chance education: barriers, supports and engagement strategies

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Second chance education programs are now a well-established presence in institutions seeking to provide access and equity pathways for socio-economically disadvantaged groups. This paper focusses on the strategies used to support positive engagement in second chance equity programs, drawing upon evaluation research data from four TAFE sponsored programs. Interviews were held with service providers involved in the programs' development and delivery, and focus groups were held to gather information from program participants. The findings highlight the complex and often multiple barriers facing participants and the importance of delivering programs with sustained and tailored approaches. While tangible educational and/or employment outcomes were delivered, it was the associated social and personal development that made these programs especially successful. Hence, there is a need for equity programs to be holistic, scaffolded, and tailored to practical and vocational pathways.

Keywords: *Vocational pathways, second chance education, access and equity*

Introduction

Australia's Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes have long provided Vocational Education and Training (VET) opportunities that fulfil access and equity policies for disadvantaged individuals, including disengaged learners and workers, by enabling them to attend programs that promote inclusiveness, access and equity (Barnett and Spoehr, 2008; Murray and Mitchell, 2013; Volkoff, Clarke and Walstab, 2008).

There are numerous terms used and contested in the literature to describe programs that enable individuals to access and re-engage in learning outside of mainstream education. The terms include second chance education programs, alternative education programs, re-engagement programs, and flexible learning programs (Te Riele, 2014). While these programs are often commonly characterised for their flexibility (Te Riele, 2014), they are also often a 'second chance' learning opportunity for socially diverse groups. Rothman, Shah, Underwood, McMillan, Brown and McKenzie (2013:141) state that the National Vocational Education and Training Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) has identified the following groups for whom VET may provide second chance learning: individuals with less than Year 12 or an equivalent level of educational attainment; those returning to learning after a long period of absence from study and or work; individuals re-skilling following redundancy; those involved in the criminal justice system; and individuals of working age who are neither working nor studying.

Second chance education is not a new concept. Over two decades ago, Inbar and Sever (1989) suggested three basic criteria for genuine second chance frameworks; that they should be: accessible for all; effective in improving educational attainment; and provide the same/ similar opportunities for success that conventional education opportunities provide. More recently, Keogh (2009) posits that second chance educational opportunities facilitate social inclusion and equality and can play various roles, including: compensating for learning not previously achieved; preparing individuals for the next level of education; raising skill levels; increasing access to learning and qualifications; and positively influencing subsequent generations' learning outcomes. However, there is a paucity of rigorous evaluation research that links program characteristics with specific participant outcomes (Gutherson, Davies, and Daszkiewicz, 2011).

While some research has focused on the tangible education and work outcomes that second chance education provides, Ross and Gray (2005) assert that the real value of these programs lies in the intangible personal benefits for individuals that include, taking greater control over their lives, developing social skills and confidence, and most importantly in building relationships with program peers and staff. This view is supported by Hargreaves (2011) who argues that these programs offer two-fold benefits in providing individuals with the skills needed to find employment, and also by assisting to alleviate potential barriers that some individuals may have in participating in education and training. The present study aims to explore the benefits of second chance education programs, specifically the intangible benefits, by examining the barriers, supports and engagement strategies in specified programs. The study will also focus on the challenges and successes experienced by the program participants and service providers to determine the critical factors for successful learning programs.

Background

A key benefit of second chance education is to build social capital which increases self-esteem, confidence and personal satisfaction through the development of social skills, a feeling of increased agency and autonomy, the development of new friendships, improved and sustained relationships, and enhancing contact with people and the community (Ross and Gray, 2005). However, Ross and Gray also caution that these programs are not a "panacea" for participants, and highlight the risk of participants getting stuck in such programs and not progressing to higher level courses. Nevertheless, the literature, as discussed below, demonstrates that these programs are an important first step for many disadvantaged participants in order for sustained participation in further training and/or employment to occur.

In delivering training needs to these diverse cohorts, TAFEs are faced with addressing the complex challenges impacting many learners who have experienced multiple and cumulative disadvantage. These challenges can impede both access to and successful participation in training (Considine, Watson, and Hall, 2005). For example, in a survey of 58 TAFE institutes across Australia, Volkoff et al. (2008) found that the most significant barriers reported by TAFEs in relation to accessing

training opportunities were low literacy and numeracy skills, with courses available attempting to bridge this gap by providing literacy and numeracy training to assist individuals to then enrol and participate in higher level vocational courses (Phan and Ball, 2001). Research also supports the view that an individual's social network, especially family and significant others, plays an influential role in accessing and successfully participating in training (Barnett and Spoehr, 2008; Volkoff et al., 2008). Additional barriers include coming from a low socio-economic background, a lack of family support (including a perceived devaluing of education), intergenerational unemployment, and non-participation in compulsory education.

The complex challenges faced by some disadvantaged learners often falls outside the scope of VET as external and multisector support is needed to deal with issues such as housing, finances, substance abuse, mental and physical health, and justice and legal issues (Barnett and Spoehr, 2008; Volkoff et al, 2008). This notion is supported by Figgis, Butorac, Clayton, Meyers, Dickie, Malley and McDonald (2007:15) who state that "when an individual is trying to learn, the disadvantages they suffer-whether limited literacy, homelessness, poor health, lack of confidence etc. tend to be magnified and compounded. Learning is a big ask if one is poorly prepared or diverted by other concerns."

In a study of short-term funded 'pilot' initiatives 'seeded' in TAFE institutes by Figgis and colleagues (2007) they found that funds for those initiatives were primarily used to provide direct support for learners (for example, ensuring more personal contact by increasing the teacher-to-student ratios; providing a diverse range of adults to work with the students; the inclusion of individual mentoring; and extending the duration of the course). These additional practices provided further support to disadvantaged learners (many of whom faced multiple and complex barriers to their successful participation). However, the researchers concluded that once the funding ceased, so did the additional support which was the key ingredient for participants to successfully engage in the programs. Similarly, Volkoff et al. (2008,) reported that the limitations of funding posed numerous barriers for TAFEs to remain inclusive due to the lack of resources that were necessary to provide the critical elements of targeted support and delivery practices that were customised and tailored to the needs of the learners.

The literature relating to second chance education commonly points to several key characteristics of training that successfully support disadvantaged and second chance learners (Davies, Lamb, and Doecke, 2011; Gutherson et al., 2011; Murray and Mitchell 2013; Te Riele, 2014). Research by Davies et al. examined low skilled and disengaged adult learners, and found that this target group often reported former experiences with learning and training as disjointed and problematic. The key factors that contributed to their sense of disengagement were access, achievement, application, and aspiration. Davies and colleagues developed a conceptual model of effective interventions based on the existing body of national and international literature that comprised the four components of outreach, learner well-being, pedagogy, and pathways.

In a review of the international literature on alternative education, Gutherson et al. (2011) found that effectiveness is based on: trusting and caring relationships; an effective assessment of the needs of learners; a person-centred and needs-led program with an outcomes focussed approach; the provision of personalised and relevant curricula emphasising the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, communication and technology; and having flexible and accessible initiatives that are delivered by highly skilled and trained staff. In addition, programs should be effectively monitored and assessed to ensure that participants' needs are met, that practices continue to inform program delivery, that there is strong program support by the wider family and community that links exist to multiple agencies, and the provision of pastoral support that includes counselling and mentoring.

Aspects of Gutherson et al.'s (2011) research are reinforced in Murray and Mitchell's (2013) study of second chance education programs within TAFEs which found that the flexibility of the learning environment and the trusting, caring and respectful relationships between teachers and students were fundamental to students' re-engagement with formal education. Recent research in Australia by Te Riele (2014) also focused on the importance of flexible learning and the key dimensions of achieving *valued outcomes* by improved futures, recognition and successful growth and well-being; *actions* to create meaningful learning opportunities, support, genuine relationships, and community engagement; *principles* in a commitment to students' needs and

enabling an empowering education; and *conditions* such as flexibility, systemic support, and a shared vision.

In pulling together this array of literature, three broad common themes are evident. Second chance programs need to be **customised** to the learner, **collaboratively** linking with multidisciplinary services, and **contextualised** to be relevant to the individual, local community and/ or the needs of industry. Indeed, McGrath (2007) and Barnett and Spoehr (2008) describe this approach as holistic, as relevant training is contextualised and specifically tailored to the needs and goals of the learner or community. These three themes are discussed in the following section.

Customised and contextualised programs

In research examining disengaged adult learners in Victoria, Davies et al. found that a consistent theme for the "engagement of low-skill and disengaged mature learners is the significance of place and of locally accessible and relevant training opportunities" (2011:9). Therefore programs need to be tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of learners by allowing learners choice in the modules to be undertaken so that learning is relevant, and that career counselling is provided to explore individual skills and aspirations, and matched to training and vocational opportunities (Barnett and Spoehr, 2008). McGrath (2007) refers to the national training and employment literature to define 'contextualisation' as a training activity delivered to apply meaning to learners. For example, this may include 'hands-on' training through real life and work situations thus making direct links between theory and practice which may appeal to disengaged learners (Davies et al., 2011).

To facilitate this tailored approach, service providers need a deep understanding of their participants in order to develop strategies which address the complex issues faced by participants (Considine et al., 2005). In order to achieve this level of engagement, there needs to be time and opportunities for sustained conversation and trust-building. Figgis et al. (2007) assert that the most successful of such initiatives are established within the community rather than by government or government agencies; and that these community providers tend to have a long term commitment to the learners. Davies et al. (2011) also argue for the importance of funding models which support the continuity and

sustainability of the provider-participant connection, thereby building familiarity and trust on the part of the learner, which is particularly important for disengaged learners with limited support/social networks.

Collaborative approaches

As highlighted earlier, some disadvantaged and second chance learners require additional and resource intensive support which is beyond the scope of what most TAFE institutions can provide. Thus, coordination amongst agencies, organisations, and educational sectors to provide 'wrap around' support through a case management approach is integral for the success of second chance education programs. Again, this requires service providers to have an awareness of holistic learner needs, beyond their training-specific needs and be able to consider the learner's family and social context and to recognise and undertake timely action when support is required.

It is these positive and supportive interactions between individuals and their environment that can result in resilient responses to barriers. According to Windle, resilience is defined as a dynamic "process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and "bouncing back" in the face of adversity" (2011:152). Thus, resilience explains how an individual's characteristics (i.e., positive emotions) can interact with situational factors (i.e., available social support) and that this process is moderated by being exposed to similar stressors in the past (Pangallo, Zibarras, Lewis, and Flaxman, 2015).

In an evaluation of an education program for young people disengaged from secondary school education, Myconos (2014) found that an integrated program combining teaching, well-being and supportive pathways led to positive outcomes, including increased school completion rates and school attendances; and improvements in engagement and well-being with many students reporting improvements in their attitudes to schooling and their relationships. Students attributed this to a welcoming environment that was tailored to their needs; a holistic learning approach which emphasised social and emotional learning; pathways such as enhanced career guidance; onsite vocational training; and enabling former students to remain engaged

with the program and connected to staff who provided them with ongoing assistance.

Considine et al. (2005) argue that in measuring program success (particularly those in a community setting), a balance is needed between economic goals such as improved labour market outcomes, and the social goals of encouraging closer connections between the program participants and the broader community. Barnett and Spoehr (2008) propose that a model of 'good practice' in providing VET pathways includes: a case management approach to address multiple and complex needs; an individualised approach to teaching; linkages and collaborative working relationships within the VET sector and across other relevant sectors; and a systems-based or a structural framework for the continuation of support for individuals. They also assert that the program delivery should be flexible and provide real life and work situations, and that support for the program includes financial assistance and childcare for participants and professional development for VET staff in order to provide them with training to meet the complex needs of participants. This model provides benchmarks of good practice that can be employed in the evaluation of access and equity programs undertaken by TAFE Institutions.

This paper will present findings from an evaluation of four TAFE sponsored programs (see details below) delivered in the northern region of Adelaide, South Australia that sought to offer second chance educational opportunities to disengaged individuals. The key aim of this study was to investigate the experiences and the perceptions of program participants and service providers on the effectiveness of the programs in terms of their reported strengths and weaknesses, and their failure and/or success in long term educational and employment pathways. As discussed below, these findings resonate well with the key themes canvassed above and provide research evidence to support the case for continuing and augmenting second chance programs.

The research

Context

In 2012, the South Australian State Government began implementing a range of reforms to its VET sector under the '*Skills for All*' initiative

to build the State's skill levels, particularly in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, which is characterised by very high unemployment rates (particularly youth unemployment), high proportions of the population on income support, and low levels of educational attainment. Some suburbs exhibit pockets of extreme deprivation, being among the most disadvantaged in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The *'Skills for All'* initiative aimed to specifically target groups that faced barriers to participation in learning and work: including early school leavers; those without preliminary qualifications; the long-term unemployed; carers seeking to return to work; and individuals with language, literacy and numeracy issues.

To address social exclusion in the targeted suburbs, several partnership projects were delivered by the TAFE SA Adelaide North Institute to promote social inclusion for disadvantaged groups by encouraging their participation in education and training. Consistent with previous initiatives, the projects received short-term funding to deliver educational and vocational outcomes to redress past disadvantage, and to improve the position of particular community groups including women, youths, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the unemployed, and people with physical or intellectual disabilities. TAFE SA approached the University of South Australia (UniSA) to conduct a research evaluation project in 2012.

Research methodology

The research was jointly funded by TAFE SA and UniSA. Ethics approval was sought and granted in October 2012 (Ethics protocol "TAFE SA Evaluation of Community Engagement Programs in conjunction with Northern Business Partnerships Program" (ID: 0000030702). The key data collection methods used for the evaluation were focus groups and interviews with program participants and service providers in addition to participant observation. Program participants were provided with information sheets detailing the purpose of the research and to consider whether or not they wanted to be involved in a focus group prior to participation. Refreshments were provided at all focus groups.

Eight service providers involved in the programs' development and delivery, were interviewed to provide background and contextual details, commentary on participant findings, and to provide their own

perspective on the effectiveness of the programs. Six focus groups were held to gather information from program participants. A total of 37 individuals (22 males, 15 females) across all four programs participated in the research. The researchers also engaged in participant observation and used follow-up interviews/discussions to clarify key themes and issues.

A research report, where findings were collated and discussed in relation to the prevailing literature, was made available to research participants and other stakeholders for comment before the report was approved for distribution by TAFE SA and UniSA. This paper draws upon those findings.

The programs

Four programs were evaluated, all of which received short-term funding for their development and delivery. Each program had multiple partnering organisations, including state, local and federal governments, industry and community organisations. The programs ran from 12-20 weeks, with one requiring full-time attendance. The same service provider was involved, in some capacity, across three of the programs. As highlighted below, a key feature of the programs was their real work setting.

The first program, *Blokes on the Block* was designed as the first step for male participants to engage in further education, training, volunteering and/or ongoing sustainable employment. Involvement in the program gave participant's experience in a live training site as they upgraded the outside yard of a government owned residential property. A later iteration of the program was offered to both males and females and was titled *Blokes and Beauties on the Block*. The program's delivery was described by its service providers as *"intensive, supportive and individualised"*, with all stages of the program underpinned with literacy and numeracy skills and mapped to competencies from the Certificate I in Introductory Vocational Education (IVEC). Some participants from later iterations of the program also undertook   Certificate I and II in Horticulture units.

Secondly, *Word@Work* was an industry-based program aimed at providing participants with the skills to move into formal educational

or employment pathways. It combined literacy and numeracy through hands-on project-based delivery and was aimed at individuals aged 17 years and over. Each iteration of the program was structured in different industry sectors, for example construction, horticulture, hospitality and community services.

Thirdly, the *Building Better Communities Program* trialled a training model integrating language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills with industry training. It aimed to increase LLN and employment outcomes for specifically targeted young people and indigenous groups through partnering with industry and the community. The program was undertaken at a local hospital and involved participants constructing a community garden.

The second iteration of the *Building Better Communities Program* was delivered during the period of data collection with participants undertaking a Certificate II in Civil Construction and 4-6 units of Education and Skills Development. This iteration also involved participants working on another garden within the same hospital. This iteration also included a mentoring component, with each participant provided with one-on-one time with a mentor once a week.

The final program, *Powerful Pathways for Women* was a pre-employment program for females aged 18 years and over aimed at increasing the number of women employed in the energy utilities sector.. It was an inaugural program both nationally and within the industry and had two iterations over two years. The program comprised full-time training over 20 weeks with the completion of three accredited certificates – Certificate II in Women's Education, Certificate I in Electro Communications Skills and Certificate I in Information Technology, including training at a power station. On completion of the program, there was an opportunity for the women to continue studying the Certificate II in Electro-technology.

Research findings

The findings below are presented in an integrated thematic format. Although there were four distinct programs, the objectives and the people targeted by the programs had commonalities. The following

sections examine the approach taken by the service providers in delivering the programs and the experiences of participants. Preliminary discussions with service providers highlighted a common understanding of program participants and approaches to developing and delivering programs, client relationships and outcomes.

Participant characteristics

Each program targeted disadvantaged individuals disengaged from the workforce, in the northern areas of Adelaide. Service providers indicated that many participants came to the programs with complex social and personal issues (including substance abuse, mental health problems, homelessness, anger management, financial difficulties, relationship problems), low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, and from dysfunctional family backgrounds. While participants were not asked specifically about their personal details and situation, the focus groups confirmed that most participants had experienced issues including substance abuse, low levels of literacy and numeracy, welfare family backgrounds, relationship problems, and long term unemployment.

Service providers had a comprehensive understanding of the participants they were working with, and acknowledged the importance of tailoring the programs they delivered in a way that engaged them, and addressed their needs. For example, providers commented that many were second, third or fourth generation unemployed and that missing from many of the participants' lives were networks and structures that could provide meaningful and sustained support. They also suggested that the complex issues many participants faced meant that they required long term support to move forward in their lives:

> *"...over 80 per cent of our clients...com*[e] *to us with drug problems, mental health issues, financial issues...relationship issues...increasingly housing issues...anger management issues, problem solving issues. I'd say over 95 per cent of them do not know how to get over basic...things."*

The *Powerful Pathways for Women Program* specifically targeted women, while the first program of what would subsequently become, *Blokes and Beauties on the Block*, initially only targeted men. All other programs had a mixture of male and female participants. The age range

of participants varied from 15-48 years and among the participants were Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) individuals, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities.

Participants' motivations and reasons for attending the programs varied: including an interest in the training topic (for example, construction, horticulture); wanting to improve their skills (including reading and writing); and for personal development. As an example, one participant explained that they had lost their job of 20 years and were looking for a means of getting back into the workforce. Another participant, who had never been in the workforce talked about their love for cooking, and as this was a component of one of the programs, they were interested in getting involved.

Participants' experiences

All participants who took part in a focus group provided positive feedback about their experiences within each respective program. These experiences included practical employability skills, but overwhelmingly, personal development, social support and the training environment were the key themes throughout.

> *"They got the job for me, they went to where I worked, set up… the work experience and everything. Other people wouldn't have done that, my job provider didn't even do that, couldn't even do that for me."*

Participants talked positively about gaining assistance with literacy and numeracy, writing resumes, applying for jobs, and the practical skills gained within the respective fields (for example, horticulture, hospitality, construction, electro-technology).

The friendships made between participants, and the (peer) social support that this provided throughout the programs (and beyond), were often the most memorable aspects for participants. For example, within the *Powerful Pathways for Women Program*, some participants were dealing with family and personal issues and they would support each other through this; some wanted to leave the program, and other participants encouraged them to stay. They also supported each other with home study sessions. It was also evident by the interaction between

participants at the various focus groups that the participants were fully engaged and a strong rapport and camaraderie had developed, even between participants who were only five weeks into a program.

Participants also talked about the importance of the assistance, support and one-on-one interaction with service providers, and in some programs, that the number of participants was a lot smaller than other courses they attended. One participant likened other programs to being at the motor registration office where participants were *"just a number"*. Some participants described the atmosphere of the training environment as *"fun"*, and felt they were able to joke around with both participants and service providers.

> *"I pictured a classroom mentality, lecturers, that sort of environment. I was deciding whether to can it* [drop out] *or continue going with it in the first week as well, but because* [the service provider] *were so genuine...they made it fun...it gave me back that motivation that I had last year."*

The role of service providers

There was overwhelming positive feedback from participants about service providers across all programs evaluated. Descriptions of service providers included their genuine, approachable and down to earth nature and their ability to draw out participants' strengths and weaknesses.

Many participants of *Blokes and Beauties on the Block* and *Word@ Work* indicated that they are still in contact with service providers, even two years after completing the program. This ongoing connection and support was underpinned by strong nurturing relationships and proved very important for further educational participation.

