# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

## Volume 60, Number 2, July 2020

## Non-refereed

## Book review

# From the Editor's desk

Dr Trace Ollis

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This AJAL editorial has been written from Melbourne as a second wave of Coronavirus takes over the city. Victorians, unlike the rest of Australia, are now amidst a stage 4 lockdown. These significant restrictions taking place in the State of Victoria and elsewhere in the world as a response to the global pandemic, are affecting education systems and teacher pedagogy and practice in a dramatic way. Secondary students are no longer attending school in person, and new measures are being implemented to support those who are studying for their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Online learning facilitated by new technologies has become the new setting for the production of work and the delivery of teaching and learning in ways that we would never have imagined before. In addition, and in response to businesses and enterprises being closed as a measure to contain the virus, we are seeing levels of unemployment that have not been seen for more than a generation. The lockdown has drawn attention to those of us who work in insecure industries such as tourism, hospitality and recreation, whilst enhancing employment opportunity and security for some in industries such as teaching, healthcare, information technologies, supermarkets and government. No doubt there are winners and losers in the new work order that we now find ourselves in. Adult community education in Australia continues to provide informal, non-formal and formal learning experiences for adults across the nation and will play a crucial role in the

education and training of adults as industries close and new industries emerge post COVID-19. Adult community education providers are linked and connected to local communities, and they are also acutely aware of gaps in service provision and support services in their local communities. Neighbourhoods houses, for example, have been at the centre of providing not only adult education to communities, but also providing emergency relief, support and care services since the advent of the pandemic.

This July edition, as usual, focusses on adult learning across a wide range of settings such as an Aboriginal literacy campaign, older learners, young adult learners and learning in Higher Education.

We commence this edition with an important article by **Frances Williamson, Deborah Durna, Tannia Edwards and Mary Waites** titled 'Maestras: Exploring the dialectical relationship of an Aboriginal literacy campaign'. This article discusses the impact of an Aboriginal literacy campaign on the teachers and trainers who delivered the program. In the paper both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and trainers speak about their own transformation, which can be compared to that of the literacy students in the literacy program. The paper draws on critical pedagogy and the popular education tradition of adult learning, and uses dialogue from reflections on the program as a starting point to uncover the relational practice embedded in the dialectical relationship between teachers and learners and the learners and teachers. They argue the impact of the literacy campaign is broad-reaching, at both an individual and collective level.

The article by **Trixie James** and **Vikki Walters** titled 'How positive is positive psychology in an enabling program?' investigates a unit of study developed for students in an enabling program at an Australian University. The program introduced students to proactive solutions focussing on their strengths rather than past perceived weaknesses. Three themes emerged from the research: students say the learning experiences improved their mental health, their personal physical health and contributed to their success with education.

A paper by **YI-Yin Lin** titled 'Support Matters: Predictors of intrinsic motivation among older adult learners in Taiwan' examines older adult learning in Taiwan. The paper, with a large-scale sample and quantitative research methodology, explores the motivations of 815

learners and the issues which influenced their decision to engage in learning. We know that prior research has revealed that many older learners embark on learning for its own sake, to learn a new skill, and to socialise and make personal connections, for example. However this study also reveals the importance of intrinsic motivations in terms of teacher support and motivation that are an important influential factor for vulnerable learners.

The next three papers focus on research in the higher education space.

**David Meire's**, paper, 'Emerging adulthood and its effect on adult education', explores whether young adults undertaking a university statistics course are ready for adult learning. The research reveals that whilst biologically these students are adults, they may not be ready for self-directed adult learning until much later.

In 'Developing a case-based experiential learning model at a program level in a regional university: Reflections on the developmental process', **Tejaswini Patil, Michelle Hunt, Kim Cooper and Rob Townsend** examine the introduction of the Federation University model of experiential learning in a human services program in a rural setting. Drawing on Kolb's four stage cycle and case-based experiential learning, they argue that case-based experiential learning is useful to human services/social work education because it has the potential to bridge the theory and praxis nexus, and provide graduates with an opportunity to work effectively in a changing human services sector.

Our final refereed article is by **Sara Weuffen, Tulsa Andrews and Kate Roberts** titled 'Promoting quality learning and teaching pedagogy: Evaluating a targeted localised academic induction program (AIP) for the impact on continuing professional development'. The paper outlines an enabling education program drawing on a case study from an academic induction program. The findings reveal there has been a defendable correlation between teaching quality and student success outcomes; universities continue to employ academic teachers largely on the basis of their content / industry expertise, and not their knowledge of adult learning pedagogy.

In the non-refereed section of the journal, we publish the Australian ACE environmental scan. This technical report, commissioned by Adult Learning Australia annually since 2014, is used widely in the adult

education sector, revealing the scope, size and practices of adult learning in Australia. It is an important report for adult educators, scholars, teachers, government and industry in understanding the breadth and depth of adult education in Australia.

# *Maestras*: Exploring dialectical relationships in an Aboriginal literacy campaign

Frances Williamson
Deborah Durnan
Tannia Edwards
Mary Waites

Literacy for Life Foundation

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*Previous studies have documented the personal transformation
that many low literate adults undergo when they engage in literacy
campaigns. In particular, research has captured how improved literacy
leads to a greater willingness and capacity to speak out, or what is
often referred to as voice. This paper focusses on the impact of an adult
Aboriginal literacy campaign on those responsible for implementing
it. Through the words of these 'maestras', we reveal how the teachers
and trainers of the campaign, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal,
experience a similar trajectory of transformation to the literacy
students. This transformation, we argue, is the result of the pedagogic
relationship between students, local campaign staff and national
trainers. This dialectical relationship in which teacher is learner and
learner teacher is at the heart of the literacy campaign model and is part
of what Giroux (1988) characterises as a radical theory of literacy and*

*voice. We further argue that the impacts of the literacy campaign at the individual and collective levels and crucially, the sustainability of these impacts depend largely on this pedagogic relationship and the new, shared understanding of the world which results.*

**Keywords:** *adult literacy, popular education, indigenous education*

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## Introduction

The national literacy campaign in Cuba in 1961 deployed thousands of young women, or 'maestras' to teach the rural poor to read and write. This act saw women take up positions of authority while at the same time helping to develop respect and solidarity between men and women, old and young, literate and non-literate. In interviews with some of the maestras many years later, they described their experience of the 1961 literacy campaign as 'the dying of an old life and the start of something absolutely new' (Kozol, 2019). In 2012, the Cuban-born filmmaker Catherine Murphy made a film, Maestra which documents this significant personal transformation through the women's own testimonies. It is to this film and the international literacy movement inspired by the Cuban experience that the title of our paper refers.

Since 2012, Australia has had its own literacy campaign with its own maestras. Yet unlike Cuba, Venezuela or Timor-Leste, the campaign in Australia has centred on low-literate Aboriginal adults. From its start in Wilcannia in New South Wales, the Aboriginal Adult Literacy campaign has recruited over 30 Aboriginal maestras to teach adults in their own communities to read and write in English. These Aboriginal maestras engage with other new staff and the national campaign leadership in a highly structured process of pre-service and on-site capacity building and leadership development. The preservice training involves induction into the mass literacy campaign model, its history and philosophy. Through this, the Australian maestras, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal begin to experience the solidarity that comes from becoming part of an international movement for social change.