> *"They* [the service providers] *were just always there, always backing us up in everything that we did."*

It was evident from interviews with the service providers that having the right people to deliver these programs is integral to their effectiveness. As noted by Gutherson et al. (2011), building trust between service providers and participants, as well as amongst participants, was an important factor, as was flexibility and tailoring the program

to individual learning styles. Service providers commented that relationships skills were key to engaging with diverse participants:

> *"We've got to recognise as trainers their personality types, their different learning styles and make sure we put the right people together in pairs because we want it to be constructive not destructive."*

Importance of ongoing mentoring support

A common theme of all focus groups and interviews was the importance of providing mentoring support for participants. Mentoring support *during* programs was seen as important, but some service providers stated that for particular client groups, such as those facing complex issues, sustained social, personal and educational/employment outcomes are far more likely when mentoring support is also provided *beyond* the conclusion of the programs.

Participants also expressed that an ongoing connection and support was very important - *"after the course is completed you're not just left by the wayside, you are still contacted and you can still contact them for advice, reference or anything that you kind of need, they're still there for you."* However, it was noted, that this ongoing support (beyond the conclusion of a program) is unfunded and most service providers could not sustain this additional support long term. Hence service providers felt frustrated - *"I actually felt like I was deserting them, because I wanted to continue guiding them."*

Participant outcomes

Participant outcomes were wide ranging across the four programs, and included both planned and intended outcomes specified in program goals and unintended and serendipitous outcomes. As per previous research (Hargreaves, 2011; Ross and Gray 2005) participants in all programs talked about the various personal development skills they gained including: goal setting; time management skills; increased confidence; enhanced self-esteem, motivation and assertiveness; learning to focus on their strengths; learning to relate to others using positive language and teamwork; and leadership skills.

These findings were consistent with service providers' comments, who talked about participants' personal and social outcomes beyond the formal scope of the program, including assistance with housing, drug rehabilitation and relationship coaching. Enhanced employment and further education outcomes were reported across all programs, including certificate completion, course enrolment, employment, volunteering, and work experience. However, as the programs only received short-term funding there is no official reporting of whether the above outcomes produced longer-term engagement with education, training and/or employment.

Discussion

Participant diversity and complexity

As recent literature suggests, acknowledging "cumulative disadvantage" (Considine et al., 2005:8) in programs aiming to address access and equity in VET is important in ensuring that the appropriate support and resources are identified and the needs of those client groups are met (Considine et al., 2005; Figgis et al., 2007). Throughout the evaluation it became clear that addressing these issues for many participants was a long-term, incremental undertaking and not a 'quick fix'. Service providers all acknowledged, addressing these issues needs to be a pre-cursor to any vocational skill development and for some participants it could be a protracted journey until sustained personal, social and vocational outcomes were evident. Indeed, the reasons for the overwhelming 'success' participants reported was a sustained holistic approach underpinned by customised, collaborative and contextualised learning – all of which resonated well with the three common themes identified in the literature. Acknowledging the importance of these themes, discussed below, has major implications for program planning, funding, and the types and levels of support required by participants to cogently engage in vocational education.

A tailored and flexible approach and the right people

The findings strongly suggest that much of the success of these programs, and what sets them apart from others, can be attributed to their original and tailored project delivery models and having the appropriate staff delivering them. Each of the programs evaluated used

training approaches tailored to the needs of participants and the service providers recognised how crucial this was for engaging participants, discerning and catering to their needs, and providing training activities based on each individual's learning style - *"we've got to recognise as trainers their personality types, their different learning styles and make sure we put the right people in pairs because we want it to be constructive not destructive."* This supports McGrath's (2007) call for holistic and relevant training purposely tailored to the learner's or community's needs.

The effectiveness of these tailored approaches was evident in participants' feedback, many feeling that they were being genuinely engaged, often for the first time, and could seek the necessary assistance with their learning and personal development if and when they needed it. This was in stark contrast to other programs they had undertaken, where they felt like *"a number"*. It was also evident that having the right people facilitating these programs is paramount to their success. Not only must service providers be able to demonstrate comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the participants' specific characteristics and the barriers that they face in moving forward; they must also have the empathy, ability and willingness to respond to those needs and provide holistic support to participants. Both participants and service providers highlighted the importance of the above (service provider) attributes in establishing *credibility* with participants, many of whom were sceptical of education and/or training programs. Hence, the service providers' ability to relate to participants and build rapport was integral to the success of these programs. Of particular importance to both participants and service providers was the fostering of trust, and the service providers' willingness to share their own life stories – *"it was important that they gave, so we gave as well"* – thereby fostering the strong supportive relationships recommended by Ross and Gray (2005) and Hargreaves (2011).

Social support and networks

As highlighted earlier, many participants reported lacking social supports within their existing networks that are necessary to engage educational and employment pathways. Indeed for many, participating in one of these programs was the first time they had been provided with sustained personal support.

> *"After the course is completed you're not just left by the wayside, you are still contacted and you can still contact them for advice, reference or anything that you kind of need, they're still there for you."*

The new social networks that participants formed through these programs often had a profound "life changing" effect, as one service provider described – *"…there is a lot of facilitation there around creating their new social networks, so that they can make it sustainable, because they are breaking away from everything they know."*

It was also evident that the programs that provided mentoring support for participants were more effective, especially if mentoring was undertaken using a holistic approach. Here service providers acted more as life coaches, engaging the complexities of the participants' lives and acknowledging the need to look at individuals as *"a whole person"*, incorporating their health, education, mindset, and financial, social and personal environments. The support provided amongst peers was equally important, and its success in building social and relationship capital amongst learners is consistent with findings in other research (Balatti, Black, and Falk, 2006; Figgis et al., 2007). Indeed, the strong rapport and trust established by the service providers often provide the environment and synergy for strong peer relationships to form. An example of the strength of these relationships could be seen in *Powerful Pathways for Women*, with participants explaining that when some women were dealing with certain family issues they would provide mutual support for each other and became a*"… backbone to each other"*.

The findings also highlight that for most participants, sustained social, personal and educational/employment outcomes were more likely when mentoring support is provided beyond the conclusion of the programs. Participants still in contact with service providers reinforced the importance of this ongoing connection and support. Service providers too keenly felt the need to provide follow-up support. However, the provision of this ongoing connection and support was unfunded and relied on the ongoing investment and goodwill of service providers. It is this "investment mindset" that the literature asserts is particularly crucial for these types of programs to continue and flourish and for meaningful changes to occur (Figgis et al., 2007). This is an important

consideration for funding bodies and suggests that equity programs serving participants with multiple and complex needs require longer timeframes and support scaffolding, to achieve the personal growth and development (the so called "soft skills"), as a prerequisite to undertaking more structured training and education.

Skills development and changing attitudes towards education, training and employment

What also set these programs apart from other programs for many of the participants was the innovative ways that the training was approached. For example, participants in *Blokes and Beauties on the Block* talked about how the excursions they undertook (for example orienteering and paintballing) assisted them in developing peer relationships, and building their teamwork and leadership skills. Similarly, participants in *Powerful Pathways for Women*, expressed how the practical electro-technology training they undertook gave them the opportunity to do things that women normally wouldn't *"get out and do"*, and helped them to realise the opportunities for women in non-traditional fields.

Participants in the *Calvary Project* highlighted the fact that the project was on an actual work site, and they were working on a development that would be retained and used and of benefit to others, unlike other courses, where they would *"build a wall and then pull it down so the next group can use it."* This supports research undertaken by Hillman and McMillan (2005) and Davies et al. (2011) identifying a link between life satisfaction and undertaking *purposeful* activities in education and training.

At the completion of most of the programs, participants also received a qualification, a tangible recognition that they could then use to either gain employment or move into further training/education. The practical 'hands on' experiences enabled these participants to visualise their futures in tangible ways as they could now see the opportunities available to them, and had developed skills that could enable them to move forward.

Conclusion

As outlined in the literature (Considine et al., 2005) and highlighted in this paper, achieving a balance between pursuing social and educational outcomes is critical for the success of second chance equity programs. Striving towards this balance means: acknowledging the complex and multiple barriers participants face in engaging in these programs; developing programs that are sustained and tailored to participants; and measuring programs from both an economic perspective (for example, improved labour market outcomes) and social/personal perspective (connections between participants, increased social supports and personal development).

To this end, the paper identified several vital features of successful equity programs. Firstly, the importance of mentoring with a focus on participants' personal development, especially for participants who face multiple and complex needs and challenges. Here the importance of tailoring services proved paramount. Secondly, service providers delivering the programs need to take a holistic perspective, requiring specialist skills and experience – especially relationship building skills – to support and fully engage with participants. Thirdly, program outcomes need to take a long-term approach, scaffolding personal development with incremental learning in order to deliver sustainable engagement and training/educational pathways.

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Insights into attrition from university-based enabling programs

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High attrition rates from university-based enabling programs continue to be the subject of much research and administrative effort. Understanding the factors behind decisions to withdraw from such programs is difficult since those who do not successfully complete an enabling program may not readily agree to participate in research into their motivations for enrolling, and reasons for withdrawal, leaving them silent in the literature. Students who are relatively successful with enabling study have 'insider' perceptions to share concerning the motivations of their fellow students, and the barriers some face. They can provide unique insights into factors behind the intractable problem of high attrition from enabling programs and the low rates of articulation into university study.

***Keywords:** University-based enabling programs, attrition, articulation, barriers*

Introduction

University-based enabling programs provide both a social justice strategy for addressing equity in access to higher education and a strategy for increasing the economic efficiency of the nation. Building productive capabilities is an important recognition that in the 21st century accumulation of human capital has superseded physical capital as the "prime mover of economic growth" (Galor, 2011: 466). In higher education globally, "human capital derives from the credentialing power of degrees in the labour market" (Marginson, 2011: 31). However, high attrition from enabling programs and low rates of articulation between enabling and undergraduate study continue to occur thereby frustrating efforts to widen participation in university study (Ramsay, 2004; Silburn & Box, 2008; Orth & Robinson, 2013).

In Australia, this form of enabling education has a 40-year history. When the first enabling program commenced at the University of Newcastle, NSW in 1974 with an average student age of 36 it was an innovation expected to "drain its market" within five years, yet in 2012 a total of 2,000 people were enrolled (May & Bunn, 2015: 1). By 2013 there were 35 Australian universities funded to offer enabling education (Hodges et al., 2013). In addition these programs, that were initially designed to assist mature-aged students to prepare for university study, are now enrolling ever-larger proportions of recent school leavers (Silburn & Box, 2008; Hodges et al., 2013; Bookallil 2014). These younger students either did not gain the required tertiary entry score or had made study choices in senior secondary school that meant they completed without eligibility for university entrance.

Therefore many student cohorts in enabling programs have evolved to include both mature age and young adults as learners. As this previously unforeseen demographic change has emerged, attrition from these programs has come onto the radar of university administrators and researchers. This paper first examines attrition through a necessarily very brief overview of enabling programs that now encompass learners of all ages. This is followed by methodology and methods of data collection and analysis for the first-phase of a mixed methods study exploring this problem. Findings and discussion are then provided, followed by a conclusion with some recommendations for future administrative and academic practice.

Enabling university for all ages

Since 2005 universities have received specific funding for enabling programs, including an additional 'Enabling Loading', from the Australian Government so that programs may be offered free of tuition charges to participants (Higher Education Support Act, 2012). A benefit to the university supplying the enabling program is a potential increase in undergraduate enrolments as those who are successful tend to transition within the same institution. This is evidenced by the marketing agenda of enabling programs that are used as a recruitment strategy for university enrolments (Clarke et al., 2004). Furthermore, there is the argument that socio-economic benefits may accrue to individuals and communities through higher rates of workforce participation, particularly for women, as a result of higher levels of education (Karmel, 2014).

Between 2004 and 2014 enrolments in Australian university-based enabling programs expanded from 4,784 to 20,087, an increase of almost 320% (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2015). During that period, the age of the student cohort declined and Hodges *et al.* (2013: 16) report: "secondary students appear to be becoming somewhat strategic and selecting enabling programs as a legitimate pathway for higher education". Such a strategy by recent school leavers could be viewed as a 'double dip' into the public purse for education services that have been already provided during their compulsory schooling years. However, a similar argument could be levelled at applicants of any age because all would have been the recipients of publicly funded compulsory education at some time in their lives whether that was directly via State schools or indirectly via independent or faith-based schools.

While much literature covers motivations for mature aged, defined as greater than 21 years, to re-engage with education (see for example Cullity, 2005; Bennett *et al.*, 2012) the declining age of enabling program students requires further investigation into motivations. According to Boyle (2015: 170), "understanding of motivating factors to re-engage with education is still limited". In addition, research is limited by the fact that only successful students tend to participate in research projects so we know very little about the motivations of

students who are not retained because they do not engage with research projects (Orth & Robinson, 2013). While provision of enabling education has expanded "there remains concern about its level of effectiveness, particularly relative to other transition pathways into higher education" (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014: 51) such as direct entry from secondary schooling and/or via technical and vocational training.

The study reported in this paper is part of a larger, exploratory sequential, mixed methods research design where the qualitative results from a series of focus groups informed the development of a survey instrument. Data were gathered about how and why students make decisions concerning enrolment in university-based enabling programs and their continuation into undergraduate study. The objective was to understand whether there is a link between students' motivation to enrol and the high attrition and low articulation rates.

Methodology and methods

Methodologically, the complex nature of individuals' choices made in respect to education services as public and/or quasi-public goods results from a range of causal factors and requires a judicious mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods to bring clarity to the findings. Mixed methods research presents a methodological framework based upon the primary philosophy of pragmatism (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). In this worldview, researchers "exhibit a clear pragmatism in their work" (Bryman 2007: 17). From a different worldview, Mertens (2010: 469) argues that mixed methods research may reflect more a transformative paradigm for researchers who "place a priority on social justice and the furtherance of human rights". The research problem addressed in this study has both a pragmatic and a transformative purpose. Accordingly, mixed methods are appropriate for its investigation.

The larger study comprises a three-phase sequential mixed methods process that incorporated first focus group interviews, then development and dissemination of an online survey questionnaire, followed by a choice modelling analytic processing of results. This paper reports on findings from the first-phase scoping activities. Thus what counted as data in this first-phase were these participants' values and beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, interpretations, and representations of others as well as representations of themselves as learners (Harreveld, 2002).

These dialogic data depicted conversational language patterns of social interactions and were consequentially descriptive in nature.

Focus groups were a strategic data collection method for this first-phase because they enabled the collection of otherwise inaccessible data (Punch, 2009). Insights into attrition from enabling programs are difficult to access because

> Once students have made up their mind to discontinue their studies, they have diminished interest in responding to research that reviews their attitude, motivation and their reasons to drop out of the program. (Orth & Robinson, 2013: 1)

The researcher conducting the focus groups was also an insider to the lived experience of transition from enabling program to undergraduate and further to postgraduate studies. The first named author was a mature age learner with personal experience of having disrupted education before re-engaging with learning as a mature aged student together with many years of employment as a Student Equity Practitioner assisting other second-chance learners[1]. This background, together with employment at the time as a Careers Counsellor at the university, helped to build rapport with participants that evoked very candid responses to the questions that may not have been forthcoming to an outsider. Insider-researchers may choose to conceptualise themselves as co-investigators (Breen, 2007) to establish a cooperative environment for data collection with the participants. The researcher utilised this conceptualisation in relation to herself and also encouraged the focus group participants to conceptualise themselves as co-investigators with 'insider' knowledge to contribute to the study.

The focus group discussions were digitally recorded and then transcribed. These texts were treated as data and analysed thematically (Guest, Macqueen & Namey, 2011). Open codes were assigned to inductively develop *in vivo* data that were key words and phrases used

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[1] Second-chance learning is providing education opportunities for individuals who are past the normal age to attend basic or secondary education and organised in accordance with an adjusted study plan. 'Second chance education offers a number of possibilities to help adults either improve their low levels of education or change careers' (OECD 2005 p. 76).

by the participants to describe and explain the transition experience (Creswell, 2014). An axial coding process was then undertaken in which the relationships between these open codes were constantly compared in terms of the patterns of responses among the data and published scholarly literature. The significance of patterns emerging was qualitatively determined according to their insights offered about the transition experience from enrolment and completion of enabling program to enrolment (and in some cases completion) in an undergraduate program. These constituted the themes with sub-themes as some codes were collapsed as subsidiary to others. Opler's (1945) seminal work on thematic development guided this process in which a theme denoted "a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behaviour or stimulating activity" (p. 198).

After gaining ethical clearance, invitations were sent to all past and present enabling program students. Only the relatively successful students who were gaining good grades in their enabling study or had articulated to university and/or those who had subsequently graduated expressed interest in taking part in the semi-structured group discussions.

Research location and participants

The research was conducted at a regional multi-campus university that has been offering enabling education since 1986. In an earlier archival study of enabling programs at this university, Bookallil (2014: 78) found that,

> Completion rates were highest in the year 2005 at 52.9%. However, as enrolments escalated from 2006 onwards the completion rates did not experience the same proportional increase, dipping to a low of 30% in 2008 and although recovering slightly were still only 39.1% in 2011.

Trend data from the enabling program to undergraduate enrolments over the decade in which these completion rates were collected indicate a low transition rate of only 39% to the host University. Additionally, the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre advised that between 2001 and 2011 there were only 241 students who received an offer to study at other Queensland universities based upon their results from this enabling program; and that represented only 2.5% of the 9,101 enabling students

enrolled during that time frame (Bookallil, 2014).

In 2013, a total of 72 past and present enabling program students participated in the focus groups at five campuses in regional centres (Refer Table 1). Of those, the majority (50) were current undergraduate students who had commenced their study with an enabling program; two of whom had completed all requirements of their degree program and were ready for graduation. There were 22 enabling program students, two of whom had completed the enabling program and were intending to enrol in undergraduate in the coming year.

Table 1: *Focus group participants*

Location	Enabling	Undergraduate	Male	Female	Total
1	4	5	0	9	9
2	4	17	1	22	23
3	5	5	2	8	10
4	5	16	6	13	19
5	4	7	3	8	11
	22	50	12	60	72

The smallest focus group had only two of the respondents actually attend on the day. The largest focus group comprised 11 people. Some of the participants had travelled between 45 and 130 kilometres to attend. The ratio of females to males within the focus groups of 80:20 reflected the statistical gender ratio of enabling programs at this university over the years 2001-2011 (Bookallil, 2014).

Most of the focus group participants were mature aged (>21 years) with the average age being 37 years. Only three attendees could be identified as recent or relatively recent school leavers. One location included a student who was just 19 and another location included two who were under 25 years. This particular enabling program is one of the 24 programs that are open to all ages enrolling students from 17 years upward; as long as they are turning 18 in the first term of their enrolment. Learning is provided by both internal study and distance

education. Learning cohorts are not divided according to age. This is in contrast to the University of Newcastle enabling program, which accepts mature aged students into their Open Foundation Program while recent, or relatively recent school leavers enrol in Newstep (Hodges *et al.*, 2013: 138).

The same semi-structured questions concerning motivations for enrolling in enabling and any barriers faced with continuing to undergraduate study, were posed to each group. Responses ranged across the spectrum of student experience generating additional factors not directly presented by the questions. Findings reported in this paper depict the participants' perceptions of, assumptions about and representations of other students, their fellow enabling program learners, many of whom did not complete the program or did not go on to enrol in an undergraduate program. A positivist critique of this process may deem it to be merely students' opinions; however, the "epistemic vigilance" of an interpretive lens incorporates such subjectivities because "in general, they [other people] are mistaken no more often than we are...and they know things that we don't know" (Sperber *et al.*, 2010: 359).

Findings

Three themes were constructed through this analytical process: mutual obligation, maturity matters, and spousal fear. Individually and collectively they provide unique insights into the transition experience of motivations and barriers faced with completion of an enabling program and articulation into undergraduate study. The naming of these themes is significant. "Mutual obligation" is an *a priori* term from the literature that emerged through the axial coding processes as initial findings were submitted to constant comparison with the literature. "Maturity matters" is a partially *in vivo* term that reflects the participants' proposition that transition is achieved when learners want to succeed for themselves, not just to fulfil contractual agreements for financial income supplements; and when of a mature age, learners have an intrinsic motivation to achieve at least completion of the enabling program. "Spousal fear" is an *in vivo* term that emerged from the data analysis. It remained consistent through open and axial coding processes and thus strengthened as a dominant theme in the first-phase findings.

1. Mutual obligation

This theme was linked to the extrinsic motivation prompted by the 'mutual obligation' requirements to qualify for welfare benefits from Centrelink. Enabling program students may be eligible for Youth Allowance (16 years–24 years), Austudy (25 years and older) or Pensioner Education Supplement (if already receiving a pension) through the Australian Government agency Centrelink while they are studying full time, which equates to 18 study hours per week.

This theme emerged organically during discussions in six of the ten focus groups. It was characterised by claims that free tuition coupled with receipt of "Centrelink benefits" is an incentive for enrolment but not enough of an incentive for continued learning and completion of the program. Furthermore, the enabling program itself was not perceived to be difficult – at least initially:

> [Male] *I thought it sounded to me from the* [young] *ones that I associated with when I was doing [enabling program] was I don't wanta* [sic] *get a job…I want benefits so I'll go do a really easy coasting course at uni* (Focus group transcript).

Mutual obligation is a requirement on those who receive welfare benefits from the Australian Government to provide evidence of being either actively engaged in job search or enrolled in a study program (Australian Government Department of Human Services, 2015). These obligations were tightened after 2005 to heighten the degree of observation and surveillance of welfare recipients' amid growing concerns about 'welfare dependency' (Parker & Fopp, 2006).

> [Female] *Our local Centrelink office will say …if you go and do this [enabling program] then you can just stay on your benefit* (Focus group transcript).

Yet some of the relatively successful students who had attended the focus groups perceived that such an extrinsic motivator as eligibility for Centrelink benefits, coupled with little or no explicit costs to the student, did not provide a strong enough incentive for academic success in the

enabling program for some students.

> [Female] *My experience too with some of the younger ones who seemed to be motivated by their benefit payments is that it didn't bother them whether they failed a subject or a course or not because they would just do that again because at the moment* [the enabling program] *is still a free program to enrol in so ... there was no financial disadvantage to them to fail a subject because as long as they were enrolled for next term they would continue to get their benefits and not have to* [provide evidence of job search]*... hasn't fazed them that they've failed a subject* (Focus group transcript).

However, as "education is a precursor to informed choice" (James, 2007: 11) it can change perspectives. Such a perspective transformation can produce "a structural change in the way we see ourselves and our relationships" (Mezirow, 1978: 100). Some responses in the focus groups indicated that, while eligibility for Centrelink benefits may have been the initial motivation for enrolling in the enabling program, increased self-confidence generated through study transformed their motivations enthusing them to complete the enabling program and even consider continuing their education into an undergraduate degree.

> [Female] *It may start out as... I don't know any different. I've been on welfare ... I'm gonna* [sic] *stay on welfare and then you get through the program and you realise that it is actually ... it's something to build your confidence...you find out whether you have the capabilities to go on and do a bachelor degree or not* (Focus group transcript).

Participants at one campus claimed that their local Centrelink office actively encouraged applicants for welfare benefits to consider the enabling program as a means of satisfying eligibility requirements. The focus group participants perceived this effect to be more prevalent, although not solely, in the younger cohort. It was also reported in the focus groups that the perceived extrinsic motivator of eligibility for Centrelink benefits did not result in academic success within the enabling program for some students.

> [Male] *The ones that drop out don't ...they don't care ...that's the*

> *sort of attitude ...they're not doing an opportunity assessment of further education they just said ...oh I've done* [enabling program]*...I've managed to avoid* [having to provide evidence of job search to] *Centrelink for a year...I'm off. ...get out of here before it gets too hard* (Focus group transcript).

The mutual obligation theme thus depicted several levels of obligation (1) to the taxpayers funding the programs, (2) to themselves, and (3) to the other students in the class. Welfare recipients have an obligation to the taxpayers funding their income to either engage in active job search or to engage in learning that would enhance their future employment prospects. They would also have an obligation to themselves to make the most of the learning opportunity the enabling program provided. Additionally, those who chose the learn option in 'earn or learn' would also have a mutual obligation to their fellow classmates to behave in a way that does not disrupt other students' learning and the responses from focus group participants suggested that disruption did sometimes occur.

> [Researcher] *"Do you think they're a distraction to the other students?"*[Male] *"...yes they do. I mean we have chaps with their feet up on the desk and carrying on down the back. (Focus Group transcripts)*

The preceding analysis suggests that perhaps, from the perspective of some of their fellow-students, there were those enrolled who were just 'going through the motions'. The average age of focus group participants was 37 years and it was the perception across all focus group locations that this effect was more prevalent in the younger cohort of recent school leavers. It needs to be considered whether encouraging welfare recipients to enrol in university-based enabling programs in order to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements for Centrelink payments provides sufficient incentive for successful learning outcomes. Research into the outcomes of those who choose the 'learn' option under mutual obligation provisions for welfare payments may be instructive in this matter.

2. Maturity matters

The second dominant theme constructed "maturity" as being important

for success. A number of participants were of the view that the younger cohort enrolled in enabling programs were not as motivated as the more mature students – that is, themselves. This is an important factor since the average age of enabling program students has been falling since 2005 and recent school leavers are becoming the dominant cohort (Hodges *et al.,* 2013; Bookallil 2014). Statistical analysis of archival data also revealed an association between age and completion of enabling programs at this University. After 2006, as the average age of students fell, the mean rate of completion also declined (Bookallil, 2014: 73).

One person suggested that some of the younger students were "time wasters" [and] "They're there but they're not really there ...." (Focus group transcripts). Another expressed a desire for unmotivated students to be removed from the class indicating they were not fulfilling their obligation to the other class members.

> [Male] *They sit at the back and they're on their* [device] *tweeting and carrying on ... their mobile phones and they've got their laptops open doing things... you know you just think ... just go home* (Focus group transcripts)

> [Male] *I'd just like to see them removed from the class room.* (Focus group transcripts)

However, although removing students who were perceived to lack motivation would have the potential to improve attrition rates, it was also acknowledged that it would be difficult to identify or exclude them. The current application processes for the enabling program involves both an intake test and a personal interview.

> [Male] *You can't filter them out with an exam 'cause some of them are smart. They just don't wanna* [sic] *work* (Focus group transcripts).

> [Female] *You have your one-on-one interviews* [prior to enrolment in enabling program] *and everyone can put on an act for that* (Focus group transcripts).

An issue that emerged was the feeling that younger students may not have the same impetus as the mature aged students concerning the

opportunity of a 'second chance' to prepare for university since they were young enough to come back again later. Mature students perceived they were more committed to the completion of enabling study as well as articulation to undergraduate study than the younger cohort. Some had longed for such an opportunity to complete the "unfinished business" as identified in the literature (see for example Munns & McFadden, 2000; Green & Web, 2003), and also to improve their financial security with professional employment.

> [Female] *As a mature aged student. You're there... I mean you really want this ... it's something that you've wanted for a long time. So you know... you're giving it your all. The difference in the motivation between mature aged students and the younger students is just incredible* (Focus group transcripts).

It was also suggested by some participants that the decision to be in ongoing education may not have been the choice of the younger students but was a manifestation of parental pressure.

> [Female] *If you come in as a mature aged student you're there because you choose to be there ...you're not there because mum and dad said or somebody else said that you have to be there. We're here because we wanta* [sic] *be here* (Focus group transcripts).

However, one participant voiced an opinion that it was not just the young students who exhibited lack of motivation.

> [Female] *I wouldn't say they were all of the young demographic ... there was some older ...more mature age people who should have known better and this was their chance and they were blowing it* (Focus group transcripts).

Their perception that maturity matters in relation to insights into attrition and/or progression to undergraduate study is important given the rise in enrolments in enabling programs by recent school leavers evidenced in the past decade. Decreasing age at enrolment in enabling programs has also coincided with increasing attrition rates and falling articulation rates. At this university enrolments from those aged 21 years and younger had been steady between 2001 and 2005, but rose

by 288% from 105 in 2005 to 407 by 2011. During the same time frame completion rates declined and a statistical association between maturity and successful completion of enabling programs was established (Bookallil 2014: 66).

3. Spousal fear

This theme of spousal fear encapsulated the perception that there was pressure placed upon some women by their male partners which resulted in these women leaving the enabling program; or, if they did complete, having a deleterious effect upon their decision to articulate to undergraduate study. The massification of higher education, as witnessed in recent decades, has offered many women the transformative experience of being a student. This in turn has impacted on their identity, their visions for the future and their job opportunities (Stone & O'Shea 2012).

There were some very personal stories articulated concerning women and the pressure placed upon them by their spouses that had caused them enough anxiety that they discontinued their studies. Other stories related to marriage breakdowns in order for the women to continue to educate themselves. When relating stories of women they knew who were pressured by their male partners to discontinue their enabling studies, the term "spousal fear" was raised by several of the males to identify this phenomenon of the male partner being afraid of being left behind by the female.

> [Male] *I think it was a sense of ...if you do that and you're successful you won't need me anymore. So there was a certain level of spousal fear* (Focus group transcripts).

> [Researcher] *So do you think that impacts on any people to stop them from completing their Enabling program?* [Male] *Oh hell yeah.* (Focus group transcripts).

> [Male] *Two of the people ...last term they left... they stopped coming because their husbands threatened divorce if they kept going. I think* [they were] *scared of being left behind if she* [spouse] *got a degree and then got a better job than he's got* [that] *she's gonna* [sic] *walk away from him* (Focus group

transcripts).

Even if the women had successfully completed the enabling program, then decisions to articulate to undergraduate study may also be influenced by deontological reasons or "pervasive interdependence" (Ng 1979: 7). Enabling programs typically involve short term study of between 13 and 26 weeks. However, degree programs require a commitment of between three to eight years depending upon the discipline chosen and whether the student undertakes study by full-time or part-time mode.

> [Female] *Not only do you have the stress of the studying and having to balance those other responsibilities in your life, but there's also the stress associated with having to deal with other people's emotions in relation to your study. And I think that particularly for women because generally we are the nurturing …you know self-sacrificing for our families… I think that does influence a lot of women in particular to walk away from their studies. While they might complete* [the enabling program] *that may then become a barrier to them continuing on because …well gee can I put the rest of the family through this for another 3, 4, 5, 6 years …however long it's going to take me to complete that program* (Focus group transcripts).

In this study 'spousal fear' emerged as a gendered phenomenon, which was perceived to be affecting exclusively females with male partners. Not only did pressure from their male partners present a barrier to the women's learning in the enabling program, it was also perceived as a reason for some women not articulating into undergraduate study even if they had successfully completed the enabling program. It was predominately the males in the focus groups who articulated this issue and named it 'spousal fear'. However, both male and female participants indicated a perception that pressure from male partners for women to end their studies, combined with the women's increasing confidence through learning, were contributing factors in the marriage breakdowns of some of their classmates.

Discussion

The three emergent themes of mutual obligation, maturity matters and

spousal fear are all linked through the broader concept of the students' personal obligations to the taxpayers funding their welfare payments, to their learning cohorts not to be disruptive in the classroom, and to themselves not to allow the manifestation of 'spousal fear' to negativity impact their education aspirations. Anderson (2007: 16) stresses the importance of students making a proactive choice to participate in study as a significant factor in retention. However, encouraging welfare recipients to undertake study as an alternative to providing evidence of work search or participation in 'work for the dole' schemes, under the mutual obligation requirements to qualify for income support payments from Centrelink, may not provide a strong enough incentive for academic success.

Focus group discussions suggest a perception of exploitation of government policies that provide income benefits for learning or job search by some people who choose to enrol in an education program without actively engaging with the learning opportunity offered. However, active epistemic vigilance (Sperber, et al. 2010) demands recognition that some comments from focus groups might be generated out of envy or some other undisclosed motivation. Although focus group participants were not directly asked to disclose if they were themselves recipients of Centrelink payments, some participants voluntarily revealed that they were or were not receiving Centrelink benefits while they studied claiming it was because their partners earned too much money for them to qualify.

Research on enabling programs has identified important outcomes such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem (see for example Cullity 2005; Willans & Seary 2011; Hodges *et al.* 2013). Soft skills such as self-confidence and self-esteem can also be improved by other means as demonstrated in an evaluation of 'Work for the dole' schemes by Kellard et al. (2015:8) where two thirds of survey participants felt that not only had their 'soft' skills increased, such as their ability to work with others (72%) and self-confidence (69%), but also their general work skills (65%). Government policy places benefit recipients in what Molander & Torsvik (2015: 1) describe as a 'throffer' situation that combines an offer and a threat where they are obliged to demonstrate job search or participate in training schemes in order to receive welfare benefits. To evaluate the effectiveness of such a policy there is a need to assess the

outcomes of education and training programs, including university enabling programs, against alternative 'mutual obligation' provisions.

If outcomes for successful enabling students are improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence then the opposite may be experienced in connection to attrition. It remains important to consider the effect of attrition upon individuals regardless of whether they made a proactive choice or were encouraged to undertake education as part of their 'mutual obligation' requirements for welfare payments. However, students who have discontinued their studies have diminished interest in responding to any research concerning their attitude, motivation or reasons to drop out of the enabling program (Orth & Robinson 2013) leaving them silent in the literature.

A great deal of teaching and research effort by institutions is going towards understanding the learning needs of enabling program students and developing strategies to educate those at the margins (see for example O'Donnell & Tobbell 2007; Willans & Seary 2011). Institutional resources devoted to the education of students who do not complete their program of study are not recouped (Hodges et al. 2013) in any way that has been measured. Enabling program students incur minimal, if any, explicit costs and, for some, enrolment fulfils their 'mutual obligation' requirements to qualify for welfare benefits from Centrelink, providing a financial incentive to enrol (Willans 2010). These factors combined may result in little reason for those enrolling for Centrelink purposes to 'buy in' and also perhaps a good reason for these students not to officially discontinue their enrolment even if they have disengaged with the program (Hodges et al. 2013; Orth & Robinson 2013).

The opportunity for mature-aged students to complete the unfinished business identified by both Munns and McFadden (2000) and Green and Web (2003) provided an important motivator for the participants in this study to complete an enabling program and articulate to undergraduate study. However, some in the focus groups were of the opinion that younger students do not feel the same imperative to maximise the 'second-chance' afforded to them by university-based enabling programs. It is possible that being in the same classes with older students may encourage the younger ones to feel they are young enough for a third or even fourth chance. Statistical analysis by Bookallil (2014: 65-66) demonstrated a positive effect between maturity and completion of enabling programs at this university indicating that,

"older students were more likely than the younger ones to complete their enabling program".

Consideration might be given to providing separate classes, particularly for internal students, based upon students' age. Comments from focus groups' such as "there's a lot of 18 year olds who couldn't handle people who are the same age as their parents" (Focus group transcripts) suggest those under 21 years might be more comfortable in classes with students closer to their own ages. Such a strategy might also allow the mature aged to progress their studies without the distractions alleged by focus group participants. Alternatively, implementing a 'provisional enrolment' system, where enrolment is 'confirmed' by the end of week three, might encourage the early engagement identified by Hodges et al. (2013) that is required for persistence in an enabling program from students of all ages.

The phenomenon of 'spousal fear' identified from this study as a gendered issue, mainly affecting women, has not been reported in the literature on attrition from enabling programs. However, this concept may be masked within responses to exit surveys such as 'personal reasons'. Additionally, those who do not complete enabling or do not articulate to undergraduate study rarely engage in research to understand their reasons for dropping out. Little is known about Australian women's experiences as they transition into higher education and whether their decisions to continue might be taken out of consideration for others, or in response to relationship pressures. Individuals' actions do not always appear rational to the observer as they may be based upon deontological reasons or be influenced by "pervasive interdependence" (Ng 1979: 7).

This finding suggests that women experience unique relationship complications when they attempt to re-engage with education giving rise to "spousal fear" that may manifest as threats to their marriages. Recognising this issue and, where appropriate, increasing provision of counselling services, and/or developing processes to facilitate student access to existing counselling services, would meet one of the key recommendations made by Hodges *et al.* (2013). The university might also consider providing functions during the term that include spouses and other family members so they do not feel isolated from what the student is achieving.

Conclusion

The 'insider researcher' in this study utilised a pragmatic approach of drawing the focus group participants into the research space as 'co-investigators' to gather data on their perceptions of their fellow enabling program classmates' motivations and the barriers they faced in their learning journeys. Thus valuable insights have been gained into attrition from university-based enabling programs through the perceptions of relatively successful students.

Although relying on 'insider' accounts is a contestable strategy, this pragmatic approach even if unorthodox, has provided unique insights that have been useful in refining the survey instrument to be used in the second stage of this project. In addition, such knowledge is important because it is implicated in curriculum (re)design, pedagogical frameworks for teaching and learning, and institutional infrastructure investment that enhance opportunity to achieve successful enabling program completion and progression through to undergraduate study.

While education may indeed be a "precursor to informed choice" (James 2007: 11) that can change perspectives, these results suggest that compulsion cannot substitute for the "proactive choice" proposed by Anderson (2007: 16) as an important factor in generating successful academic outcomes. Enrolment of recent school leavers, evidenced since 2005, may be related to the 'mutual obligation' provisions compelling welfare recipients to 'earn or learn'. However, the increase in recent school leavers enrolling in university-based enabling programs also coincides with increasing attrition rates suggesting such compulsion may not provide sufficient incentive for academic success and may even leave these students vulnerable to negative psychological consequences.

Evidence has been provided that the majority of mature aged students are very serious about making the most of the 'second-chance' that university-based enabling programs provide, whether by proactive choice or initially compelled under mutual obligation requirements, indicating that maturity matters with respect to success in enabling study. Conversely there are indications that younger cohorts in enabling programs may not feel the same imperative as the more mature cohorts to maximise the opportunity as a 'second-chance' but rather viewing the program as an alternative to searching for jobs that may not be readily

available in their local area or simply 'filling in time'.

While including younger students in classes with mature aged may in some cases provide positive role models, it may also have a negative effect of signifying that their youth gives them time to re-engage with education later in life rather than making the most of current opportunities. This was the perception of the mature aged concerning the younger cohorts in enabling programs. However, only three participants who were within five years of completing secondary school responded to the invitation to attend the focus groups in this study mostly leaving younger voices unheard and no counterbalancing contribution suggesting the need for further research into the rapidly declining age demographic.

The gendered nature of difficulties faced by mature-aged women as they negotiate the study environment has previously been identified (See for example Scott, Burns & Cooney (1998); Tett (2000); Stone & O'shea (2013). However, explaining and naming the negative pressure placed upon women undertaking enabling programs by their male partners as 'spousal fear' is a unique finding in this instance given that the impact of this pressure was perceived by focus group participants to be strong enough to cause some females to discontinue their study. Thereby, blocking development of human capital that can provide significant social benefits to the economy through higher rates of workforce participation resulting from higher levels of education for women (Karmel 2014). The importance of this finding is further emphasised when considering the gender balance in the enabling program where females make up the majority of enrolments with only 20% being male (Bookallil 2014: 70).

The second-hand nature of the 'insider' comments reported in this paper must be acknowledged as only the other students' perceptions and may not necessarily reflect the multiple realities of the individuals' situations. It will be from analysis of the survey in the second stage of this project that direct information from those who discontinued may be captured. However, there were enough recurring views that arose organically across different focus groups and locations to consider that these perceptions may provide insights into the under-researched area of attrition from this particular enabling program.

As with most case studies there is no claim to generalisability of these findings for all enabling programs, nor indeed for all students of this enabling program. Rather, the analysis and findings suggest issues for further consideration within the program in this specific institution; while others may interpret this as worthy of further consideration for their own administrative and academic contexts offering enabling programs. The concepts of mutual obligation, maturity matters and spousal fear deduced from the thematic analysis presented in this paper suggest areas for further research, either individually or in combination with each other.

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Just another student survey? – Point-of-contact survey feedback enhances the student experience and lets researchers gather data

Warren Lake, William Boyd, Wendy Boyd and Suzi Hellmundt

Southern Cross University

When student surveys are conducted within university environments, one outcome of feedback to the researcher is that it provides insight into the potential ways that curriculum can be modified and how content can be better delivered. However, the benefit to the current students undertaking the survey is not always evident. By modifying Biggs' revised two-factor study process questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F), we have provided students with immediate point-of-contact feedback that encourages students to consider their own cognitive processes. The main purpose of the modified tool is to provide immediate benefit to the student, whilst retaining the functionality of the survey for the researcher. Two versions of the survey were presented to students, a feedback version and non-feedback version, with results indicating that the participants of the feedback version had a significantly higher opinion that the survey helped them to be a better learner. In general, the importance students place on feedback, regardless of the version of the survey completed, was evident in the study. The point-of-contact survey model implemented in this study has successfully allowed a tool

that was once exclusively researcher focused to be oriented towards current students, introducing an additional layer of feedback, which directly benefits the current student, whilst retaining its usefulness as a diagnostic research tool.