Much has been said and written about the Aboriginal Adult literacy campaign (see Williamson & Boughton, 2020; Boughton & Williamson, 2019; Ratcliffe & Boughton, 2019; Wise, Harris, Nickson, Boughton, &

Beetson, 2018; Boughton & Durnan, 2014). However to date, the focus has been on understanding how the model works and its impacts on participating students and communities. Less attention has been paid to the impacts of the campaign on the staff, or maestras, and the legacy the campaign leaves in each community. Over several years of researching the workings and impacts of the campaign, a single phrase has passed the lips of campaign staff from Wilcannia in the far west of NSW to Toomelah in the east: 'it just opens you right up'. This paper is an account what this phrase means through the words of four maestras who have collaborated closely on the literacy campaign in north-western NSW: two Aboriginal women who were employed as local coordinators in their communities of Enngonia and Brewarrina and the two non-Aboriginal staff responsible for supporting them to deliver the campaign.

## Background and methodology

In March 2018, the co-authors met in Dubbo, NSW. The goals of the research were two-fold: first, to understand and document the effects the campaign has had on our lives and relationships; and second, to continue to develop our knowledge and capacity as popular educators through the research project itself. As an extension of the way in which the co-authors have worked together on the literacy campaign, this project draws strongly on the principles of popular education and the intimately linked methodology of participatory research. An explicit aim of participatory research is to empower communities and community-based researchers/participants through engaging in an equal and collaborative process of inquiry (Walter, 2009; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 2001).

Many have highlighted the appropriateness of participatory and narrative-based approaches to research within Aboriginal communities (Ober, 2017; Caxaj, 2015; Jackson-Barrett, Price, Stomski, & Walker, 2015; Barker, 2008). Through participatory and narrative-based approaches to research, the process of knowledge creation can shift from a top-down to bottom-up process. In this way we can build a more critical, coherent and collective account of the impacts of the literacy campaign on understanding the role of literacy in our own and each other's lives and communities.

The central question this study explores is 'how did the campaign contribute to our development as popular educators and leaders in both local communities and the literacy campaign more broadly'. The theme

of leadership emerged from the individual narrative-based interviews that one of the co-authors (Frances) conducted. The workshop which followed these preliminary interviews sought to construct new knowledge around how the campaign develops leadership using the popular education methodology of 'systematization' (Streck & Holiday, 2015); that is, a practice of collective knowledge production using:

- dialogue as a basic methodological principle to co-construct an account of how we see the world and what we value

- strategies to maximise participation through a structure of story, personal thinking and reflection time, yarning and deep listening

- recollections of the story of the campaign in each of our communities to make connections between ourselves and others, our past and present

- questions to help analyse the economic, social and cultural context of our lives and how these contribute to the issue of low literacy

- strategies for action on how to continue the work of the campaign through ongoing popular education and leadership

- theory to develop our thinking about our roles in our families, communities and wider Australian society.

As with the methodology adopted for the research, we felt it important to present our findings in a way which reflects the critical components of popular education and transformative learning. For this reason, we have developed this paper as a conversation, allowing dialogue to reveal not only our ideas but the way those ideas came to be. Writing as a dialogue also allows us to honour the grassroots intention of the literacy campaign by privileging the voices of the participants/co-authors. It also highlights the value of yarning, deep listening and two-way learning so crucial to respectful and constructive relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues (Buchanan, Collard, & Palmer, 2018).

### *The gate is open*

Deborah:    You know when you joined the Literacy for Life campaign I called you popular educators. You probably looked at me and thought what on earth is she talking about? So it's been a couple of years since the campaign finished in your communities. Do you see yourselves as popular educators now?

Tannia:    I'd like to think so. Someone said to me a while back "how do you feel about the Literacy for Life campaign leaving?" And I said, "but it hasn't – the Literacy for Life is still there. We own that". So we've got to keep it going. If people need to come and learn how to do something, I've got to acknowledge that person as soon as they walk through the door, "Do you need any help? Just yell out." Because sometimes our people feel excluded because they don't know enough about the land council or community working parties and how they work. All these different organisations; our mob are afraid of not knowing what really goes on there. So it's up to us to try and encourage them to come, even if it's to listen. Slowly it'll build someone. So I've got to still be that person I was when I was the [literacy campaign] coordinator. I've got to be that same person whether I'm in the community or whether I'm working on something else.

Mary:      I'll never forget going up to the Shire Council Chambers for an excursion with the students. We'd never stepped past the front counter. No one'd went beyond that, you know. So to see the students sit down in the council meeting room, a place that they knew was making decisions about us, about our community, I knew I couldn't stop. And even now the Literacy for Life is gone from Brewarrina, it doesn't stop there. You can continue to go on, to do more, you know.

Tannia:    Yeah, I guess the Yes, I Can! empowered me to keep going and stand up in front of community. When you deliver the lessons, that alone starts creating that leadership within you, and I guess you don't feel it at the start, but you do feel it at the end. It empowers you to do more and encourage others to keep going, inspire them to step up and not be afraid to speak out. Being a community member, being a better parent, but also showing leadership, showing people that we care.

Frances:   You know, what really struck me? The first time I met you, Tannia was when you were helping to start the campaign in Brewarrina. You kept saying, 'the gate is open' or 'it opened

me up' when we talked about the campaign. I knew 'the gate is open' is the first positive message the students hear in the lessons but I was surprised by how much that phrase meant to you. Well, it's taken me a few years of being in the classroom and reflecting on what I've learnt to finally understand what you were getting at. It's not just about opening the gate for someone, as in teaching them, but it's about opening yourself up as a learner too by being willing to walk through the gate with them. In other words, you can't open the gate for others if you don't go through that gate yourself. That's what I think a popular educator is.

Tannia:   Yeah, we've got to feel that too, that the gate is open. If we just tell the students that the gate is open to all these possibilities and we're not feeling it ourselves, then it means nothing.

Mary:   For me, from when I first started with the Literacy for Life as a coordinator for Brewarrina, every interview I've had or when I spoke about it with my people, it was always about empowerment.

Deborah:   Can I ask a question? Was there anything that actually happened with you being part of the literacy campaign that made you think, "I can do this"?

Tannia:   Yeah well like I said, standing up in front of the class. That was the hardest job to be able to deliver lessons to your own people. That alone builds confidence. And it wasn't only within the class. I think as a coordinator too I had to deal with other people within the community, like Council and all these other organisations. It was like peeling one layer at a time and opening up. I started to build that relationship right around from the class to the whole town. It was something I'd never done before, I was afraid of doing. So yeah, it empowered me to have that voice, that voice that was there but needed to come out. And the Yes, I Can! has done that for me.

Mary:   Yeah like Tannia was saying, that voice's always been there but just bringing it out, you know that's what the Literacy

for Life did. It was there with us all the time, but I don't know, there was something that stopped us. Was it us, was it ourselves? We knew that we could make changes, and changes was meant to come, but if we didn't voice our opinions then changes wouldn't happen.

Deborah:    So Mary, I recall the very early days of working in Brewarrina, we'd go to those community working party meetings and you'd sit there, quietly. And then I remember several months later going back and you wouldn't stop talking.

Mary:    Yes!

Deborah:    The thing that I remember most was you were disagreeing and I thought, "Mary, you're saying publicly you don't agree?" That was a big thing for me because I remember thinking that wouldn't have come easy to you.

Mary:    Yeah, I never spoke. I've seen that change from the campaign, you know, when something happens, I just can't shut my mouth now. When something's happened to my family or to my people, you know … I just have to speak out.

Deborah:    I remember Tannia when you did your first lesson I said, "you were just beautiful, you did such a wonderful job" because you did, and you turned around to me … you were cleaning the board, and you said "no one's ever told me that before".