Keywords: *Feedback, survey feedback, student feedback, point-of-contact feedback, immediate feedback, R-SPQ-2F.*

Introduction

Survey questionnaires are an established and effective means to access evidence that can be used to assess and improve the quality of teaching (Richardson, 2005:387). However, this has tended to be a one-way process, in which student respondents provide information with little, if any, immediate return. Survey questionnaires using computers, however, have the potential to enhance the positive effect they can have on the respondent; they have long done this. This is largely because they can use automated processes that easily and quickly skip blocks of questions based on the respondent's answers. This effectively tailors the survey to the respondent, thus both enhancing the survey relevance to the individual respondent, and reducing perceived redundancy or irrelevance within the survey. Such an approach allows a directness of interaction between the respondent and the survey, and therefore allows a depth of feedback to be provided through extensive branching of questions (Doherty & Thomas, 1988:11).

Research regarding effective student feedback indicates that feedback clearly aids students to become more competent and confident and build self-assessment skills that allow for students to self-correct weaknesses in their work (Bird & Yucel, 2014:508). In contrast, James, Krause, and Jennings (2010:61), in a study of first-year students at Australian tertiary institutions, found that only one-third of first-year students in Australia believe that the feedback about their performance was helpful.

Regardless of the purpose of any student survey, providing feedback to participants, apart from being ethical, encourages further participation, as it demonstrates to the student the value of their responses to the research being undertaken (Watson, 2003:145). Additionally,

from a student-centered perspective, the type of feedback received when entering higher education will likely play an important part in influencing their future learning (Eraut, 2006:118). Discussion of feedback in higher education usually focuses on its role in assessment, especially formative assessment. In this regard, it is important to consider if formative assessment practices can enhance student learning through the use of feedback (Hernández, 2012:489). Assessment is more than just about grading and reporting student achievements, but should also be about supporting student learning (Hernández, 2012:490). Therefore, when considering the assessment that students undergo, it is important to consider the way feedback is used in the formative assessment, which primarily deals with providing feedback to either the students or the teaching staff and/or institution (Brookhart, 2008:1), and the context in which the feedback is used. This can include, for example, feedback regarding a student's progress (James et al. 2010:5), feedback to an individual or group, peer feedback, and self-assessment type feedback (Parikh, McReelis, & Hodges, 2001:632). A type of feedback that is relevant to this study is feedback that is given to students immediately. A typical example of this type of feedback is the use of clickers to enhance interaction between students and teachers by providing immediate feedback within the class or lecture (DeBourgh, 2007; Yourstone et al, 2008). Interactive software also provides dynamic point-of-contact feedback: the Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IFAT), a commercially available multiple-choice testing platform, for example, provides immediate feedback in an answer-until-correct format; this permits the earning of partial credit when the student's initial response is incorrect and encourages further learning (Dibattista, Mitterer & Gosse, 2004:17).

In this study we have used a widely adopted researcher-focused learning approach survey tool (R-SPQ-2F) (Biggs et al., 2001). This tool has the potential to provide feedback on each psychometric component as immediate point-of-contact feedback. The components in this particular questionnaire consider both cognitive processing strategies and learning orientations (Gibels, et al. 2014:14). Conventionally, the tool provides data and computed index scores for these parameters for the targeted student cohort population; these data outputs form the basis of analysis of student learning patterns and processes (Lake, Boyd & Boyd, 2015). Also, conventionally, respondents may be offered the opportunity

for whole-of-project feedback, often a considerably long time after completing the survey. We have adapted this data-gathering tool to add a further output, point of contact statements for individual respondents as they complete the survey. This allows respondents to self-analyse their individual performance.

By modifying the tool to give immediate feedback, the survey allows for immediate student feedback, retaining the essence of the survey for the researcher, while also closing the loop on feedback so that students can benefit immediately from the survey. Closing the loop (Coyle & Powney, 1990; Powney & Hall, 1998; Watson, 2003) is a concept sometimes used in the process of determining the impact of feedback on students' subsequent learning, in a process where the data is collected, analyzed, and then, most importantly, reported to stakeholders, so that changes can be made to course design. Closing the loop in this conventional sense also includes the idea that institutions should seek to implement continuing improvement of the learning environment, linking educational provision with feedback, evaluation and review (Powney & Hall, 1998:3). However, if current students do not benefit from changes to the course at the time of data collection, we would argue that the loop has only been closed in the traditional sense and that the improvements have not necessarily benefited the students giving the feedback. To this point, Powney and Hall (1998:13) noted, "improvements seldom affect the present students and are directed at future cohorts". However, in contrast, Kane, Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield (2008:138) indicate that the "Students' satisfaction with the action that has been taken by institutions is often reflected in the surveys over time, even if a clear causal relationship cannot always be fully established". In essence, closing the loop as is generally done in current (conventional) approaches, which, as a post hoc action, cannot be easily proven to benefit future students.

It appears straightforward to evolve the process to benefit not only future students but also current students providing the survey data. More specifically, in using such a model, students completing the survey can be encouraged to think about the motives and strategies they use in their approach to learning (Figure 1). In addition, Figure 1 expands this model slightly to consider the possibility of including point-of-contact feedback as in-class content and activity.
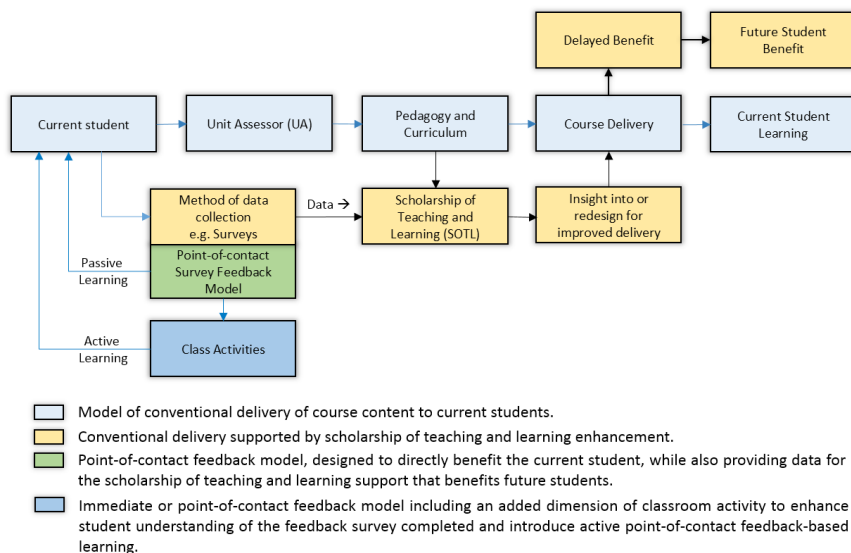
In this study, we examined whether the enhanced survey empowered the students to think more about their own approach to learning, and thus the suitability of using the immediate or point-of-contact feedback model to promote deep approaches to learning of first year students in the Preparing for Success at SCU Program (PSP). Importantly, there does not appear to be any surveys based on the Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) that give point-of-contact feedback to students. Given that the SPQ considers the approach a student takes towards their studies (Biggs et al. 2001), and that as, Parikh, McReelis, and Hodges (2001:632) indicate, feedback is considered an essential component of learning, thus combining the conventional survey function and the innovative point-of-contact function appears to be an appropriate and urgent need in promoting metacognition amongst university students.

Although student surveys are considered an important element in informing educators (Watson, 2003:147), the effects that poor quality feedback may have on future participation should be carefully considered (Watson, 2003:148). Feedback about academic teaching from students allows academics to act upon the results, with actions potentially communicated back to the students (Tucker, Jones, & Straker, 2008:283). Tucker et al. (2008:283) point out that students who are given feedback, particularly from surveys designed to evaluate teaching, however, have often already completed the unit of study and have no mechanism for determining if the information provided has influenced change, either for themselves, or future cohorts of students. Tucker et al. (2008:283) point out that the lack of a mechanism can lead to further issues due to the lack of closure of the feedback loop, potentially creating a student attitude of not taking feedback mechanisms seriously. This, therefore, could have extended impact on future surveys, either through a withdrawal of student participation, or a high number of non-serious attempts, which may or may not be identifiable within a dataset.

The current study provided students with feedback specifically regarding their approach to learning, in a form to facilitate learning that is transferrable to other situations (Hattie & Timperley, 2007:104). This allows for a tool to (i) be student focused, (ii) retain its usefulness as a research tool, and (iii) encourage participation in other student surveys. In addition, the survey and the feedback provided makes use

of what Brookhart (2008:2) describes as a double-barreled approach, which addresses both cognitive and motivational factors by providing the student with information what they need to (i) better understand the stage in the learning process they are at, and (ii) do to improve their learning. This should give students greater control over their own learning.

Figure 1: Point-of-contact feedback model designed to directly benefit the current student, while also providing data for the scholarship of teaching and learning to benefit future students. Both current and future student may benefit from this model with potential immediate benefit to current student and enhanced student experience.

Model of conventional delivery of course content to current students.

Conventional delivery supported by scholarship of teaching and learning enhancement.

Point-of-contact feedback model, designed to directly benefit the current student, while also providing data for the scholarship of teaching and learning support that benefits future students.

Immediate or point-of-contact feedback model including an added dimension of classroom activity to enhance student understanding of the feedback survey completed and introduce active point-of-contact feedback-based learning.

Context

The Preparing for Success at SCU Program (PSP) is an award winning enabling program for students at a small regional university in Northern New South Wales, Australia (Hellmundt, McGuire & Kayess, 2014). The program provides a pathway into university for those who want to pursue tertiary study but who do not have the qualifications for entry.

The Preparing for Success program comprises three compulsory core units, along with a selection of either an arts or science elective. Students learn how to manage their time, write an academic essay and report, master basic numeracy skills, as well as develop key learning strategies for tertiary study. A key aim of the program is to build students' confidence and self-esteem by first identifying, and then capitalizing on, their strengths to actively engage them to become independent, self-directed and self-aware learners. The curriculum and pedagogy are specifically designed to enhance student awareness of their preferred learning styles and particular strategies for successful tertiary study. A core objective of the course is to develop student confidence, skills and engagement in tertiary education. This paper reports on a novel use of student surveys to support this objective.

Methods

The study was conducted with students enrolled in one of the compulsory core units (subjects), within the Preparing for Success (PSP) course, namely, Managing your Study (EDU10445) in Weeks 5 to 7 of the 12 week teaching session. Three hundred and eight students completed the unit in over two study sessions.

The Managing your Study unit was considered ideal for this study, as the second assessment, due in Week 6, focused on learning strategies. This assignment asked students to reflect on two strategies they had discovered in their study that had helped them become more effective learners. Tutors at each location and mode of delivery (the unit is delivered face-to-face and online) were asked to promote the survey twice in class, and the unit assessor (lecturer) posted an announcement twice on the online learning site, encouraging students to complete the survey.

Students in each teaching session were randomly presented either a point-of-contact feedback version of the survey, or a non-feedback version. Students included in each group were randomly but evenly, presented either version via the Qualtrics online survey tool. Two groups of students from each of the two teaching sessions (sessions 2 and 3) completed the survey.

The survey was based on Biggs' R-SPQ-2F questionnaire (Biggs et al.,

2001). The questionnaire comprised 20 questions designed to measure two main scales of deep and surface approach, and subscales of motives and strategies (Table 1) to learning. The content and intent of the questions formed the basis of feedback text, so that feedback could be reported back to the participant throughout the survey. The logic of the feedback was based on student responses to the Likert scale for each question. As an example (Textbox 1), in question 1 of the survey, if a student selects A or B (frequently true or almost always true of me) of the Likert scale then the output response to that answer was displayed to the student after answering that question. If the student selects D or E (never or only rarely true of me) or C (True about half the time) on the Likert scale, then different output responses to the answer were displayed. The same logic is followed for all the questions in the feedback version of the paper. The details of each response were based on information published in the scholarly literature, although only a non-referenced version was displayed to students.

Table 1: *The psychometric properties being measured for each question relating to deep or surface approach and their subscales.*

Deep Approach (DA)	Surface approach (SA)	Deep Motive (DM)	Deep Strategy (DS)	Surface motive (SM)	Surface strategy (SS)
Questions 1 + 2 + 5 + 6 + 9 + 10 + 13 + 14 + 17 + 18	Questions 3 + 4 + 7 + 8 + 11 + 12 + 15 + 16 + 19 + 20	1 + 5 + 9 + 13 + 17	2 + 6 + 10 + 14 + 18	3 + 7 + 11 + 15 + 19	4 + 8 + 12 + 16 + 20

Textbox 1: *Example of actual output responses for Question 1.*

Feedback for Q. 1

Literature sources use to inform feedback: Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Matlay, Hytti, Stenholm, Heinonen, & Seikkula-Leino, 2010

Question: I find that at times studying gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction.

Text for each feedback:

Student response = frequently true or almost always true of me: Your answer indicates that you may not be as deeply motivated as you could be when it comes to study. Research that focuses on motivation and its relationship to achievement indicates that motivational differences between students has long-term learning implications, and is often a good predictor of learning outcomes and competencies.

Student response = never or only rarely true of me: Your answer indicates that you are likely to be deeply motivated when it comes to study. This is a trait that is often associated with improved academic performance. Research that focuses on motivation and its relationship to achievement indicates that motivational differences between students has long-term learning implications, and is often a good predictor of learning outcomes and competencies.

Student response = true about half the time: Your answer indicates that at times you may not be as deeply motivated as you could be when it comes to study. Research that focuses on motivation and its relationship to achievement indicates that motivational differences between students has long-term learning implications, and is often a good predictor of learning outcomes and competencies.

The standard questions in Biggs et al.'s (2001) questionnaire were supplemented by basic demographic questions asking about gender and age and questions to test whether feedback had an impact on student perceptions of the survey utility. The latter questions were:

1. Do you think that this survey will help you to be a better learner?
2. If all surveys you participated in at university provided feedback at the end of a survey, would you be more likely to complete them?
3. Have you ever been disappointed after submitting a survey that there was little or no feedback?
4. Do you think that your knowledge about how you learn at university has been enhanced by completing this survey?
5. Please tell us your thoughts about how this learning survey could be improved?

The survey conducted in session 3, involved an additional activity in class where the students were introduced to the survey in week 3 and asked to complete an activity in week 4. The activity involved students getting into groups of 4-6, making sure at least half the group received feedback from the survey, followed by a discussion of the questions such as, for example, what did you think about the survey? Did you find it beneficial? Why/why not? On this occasion no specific data was collected, apart from the observations of the unit assessor.

Results

A total of 125 surveys were fully completed, with 114 used in the analysis. This adjustment occurred to account for participants that undertook the survey more than once, and therefore only had their first attempt included in the survey analysis. The ratio of males (20.2%) to females (79.8%) was typical of this university, with recent studies such as Markopoulos, Chaseling, Petta, Lake, and Boyd (2015) citing a high ratio of predominately female students (80%) at the same university. The median age of the student participants was 30.5 years.

Prior to combining the two results of the two sessions, the difference between the two cohorts was assessed based on the scale SPQ scores. The results of the independent samples t-test indicated that the difference was not significant between the session 2 and session 3

groups for either a deep approach to learning t(112) = -0.985, p = 0.33, two-tailed, d = 0.19, or surface approach to learning t(112) = 1.43, p = 0.16, two-tailed, d = 0.23. For the remaining analysis, therefore, these two sets of data were combined.

The following 5 core questions were asked of students:

Question 1: Do you think that this survey could help you to be a better learner? A Mann-Whitney non-parametric U test indicated that the level of agreement for students completing the Feedback version of the survey (mean rank = 70.38, n = 53) was significantly higher than the non-feedback version (mean rank = 46.31, n = 61), U = 934, z = -4.123 (corrected for ties), p = 0.0001, two tailed. Thus, we can state that the participants of the feedback version had a significantly higher opinion that the survey helped them to be a better learner, with 73% of participants in the feedback group (n = 53) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the survey could help them to be a better learner. This compared to the non-feedback group (n = 61), where only 40% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the survey could help them to be a better learner. In addition, only 2% of students from the feedback group reported any level of disagreement (Figure 1). The size effect can be described as "medium" (r = 0.39).

Figure 1: *Do you think that this survey could help you to be a better learner?*
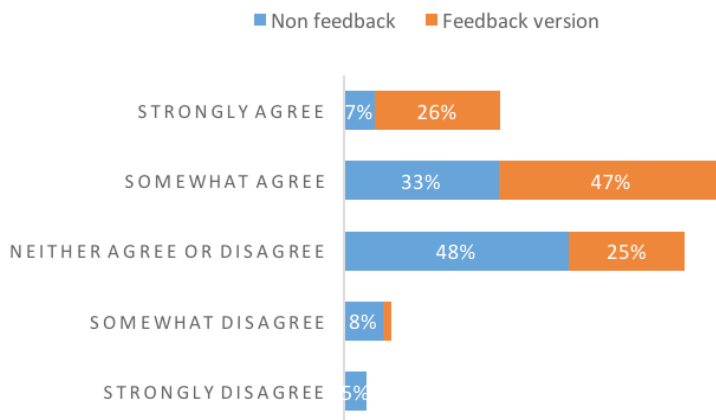
Question 2: If all surveys you participated in at university provided feedback either throughout or at the end of a survey, would you be m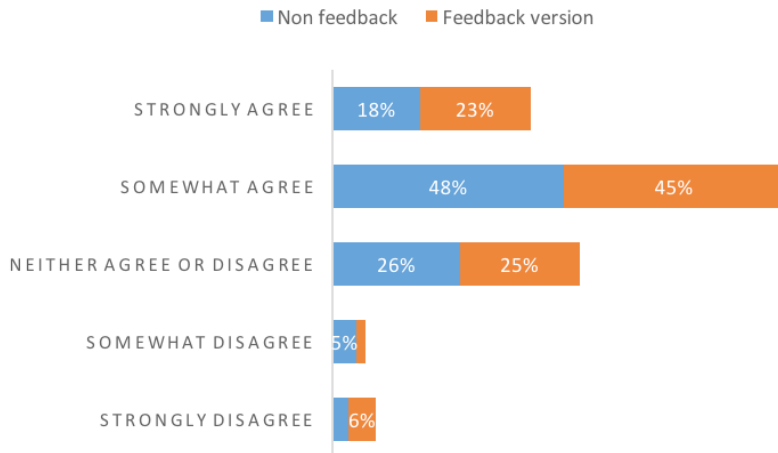ore likely to complete them? A Mann-Whitney non-parametric U test indicated that the level of agreement for students completing the Feedback version of the survey (mean rank = 60.02, n = 53) was not significantly higher than the non-feedback version (mean rank = 55.31, n = 61), U = 1483, z = -0.818 (corrected for ties), p = 0.41, two tailed. Thus, we can state that the participants of the feedback version and non-feedback version are not significantly different in their opinion that feedback had an effect on their completion of surveys. However, although there was no significant difference between groups, 86% of participants in the feedback group either agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more likely to complete surveys if they were provided feedback. This opinion was also prevalent in the non-feedback group, with 77% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would be more likely to complete a survey if feedback was given (Figure 2).

***Figure 2:** If all surveys you participated in at university provided feedback either throughout or at the end of a survey, would you be more likely to complete them?*
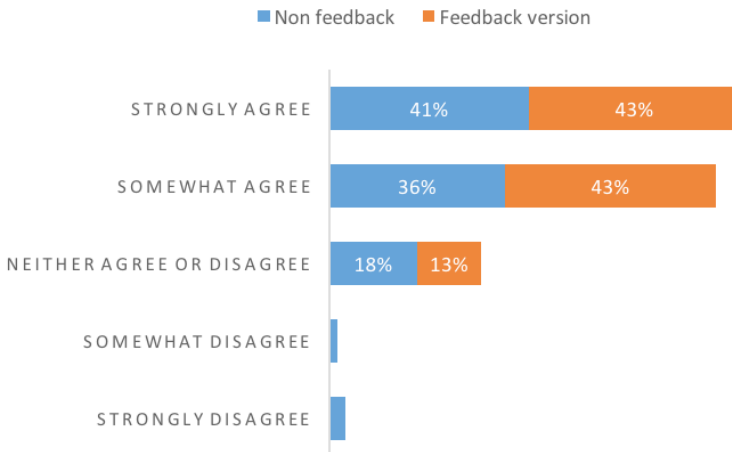
Question 3: Have you ever been disappointed after submitting a survey that there was little or no feedback? A Mann-Whitney non-parametric U test indicated that the level of agreement for students completing the non-feedback version of the survey (mean rank = 58.95, n = 61) was not significantly higher than the feedback version (mean rank = 56.24, n = 53) U = 1539.5, z = -0.468 (corrected for ties), p = 0.64, two tailed. Thus, we can state that the participants of the feedback version and non-feedback version are not significantly different in the disappointment they may or may not have experienced if little or no feedback was received. However, 68% of participants in the feedback group and 66% of the non-feedback group either agreed or strongly agreed that they had been disappointed because they had not received feedback (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Have you ever been disappointed after submitting a survey that there was little or no feedback?

Question 4: Do you think that your knowledge about how you learn at university has been enhanced by completing this survey? A Mann-Whitney non-parametric U test indicated that the level of agreement for students completing the Feedback version of the survey (mean rank = 63.38, n = 53) was not significantly higher than the

non-feedback version (mean rank = 52.39, n = 61) U = 1305, z = -1.891 (corrected for ties), p = 0.059, two tailed. Thus, we can state that the participants of the feedback version and non-feedback version are not significantly different in their opinion that knowledge about how they learn at university has been enhanced by completing this survey. However, 80% of participants in the feedback group and 63% of the non-feedback group agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge about learning had been enhanced (Figure 4).

Figure 4: *Do you think that your knowledge about how you learn at university has been enhanced by completing this survey?*
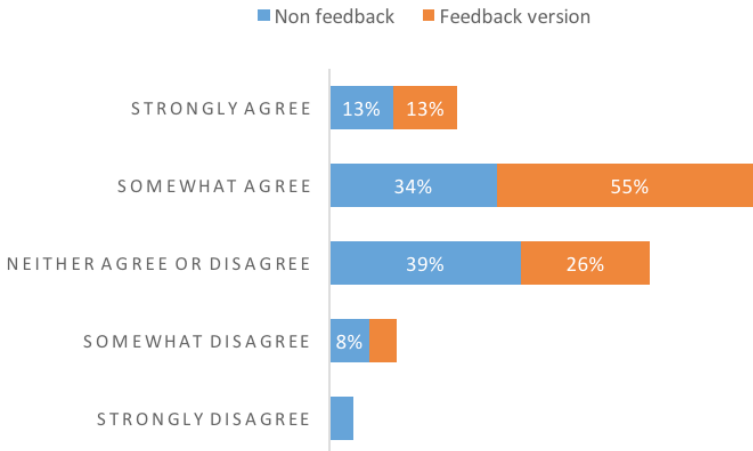
Question 5: "Please tell us your thoughts about how this learning survey could be improved": The non-feedback version of the survey had 29 responses to this question compared to the feedback version, which had 15. The most noteworthy comments are coded into three groups related to: the perceived benefit to student learning; the timing of the survey; and the presentation of the feedback, and are shown below (Table 2).

Table 2: *Summary of student comments on non-feedback and feedback versions of the survey.*

NON-FEEDBACK VERSION
Perceived benefit to student learning
• Perhaps if I was able to answer the questions in the survey further into my course, I'd have better judgement. It was interesting though.   • I found this survey to be more interesting as the questions were self-reflected.   • It made me more aware that I could definitely improve my learning skills but in no part did it inform me on how too?   • It is interesting that the majority of teachers ask for feedback constantly and I think you should have a section on asking for feedback. I know I'm at a point now, where I want to interact more with either my lecturer, U.A. or tutor and get answers on areas I went wrong in and how I can rectify the problem and learn from it. For example, when an assignment is returned there would be a wide range of attitudes to feedback.   • I feel that this survey could be improved by at the end providing some suggestions based on your answers on how to enhance our study skills, and feedback, again, based on our answers how to improve.   • The questions did not make me feel or think any different about the study. I am struggling a little and I think to better understand me as a new student questions around how things could be improved would benefit me vastly with options to choose. I am unaware of any extra support available. Even doing this study part time it seems like a lot to take on and in. I feel a huge expectation to have to study to achieve and I do not find there is much of a balance for my home life as a mum. However I am my biggest obstacle and I am the power of my mind and I am set to achieve!   • I think the survey is a sound survey. It asks appropriate questions, it is any to answer and easy to identify to.   • The Survey could have been made a little more colorful and exciting.   • It was good, I don't think it needed much improving.
Timing of survey
• I know surveys are supposed to be short but there are a lot more questions on this subject to ask. I feel this survey would be better served if it was distributed a bit later into the PSP course because the student is likely to have a better grasp on their thought of learning.   • I feel as it is only week 3 in the PSP we are still learning about our individual ways of learning, approaches to assessments, readings etc. and we have not received feedback on an assessment as yet. In which case the survey may have been better completed later in the program. Also if this survey is specifically for PSP students, as we won't be completing exams it can be hard to gauge how we would prepare for and the content we might expect to need to know for exams. I felt I was guessing responses to the exam related questions.

- I could only really answer these questions over a period of time after completing the learning survey a few more times. Then I would have better understanding of the survey and if it works see my answers changed over time.

Presentation of feedback

- None

FEEDBACK VERSION

Perceived benefit to student learning

- A few more ideas on ways to improve on certain areas where you didn't have the best answer to help you improve on areas that you are lacking in or are less focused in.
- I didn't think it needed to be improved!
- I believe this survey was quite helpful to me personally as it opened my eyes to how I study. Found some key points that helped me to see where I could improve or how I could change my way of thinking. Example I see that it's important to expand my range of study to not only subject related topics but to keep an open mind, and read things beyond what's being asked by an academic. Thank you.
- Maybe it could have asked about different learning strategies students use.
- Sound quiz with a refreshing use of feedback.
- Having an interactive voice reading out the questions to assist in understanding text better

Timing of survey

- None

Presentation of feedback

- Feedback at end of survey is preferred.
- Give a general statement at the end of the survey.
- Printout on points to remember and recall because no one has a perfect mind when it comes to memory recall.
- I like the idea of feedback because some valid points were raised. I'd like to keep a copy of them.

In practice, however, question 1 was the only question where we can say that the influence of the version of survey had a statistically significant effect on student opinion. This finding is particularly interesting, given that when asked whether they (the student) would be more likely to participate if feedback was provided, the results although similar for both groups overwhelmingly indicated that they agree with the feedback group rating agreement in 86% of participants and non-feedback group 77%. This highlights the importance students place on receiving feedback. In essence the results indicate that students do want feedback, and that this opinion will remain strong whether or not feedback is given. This is important, given that it has been previously established that the lack of closure of the feedback in surveys can potentially create a student attitude of not taking feedback mechanisms seriously (Tucker et al. 2008:283). This attitude is considered in our study in terms of student emotions related to disappointment, but more specifically in terms of an attitude of disappointment through not receiving any feedback. When asked if they had ever been disappointed that there was little or no feedback after submitting a survey, surveyed students indicated a feeling of disappointment, with 68% of the feedback group and 66% of the non-feedback group agreeing that they had been disappointed on some level. These results suggest that in terms of student focused surveys, whether feedback is given or not should be carefully considered. However, by providing feedback consistently in surveys where appropriate, we could potentially be encouraging students to participate, thus having extended impact on future surveys, encouraging future participation and increasing student satisfaction; and also supporting student learning.

In the introduction, we argued that standard models of conventional delivery of course content, supported by enhancements developed via the scholarship of teaching and learning can be further enhanced by including a point-of-contact feedback model. To a certain extent we can see an indication of the potential benefits from a student-centered perspective. For example, in the fourth question we asked whether the students' knowledge about how you learn at university has been enhanced by completing this survey, with 80% of participants in the feedback group and 63% of the non-feedback group agreeing or strongly agreeing that their knowledge about learning had been enhanced. Although the difference between the two groups was determined not to be statistically significant when considering each group as a whole,

the 17% difference between the two groups may indicate that further research should be considered in order to investigate this question in more depth.

In the non-feedback version of the survey, one student suggested that the survey "questions were self-reflected" perhaps indicating that the content of the questions provided some form of knowledge to the student, regardless of the fact that no feedback was given. At this point it is important to recognize that one of the limitations of this study was the fact that we cannot control all the variables surrounding what the unit assessor is teaching and the effects this might have on the way the students approach the survey. Given the nature of the unit, it is likely that students would have a direct interest in understanding how they study and thus have a more positive response and conceptual understanding, regardless of the survey given. Feedback from students about the non-feedback survey also included statements such as "I feel that this survey could be improved by at the end providing some suggestions based on your answers on how to enhance our study skills, and feedback, again, based on our answers how to improve". This sort of statement directly supports the conceptual basis for providing feedback.

In the feedback version of the survey, the most common comment was, for example that "Feedback at end of [the] survey is preferred" and that "...a general statement at the end of the survey" would have been more optimal. Furthermore, another student commented that they would like to have been able "to keep a copy of them [the questions and answers]". One student commented "no one has a perfect mind when it comes to memory recall." The importance of the point-of-contact model should not miss the importance of more mundane issues such as the ability to view the feedback at the end of the survey as well as throughout. Another student statement which backs up the potential usefulness of point-of-contact surveys was "I believe this survey was quite helpful to me personally as it opened my eyes to how I study. Found some key points that helped me to see where I could improve or how I could change my way of thinking." Interestingly, the activity introduced in session 3, to help students engage further in the learning process in essence further strengthened the importance of feedback.

By creating a survey with point-of-contact feedback we reduce the

chances of students developing an attitude of not taking feedback mechanisms seriously. This survey, but more specifically any survey that provides immediate feedback could, therefore, potentially impact positively on future surveys, avoiding as Tucker et al. (2008:283) points out, the potential withdrawal of student participation, or the inclusion of non-serious attempts, which may or may not be identifiable within a dataset. Therefore, by providing feedback, we are potentially minimizing the negative effects non-serious attempts could have on the data collected in the conventional model of supported by the scholarship of teaching and learning.

In contrast to a typical survey, where students do not benefit from changes to the course at the time of data collection, the approach taken in this study more adequately closes the feedback loop. The loop we are referring to is slightly different from that suggested by Watson (2003), where there is a focus on ensuring that staff are alerted to student feedback, are able to react promptly, and allow students to feel that their feedback to be heard by those who can implement suggested changes. The premise of the Watson (2003) approach does not imply a specific focus on what the survey can do now for the current student (apart from student satisfaction that they have been heard and that changes have been implemented as a result), as any changes to a course or its delivery will not necessarily benefit the current student undertaking the survey. In our study, we enhance the benefits to the current student by providing an additional feedback loop, using the survey as a tool not only as a data collection and engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, but also as a tool of student learning enhancement. In this case, closing the loop, applies to the importance of providing immediate feedback to inform the student of learning opportunities, either passively or actively in a point-of-contact fashion. The model supports both the conventional 'close the loop' approach typical in the scholarship of teaching and learning process and the point-of-contact feedback model used in this study. In conjunction these could work together to make surveys (when applicable) more effective, by benefiting both in terms of students' being satisfied that they have been heard and contributed to positively to changes in course design and delivery, as well as the immediate learning benefits they receive. In combination, this could lead to a continued strengthening of the scholarship of teaching and learning, and most importantly an increased participation

by students by actively demonstrating the value of student survey responses in terms of their contribution to the traditional feedback cycle and to their own learning experience gain.

Conclusion

The point-of-contact survey implemented in this study has allowed a tool that was once researcher focused to be oriented towards current students, whilst retaining its usefulness as a research tool. We determined that the participants of the feedback version had a significantly higher opinion that the survey helped them to be a better learner. Based on previous research and the positive perceptions of students we believe that this model could encourage participation in other surveys at university. In addition the use of the point-of-contact model introduces a further layer of feedback, which directly benefits the current student.

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Integrated non-formal education and training programs and centre linkages for adult employment in South Africa

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This article outlines the results of a qualitative study, which investigated the adult non-formal education and training (NFET) centre linkages with external role-players in providing post-training support for the employment of graduates. The concern that informed this article is that adults who face long-term unemployment remain unemployed after completing the NFET programs in South Africa. The article reports on an empirical study conducted to investigate what constitutes NFET enabling environments for employment. The findings reveal that managers did not create adequate linkages that could enable graduates to access needed post-training support, community resources, public goods and services. The author concludes that without linking the NFET programs to external stakeholders, graduates will continue to find it difficult to be employed or to start small businesses which perpetuates unemployment and chronic poverty in South Africa.

Keywords: *Non-formal education, adult training, employment, centre linkages, South Africa*

Introduction

The central discussion about the provision of adult non-formal education and training (NFET) today is the question: Is training for purposes of merely obtaining a certificate or it training for obtaining employment? Adult NFET has become a significant developmental agenda after the World Education Forum convened in April 2000, had approved the Dakar Framework for Action to the achievement of Education for All (EFA). Governments, organisations, agencies and associations represented at the World Education Forum had to implement six main goals of EFA (UNESCO, 2011). The focus of this article relates to goal three which deals with the learning needs of the youth and adults. The World Education Forum stressed the importance of "ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs" (UNESCO, 2011:4).

The EFA's third goal lays a ground for providing skills training to all youth and adults in order to integrate into the labour market. In order to achieve this goal three of the Dakar Framework for Action, King (2011) argues that there is a need to develop occupational skills and knowledge, and create enabling factors to ensure that these are utilised to generate income. Previous studies on adult education and training for employment focused only on the contribution of adult non-formal training in reducing poverty among disadvantaged communities. They reveal details on the learning conditions for non-formal (Kyndt, Dochy and Nijs, 2009); job-related non-formal education and training (Kaufmann, 2015); and on training delivery methods (Islam, Mia and Sorcar, 2012; Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2012). Morton and Montgomery (2011) note that trainees experience difficulty in finding employment in the formal and informal sectors. Furthermore, trainees do not have access to resources to start their own businesses (Akpama, Esang, Asor and Osang, 2011).

A little is known about the link between NFET programs and employment of the graduates. The present study investigated NFET centres that offer skills training programs to adults in order to empower them to take up wage or self-employment in the fields of agriculture, industry, services and small business activities. The main objective

of this article is to investigate the extent to which the centres have established effective links with institutions to foster the utilisation of acquired skills in paid or self-employment of graduates. The following secondary objectives are identified:

- To examine the training delivery approach at NFET centres.
- To investigate the extent to which a centre has established linkages with institutions to foster graduates' employment.

In South Africa, the provision of livelihood skills under NFET programs aims at increasing employment opportunities for adults and to improve social inclusion (Aitchison, 2007). To this end, the South African government legislated non-formal adult education and training through the Adult Education and Training (AET) Act 25 of 2010 in order to reduce poverty due to unemployment among non-educated and unskilled adults. NFET targets those adults who have no access to formal vocational training systems at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges (Department of Higher Education and Training ([DHET], 2012). Central to Act 25 of 2010 is the objective to increase the capacity of unskilled adults to produce goods and services; that is, to generate income. To reach this objective, the Act specifies that NFET centres, in collaboration with government departments, private institutions and various stakeholders should create conducive factors (enabling environments) for the skills utilisation in the labour market (RSA, 2010).

In this article, enabling environments to refer to internal and external factors of the NFET centre which create conducive conditions for skills acquisition and skills utilisation in wage or self-employment (King and Palmer, 2006; World Bank, 2004). The article begins with the theoretical framework guiding the study. Next, the focus is on the study's context and methodology. The presentation of the findings is followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations in form of an integrated framework of NFET for employment are presented.

Theoretical framework for enabling environments of adult NFET centres

Scholars and practitioners argue the provision of adult NFET programs

should mainly focus on wage and self-employment rather than a certificate. On one side of the coin, a certificate is important because it is a testimonial of a certain knowledge and skills acquisition. On the other, training alone is no longer a guarantee for a job (Langer, 2013; Pantea, 215). The essence of the latter view is that adults do not need a certificate for prestige, rather a sustainable job to support their families. Islam, et al. (2012) and King (2012) are of the view that if the environments of NFET are conducive, in some cases, adults with skills can secure a sustainable job without a certificate.

In general, the theoretical framework below is based on the proposition that if adult trainees acquire both technical and business skills from NFET centres if there are enabling environments for them to access to community assets, goods and services, graduates will become self-employed in businesses or employed in the formal or informal sectors.

Figure 1: *Theoretical framework of the study*
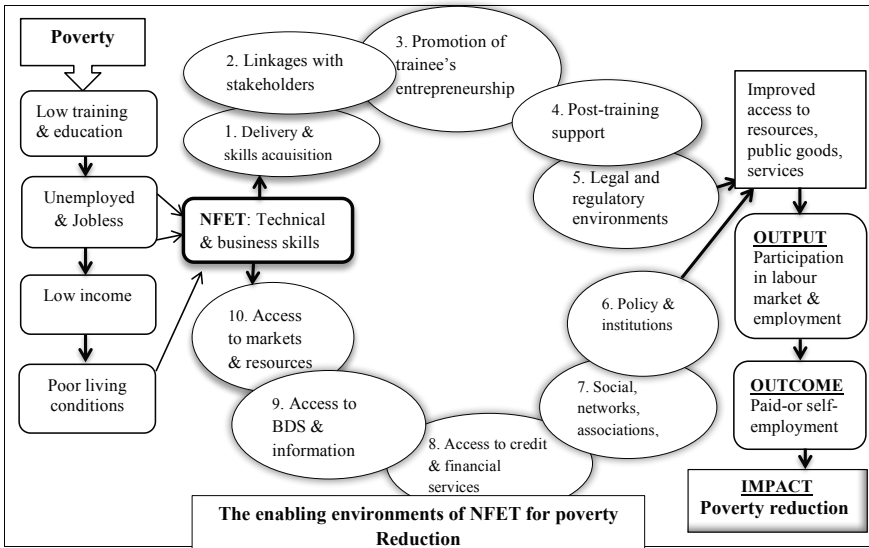
Source: adapted from International Labour Organization (2007: 7)

For NFET programs to achieve employment outcomes, there is a need for an enabling environment. Palmer (2007), Palmer, Wedgwood and Hayman (2007) note that the existence of enabling factors will foster the

skills acquired through NFET centres to contribute to the employment of a target group. The reason is that an enabling environment allows skills to be utilised effectively. In the same vein, Adams (2007) argues that skills acquired from NFET alone are unlikely to address the problems of unemployment or meeting all the needs of poor adults. Furthermore, King (2012) points out that skills acquisition is very different from skills utilisation for employment, and especially for the poorest who can only access low-skills training of very low quality. Therefore, without enabling environments, NFET programs may only lead to educational achievement that has to be valued for its own benefits apart from those of immediate employment. Adult NFET programs need enabling environments in order to reduce unemployment and poverty.

Education in general and skills training for poor adults, in particular, cannot on its own achieve the desired outcomes without supportive conditions in place. As seen in Figure 1 above (framework of the study), there is no automatic connection between adult skills training and employment. In line with the argument of King (2012) and Pantea (2016), NFET alone, as a strategy of unemployment reduction is not enough. It does not create employment, nor does it guarantee income-generating activities for graduates. Therefore, for skills acquired from NFET programs to translate into employment and poverty reduction, there is a need for other factors, internal and external to the NFET system. Dunkley (2008) and White and Kenyon (2005) note that among the significant factors external to the adult centres that foster the utilisation of skills in employment are: the linkages with public institutions and associations, the social networks and post-training support programs.

Institutional linkages of the centre with public and private sectors

Adult NFET programs do not operate in a vacuum, but in a given community with social and economic environments. One would agree with Freedman (2008) and the World Bank (2005) that a quality NFET program is aware of the resources and needs of the community in which it is located. It establishes and maintains links with various referral sources and community agencies as well as other relevant educational programs and organisations. It regularly reviews its community, sectoral and organisational relationships. According to Freedman (2008), the

collaboration should be between the NFET centre and the agencies at local and national levels, and keen involvement of social partners. This debate implies that there should be a relation between institutional linkages of the centre and the provision of post-training support. Freedman (2008) further argues that the more a centre is formally or informally linked to external role-players, the more likely its graduates may receive support for employment.

Providing post-training support for wage and self-employment

The provision of skills training to adult is only one package of an employment promotion strategy. Dunkley (2008) is of view that adult skills training might have limited effectiveness unless other supporting mechanisms are in place in order to enhance skills utilisation in the employment of graduates. So, graduates need support from both the centre and other stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Effective entry into employment and establishment of a micro-enterprise requires much more than providing skills training. One can agree with King and Palmer (2007:51) that adult skills training programs without post-training support lead to the creation of 'half-baked' skills gaining.