Tannia:    Yes. And just in that alone like you know, when we get the feedback … like Deb what you're doing now and the way you and Frances see Mary and I through your eyes … I guess it's something we don't see ourselves. We doubt ourselves too much, that we can't do things but when you see us that way, it inspires us and makes us want to do more.

Frances:    I think that different perspective is key to the learning that takes place in the campaign. We all – the students, the local staff and the national staff start to see ourselves differently through each other's eyes. But in my case, seeing myself through your eyes forced me to question lots of things I thought I knew. It has only been from reflecting on my experiences through this project that I've realised that the world which made you and Mary who you are is the

same world that made Deborah and I who we are. They're not two different worlds. And yet, before I worked on the campaign, I'd only ever seen one side of that world. By inhabiting this other side, I've come to understand my own side in a different way. Does that make sense?

Tannia:     I always say what I've learned I've learned most from Deborah, a non-indigenous woman, a person who come into my community. Deborah was the only one who I can really say has built me as a person, and the person I've become.

Mary:       We have strong women in Bre who seen that I had something there. They knew that I can move forward and move on, but how? And it wasn't until the Literacy for Life and for Deborah to come.

Tannia:     They saw something in you that you don't see as an individual.

Deborah:    You think that you learn things from me, but it's definitely two ways. I'm very nervous when I go into your place. I remember driving into that community and these three blokes were at the land council at their ute, hanging off the ute and wouldn't turn around and say hello. I thought, "How do I do this? I don't think they actually want me here". So that was really ... difficult. But my great mentor, Jack Beetson has always said to me, "Just go in there and listen, just listen and you'll be all right". I'm sure I didn't always listen, I know that, but I really tried to listen and I have learnt so much by working with you.

Frances:    I think I learned to listen in a different way. By closely watching you all and listening to what wasn't being said as much as what was, I started to see what literacy really means for our students, what it looks like, how they use it. Only when I began to understand what the world means to the people in Brewarrina could I start speaking their language. And only then could I teach them.

Tannia:     I think listening is really important, because if you're a leader and you don't listen, then you're doing it for you. You're not doing it for the community.

Deborah:    I want pick that up just for a minute and see what you think. One of the reasons why the Literacy Campaign is so

essential is because otherwise it falls to the literate to be the representative of the people. But the problem with that is that unless the people behind you have had a voice in what you're saying as that leader, then you're not being a leader.

Tannia: I agree because if you look back and no one's following, you only benefit yourself. But I don't want to be a leader, I just want to be me. But I want to voice what's real, what's going on and get over some of these barriers within the community. And I want to encourage other people to be themselves and to be able to come out of their shell. They want to say things but they're too afraid to.

Deborah: So leadership Tannia, if I'm hearing you correctly, would be that you're empowered to take that voice to speak up. But as a leader, you have to empower. So it's that circular thing; you can only be a leader if you're empowering the next person to step up, then you're all stepping up.

Tannia: Yeah, that's it. But having the responsibility that comes with it, people having that expectation of you, that's the part that I don't like. I think that too often there's the expectation that we need to deliver for everybody else, but at the same time we've got to share love and take care of our own families.

Mary: Yeah, it's hard and I've learnt that with leadership you can't give up.

Tannia: It's like we all have a responsibility in the community, and everyone's gotta find their place in community. We all should be doing it together. And I don't believe that we've gotta wait 'til someone hands us the baton to step up. I believe that we can step up now 'cause we can all create the things that are needed but unless the people are with us nothing will work.

Mary: Yeah. We all walk this walk together, you know?

Frances: And you know that understanding took a while to crystallise for me. Just like with 'the gate is open', the campaign slogan we use, 'Literacy: everyone's right; everyone's business'? Well I understood that but only in the abstract. That whole idea of solidarity which the campaign

rests on was something I thought I understood but it wasn't until I had spent a lot of time not only  living and working alongside you but walking through the gate together that I realised something important: Literacy and the change we're seeking is not going to happen unless everyone learns through the process of the campaign – not just the low literate people. And not just the facilitators and community people but the managers as well. Everybody has to develop new knowledge as a result of the campaign.

Tannia:    But sometimes it does take one person to step up and voice things out for change. Say for example, if domestic violence is an issue in community, it's voicing it out, showin' that it is a problem within the community. Not pointing the fingers, but it's our problem. Because until it's said out loud, we can't see it reflected it back at us.

Deborah:   When you said that I thought, yeah exactly, it's a collective problem. A leader has to show that housing or drugs, or whatever it is, it's our problem. It's like literacy. The literacy is a problem for us. It's not a problem for the person who can't read or write. And it's only when we collectively own the problems of the community, of the family, of the class, do we actually change anything.

Tannia:    Yeah, and that's why it needs to be voiced out and then reflected back. And when you voice it, you find out you're not the only one having the problem.

Deborah:   Exactly. It's like that moment in the campaign classes where the students suddenly realise they're not the only people in the world that can't read and write. Do you remember when we do that lesson about how many people all over the world aren't able to read and write?

Mary:      When I started with Literacy for Life, we said it had to be at a grassroots level, had to reach out to the people. And one the things we've always talked about was equality. How do we show the grassroots people that they're just as good as anyone else? Well we do it together; we started the class together, so we're going to finish it together, you know?

Deborah: You've got to go out and make sure everyone shows up. Because if they're not showing up, all you're doing is benefiting you, the literate. That's what the literacy campaign is all about.

Tannia: Yeah, and that comes back to building that trust and relationship so you can really see where your mob are coming from, how their lives are and the challenges that they face just within community or home.

Mary: Listening from a grassroots level. We need to listen to our people. That's where the trust come from.

Tannia: The trust. And respect. It comes back to the core values. When we're doing the core values in the very first lesson and we ask the students to say how they want the class to be, usually the number one thing they'll say is respect. But how often do we actually practice what we speak? We say respect, but do we give it? If you're going to put respect up there on the board, you've got to really live it. And for me that means being able to listen when people disagree with you. Because the frustration has built up over the years that no one is listening to them so they're going to keep coming angry.

Deborah: And I think we were always clear that it isn't our role in the literacy campaign to solve the conflicts, especially as they're very deep, sometimes going back generations. But, what we have done is said, "Okay, here's a space. We can create a space inside here to start the dialogue, to start the rebuilding, and to let that fabric strengthen." So, I think we created that sense that you don't have to solve everything in order to move forward.

Frances: I agree, the whole campaign from the very first lesson to the end of post literacy is about supporting people to read the world a bit better so they can come to their own realisation about how to solve problems. That critical literacy.

Mary: Yeah, I've seen it within the lessons themselves, especially the one with the story about the old fella who was being neglected. When we started to get into the writing, it took the students back to their elders. They thought "Oh, how do we respect our elders? What do we do for our elders?"

Deborah:    Well you know that I really believe in critical reflection. I
            think it's a really powerful tool. You know how we used to
            ask as part of the critical reflection each day, "How are you
            feeling about the class, the students, the campaign?" But
            the crunch was really, "What can you be doing better?" Do
            you think that critical reflection, just for you personally, has
            helped? Do you think it's a useful process?

Tannia:     I think it's a very useful tool. It's definitely helped me
            at home and in the land council as well like when we're
            having board meetings; it helps doing all that stuff too.
            And you know, with the [community] garden, we have that
            conversation all the time. "What's working, what's lacking,
            and what else could we be doing?" So, we've had to put our
            heads together. We just couldn't get many people in the
            garden, so it was like, "What do we need to do?" Making
            sure that everyone has their say, and making sure it's going
            around the table, so people are then opening up.