The types of post-training support depend on wage or self-employment opportunities available in the community. Dunkley (2008) argues that the post-training support for graduates who are interested in wage employment comprises linking them with employers for job placement, the arrangement of opportunities in order to gain work experience and the preparation of a list of prospective employers. The post-training support for those graduates interested in self-employment entails the service to start small business; accessing credit, suitable premises for production purposes, equipment and tools, marketing support, support for the formation of groups or forming enterprises/co-operatives, follow-up advisory services or technical assistance; support to access business development services and financial assistance (Dunkley, 2008; Hasanov, Biybosunova and Hasanova, 2009; White and Kenyon, 2005). The support will help overcome the disabling factors outside of the NFET system at all levels (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2011).

Study context and methodology

In South Africa, the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the Department of

Education provides two significant categories of NFET programs for adults who have no or little formal education. The first type is the formal educational system linked to the National Qualification Framework (NQF) structure and Adult Education and Training (AET), which facilitates the adult learner's progression from AET level 1 to level 4. Level 4 concludes in a General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) at the end of the programs (KZN-DoE, 2011). The first type of program covers AET levels 1-3, which is equal to high school, also known as "second-chance" schooling. It provides "an educational level equivalent to the Adult Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults". (KZN-DoE, 2011: 36).

The second type is AET level 4, which is linked to livelihood skills. It is this category of NFET program, which is relevant to the focus of this study. It encompasses training unemployed adults from rural and urban backgrounds in technical and entrepreneurial skills to enable them to take up paid or self-employment in the fields of agriculture, services or small business activities (KZN-DoE, 2012). Both government and NGO-based NFET centres in this type of adult education and training provide technical and entrepreneurial skills for impoverished adults to enable them to take up self-employment or wage- employment in urban and rural areas.

Research methodology

The research design was in the form of multiple case studies, which is an approach in which a particular instance or a few carefully selected cases are studied intensively (Gilbert, 2008; Rule and John, 2011). The main reason behind choosing the multiple-case study design is that it helps make a comparison across NFET centres, and its nature of analytical detail and inductive logic (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Cases in this study also included document analysis and some observations of activities that were written up. The sample was drawn from the education districts of Umlazi, Pinetown, ILembe and uMgungundlovu (Msunduzi) in the KZN province. The sample consisted of centre managers and trainers from both urban and rural settings from public centres managed by the provincial department of education and private centres managed by non-profit organisations (NPOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). However, the study also utilised questionnaires in the

quantitative method as a supplement to the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews.

The qualitative method was beneficial to the study because it helped present the data from the perspective of the respondents on the enabling environments being studied (Creswell, 2009). In the context of non-probability sampling, from the 21 centres, a sample of five managers and 10 trainers (each centre with two trainers) was selected for one-on-one interviews. The study used the purposive sampling method (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The sample selection was based on whether NFET centres managed to make provision for at least one of the following additional criteria: Post-training follow-up and support programs for paid or self-employment; linkages with public institutions and agencies or private sectors; linkages with social networks, associations and employers and mentorship for self-employed trainees.

Document analysis and field observation and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection in this qualitative study (Creswell 2013) and data were analysed through thematic analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2012; Fouché and Bartley, 2011). With regard to document analysis, for the purpose of the analysis, the researcher reviewed the documents regarding the training program of the NFET centres under investigation. These included the training proposal, NFET manuals, annual reports, and NFET program implementation, monitoring and evaluation documents (Bryman, 2008; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). From a descriptive content analysis point of view, the researcher identified information linked to variables such as training objectives, training design and implementation, and post-training support for employment. With regard to comparative content analysis, the information from documents was compared with empirical data collected from adult trainees and centre managers. The comparative content analysis developed the understanding of the link between adult NFET and employment, for it helped thoroughly to assess the centre's enabling environments.

The researcher used the field observation to determine the extent to which the training delivery environments of the NFET centres contribute to skills acquisition. The checklist consisted of the centre's material resources such as the training venue, the convenience and condition of utilities, and plant equipment. Then the data were

compared to documents, field observation and with responses from semi-structured interview schedules. The interviews were aimed at developing a better understanding of how managers and trainers view the effectiveness of the skills training delivery environments and the external environment in fostering links for skills utilisation in wage or self-employment. The data were coded, then sorted and classified to find common themes.

Findings

The examination of the centres was based on assessing the aspect of co-operation between an adult training centre and various partners in order to provide opportunities for trainees to acquire skills and to access post-training support outside the centre. The article looks at how a centre uses the institutional linkages to foster the utilisation of acquired skills in the labour market (wage or self-employment). There are differences between public and private centres. Public adult centres are governed and financially supported by the provincial Department of Education. They rely on the Department of Education in terms of trainers' salaries, financing, materials, labour and technical assistance. Field observations indicated that skills training programs in the public centres serve a dual purpose: Self-employment for older trainees and a national certificate for youth to allow them to gain access to Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in South Africa. By contrast, the provision of skills training programs in most private centres the main focus is on self-employment. Private centres were supported by occasional national and foreign donations. Hence, the skills training approach is tailored towards immediate self-employment after graduation. It was observed that their skills training programs were often linked to income-generating activities for poor and marginalised adults.

Adult training centre A: Public centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: Skills training programs at centre **A** started in 2012 after its establishment by the KZN-Department of Education. Document analysis and interviews with the centre manager revealed that the focus of the skills training program is on both self-employment and wage-employment. "It also caters for trainees desiring to pursue their training at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges," (centre manager, interview). The centre has been offering

training courses in travel and tourism, ancillary health care and sewing. The duration of the skills training program is for one year (AET level-4). The programs are basically designed as a pre-employment training in both formal and informal sectors. However, the centre manager reported that the centre has financial challenges to continue implementing the skills training programs. "To sustain the program, the centre manager and trainers have to contribute from their own personal funds for the purchase and maintenance of the training materials" (centre manager, interview).

Training delivery approach: Field observations revealed that the approach of teaching and learning is subject-based, teacher-centred, has a more rigid arrangement of time table and the centre calendar followed a formal system of the National Department of Education. The program content has a variety of theoretical and practical activities done in classrooms; more attention is given to technical theory, but little to business skills. For the ancillary health care course, trainees are used to going to clinics to do some practical work. "For instance, they test people with diabetes, check their sugar levels; help people who have diseases such as HIV/Aids, and TB by caring for them and making them aware of how they can live with diseases" (centre manager, interview).

Effective links with institutions: The centre had a very limited collaboration with the local municipality which once donated some training equipment. "The municipal officials sometimes came to the centre to provide business skills training related to the sewing trade" (centre manager, interview). The training entailed small business management and entrepreneurship skills. They also taught trainees how to open a business account, and to register a small business so that they might be able to apply for a bank loan when the business would be viable in terms of criteria of the bank. Findings from interview revealed that the centre had no other links with external role-players such as public institutions, NGOs, business enterprises, employers and other local partners in fostering skills utilisation in wage or self-employment.

Post-training support for employment: There is no mechanism that the centre utilises to assist a graduate with finding wage-employment. Similarly, the time constraint made it difficult to assist a graduate with establishing a micro-enterprise or co-operative. During an

interview the centre manager pointed out that:

> *We do not have enough time to teach trainees how to form a co-operative. We rarely receive officials from the municipality to train them, but our adult trainees do not have enough time to learn business skills which can help them start a micro-enterprise or co-operative. They are more interested in wage-employment. The other problem we have is that our trainees only have theoretical and basic knowledge on how to start a small business or a co-operative, but not in a practical way.*

This statement is an indication that the internal training delivery environments were not facilitating post-training support for wage- and self-employment. According to the centre manager, the challenges in human and material resources are hindrances to establish a mechanism in order to assist a graduate with finding wage-employment. Likewise, the training delivery environment was not conducive for the centre to assist a graduate with establishing a micro-enterprise or co-operative. There are some lessons learnt from this case study. Firstly, the connection between skills training delivery and support activities was not planned at the design stage. Secondly, the skills training was delivered on a "once-off basis"; not provided on a continuous basis.

Adult training centre B: NGO centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: This NFET centre provides training program related to self-employment. It provides training courses in agricultural technology, SMMEs and co-operatives. The manager and trainers mentioned in the interviews that the overall goal is to promote and develop entrepreneurs for sustainable small businesses at the same time. The centre trains adults who are already involved in small businesses and co-operatives; as well as potential entrepreneurs with a business idea.

Training delivery approach: The training courses begin with training need assessment sessions. The sessions help to recruit suitable trainees by identifying what type of small business he/she is interested in. The centre informs the trainees well about the skills training and the outcomes of the program. As soon as a trainee or a group of trainees decide to establish a small business or a co-operative, they undergo

further training programs. The manager stated that "We start a training program which produces an entrepreneur who can work independently. The training is a process which starts from a lower to higher stage in business."

Effective links with institutions: The centre has linkages with public institutions and agencies and associations. The links from the private sector involve micro-finance institutions such as ABSA Bank, Ithala Bank, Capitec Bank, NGOs and local businesses. As part of entrepreneurial training, the centre train in how to articulate a business plan and present it to possible funders (centre manager, interview). Every trainee is given an opportunity to orally present his/her business plan in a workshop attended by various delegates from the micro-finance institutions.

As post-training support mechanism, the centre uses stakeholders to facilitate the transition from training to self-employment in micro-enterprises. An interview with the manager, field observations and document analysis revealed that the centre has engaged in important networks with credible organisations active in informal micro-enterprises. Stakeholders are consulted at the planning stages and are involved throughout the whole process of the training. The centre plan and provides post-training support in micro-credit and technical assistance in order to sustain graduates' small business.

Adult training centre C: Community-based organisation centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: The centre was established in 1992, and intended to meet the skills training needs of the poor and to empower the disadvantaged. The skills training within the centre is part of empowerment programs which entail providing non-formal vocational skills and low-skill jobs. Interviews with the manager and trainers revealed that the training programs aim at training young entrepreneurs in order to start up and grow sustainable businesses.

Training delivery approach: Interview with manager and document analysis reveal that the centre implements an inclusive Competency-Based Training package from the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) to ensure that objectives are attained.

The training course in fashion design and sewing is an SAQA accredited without certification. Trainees are taught technical and business skills at the same time. According to the manager and trainers, business training is still informal which means it is not well-integrated as it should be. At the end of the training, trainees were able to write a business plan and implement marketing strategies for their small businesses.

Effective links with institutions: The centre operates in informal partnership with the Chamber of Business and other NGOs in the community and the business support centres (centre manager, interview). It sometimes receives officials from Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and ABSA bank and also has a link with prospective employers. Furthermore, the centre established an informal partnership with Standard Bank and ABSA Bank for granting small business loans. For the post-training support in self-employment, the centre refers graduates to the external partners mentioned above (centre manager, interview).

A remarkable element of this case study is that the training approach is learner-centred. Like other private centres, the observations revealed that approaches such as workshops, on-the-job training and project-based training are used. Trainees were earning an income while being in training. It was observed that training delivery is characterised by three main approaches namely, 'learning by doing, learning by producing and learning by earning' in the workshops.

Types of wage-employment of trainees by centre areas

The types of the labour market where the graduates from NFET are likely to be employed according to the geographical areas are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Distribution of types of wage-employment of trainees by centre areas (n=181)*

Type of wage-employment	Urban (n=39)		Peri-urban (n=90)		Rural (n=51)		Total sample (n=181)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Working for someone in small business area	11	28.2	17	18.88	3	5.88	31	17.12
Working for someone in small service areas/ small enterprise	11	28.2	13	14.44	5	9.8	29	16.02
Working in big business area	-	-	17	18.88	1	1.96	18	9.94
Working in big services area	1	2.56	6	6.66	1	1.96	9	4.97
Working for government/ public sector	6	15.38	14	15.55	21	41.17	41	22.65
Working for community-based organisation	10	25.64	23	25.55	20	39.21	53	29.28

Note: % within centre areas

Table 1 indicates that in the urban areas, only a few trainees (28.2%, 11/39) started working for someone in a small business or in small service areas (small enterprises). The chance of working for the government/public sector was very low (15.38%, 6/39). The probability of finding jobs in the peri-urban areas was very low, and only 25.55% (23/90) could be employed in community-based organisations. However, wage-employment chances increased in the rural areas for those who studied ancillary health care. Less than half (41.17%, 21/51) of trainees started working for the Department of Social Development, and 39.21% (20/51) respondents found jobs in community-based

organisations. According to all managers in the rural areas, the reason for this increase of wage- employment was the insufficiency of social service delivery in the rural areas.

Discussing the case studies

Adult training centre B and C demonstrate that a combination of technical skills with business skills in most centres is an effective training delivery approach that prepared most of the trainees for low-skilled wage or self-employment. The training approach is based on the principle of 'learning by doing, learning by producing and learning by earning'. The training approach of combining technical skills with business skills in a real work environment or as simulated activities as part of adult skills training, is a significant component of all initiatives to prepare trainees for the world of work in small businesses or co-operatives (Kyndt, et al., 2009; Georgiadou, et al., 2009, Kaufmann, 2015). These findings are similar to those of Islam and Mia (2007) in the NFET study in Bangladesh and Blaak, et al.'s (2012:93) study in Uganda. In these two studies, the training delivery approach for skills training acquisition was directed at producing services, goods and marketing of the products. Similarly, the practice of the skills also allowed trainees to earn some income during the training period.

Centre B and C have informal linkages with public institutions and agencies or private sectors without a signed partnership and a memorandum of understanding. Though the linkages and networks with other external role-players were not formalised, to some extent, they help in assisting graduates to start micro-enterprises or co-operatives. The findings are congruent with the argument that stakeholders tend to support adult training programs that they have been involved in during the designing and implementing phases (Georgiadou, et al., 2009; ILO, 2009).

The findings highlight the need for involving key stakeholders from the communities at the planning stage of the training. The commitment and buy-in of stakeholders would facilitate an enabling environment for the success of the training programs. Weyer (2009) and Kyndt, et al. (2009) are of the view that for the NFET programs to have external support, the centre managers should consult public, private agencies and local

leaders from the planning stage of the training. Similarly, Langer (2013) and Pantea (2016) also argue that non-formal training programs are most effective when centre managers carefully assess training needs together with other stakeholders within the community. The present findings imply that most of the managers did not visit the private sector operators in order to find out whether they might be interested in providing post-training support for wage or self-employment.

The weak institutional linkages can be explained by the failure of the training managers to persuade stakeholders interested in developing micro-entrepreneurs. As noted elsewhere, the findings reveal that most of the managers did not visit private sector operators in order to find out whether they might be interested in taking graduates (DVV International, 2011; Weyer, 2009). However, these findings are in contrast with the Integrated Women's Empowerment Program (IWEP) in Ethiopia, where training centres work in partnership with microfinance institutions (Belete, 2011). Although graduates were previously unemployed prior to the training, this partnership was effective in accessing business loans. Belete (2011) reports that there were supporting mechanisms in place and services to enable access to start-up capital.

Conclusions and recommendations

The training delivery approach, which consisted of a combination of technical and entrepreneurial skills, was relevant in responding to the needs and objectives of adult trainees. It was trainee-centred and directly intended to solve a trainee's problem of unemployment. However, the centre managers did not create adequate linkages that could enable graduates to access needed post-training support, community resources, public goods and services. The managers do not consider the significance of institutional linkages and the fact that the trainees have faced long-term unemployment which then further decreases the probability of employment.

The author concludes that the NFET centres did not create effective centre linkages for the employment of the graduates. The weak institutional linkages resulted in graduates not having adequate access to community assets, goods and services. Without linking the NFET programs to stakeholders providing post-training support, graduates

will continue finding it difficult to be employed or to start small businesses which perpetuates unemployment and chronic poverty in South Africa.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the author suggests four recommendations forming an integrated framework of NFET for employment. They could assist in improving the disabling factors in various adult training contexts in contributing to the coordinated efforts for wage and/or self-employment capacity of graduates. Firstly, centre managers should consult public, private agencies and local leaders from the planning stage of the training programs. Secondly, centre managers in partnership with stakeholders should identify potential labour markets, goods, services and income-generating opportunities for the trainees. Thirdly, centre managers should ensure that training delivery approaches the match with the employment opportunities and available income-generating activities. Fourthly, centre managers should put great effort into post-training environments and have an employment co-ordinator who will maintain contact with partners and graduates.

Limitations of the study

The research design was in the form of a selective qualitative study using small samples of NFET centres as case studies. However, the findings could apply to NFET centres in other contexts for making the adult non-formal training programs market and demand oriented. The study was limited to adult centres in South Africa and did not include centres from other countries in Africa or other continents.

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On the borders of Pedagogy: Implementing a critical pedagogy for students on the Thai Burma Border

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This article uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore the reflections and insights that occurred during my teaching of a subject in adolescent development on the Thai Burma border. This paper adopts a relatively descriptive style to a personal reflection of teaching on the border and how it transformed the way I teach and made me look at the pedagogy that underpins my teaching practice. I found a lack of congruence between the pedagogical theories that are espoused and how I could apply these to a border setting. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore some of the ways I began to develop a Thai Burma classroom praxis that drew on the theoretical underpinnings of a humanising critical pedagogy.

Keywords: *refugee, Burmese, critical pedagogy, transformation, collaboration*

Introduction

The border between Burma and Thailand represents the beginnings, endings, and blending of languages, cultures, communities, and countries. It also reflects the complexity, juxtaposition, and intersection of identities, economies, and social and educational issues. Since 2008 the Australian Catholic University has delivered a diploma in liberal arts for Burmese refugees living in this border region. The circumstances for students in these borderlands create significant and complex challenges within a tertiary education environment. This article uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore the reflections and insights that occurred during my teaching of a subject in adolescent development. This paper adopts a relatively descriptive style to a personal reflection of teaching on the border and how it transformed the way I teach and made me look at the pedagogy that underpins my teaching practice. I found a lack of congruence between the pedagogical theories that are espoused and how I could apply these to a border setting. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore some of the ways I began to develop a Thai Burma classroom praxis that drew on the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy.

Background: Burmese Refugees and Education on the border

For decades Burma's population of approximately 50 million has struggled for democracy and human rights against a brutal military regime (Allden, 2015:4). With over one hundred ethnic groups, Burma is said to have the richest ethnic diversity in Asia. The largest ethnic minorities typically live in mountainous frontier regions. Minority group demands for autonomy and self-determination, often in the form of militant insurgency have been brutally supressed by the Burmese military. Civilians in these ethnic areas suffer the most and thousands have been forcibly relocated and their land confiscated. Increasing campaigns against ethnic groups have driven an estimated 500,000 people from their homes into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) areas inside Myanmar or across the border to refugee camps in Thailand (Allden 2015:5).

The conflict has resulted in over 3,000 ethnic villages being razed to the ground, poor farmers being killed or abducted, and educational, health and social services being destroyed. While the inhabitants of the

camps have mostly fled violence and oppression in their homeland, an increasing number are leaving for reasons of poverty and educational opportunities (KHRG 2009).

Zeus (2011) estimates that around 150,000 refugees live in refugee camps along the Thai Burma Border, and have done so for a quarter of a century (2011:257). Until 1995, refugees on the Thailand-Burma border lived in village-type settlements and were allowed to travel outside the camps to get food and shelter materials. Camp life changed dramatically in 1995 after attacks by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the village-type settlements were merged into large, sprawling camps that became increasingly dependent on outside aid as residents became more and more restricted on space and movement (TBC, 2004). Due to this restriction on movement, there has been a 'whole generation who have been born and raised in the artificial environment of a refugee camp' (Zeus 2011: 257). This is what is known as a protracted refugee situation (PRS), and one in which the typical response is a process of encampment, where refugees are contained in isolated camps, mostly in border regions (Zeus, 2011: 257).

Worldwide, two-thirds of all refugees now live in protracted refugee situations (PRS), defined by UNHCR as '25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries' (Maclaren 2010:105). Such situations 'involve large refugee populations that are long-standing, chronic or recurring, and for which there are no immediate prospects for a solution' (Maclaren 2010:105) a description that perfectly fits the plight of Burmese refugees in Thailand. This 'trend', recently termed the "warehousing" of refugees" (Loescher *et al* 2007:3) has existed along the Thai-Burmese border for about a quarter century. Having spent much or all of their lives in confinement, young people ambitiously progress through the basic camp education system only to find themselves with few opportunities to further their studies. Although Higher Education has been made available to a select number of refugees through various modes, increased student demand exceeds current provision.

Higher education in protracted refugee situations (HEPRS) might appear like a series of paradoxes, contradictions in terms, or situations which seem impossible or extremely difficult to achieve for they contain

two opposite characteristics or social meanings. The most obvious might be that universities are generally associated with freedom, be it academic freedom or freedom of thought and speech more broadly. Refugees, however, are deemed to be 'unfree', for many spend much of their time in exile in camps where restrictions are placed on their basic rights and freedoms. Moreover, higher education institutes are considered long-term, sustainable institutions, whereas refugee camps, although having in many cases existed for several decades, still carry a connotation of temporariness (Zeus, 2011).