Mary:       It's giving them the option to identify better things, and
            then we're focussing on tackling some of those barriers,
            and focussing on the good stuff that we can do. So it gets
            their mind off all that toxic other stuff and it helps them to
            develop their community as well, and be a part of it.

Tannia:     But how do you know if you don't know? That's a question
            in one of the lessons and I love the fact that it's raised
            because it's not until you know something that you're more
            likely to speak up. If I look back at myself throughout the
            years, even before the Literacy for Life come, if I had known
            the things back then that I know today, I would've been
            speaking up I reckon back then.

Frances:    I'm just thinking of what you're saying. When we did
            post-literacy, the aim was to expose people to a lot of
            different services, different bits of knowledge, learning
            their rights, talking about history, finding out who their
            family is. Well as you know, part of why we do all of that in
            addition to continuing to practice literacy is to give people
            much more confidence to participate outside the safety
            of the classroom. We're trying to go through another gate

together. So how do we continue to do that once the classes have finished?

Tannia:     It's really hard if community don't come to the meetings. All we can do is try to share it when we see them, you know, word of mouth.

Mary:       I still go to the community working party meetings and I go to the AECG [Aboriginal Education Consultative Group]. And you want to see your old students there, you want to see them stepping up.

Tannia:     We have to share information. I believe it's our responsibility to keep the chain going, where you're passing on that information. Because it's not only for them; it's going to help their family and our children.

Mary:       Yeah, if we're fighting for the injustice, it doesn't really help no one except yourself if you're not sharing knowledge and information. I think a leader is sharing the information and listening to people. If you're not doing that, you're ain't one.

Tannia:     And when people start to see that you're speaking about things that they've told you, that you're actually listening and bein' the voice for the people who haven't yet found their voice, they start to believe in you.

Mary:       Yeah, it shows the students we believe in them, we care about them.

Deborah:    What you just said Mary reminds me of what we always used to say: if you can't love your students then you won't be able to teach them. Really deeply, believing in the humanity of each student, which is what you did in bucket loads, both of you. And you communicated that compassion so that each and every one of your students thought, "You know, I'm really special".

Frances:    For sure, you can't build literacy unless you've built a relationship and that takes lots of time and patience. It's a slow process.

## Discussion

Previous studies have documented the personal transformation that many low literate adults undergo when they engage in literacy campaigns (Boughton & Williamson, 2019; Stromquist, 2009; Prins, 2008). In particular, research has captured how improved literacy leads to a greater willingness and capacity to speak out, or what is often referred to as 'voice'. The dialogue above reveals how we, as teachers and trainers of the campaign, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal have experienced a similar trajectory of transformation. Like the Cuban maestras who came before us, we all feel we have learned far more than we could ever teach (Kozol, 2019).

Local staff Tannia and Mary identify specific transformative experiences within the campaign such as standing in front of community members, including elders, to deliver literacy lessons; liaising with service providers; and accompanying students to places they have not previously felt confident to enter such as the local government offices. Tannia likens the effect of these experiences to 'peeling one layer at a time and you're opening up and your confidence is building'. Increased confidence and self-belief are the first transformations we see in students involved in the campaign (Williamson & Boughton 2020; Boughton & Williamson, 2019) so it is not surprising that it also emerges as one of the most significant and immediate impacts on staff. One of the consequences of increased confidence is having the courage to speak up more. This is particularly true for Mary, who throughout the campaign transformed from silent observer to vocal participant. However, as Mary and Tannia both point out, they have

always had the ability and opportunity to speak out on issues that matter to them, but 'there was something that stopped us'. A main catalyst for the reclaiming of voice is the close working relationship that formed between us, as local and national staff.

This relationship developed as a result of close collaboration over the duration of the campaign. Mary and Tannia undertook structured in-service training with Deborah and Frances in their capacity as LFLF professional staff. The training began with two weeks on-site training, learning about the three-phase structure of the Yes, I Can! model and the theory of popular education. Mary and Tannia as well as the local facilitators in turn taught the national staff about their community,

including how low English literacy is experienced and understood in their context. Collectively, we, worked out how to undertake community mobilisation and socialisation work (Phase One of the campaign). A similar three week training program was held prior to the start of the basic literacy lessons (Phase Two) and  four days training  before Post Literacy (Phase Three). During each phase, this 'pre-service' training and preparation was supplemented with daily and weekly sessions, conducted on-site or by teleconference, doing action–reflection and lesson preparation.

In particular, it was this structured practice of critical reflection in which we critically reflected as individuals and as a group on our own culture and practice in doing our job, shared ideas, problem-solved, devised actions and together learnt how to improve our own practice. Tannia explains the impact of this reflective practice:

> *When we get the feedback ... and the way you [Deborah] and Frances see Mary and I through your eyes ... I guess it's something we don't see ourselves. We doubt ourselves too much, that we can't do things that we can do but when you see us that way, it inspires us and makes us want to do more.*

A corollary of this newfound confidence and voice is the willingness to challenge the status quo. For Tannia, this involved renegotiating personal relationships, as she describes:

> *I think we need to take our rightful place in relationships, in community as women. In your relationship there's problems going on or domestic violence but we can step up and say "I'm not going to do that anymore; this is how it's going to be". And as a community member, it's starting to get involved in meetings, in schools, in community gatherings, just to take our rightful place and start speaking up and having our say so we can encourage others to also do that and then be able to empower other women so they can take that leadership.*

The above extract clearly shows the cascading impact of personal transformation that the local *maestras* have undergone as a result of teaching and learning in the literacy campaign.  By undergoing transformation in their own lives, Mary and Tannia have been empowered to address inequalities in their own relationships and then to more actively engage and advocate at the community level.

We argue that these changes are the result of the new identities, understandings and knowledge we have formed through the dialectical relationship that is at the heart of the literacy campaign model. This relationship is part of what Giroux (1988, p. 73) characterises as a radical theory of literacy and voice, which he argues:

> *... must remain attentive to Freire's claim that all critical educators are also learners. This is not merely a matter of learning about what students might know; it is more importantly a matter of learning how to renew a form of self-knowledge through an understanding of the community and culture that actively constitute the lives of one's students [our emphasis] ...*

This is far more than walking in each other's shoes; in becoming critical educators, all four of us have engaged in a process of questioning our own self-knowledge. This process is a direct result of repositioning ourselves as learners and teachers simultaneously. In the literacy classes that form part of the Aboriginal adult literacy campaign, each lesson starts with a positive message, and the first message in the first lesson is simply 'the gate is open'. Each time someone with low English literacy walks with their local facilitator or coordinator and their campaign adviser through that gate, each of us learns something new; and as these learnings come together, we are building our joint understanding, our collective consciousness of the reality we share. That reality is the product of a history of unequal educational provision, a history through which some people have become educated while others have not. We have always been part of that same reality, but none of us could see it from the other's standpoint. Our solidarity, if it existed at all, was abstract, not the concrete solidarity which emerges from a jointly lived experience. The emergence of this new solidarity consciousness is what Freire calls conscientisation (Freire, 1970).

Early in the training of new maestras, we all watch Catherine Murphy's *Maestra*. Despite the audio being in Cuban Spanish and despite the fact that we must read subtitles to follow the story, we see and feel the story in new ways. This is because by watching the film together, we are also seeing it from each other's world view. Local facilitators and coordinators like Mary and Tannia see a possibility for themselves and their communities, the possibility that their communities, like the Cuban people of 1961, can learn to read and write and can become people who

will be able to speak and be heard by those who are educated. The key message is that it can be done, because others have done it before them.

The practice as it is portrayed on the screen also produces a new consciousness for the non-Aboriginal staff. Those who are more educated and literate must also go through that 'open gate', just as much as the local staff and students do. None of us can ask another – student, teacher, trainer or community member to go through, or help another through, unless we are prepared to go through it ourselves. What lies on the other side of that gate is not something any of us already know. It is, in fact, a new knowledge, a new consciousness, a new understanding of the world which we inhabit together; and of what we can do and must do to change it. We view the insights gained through our close collaboration in the literacy campaign as "movement knowledge", or the knowledge a social movement collectively constructs in the process of action (Cox & Fominyana, 2009).

This movement knowledge is consolidated and sustained by the campaign model. The curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation and research – all components of the campaign model that both local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff are actively involved and trained in – draw on the techniques of critical reflection, dialogue, active participation and story-telling. It is these components that are intrinsic to the literacy campaign as an expression of Freirean-inspired popular education and therefore intrinsic to social transformation. And yet the literacy campaign is more than a model; it is also a philosophy and a practice. Its core values are compassion, solidarity and the right to learn, to speak and to be heard. In order for the campaign impacts at the individual and community level to be sustained and indeed for the campaign as a movement to be sustainable, we argue that these values must be embodied by campaign staff.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented one of the most significant findings of a longitudinal impact study of the Aboriginal adult literacy campaign of which this study is one part; that is, that the transformation that has been shown to occur in graduates of the campaign also takes place in the staff. Further, we argue that the impacts on students and communities are the direct result of the dialectical relationship between not only the local staff and their students but also between the local staff and

the national staff. This relationship positions learners as teachers and teachers as learners. The new knowledge and embodiment of the values of compassion, solidarity and rights are acquired through the pedagogic relationship between teacher and student, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, action and reflection.

Moreover, what we have understood and are embodying is that leadership is a pedagogical act. That is, at its core, leadership is about teaching people how to take more control over their lives and encouraging them to have the confidence to take steps towards an alternate life that they envisage for themselves. Further, through our shared experiences in the campaign and this action–reflection project, we have come to understand that the campaign and its objectives are only sustainable to the extent that the relationships we have developed are. In this way, we, along with the students of the campaign, their families and the communities as a whole have taken the first step in building a movement for transformation.

The social relations of western NSW Aboriginal people with the wider society of which they are a part is characterised by massive inequality. The Aboriginal Adult Literacy campaign takes a few small steps towards bridging the gap between the more educated and the less educated. The objective of the literacy campaign is not the low literate gaining literacy to move closer to the literate but rather both sides reaching toward the other so that the conditions – the lack of shared knowledge, understanding and solidarity – that produced the gap between literate and non-literate no longer exists. Through the opportunity the literacy campaign creates and the reflective dialogue captured in this paper, new possibilities emerge for us all; the possibility of working together in ways we might never otherwise have done and the co-creation of new knowledge, new skills and new perspectives.

## Acknowledgements

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# How positive is positive psychology in an enabling program?

## Investigating the transformative power of positive psychology for enabling students

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*Positive psychology is one of the newest branches of psychology to emerge, and there is a growing research base of scientific study to validate the significance of this psychological approach in people's lives. This research investigates a unit of study that was developed for students entering university through an enabling program in order to introduce them to proactive solutions and strategies to develop their strengths, capacity and virtues rather than focusing on past weaknesses. Currently, only anecdotal evidence exists indicating that this unit is having a positive impact on the students who have completed the unit. As this research wants to identify the effectiveness of this unit in facilitating change in a student's life, the core tenets of Appreciative Inquiry guided the overall process of formulating the research approach and designing the questions for the survey. Past students became the change actors and their voice and experiences became the data.*

**Keywords:** *positive psychology, positive learning, enabling programs, tertiary access, first year, transitioning to university, mature age students, support networks*

## Introduction

Enabling programs within the Australian higher education system focus on developing student's study skills and applicable knowledge to assist with the transition into a degree-based program. However, for many of the students who enter university via an enabling pathway, they come with disparate expectations of their ability to undertake such a program and often have to counter-balance low self-confidence alongside a sense of uncertainty and fear. Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS) offers a unique and innovative unit which introduces students to Positive Psychology through the unit Positive Learning for University (PLU). The underlying core purpose when designing this unit was to improve student's psychological well-being which can often inhibit learning if allowed to continue in the negative. Therefore, PLU was specifically designed to take students on a personal learning journey where they learn about the theories that underpin positive psychology and are encouraged to apply these concepts to their role as students and further into their personal life. For the students who undertake this unit, the goal is to develop their psychological wellbeing, which may impact positively on their personal, social and academic performance and assist them to perform at optimal capacity in their role as a tertiary student. The unit looks at proactive solutions and strategies which assist in breaking the mould of the victim paradigm and guides students with examples, strategies and concepts that can be implemented into their lives in order to make their educational journey more meaningful. The concepts taught should assist students to gain valuable skills that are transferable to life and thereby, may contribute to significant improvement in their mental health, well-being and self-efficacy whilst studying. Since 2012, PLU has undertaken a few changes due, in part, to student feedback, review of curriculum and keeping abreast with the growth of research in this field. This paper reports on the findings from a research project that strove to determine whether the unit was effective in its aims of increasing student's psychological wellbeing and mitigating distress.

## Literature review

## Background

The advent of positive psychology can be traced back to Martin E.P. Seligman's 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). His emergence into this position was instigated through a couple of serendipitous events that made him question whether the current state of psychology had in fact neglected its core mission of curing mental illness, helping people to lead more productive and fulfilling lives, and identifying and nurturing high talent (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006). As the leading advocate of positive psychology, Seligman united the efforts of many leading psychologists who in turn have become the key players in this field (see Ben-Shahar, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Fredrickson, 2010; Leaf, 2009; Leimon & McMahon, 2009; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 1992; 1999; 2005; Sharp, 2007; Weiton, 2005). The development of positive psychology (PP) has been clearly shaped by these pioneers in this field and it is through their deliberate sociological scientific approach that has validated PP through bringing in major research funding, providing research leadership, opening training institutes and attracting other researchers into the field (Linley et al., 2006).

Positive psychology provides an interpretative lens and different worldview to that of traditional psychology. It could be said to shine the light of 'scientific inquiry into previously dark and neglected corners' (Linley et al., 2006). Although the terms positive and negative are used to describe the two poles of the human condition, it is not meant to imply or support the dichotomisation of human experience into either positive or negative. Instead, it is meant to infer the state of being along a continuum with the aim of living 'above the line'. Sheldon and King (2001, p. 216) define PP as 'the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues'. Positive psychology revisits the 'average person' with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving … positive psychology is simply psychology'. A common perception suggested by Held (2004) and Lazarus (2003) is that PP emphasises the positive at the expense of the negative. With traditional psychology's focus on mental illness, dysfunctional conditions and disorder of the functioning brain, this is an easy juxtaposition to

make given that the early emphasis of PP was 'independent' from the traditional viewpoint (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). However, PP's antithesis is that psychologists should also focus on well-being, health and optimal functioning with the futuristic view that this become synonymous within the field of psychology. Thus, when viewed at the meta-psychological level, PP is an attempt to redress what is perceived as an imbalance in the focus of research attention and practice objectives in psychology (Linley et al., 2006).