Crossing into educational Borders – the ACU diploma

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) was the first tertiary institution to offer accredited university education to refugees and migrants in protracted refugee situations. The program is funded solely by ACU as part of its community engagement program and is offered in western Thailand in Mae Sot and Ranong in Southern Thailand.

Since 2008, the diploma has offered units which adhered to what the Burma community itself regarded as useful. Lecturers progressively changed the content of their units to be of more relevance to the Burmese or refugee context. The Diploma is taught in mixed mode— online and face-to-face teaching by ACU lecturers. The first unit of the Diploma in Liberal Studies is English Communication Skills, which covers academic English and academic practices such as proper referencing. Students then study Global Environmental Change, Introduction to Development, Introduction to Management, An Introduction to International Human Rights Law and Practice, Issues in Global Health, Adolescent development and wellbeing and Education for Sustainability.

Initially, ACU elicited the assistance of some Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in identifying potential students who had the commitment to remain on the border. In addition, only students who had been through post-10 secondary education, had passed a written and oral English test, and had not applied for resettlement at time of application for the course were accepted. More recently, the Memorandum of Understanding between ACU and the students asks them to devote at least two years of their time after graduating to the refugee or migrant community. Whereas all students in the past

belonged to the majority ethnic group, the Karen, a deliberate attempt was made to include students of as many ethnic groups as possible. In the current Diploma program, there are eight Burmese ethnicities represented. There was also an attempt to maintain gender equality and, in the current program, there are thirty six females and twenty five males undertaking the course. Students must have completed year 12 – within the camps or Myanmar, and pass the English language test, which is administered by ACU staff within the camps. Each year applications well exceed the number of places offered. Once the students are offered a place they are able to stay in the group houses funded by ACU for the duration of their course.

Each Diploma course begins with an orientation session lasting at least a week on topics such as introducing the participating universities, dealing with expectations of the students as well as the universities' expectation of them, critical thinking, peace-building exercises, and guides to study. There are resident tutors who work with students to improve their academic English and assist them with assignments. There is a resident tutor is on hand to guide the students on a day-to-day basis and there is a local Burmese coordinator who looks after the students' well-being and security, liaison with the local authorities, and logistical matters.

Auto ethnography

Although I have worked and lived in refugee communities for over thirty years, my role as a teacher on the Thai Burma border has significantly changed my outlook on how I teach as it required me to reflect carefully on how I practice, why I teach the way I do and how I could adjust class content to make this relevant to the students in Thailand. In order to reflect on this and in the writing of this article, I have drawn upon methodology from auto ethnography, a research process where the researcher becomes the phenomenon under investigation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:741). Auto-ethnography is a useful methodology for researchers and teachers in settings such as the Thai Burma as it can lead to greater understanding for the researcher of their own practice (Chang, 2008 p. 51). Auto-ethnography can also assist in examining the assumptions that are usually overlooked but influence our actions in life and work (Muncey, 2010, p,xi). Furthermore, reflexivity researchers consciously reveal their beliefs and values when selecting their research

methodologies and writing about their research (Hellawell, 2006). When I began preparing for my class in Thailand I looked to the literature for a pedagogy I could draw on that took into account the experience of teaching in protracted refugee settings. While much has been written about the need for education in short-term emergencies, there is dearth of research that analyses refugee camp education from a long-term perspective (Corrigan, 2005). I then looked towards the literature on critical pedagogy where although rich in theory lacks in guidance about its implementation (Estes, 2004; Keesing-Styles, 2003). Finally, I looked at literature on experiential education where a lack of congruence between what is theoretically espoused and what is practiced again emerged (Estes 2004). Consideration of these three factors further motivated me to explore my own practice.

Therefore this article is based solely on my reflections and perceptions and the insights that I gained during my time in Thailand. In this way it draws on my personal experience and connects it to the wider issues and culture of the class (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 739). As auto ethnography draws on reflexivity, and situates the personal experience within that of the wider group, it does not sit within the more conventional styles of academic writing. Given this, I do not pretend to be objective.

Alongside my experience as a teacher I am also mindful of the ethics of refugee research which demand the, 'intersecting issues of power and consent, confidentiality and trust, ... as well as the broader cross-cutting issues of gender, culture, human rights and social justice' (Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2010). As I initially had not considered writing about this experience, I had not applied for ethics approval. When I realised I would like to document this experience, I spoke about it with my class. They all expressed willingness for me to do this. I have put several drafts of this paper on the ACU e-learning site where students have commented on content and my interpretation of events.

Looking for a Thai Burma Critical Pedagogy

'Critical pedagogy' is the general name given to theoretical perspectives and oppositional pedagogies that promote educational experiences that are transformative, empowering, and transgressive (Giroux, 2004; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2003). It is a 'way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among teaching, the

production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relationships of the wider community, society, and nation-state' (McLaren 1999:454). Critical pedagogy is drawn from many theoretical streams (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003) including liberation theology, Freirian pedagogy, the sociology of knowledge, the Frankfurt school of critical theory, feminist theory, neo-Marxist cultural criticism and, more recently, postmodern social theory. It is influenced greatly by the work of Freire (1974) and seeks to expose and deconstruct conceptions of truth that privilege those in power and perpetuate injustice (Darder et al., 2003).

Critical pedagogy also views education as a form of cultural politics and as a means to social justice and change (Giroux, 1992, 1994), since education always involves an introduction to, preparation for and legitimisation of, certain ways of seeing and behaving in the world. Education always involves power relationships and the privileging of certain forms of knowledge. Invariably, these forms of knowledge serve to reproduce social inequalities linked to racism, sexism, class discrimination and ethnocentrism. Therefore Critical pedagogy aims to engage teachers and students in a critical, dialectical examination of how existing curriculum, resources and approaches to teaching offer students a perspective on the world that serves to marginalise certain voices and ways of life. The task of critical pedagogy is for teachers and students to make explicit the socially constructed character of knowledge, and ask whose interests particular 'knowledges' serve. Armed with such awareness, students and teachers should be able to challenge unequal and undemocratic structures (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux, 1992, 1994, 1996; McLaren, 1995, 1999).

Although critical pedagogy has been in the forefront of discussion it appears that it still exists more as a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical guide for educators about the principles that should govern their work (Osborne, 1990; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1993). It is agreed that critical theory continues to be excessively abstract and too far removed from the everyday life of educators. Giroux (1988) declared that critical educational theory has '[been unable to move from criticism to substantive vision' (1988:37). He maintains that critical theory has been unable to 'posit a theoretical discourse and set of categories for constructing forms of knowledge, classroom social relationships, and

visions of the future that give substance to the meaning of critical pedagogy' (Giroux: 37-38). Gore (1993) argues that, in fact, some of the best writings of critical theorists offer little suggestion of strategies that teachers might use in the classroom. Indeed, critical pedagogy and its theoretical language does not rest easily sit with other contexts, such as the Thai Burma.

As a teacher it is often difficult to reconcile the emancipatory claims of the critical pedagogy literature with the day-to-day reality of working in institutions that appear to work in the opposite direction. However, I would argue that critical pedagogy does provide a set of ideas with which teachers can work to explore new pedagogical possibilities, and it is in this vein that this article works. The literature of critical pedagogy provides a resource with which to interrogate existing educational practices. This is the value of some of the more 'practical' works of critical pedagogy that provide examples of how teachers have attempted to develop critical pedagogies in their classrooms (Peterson 2009; Perry 2008). They provide examples to be rejected, modified or attempted in new contexts.

Critical Praxis in the Thai Burma classroom

Taking of my shoes and walking into the wooden house that serves as the ACU class room on the border, I was aware I would be teaching in a context of 'unprecedented historical trauma' (Worsham, 2006: 170) and must adapt my teaching to the 'posttraumatic cultural moments' which would infiltrate my class room – both for myself and my students (Zembylas 2013). I was mindful of the work of Zembylas (2013: 177) who uses a concept of 'troubled knowledge' (knowledge coming from the "profound feeling of loss, shame, resentment, or defeat that one carries from his or her participation in a traumatised society"), and argues that there is a need to acknowledge the consequences of the emotional complexity or 'difficult knowledge' in conflict and post conflict situations in order to enrich the radical potential in creating transformative classrooms.

Critical pedagogy in these contexts, should not simply rest on questioning but it should also be 'the people there, the bodies in the classroom, who carry knowledge within themselves, that must be

engaged, interrupted and transformed' (Jansen 2009:258). Therefore, I was aware that I must somehow turn the theories of pedagogy into meaningful classroom teaching. In the rest of this article I will draw on Freire's (1970) concept of praxis as a basis for addressing how I worked with some of the aforementioned incongruence in developing a praxis that acts on the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy applicable for the Thai Burma setting.

Developing an Authentic curriculum

Curriculum in Critical pedagogy is based on the idea that there is no one methodology that can work for all populations (Degener, 2001). As Bartolome (1996) also maintains, there is no set curriculum or program because all decisions related to curriculum and material to be studied are based on the needs and interests of students (Giroux, 1997; Shor, 1992). In developing the curriculum for this unit, I was reminded of how both the content and form of the curriculum are ideological in nature (Giroux 1988). This means that both the knowledge that inform the subject and the way it is taught also affirm the values, interests and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society (McLaren, 2003). This was particularly relevant in my unit as I was teaching a subject on adolescent development, to students whose society does not recognise adolescence. Additionally, there has been virtually no dialogue between the global 'North' and the 'South' in youth studies, which means that dominant interpretive paradigms describe most accurately young people in the nations and cultures where these paradigms are produced rendering them useful only to nations such as Australia (Nilan, 2011:21). Historically, in the West, the term 'youth' has been variously constructed as a category of people who are not children, yet neither are they adults. This definition has to be contextualised in the Thai Burma context where young people have faced the lived experience of trafficking, war, work and early marriage, often at a time of life that we would consider in the West to still be childhood. Thus, the curriculum needed to be framed through the use of student experiences and realities of their lives (Degener 2001).

Prior to leaving Australia, I had met with two Burmese graduates of my youth work course in Melbourne, both who had come through the ACU program on the border. They offered me suggestions about how

the subject could be adopted to the border context. Although armed with ideas, I deliberately left deciding on the topic sequence and assigned readings until I got to the border. On our first day together, we discussed forms of knowledge and information that reflect the experience of young people in the border. It was agreed by the class that experience is an essential part of knowledge and that we would draw on our experiences to explore the issues surrounding wellbeing for young Burmese adolescents. Following the suggestion of Kessing Styles (2003) the lesson plans were based on materials from Burmese writers and popular culture which are representative of the realities on the border and within Burma and which would serve as the basis for discussion and critical reflection of the culture (Ohara, Safe, & Crookes, 2000). The texts and their themes were provided by myself, and the students who bring their experiences to the classroom and place that knowledge with the context in which it took place (Kincheloe (2005).

Teaching Methodology

Teaching methodology can be a source of educational hegemony. Freire (1974) refers to the 'banking model' of education whereby the student functions as an open repository to whatever knowledge the teacher chooses to deposit that day. This methodology further supports the dominant educational ideology that silences and marginalises students' voice and experience.

One method to counter the 'banking model' of education is the problem-posing (liberatory) method of education espoused by Freire (1974). Within this practice, dialogue is employed as a pedagogical method in juxtaposition to the oppressive monological methods of knowledge transmission. Problem-posing education counters the hierarchical nature of 'banking' education by suggesting that education should be co-intentional, involving both teachers and students as subjects. Through dialogue new relationships emerge, that of teacher-student and student teacher (Freire, 1974). Within this context, there is opportunity for moving beyond some of the limiting factors of banking education.

The Thai Burma classroom is not a homogenous environment with a common understanding of oppression, but in fact a deeply divided space of several ethnicities all who have their own experience of living in and escaping from Burma. It was critical at the start of the class that

I constructed a safe space to enable critical and productive dialogue. This safe space was not intended as a therapeutic intervention, but rather a space of 'critical emotional praxis' (Zembylas 2013:203). This is described by Zembylas (2013) to be a space where pedagogical opportunities are created for critical enquiry and where a restoration of humanity, healing and reconciliation can take place. When a class is a safe place, and common feelings of vulnerability and empathy emerge, and we can relate our stories, we set up better conditions for new relations. As Zembylas (2013) notes this occurs as it 'offers opportunities for transformation because teachers and students translate emotional understandings into new ways of living with others' (2013:177).

As a starting point, I moved students into a circle and we began a process of collectively establishing classroom 'expectations'. I reminded the students that we had all agreed that experience was important knowledge and we would be drawing on our own experience and therefore confidentiality was important. There was some discussion as we translated the concept of confidentiality into Burmese and Kareni as the closest words to confidentiality in Burmese are *Liu wak* and *teb dot the er,* which translate to 'secret' (Erikson et al, 2015:141). Being mindful of the impact of secrecy and silence perpetrated by the Burmese regime, we discussed this more in terms of not 'gossiping' outside the classroom, and that 'what is said in here stays in here'. One student referred to the Buddhist concepts of sanctuary and refuge as a living space within the class. At this point I also told students that the content of this subject may cause students worry or *sou: jeinde* and reminded them that they had the choice whether to talk or not and they should weigh up the risk and consequences of doing so, but that I was here for them to talk to me should they need.

My aim from that point on was to create a student-teacher led classroom process. To start with I asked the class what music young people like to listen to on the border. Students were keen to tell me about a Burmese band called 'Iron Cross' – the most popular band in Burma. They play western style music with Burmese lyrics that first have to be approved by a Board of censors. Students all comment that Lay Phyu, the group's lead singer, is the most admired celebrity in the country because he taunts the government at every opportunity. In class we listened to songs from an album called 'Power 54'. Students told me that apparently

it was on the shelves and people were buying it before the government realised 54 is Aung San Suu Kyi's street address. Another time, his hair was down to his waist and the government told him to cut it. So he shaved his head. And then a military officer asked him to perform at the wedding of his son and Lay Phyu said, 'These are not our people'. Using this a starting point allowed a discussion around young people and rebellion, resistance and disaffection, and some of the issues Frymer (2005:1) would suggest are symbolic of this disaffection – drugs, gangs, suicide and violence.

Another song, '*Yoo Shin The BarWah'* is about obtaining a 'simple, happy life' and so I asked the students 'what does a 'happy life' or wellbeing look like for a young person in Burma and on the border and much to my surprise there were many overlaps with young people in the West – friends, belonging, family, protection, good mental health and freedom. There were also vast differences, as students described a life free of trafficking, working, being recruited as a soldier, early marriage and a myriad of health and trauma related issues. This was how the class started each morning, and when the song concluded I asked the students to summarise the major themes discussed in the lyrics and relate these to the lecture or discussion topics. Students were asked to make connections with their own lives and experiences. Did they have any personal experiences that would support or undermine the situations described in the songs? This created a powerful setting for presenting and reviewing material and making connections between their own experiences and the larger social, economic and political context.

The songs students chose are also important for another reason. Building a classroom community was one of the central features of the critical praxis employed. It has been questioned that such collaborative learning may motivate students but can it bring about a more socially just world? Students told me that they feel that the ethnic reconciliation amongst the Burmese is essential for the future of their country. This does not mean 'social forgetting and silent sufferings and grievances' (Gravers, 2007 cited in Costello 2008: 112), but building a community of trust. The breakdowns in interpersonal relations in Burma and the border have inhibited the formation or, and trust in, friendship and support networks. Aung San Suu Kyi (2004) has written that 'the greatest obstacle in the way of peace and progress in Burma is the

lack of trust: trust between the government and the people, between
different ethnic groups, between the military and civilian forces. Trust
is a precious commodity that is easily lost, but hard indeed to take root'
(cited in Skidmore 2004: 51). In one song, by Zae Win Htut, *'Si Lone
Chin Atwet Tha Chin Ta Pote'* each of the main ethnicities of Burma are
represented. When this song was played the students from each of the
ethnic groups stood up and did the particular cultural dance to their
part of the song – it was done with great pride and their fellow students
listened, clapped and smiled and encouraged them. We then talked
about what unity of Burma means to them and the role young people
can play in achieving this. It was the creating of this democratic space
through such constructivist oriented classroom practices that in many
ways was an act of social justice itself (Dewey 1938).

I generally used a mixed methods approach with most classes including
experiential activities, small-group work, student presentations,
discussion, and creative expression. I would begin by identifying a clear
purpose to the lesson and identify related readings. I then moved on
to incorporate a mini-lecture, guided discussion or small group work,
and an experiential activity. To initiate dialogue, I included dialogue
'triggers' – photos, cartoons, comics, poems, digital material and stories
– all with a focus on young people in Burma.

I also followed Wallerstein and Bernstein's (1988) 'SHOWED' technique
to respond to such triggers (cited in Peterson, 2009: 313)

> **S** what do you See?
> **H** what's Happening to your feelings?
> **O** relate it to your Own lives
> **W** Why do we face these problems?
> **E**
> **D** what can we Do about it?

As Peterson (2009) describes, what is the most useful about this
method is that it directs students away from 'spontaneous conversation
to a progression that moves from personal realities to social analysis
to consideration of action' (2009:13). I often took this task further in
asking students to identify two or more opinions on an issue and then
talk about the evidence that supports what they believe. For example,

in one class I showed a photo of a young punk in Burma. There were various reactions to this, but mainly laughter, ridicule and shock. We then read several newspaper articles about the rise of punk in Burma. Using print media in this was can be particularly useful, if the teacher can assist students to unpack the ways in which unequal social relations are 'reinforced by those institutionally empowered to do so' (Kelly, 2006: 27). As youth subcultures are a particular area that attract considerable news coverage and are often over sensationalised, this is a good opportunity to examine theories of 'moral panic'. I then showed the students blogs written from within Burma about how young punks were feeding the poor and had started a chapter of 'Food not Bombs' in Yangon. This enabled a good discussion on about whose ideological interests stigmatised images serve and what impact such reports may have about young people in society and any subsequent coercive measures. This exercise also enabled students to differentiate between opinion and evidence. Students then were asked to write a small report on the issues of Punks in Burma from different perspectives.

When we explored different topics I would always ask students 'Is this useful for your community?' 'How will your community react to this information?' 'What will happen if a young person does this?', 'How would you change or improve this topic?' These suggestions were first asked about the class itself, but I then incorporated them into specific subjects such as mental health, drugs and alcohol and violence. This enabled me to see how these issues were thought about and addressed within the community context.

Assessment

If multiple 'ways of knowing' and multiple sources of knowledge are valued, then multiple methods of assessment must also be considered. As I had initiated a collaborative learning model from the start of the class, I felt that bringing in a standardised assessment from the outside, or designed by me separate from the class, would only 'contradict the emergence of students as subjects' (Shor, 1980: 112). Assessment was developed so that in their assignments students were able to pick up the themes that are most meaningful and most relevant to their own lives and the content in which they work (Kessing-Styles, 2003). In this way assessment became part of the learning activities that are

consistent with the democratic processes of the classroom. I had been warned that such processes take some time to establish as they often challenge all the preconceived notions of education and teacher power that students enter with from their previous experiences, however I was remarkably surprised how quickly students engaged with this process. Two of the themes that had emerged throughout the class were how adolescence was experienced differently on the border and what programs could be developed for young people in a border context. Therefore, the class decided that the development of a 5 minute digital narrative on adolescence and the development of a youth community program would be the two main forms of assessment. Because these were both group projects, students worked together in groups to define assessment criteria to assess their practice and learning. Here, the dialogue, mentioned by Freire (1974) as being an essential part of critical pedagogy is again enacted, and students can interpret the assessment criteria in their own context. Once the groups had developed criteria, we together selected those that were most appropriate to their practice and context, enhancing a possibility for engagement in a "transformative critique of their everyday lives" (Simon, 1992: 60).

Conclusion

The critical pedagogy developed by Freire is as 'superbly applicable' to the Thai Burma context for its timeless synergy between the transitional contexts of Brazil in the 1970s and the struggle of people in and from Burma in 2016 (Costello 2008:19). Freire (1974) describes Brazil as a 'society in transition' or a 'closed' society where 'splits between different interest groups, the small elite and masses of submerged people', 'the lack of critical awareness or democratic experience' (19) and 'the peoples entrenched habit of submission, adaption and adjustment to oppression' all seem remarkably familiar to the oppression operating in Burma and on the border (21).

Although Freire made numerous contributions to liberatory educational paradigms, Dale and Hyslop-Margison (2010) argue that humanisation is the single most important element to Freire's philosophical approach. Freire describes humanisation as the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world (Freire, 1993).