At a meta-physical level, positive psychology aims to readdress the imbalance of current practices by calling to attention the positive aspects of human functioning and counterbalancing the negative implications. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) consider that PP is viewed at two different levels: the individual level is about positive individual traits which include, but are not limited to, capacity to love, courage, interpersonal skill, perseverance, future mindedness, wisdom, hope and optimism. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues that move individuals toward better citizenship, responsibility, altruism, tolerance and work ethic (2000, p. 5). At a pragmatic level, it is about understanding the wellsprings (foundations of well-being and early experiences that develop strengths and virtues); processes (factors that contribute to optimal functioning and those that prevent it); and mechanisms (extra psychological factors that facilitate or impede implementation) that lead to desirable outcomes (states of mind that lead to a fulfilling life) and allow for the interactions between them (Linley et al., 2006. p. 8). PP should seek to understand the factors that facilitate optimal functioning as much as those that prevent. The mechanisms of interest to PP can be defined as those extra-psychological factors that facilitate, or impede, the pursuit of a good life. For example, these mechanisms may be personal and social relationships, working environments, organisations and institutions, communities, and the broader social, cultural, political and economic systems in which our lives are inextricably embedded (Linley et al., 2006. p. 7).

## Enabling students

Enabling education has a respected position within Australian universities whereby the primary objective is to provide an alternate pathway into higher education for students from minority and under-represented groups within society. The cultural capital required for thriving in

university suggests that some students, such as enabling students, who are often the first-generation in their family to attempt university, may not have an exemplar or role model to follow, nor may they fully appreciate what it takes to succeed in this foreign environment (Pismeny, 2016). Klinger and Tranter (2009) suggest that students who enter via an enabling pathway may present with family and employment responsibilities; low academic confidence levels; socio-cultural displacement and even lower English language proficiency. Bourdieu refers to habitus as the physical embodiment of cultural capital where students recognise the ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that have been developed through life experiences (Power, 1999). Enabling programs acknowledge a student's habitus and scaffold the skillset and knowledge acquisition required for transition into university through engaging students and helping them to flourish in this new environment. Schreiner (2010a) suggests that the five factors of thriving include positive perspective, engaged learning, academic determination, social connectedness and diverse citizenship. He has labelled these five features into three categories being academic thriving, intrapersonal thriving and interpersonal thriving. Schreiner (2010a) highlights the necessity for a paradigm shift where universities change from a failure prevention model, to a success promotion model. Pismeny (2016) suggests that developing a healthy attitude about oneself will benefit the learning process and, in turn, enable a change of perspective helping them to proactively cope better (Carver, Scheier, Miller, & Fulford, 2009; Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2006; Schreiner, 2010a), be more optimistic about their study (Carver et al., 2009) and employ a long-term view when situations arise (Schreiner, 2010b). Therefore, it is hoped that by exposing students to PP concepts and strategies through PLU, the students' enrolled will have an opportunity to broaden their worldview, change ingrained mindsets, and identify personal strengths, capacity and virtues (James & Seary, 2018). In turn, these characteristics are transferrable to life, and it is hoped, they will find improvement in their mental health, well-being and self-efficacy.

## Methodology

The core tenets of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as discussed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) guided the overall process of formulating the research approach and designing the questions for the survey. AI is an evaluative tool that assists in facilitating positive change; its core

approach engages change actors in defining positive change (Harrison & Hasan, 2013). As this research wanted to identify the effectiveness of PLU in facilitating change in a student's life, past students became the change actors and their voice and experience became the data. The ideology behind this is identifying the 'positive core' of the past experiences in order to consider what worked well and what requires further development. In turn, investigating what elements were common to the moments of greatest success and fulfilment felt by the students.

## Research design

An email to participate in this study was sent to 168 students who had achieved the minimum of a Pass grade for the Positive Learning for University (PLU) unit between Term 1, 2012 and Term 3, 2016. A link to a survey via Survey Monkey was included in the initial email with a consent form and information sheet that outlined the aims, purpose and risks involved by participating in the study.

The survey consisted of 14 questions. The first five questions related to the demographics (age, gender) of the student group and asked what their passing grade was at the end of their term of study. The following question asked them to rank the ten modules from one to ten as to which concepts they felt they gained the most benefit in their own lives. Following this, the students were asked opened ended questions relating to their experience in PLU. The first six questions related to their own experience of the unit and the concepts that had the most impact on them personally. In addition, they were asked to share personal stories of success that can be attributed to the concepts learnt, a single word to describe the impact the unit had on them, positive experiences and any epiphanies that may have resulted from the unit. The last section of questions related to how the concepts may have relevance to their community and further into their personal lives. They were asked to suggest some innovative ideas that could be introduced to help students apply the concepts to their lives.

## Limitation of the research design

As this research was seeking to hear from the voice of the student and their reflection of past experiences, it is acknowledged that the findings are subjective and relate solely to each student's personal perceptions around their experience undertaking this unit of study. Another

limitation was the total sample number of qualitative responses (n=18) as some respondents (n=7) did not share their responses in the open-ended questions. Therefore, we recognise this may be regarded as a limitation, but within the scope of a highly qualitative and reflective research approach, the findings contain rich data that reflect each student's perceptions and perspectives around their personal lived experience of how the concepts taught in this unit impacted their lives.

## Analysis

The open-ended responses were scrutinised and the analytical framework of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied as it allows the data to guide the findings. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach was used whereby the data from Survey Monkey was downloaded and the responses were reviewed a few times to get a deeper appreciation for what was being shared. Then the responses were coded and descriptions written to inform the context behind the codes until finally themes were revealed and correlated, then written into findings.

## Participants

Twenty-five students responded (return rate of 15.47%). Eight of these respondents did not answer any of the questions other than grade achieved and so were not included in the final analysis, leaving a total sample group of 18. Students ranged in age from 18 to over 56 with the majority being in either the 26–40 or 41–55 age range (see Table 1). Fifteen of the final survey respondents were female, two males and one respondent who did not denote their gender (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Age groupings of respondents Age / Gender Breakdown**

|  |  | Male | Female | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18–25 age range | 2 |  | 2 |  |
| 26–40 age range | 8 | 1 | 7 |  |
| 41–55 age range | 7 | 1 | 5 | 1 |
| 56+ age range | 1 |  | 1 |  |
| did not answer | 8 |  |  |  |

## Findings

Students were asked to rate the modules based on how useful the concepts were to them in their own lives (1 (not useful) to 10 (very useful) on a forced choice 10-point scale. These rankings were then averaged to identify the units that students found most useful to them. Module 2 – Positive meaning was rated the most useful (with an average score of 6.5) and the module deemed least useful was Module 3 – Positive health (4.4) (see Figure 1).
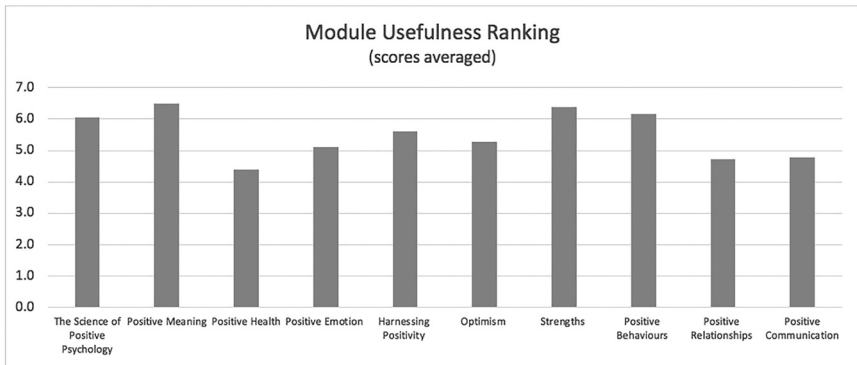


**Figure 1: Usefulness of module in student's lives**

When looking at the two age groupings with the largest number of respondents, 26 to 40 years old (n=8) and 41 to 55 (n=7), there was a marked difference between the modules they saw as being most useful in their lives and that which they saw as least useful. The younger group were most drawn to the module on Positive Meaning and least drawn to Positive Communication. The older group felt that the module on Strengths was most valuable but were not so enamoured with the module on Positive Health (see Figure 2 and Appendix A for descriptors of modules).
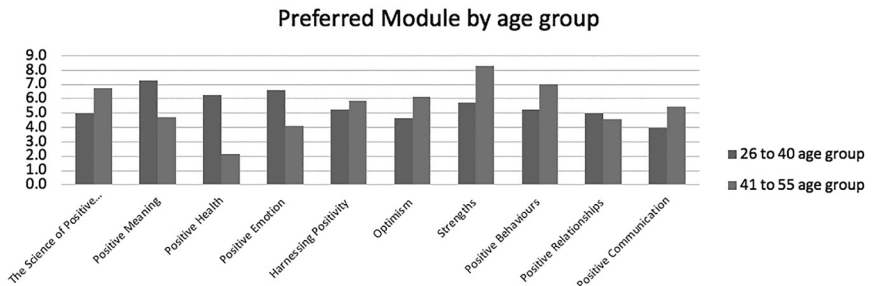


**Figure 2: Comparison between age groups**

The average scores when including the other two age groupings (18 to 25 and 56+) showed a skewness in the data. When these two groups were included, Positive Meaning and Positive Behaviours were deemed to be the most useful modules and Positive Emotion was seen to be the least useful (see Figure 3).
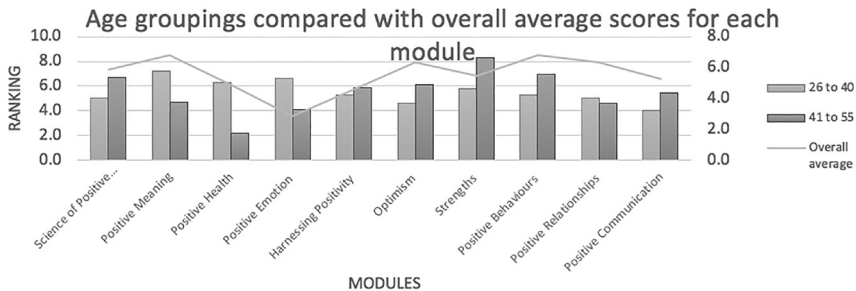


**Figure 3: Age grouping with comparison of overall mean for each module**

## Most valued concept

Students were asked to qualify their reason for choosing the module they found most valuable. These qualitative responses were themed in order to identify whether it was the concepts shared in the modules or particular aspects that they valued. The analysis identified that the largest response area was around 'thinking processes', which does not align to one specific module but has links to a number of modules that develop understanding around the value of both positive and negative thinking. One student shared 'I have gained clarity and understanding on why and how people make negative decisions … instead of reacting to people's negative decisions, I can react to why they are making them. Consequently, I am a lot calmer'. Another shared how a couple of earlier modules had a 'profound effect' on understanding how her thought patterns have affected her life in the past. She shared that the tips and strategies given were the beginning steps in a long journey of recovery. For another student, looking at her past thinking errors has 'helped me to stop sabotaging myself and to overcome negative thoughts, especially about my ability to believe in myself'. She gained a stronger sense of self and used affirmations to reinforce that she has what it takes to improve herself and her situation in life.

The strengths module had a strong response from all age groups, but limited qualitative responses to justify why. Whereas, the positive behaviours module that discussed the stress spiral and how to catch negative thinking had lower ratings but one student shared that 'as a person who suffers from clinically diagnosed anxiety, this module was the most helpful as it suggested way of coping with stress and encouraged me to think about resilience'. The communication module was also one of the lowest rated modules, but again a student found value in learning strategies around positive communication that they shared 'has allowed my experiences with the university to exceed beyond all my expectations'.

Health was a module that was highly valued by the younger generation compared to the older generation. For those that chose health, they shared that it helped them to realise that the choices they make in what they eat, their level of physical activity, and the amount they sleep, all play a role in achieving better clarity of mind. One student shared that not only did it assist with the decision to give up smoking, but the family now make better food choices and they participate in exercise together. She states that 'I am a better person when I'm healthy'. Another shared 'If I am healthy, I can live life to the fullest'.

## Personal stories of success

When asked to share personal stories of success that can be attributed to PLU, there were three themes that came through strongly:

1. Improved mental health

2. Personal physical health

3. Success with education

The strongest of these was the positive impact on mental health with students openly sharing how the unit helped improve their mental capacity. Students shared that by applying the strategies learnt, they were able to 'understand/mend/alleviate issues and mental challenges which has been carried for years'. Another shared 'I was cleared of my serious depression and negativity. I am now a positive and happy person that values my life and my image'. For another, it has given them clarity about the negative thinking process. This student has learnt how to deal better with a negative family member and has shared strategies with his

nephew and niece to help them as well. Further to this, some students entered the unit with negative feelings about the content, yet this next response demonstrates how impactful the unit can be on a student's mental health.

> There was much hesitation beginning PLU. I was at a stage in my life where not much was positive and it was difficult to relate to the material. Throughout the course the content taught me how to have a better mental perspective.

Personal physical health was another theme that was evident with comments like 'I have successfully lost 6 kgs since the unit ended', to 'it helped me to quit smoking, choose healthy options and try to be the best role model I could be … I sleep more …'. Another student had a slightly different slant as this one entered university with chronic back pain after major surgery and therefore began with a physical disability which impacted negatively on her mindset and nearly caused her to drop her studies. PLU was very relevant to her situation and provided her with confidence and motivation to continue her studies.

The final theme was around the educational capacity of students. One student shared that she entered university with the expectation of failing, yet she realised that 'I needed to change my attitude to suit my goals'. Another had hesitations about whether this subject would be beneficial in their life but this student shared how 'I have gained skills and understanding of people and the complex relationships that exist' and it has allowed her to step up into student leadership roles in the university.

## Epiphany – that 'ah-ha' moment

Students were asked if there was a single moment in time that they experienced an epiphany about either a deep-set belief system or a circumstance that had been positively impacted whilst undertaking PLU. This question achieved the largest number of responses with these falling into five key themes: deeper self-awareness; changes in personal beliefs, expanding worldviews; changes in beliefs around academic ability and social interactions.

## Deeper self-awareness

Changes in 'self' were the strongest two themes that were identified.