According to Giroux enacting this philosophy of humanisation requires radical reconstruction of teaching and learning (Giroux, 1988); with pedagogy being both meaningful and connected to social change by engaging students with the world so they can transform it (Giroux, 2010). Curriculum must be tied to the needs of students and locally generated (Giroux, 2004) in order to transform existing patterns of marginalisation and exclusion. Thus, humanisation in the classroom cannot occur without educators having a clear ethical and political commitment to transforming oppressive social conditions (Roberts, 2000:13). In the Thai Burma classroom I have tried to use Freire's work as a guide to how I can live as an educator rather than draw strictly from a kit bag of decontextualized techniques, skills or methods (Roberts 2000).

It is fair to say that implementing a critical and humanising pedagogy on the border was not without its challenges. In writing this article, I do not want to present the subject as an easy process. To be honest, there were many times where I wondered if I was on the right path. Being in Thailand for a short period of time, I felt pressured to deliver information and subject content and on one occasion got angry, when after a large lunch to celebrate EID, two students fell asleep.

One problem that emerged early on was the discomfort students felt when I asked their opinions and acknowledged the relevance of their previous experience. Until beginning the ACU diploma, students had been rote taught via the 'banking method' of education (Freire 1974). Some students initially said they would prefer an essay as an assessment and more traditional approaches. They commented that they were not used to having their voices recognised and respected, but they did adapt. It was important here that I acted as a facilitator and a guide and engaged in a meaningful praxis with the students. Democratising the classroom, also had an opposite effect to what I thought when I realised that I had gained more respect and paradoxically, more authority among the students (Bickel 2006). Furthermore, collaborating in the classroom does not mean that I no longer taught, in fact as an educator, I have never felt more exhausted. As Freire (1998) notes 'to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge' (1998:30), this required the creation of a genuine space for students to contribute. When this space was opened,

students began to use language to name their experiences and explore their feelings within the group. At times this was overwhelming, for example when we were discussing family violence, one student cried as she recounted the effect such violence had on her life, another student described the experience of having his village burnt down a dozen times and having nothing to eat, another described his feeling of fear as a child solider, and how he would get drunk before going to fight. At such moments students reached out to each other physically, or sat in silence, bearing witness to each other's stories, requiring no language at all. Witnessing these social and emotional transformations left an indelible mark on me. Throughout the class the students embodied deep mutual trust, humility, and love for one another, elements Freire identified as necessary for true dialogue (1993).

Ultimately, what stands out is that, even in these challenging conditions, critical and humanising pedagogy based on dialogue affirmed, validated and gave voice to student's experiences, creating space for a collaborative learning and empowering and transformative educational experiences for the student and the teacher.

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Analysis of an organisation: A University of the Third Age (U3A), Mornington, Victoria

Michael Small

U3A, Mornington

The purpose of this paper is two fold: to look at Mornington U3A in organisational terms and then look at U3AM as a loosely coupled system. One outcome of the study would be to undertake further analyses of U3As in Victoria to determine the levels of bureaucracy under which each operates. Questions to be asked: are U3As in Victoria operating as bureaucracies and so need to be loosened up? Or are they run as organisational anarchies and need to be tightened up?

Keywords: *organisation, loosely coupled systems, bureaucracy, collegial, rational, mechanistic, anarchic, goals, efficiency, effectiveness.*

Mornington

Mornington, fifty seven kilometres from central Melbourne is a sea-side resort for holiday makers, but more recently people have been arriving to settle in the area resulting in the construction of new apartments,

houses and retirement villages. Mornington U3A has benefited from this rapid growth. Many members are qualified in computer technology, dance and choral singing, painting-oil and watercolour, and language teaching. They include retired medical and legal practitioners, health professionals, architects, psychologists, policy advisers to government, theologians, university administrators, clerical staff from Winston Churchill's underground bunker and the Royal Marines. So there is no shortage of people with interesting backgrounds who take part in the number of courses that Mornington U3A has to offer.

Mornington U3A as an Organisation

Kast and Rosenzweig (1979: 237) stated that organisations are composed of individuals, the fundamental units of analysis in organisation theory. Individual behaviour patterns are the result of complex factors and represent an integral part of the psychosocial system. Behaviour, the way a person acts, refers to conduct and the way an individual carries out activities.

In regard to the first aim, *i.e.* to look at U3AM in organisational terms we could ask what factors determine if a group of people constitute an organisation? We could ask if a music appreciation group or a book club or the Red Cross are organisations? What are the differences between these types of groups? In regards to Mornington U3A as an *organisation,* March and Simon (cited in Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2003: 613) defined an organisation as a 'system of co-ordinated action among individuals and groups whose preferences, information, interests or knowledge differ'. We could also say that an organisation is 'just a group of persons associated by some common tie or occupation and regarded as an entity'. This group might later evolve into a bureaucracy or *adhocracy*. Organisations compete for their most valued resource *viz.* knowledgeable and qualified people, and Drucker (1988) writing on organisations in the future thought they would probably look more like hospitals, universities or symphony orchestras. By this he meant that organisations of the future (*i.e.* 2017) would be 'knowledge based and composed of specialists' in their respective fields'.

Organisation theory (OT) is an academic field which specialises in the study of organisational phenomena (*ibid*.: 15). It explains the genesis, the functionality, the transformation, the interrelated concepts, the

assumptions, and the generalisations that occur in organisations. Organisations are a permanent part of our lives, but what is it about them that makes them so relevant? We know about the functions and features of organisations such as the Australian Taxation Office, but in the case of Mornington U3A this is not quite so simple.

An organisation may exchange material, energy, people and information with its environment. Mornington U3A has developed a relationship with local schools, the community, the shire council and when appropriate the State Legislature. It has developed an innovative, intergenerational program with the local primary school where U3AM members assist in teaching reading and literacy. Representatives from all three levels of government attend major U3AM functions as appropriate.

Background and Context of U3AM

Mornington U3A provides programs, courses and activities for an increasing number of senior citizens/retirees who want to learn something (or re-learn something that they had learnt years ago). They are thus keeping themselves mentally active and socially involved. Tsoukas and Knudsen (2003:7) described this complex process as 'the production of knowledge for use as a practical social activity'. Generating knowledge involves work and activity *i.e.* transforming matter/symbols for human purposes, and communicative interaction or sharing meaning in a community of inquirers. These activities might include learning French, German or Italian for that long awaited overseas trip; taking part in physical activities such as cycling, dancing, bush walking; taking an active role in social-cultural activities such as music appreciation classes, participating in choral singing, engaging in local history research; or being purely social and physical, and taking part in activities with other like-minded people.

Mornington U3A is run entirely by volunteers who handle the tutoring, clerical and administrative tasks associated with a complex adult education facility. In voluntary organisations there are no clearly defined lines of authority with the power to hire and fire, but there is an informal network, which appears when major issues need to be resolved. Voluntary organisations depend to a large extent on 'goodwill', and a handful of perhaps two or three dedicated personnel who have the

knowledge, expertise and skills to keep the organisation functioning.

Mornington U3A was established in 1991 with 42 members. It has now 100 + tutors, 225 courses, a committee of 14, and 40 volunteers who assist in the day to day running of the organisation. The number of students is currently 1,124 an increase of 5% on last year's enrolment. This number is expected to increase in the coming years, meaning that a lot more people are signing up for a lot more courses resulting in a greatly increased workload for the (overworked and sometimes stressed) voluntary office staff.

Learning Activities of U3AM

In addition, an organisation should have a goal, aim or purpose, which gives it direction to perform effectively.   The goals/aims/purposes of U3As are to make retirees: aware of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic potentialities; aware of their value to themselves and to their society; provide from amongst their members the resources for the development of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic lives; and create an institution for these purposes.

Some people have a need for high achievement, and an increase in self-esteem and self-actualisation. For example, there are some in U3AM who choose to read the poetry of Sappho, Virgil and Catullus, the comedy of Aristophanes, Plato's views on justice (even in English he is difficult to follow), and Cicero's legal arguments, and all in the original Greek and Latin. They rise to the challenge of discovering that Plato is using the aorist optative part of *fέρω/fero* (meaning to bear), an irregular verb, in 'The Crito' that tells of the death of Socrates; or when Virgil, describing 'The Death of Dido' writes *fando*. Here Virgil is using the gerundive form of the verb *for,* which comes from an irregular verb meaning 'to speak'. All of these puzzles or challenges require enormous amounts of patience, time and application. Of course these activities do not suit every body in U3AM! Some members and even some lecturing staff have been known to prefer a wine and cheese evening, or begin a course in watercolour painting.

Other students have a need to up-skill *via* the ever popular computer courses. Recognition of achievement is a critical factor for those in textile arts, watercolour, oil painting, drawing and performing arts

courses. Admiring crowds attend the displays of art works and listen to the choir recitals whenever they are arranged.

So What Type of Organisation is Mornington U3AM?

Does U3AM have a collegial approach when solving its problems? Is it a mechanistic organisation similar to any bureaucratic/government department? Is it a rational organisation, with every decision carefully thought through and members making extensive use of the latest management theories? Is it just a large, informal, voluntary organisation justifying its existence by providing courses for people who are merely looking for something to fill in their days? Perhaps it is none of the above, but is really a model described in management writings as a 'GIGO' model *i.e.* 'garbage going in and garbage coming out'.

A *collegial/organic* model can be identified by the number of highly motivated and ultra-keen individuals who work or say they want to work there. Group loyalty, shared decision making, mutual support and joint planning are all very evident. The goals of an *idealistic* organisation are often developed together where everybody has a say in what goes on. A *bureaucratic/mechanistic* organisation has a rational structure and super efficient work routines. The Australian Taxation Office or a Local Shire Council would be examples. This type of organisation is (or would like to be) seen as impartial and objective. A sense of order would be obvious in the way the organisation was run. In a *rational/scientific* management organisation, such as a medical or scientific research unit, scientific method is the preferred *modus operandi* rather than an individual/idiosyncratic approach. The best person available (one presumes) would be selected for the job, and standards, procedures, objectives and outputs would be carefully defined and followed.

In a Garbage Can (organised anarchic GIGO theory) model, the goals and technology of this organisation would be ambiguous, fuzzy and unclear. The activities of such an organisation would be uncoordinated and loosely connected. For example, a number of post-secondary educational training institutions that provide courses for overseas students recently received a lot of adverse media publicity. They fit into this category where the goals or aims of their institutions are poorly defined.

Mornington U3A selects the most appropriate parts from all four of the models above depending on the particular circumstances at the time. The prevailing model has yet to be determined.

What Do People Do in Organisations?

Tsoukas and Knudsen (2003: 11) raised questions such as: 'How do individuals make sense of their task and with what consequences? What do people do when they work in an organisation? What makes a group of people an organisation? How do organisational members sustain a sense of community? How do gender and ethnicity influence organisational politics? How are organisational objectives and policies set, by whom are they set, and with what consequences?

Handy (1984), management guru, public speaker and social philosopher, asked in a conceptual sense, *inter alia,* 'What is an organisation? Why do organisations exist? For what? And for whom?' He stated that these were philosophical questions. Drucker's (1998) argument was that the purpose of an organisation was 'to get the work done', and Parsons (1968) identified key indicators or major characteristics of organisations. Some of these issues are addressed in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organisation Studies,* 2016.

Organisational Goals, Structure and Technology

Organisational goals can be *official, operative or operational. 'Official'* (usually) implies that the specified goals will be vague and (possibly too) general. *'Operative'* means the organisation's goals will be more specific and (hopefully) more useful and then there are *operational goals.* Derived from *operative goals, operational goals* are set out in detail, so that the activities of the organisation can be more readily evaluated and understood.

Formal structure refers to the relationships among the parts of an organised whole. In this regard, Mornington U3A could be viewed as bureaucratic *i.e.* it has a central administration, a fourteen member committee of management consisting of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, course coordinator, data base coordinator, office manager, maintenance supervisor, newsletter website manager, social organiser, marketing manager, intergenerational manager, committee

secretary and minutes secretary.

Weber cited in Hatch (1997: 171) described the *ideal* bureaucracy. It would have a fixed division of labour; a clearly defined hierarchy of offices based on competence; candidates for positions to be selected on the basis of technical qualifications and appointed-not elected; officials to be paid fixed salaries; promotion to be dependent upon the judgement of superiors; and rules to govern the performance of officers-meaning that strict discipline and control in the conduct of offices were to be expected.

Weber was describing the *ideal* arrangement with professional, salaried personnel responsible to those in higher authority. U3As are run by volunteers and do not meet any of Weber's criteria for an 'effective bureaucracy'. Yet despite a *quasi*-bureaucratic structure, Mornington U3A is successful in meeting its organisational goals.

In respect to the successful integration of structured activities with members who are studying, practising or learning a new subject/ skill, Mornington U3A has developed structures which accommodate members working together in interdependent relationships in the various classes.

Kast and Rosenzweig (1979: 176) defined technology as 'the application of knowledge for the more effective performance of certain tasks or activities' or technology is 'the organisation and application of knowledge for the achievement of practical purposes'. Technology converts spontaneous behaviour into behaviour, which is deliberate and rationalised, and is linked to achieving efficiency and rationality.

Perrow (cited in Daft, 1989, 147) identified four major categories of technology *viz*. routine, craft, engineering and non-routine. The two technologies most relevant to U3AM are 'routine' and 'non-routine' technologies. 'Routine' technologies are characterised by little task variety and the use of objective computational procedures *e.g.* much of the enrolment process and allocation to classes is routine. These procedures are formalised and standardised with the participants undertaking most of the work themselves. 'Non-routine' technologies are characterised by high task variety and advising new comers into appropriate classes or courses. Some of these new comers may have

come from a wide range of occupations, plus a number of people who now want to study a language denied to them while they were at school.

Organisations in the Future

Organisations today differ from organisations of the past, and organisations in the future will be different again. We can only guess, but it might be expected that any future U3AM will be more innovative in course offerings, more conversant with the latest developments in educational and technological know-how, and more able to cope with competition from other organisations keen to usurp some of U3AM's functions. An increase in the expertise of directing staff will also be obvious for all to see.

To ensure the survival of an organisation such as Mornington U3A, a range of issues will have to be addressed. *Leadership:* who would want to take on the challenge of guiding and directing a complex adult education facility, and in a voluntary capacity? *Strategy*: would the new U3AM muddle through on a day-to-day basis or would it engage in a series of (time-consuming) discussions/workshops/round tables where long term planning would be carried out, and major decisions decided upon? *Decision making*: who would make the final decision in regards to courses, programs or the future direction of U3A? Would the responsibility of decision making be given to an individual, a committee, or a sub-committee? Would it be an executive decision, a consensus decision of the membership or a plebiscite? The time involved in decision making would also have to be considered. Some members have neither time nor inclination to engage in long term planning, and then sharing the moral responsibility of seeing their plans put into action. *Diversity*: In the Australia Day celebration, 26 January 2016, a colourful procession of local ethnic groups paraded through the main street before a large and appreciative gathering of local townsfolk. Amongst the marching groups were people from different ethnic backgrounds who now reside in the area. In a scan of current members, there are no representatives from the ethnic groups who paraded so colourfully on Australia Day. Diversity, in all aspects, is part of Australia's changing scene. If all U3As were to include representatives of the different cultures with examples of their music, art and dance, such additions would add a richness and diversity to the range of courses and offerings currently offered.

U3As as Loosely Coupled Systems

In regard to the second aim of the paper, Hoy and Miskel (1982) have argued that the concept of *loosely coupled systems* is another way of looking at organisations, which are both bureaucratic and educational. The concept of 'structural looseness' recognises both the bureaucratic and the structural looseness of an organisation when looking at complex educational systems or institutions. In a loosely coupled system there are two basic organisational domains, a tight bureaucratic one, with institutional and managerial values to the fore; and a loose professional one involved with the technical processes of teaching and learning. Karl Weick developed the idea of *loosely coupled systems* when he was analysing bureaucracy in educational institutions and systems. On a superficial level Mornington U3A has a bureaucratic structure, and as an adult educational institution it provides a ready made platform for detailed analysis in regard to the concept of *loosely coupled system*s. Weick's argument was that elements or subsystems in educational organisations were tied together somewhat loosely rather than tightly as in a bureaucracy. Further, some educational institutions have ambiguous goals, unclear technologies, fluid participation, uncoordinated activities, loosely connected structural elements and a structure that has little effect on outcomes. Analyses like the above are known as loose coupling theories and are useful in addition to bureaucratic theory. Tutors and lecturers need academic freedom to make professional judgements, and professional autonomy seems now to be standard in many educational institutions. Tutors usually work alone and have broad discretionary authority over what they actually do in their classrooms. This results in structural looseness *within* the organisation. Structural looseness can also exist among the different units in a system. This really means that both the smaller, individual organisation and the larger system within which the smaller one operates depend to a large extent on confidence in each other, the system in which they operate, and the belief that the approach works. In the case of Mornington U3A, each of its programs or courses seems to operate efficiently and effectively.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

The retiring Course Controller, in a valedictory speech in early

2016, referred to a 'major problem' in regard to the organisation's effectiveness. This related specifically to enrolments procedures, where the administrative (volunteer) staff are asked to amend enrolment forms when new members (frequently) change their minds about what they want to do, a practice which increases the workload of the voluntary staff. So there are a number of issues in respect to U3AM's effectiveness, all of which would have to be addressed and resolved at some stage.

In relation to the criteria of 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness', committees of management must determine if the stated goals of their organisations are being met, and the organisation is, therefore, 'effective'. The same committee must decide if the organisation has the ability to carry out its tasks avoiding waste in money, time, effort and energy, and therefore be considered 'efficient'. 'Efficiency' being a measure of the extent to which input is well used for an intended task. These are two major challenges of any voluntary organisation such as Mornington U3A.

Future Directions

If a researcher in adult learning, with an interest in organisation theory or a current member of U3AM with experience in the practicalities of running U3AM, were to undertake analyses of other U3As and investigate the level of bureaucratic process under which each U3A operates, any findings of this research would add to the general knowledge base and well being of all U3As. Questions to be asked might include: are U3As in Victoria operating as bureaucracies and need to be loosened up? Or are they run on organisational anarchic lines and need to be tightened up?

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About the Author

Michael Small has been a tutor at Mornington U3A for eight years. This means that he also is a retiree, but chooses to tutor to other retirees interested in Latin, Greek and Current Affairs. An earlier career involved appointments in a variety of educational institutions in Australia and overseas.

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Book Review

These Walls Speak Volumes: A History of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria

Pam Baragwanath and Ken James,
Self-published, Ringwood North, Vic. 2015.

Reviewed by Rob Townsend,
Associate Dean Engagement, Program Leader in Social Work
Federation University Australia

This voluminous piece of work documents the history of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria and their roles as centres for adult education and spaces for free libraries. From 1839 to the present, these Institutes strived in creating a fairer society by disseminating literary, scientific and general knowledge and through the literary advancement and recreation of local community members.

This book spans 704 pages in hardback and is essentially in three parts; the first part consists of a foreword, dedications, a preface, introductions and acknowledgements with a brief outline of the project. The most insightful story also sits in this section; *Dingo Flat Mechanics' Institute: An Investment in Social Capital*, a story by Pam Baragwanath, which reminds us of the complex interconnection between physical infrastructure in communities and the social and cultural capital they serve to develop. The social purpose of education is highlighted and the

many uses of the institute also remind us of the many forms of adult learning and adult education that can exist in any community. I wanted to know more.

Pages 18-653 outline the alphabetical documentation of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria and while I was surprised by the sheer volume of these institutes across Victoria, each entry is quite brief in this encyclopaedic, historical section of the book. Each entry also has a small picture of the Institute and a reference of where further details could be found. This section is for the historical enthusiast to delve into the details of these many Mechanics' Institutes.

The appendices of this book provide some more insightful pieces, a brief summary of the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria, a poem and also a short essay on the role of women in Mechanics' Institutes. I would have liked these at the beginning of the book alongside the story of Dingo Flat Mechanics' Institute, these would have provided a more narrative approach to the beginning of the book before it then became a significant historical text.

I was left with the sense that Mechanics' Institutes were instrumental in the social and economic development of communities throughout Victoria and that there is hope that many of these buildings, if they stand, are being renovated to celebrate the birth of adult education in communities across Australia. I am not an historian so I found the structure of the book intriguing and encyclopaedic but easy to thumb through, to locate geographic areas of interest and read about specific Institutes. I now wonder if there could be a companion piece that tells the stories of the people and great achievements of these Institutes across Victoria, I wanted to know more about the social purpose and activity that sounded throughout these great buildings.

NOTES FOR INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

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