The first theme was around growth and confidence and higher levels of personal self-awareness. Students shared phrases like 'I realised I am enough. I am good enough. I am worthy of respect. I am a good person' and 'belief in myself' showed that their inner dialogue had themselves talking more positively into their own lives. Alongside this, clarity was also mentioned where students shared 'I did have moments of clarity in which I could see the right choices to make during the term, but it wasn't until the term had ended that I started to put them into action. I still think back to my lessons and try to instil it in my life'. Another shared around mood and the impact it can have on them and those around them. One student stated 'understanding the effect that thought has on mood and how this can affect one's whole life was one of my lightbulb moments'. Even though positivity and the effects of positive thinking was highly evident, one student shared how her life had been so negative that her epiphany was related to bringing positivity into her world. She shared 'I was deeply negative about life with a lot of issues and would feel depressed and dragged down. I now see myself in a different light and am a more positive and encouraging person that wants to be around others to help and support'.

### Changes in personal beliefs

The second part of the themes around 'self' related more to student's personal beliefs in and of themselves. In these responses, students shared around gaining a greater understanding about themselves; helping to clarify negative thoughts; boosting self-confidence; gaining a better outlook on life with attitudes that have changed and improved ability to handle stress. Some shared that they don't judge others or themselves as harshly as they had in the past, with another confidently stating that 'I can achieve anything I put my mind to'. For one student, the epiphany came in the realisation that they had the capacity to change. 'I had always thought that emotions and ideas of how to act could not be broken down. I now believe they can be and that has helped me self-improve in areas I used to struggle in'. Another shared that 'I gained an insight into my strengths and weaknesses as a person and my characteristics' and change came from that new knowledge. Some students shared that the changes they experienced were witnessed by friends and family. One shared 'others have seen a new me' and 'I have developed in my thinking and approach. Many have said they have

seen me grow and my thinking change." Another shared 'my family, friends and acquaintances noticed a change in my confidence, which was positive all around'.

### Expanding worldviews

For many enabling students that have not experienced critical thinking or research to expand their knowledge, their worldview can be quite narrow (Armstrong & James, 2018). Changes around broadening of their minds and being more open-minded came through consistently in the responses. One student shared 'my perception of others was changed – I was more open minded', whilst another shared 'I learnt a lot about the different aspects of the course which helped me to understand myself better and to view others from a different perspective'. Some found that this broadened worldview was evidenced by their family with one sharing 'my family said they noticed I was more accepting of changes and ideas'. Another angle presented was that of external influences. For one student, the epiphany was around accepting that she can view the world differently to others, 'I learned something about myself and my up-bringing … I realised it's ok to see the world differently from her. My way is neither right nor wrong, but it is my way of living to my beliefs'. Another's worldview and trust in people had improved; 'I realised that the world really is not such a bad place after all and not all people are horrible'. One student shared that stepping out of their comfort zone and completing the assessment where they had to perform random acts of kindness gave her a deeper appreciation for how she can impact the world around her. 'I enjoyed the assessment where I performed random acts of kindness. This gave me the realisation that doing something small for a stranger is not only nice for them but also makes you feel good as well.'

### Changes in beliefs around academic ability

Gaining belief in their capacity to study at university was another theme that was evident. One student who entered the STEPS course with low levels of confidence in her ability to handle academic study, found that 'focusing on my strengths and thinking positively helped change all that' and in-turn students gained increased confidence to learn. As one student states 'I study more now that I realise the benefits it has' whilst another shared 'I viewed study differently. Rather than being a chore,

I can see it as enlightenment'. As their confidence in their ability to study increased, this gave many students a renewed vigour to continue on with their studies to complete a bachelor degree. One shared that 'I became determined to complete a uni degree' whilst another shared that it gave them 'confidence to apply for an undergrad program'. Students shared how the unit assisted them to change mindsets. One shared that although confident within themselves to study academically, the unit helped them to overcome some of the more physical challenges and the mental challenges that came with that. Another shared, 'I have used my strengths to accentuate my study methods and know that any small success is still a big step for the future'. Finally, this thought from another student demonstrates the mindset change that was uncovered 'nothing is impossible, just challenging'.

### Social interactions

The final theme related to students' ability to positively interact with others on a more social level. One student shared 'my interactions with people were different, improved' whilst another shared 'socially, PLU made a positive impact. It strengthened some of my interpersonal skills, and helped me address some aspects of my personality that I've found socially challenging'. Ways of thinking about the role they play in relationships was highlighted where one stated 'I have become much better at accepting the differences in other people which has made interactions, social and academic, much easier'.

For some students, their epiphany was on understanding and appreciating the different types of relationships they were in and whether they had positive or negative effects. For some, it was about allowing others into their personal circle of influence where 'I made friends and allowed them into my life without expecting them to hurt me or abuse my friendship' whilst another shared that it 'allowed me to see the positive in my life and enabling me to build positivity into friendships'. Some looked deeper into the core of the relationships and shared 'I try and not make every situation about me and I listen more' where another understood that not all relationships are positive and this one shared 'I have given up toxic relationships'.

## Word cloud

Students were asked to share one word that represented what they gained from undertaking PLU. These single word descriptors were put into a word cloud as a visual representation of the impact that PLU had on their lives, personally, emotionally, mentally and academically. As one student shared 'the subject became one that I really enjoyed and have been grateful for participating in ever since'. These words share the positive impacts that the unit had on each of these students as each and every word expressed the essence of gratitude (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Word cloud of student's descriptors.**

## Discussion

There is value to be found in investigating the benefits of psychological wellness and personal well-being as it is an often overlooked construct in research. This is evident with research output on depression and anxiety exceeding the research output on subjective well-being extraneously. Although as Linley and Joseph (2004, p. 6) point out, there are encouraging trends with research into psychological well-being increasing since PP was introduced by Seligman in 1998. PP develops a person's strengths, capacity and virtues rather than solely focusing on weak areas. The PLU unit aims to see positive outcomes for each student that should be evident in their approach to study and further afield in their personal lives (Walters & James, 2020). The goal of this paper was to investigate whether this unit had positive impacts on the students' personal lives through improved mental capacity,

wellbeing and changed mindsets and whether this infiltrated into the world around them. The stories and examples expressed by the students overwhelmingly demonstrate the power that an optimistic mindset has through changing the neuro-pathways to think in a more positive manner, which in turn leads to better consequences both internally and externally on the world around them. Recent research by Walters and James (2020) found that students valued changes that improved their mindsets whereby refuting negative thought patterns and replacing them with a more optimistic outlook. These students firstly looked at how they could implement these strategies to employ change in their lives and this then infiltrated into the world around them. This was further supported by the research findings as students shared that they used this more optimistic outlook within their personal lives and in their student journey and they had a stronger sense of wellbeing and contentedness. There is an alignment between these findings and self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (1985) asserts that a person's values, motives and goals are inherently and positively associated with well-being. Sheldon and Elliot (1999) suggest that a positive sense of well-being results from psychological need satisfaction. Sagiv, Roccas and Hazan (2004) contend that a positive sense of well-being is more likely to occur when the person is in a place where they feel secure within a supportive environment so they can find out what their internal motives are and are encouraged to follow them.

When considering the role that positive emotions play on developing student's emotional wellbeing, Fredrickson (2001) shares that 'positive emotions serve as markers of flourishing, or optimal well-being'. Certainly, when students experience positive emotions such as joy, interest and contentment, these are moments that are not plagued by negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness and anger. Therefore, when reflecting on the positive experiences they had whilst undertaking a unit such as PLU, students are recalling those experiences and times that have brought positive change, in turn, promoting flourishing within their 'self' and the world around them. Fredrickson (2001, p. 1) claims that 'positive emotions are worth cultivating, not just as end states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved well-being over time'. Students entering into an enabling pathway prior to undergraduate degree, often enter with very low self-confidence in themselves and in their ability to handle academic study

(James, 2016). For many of these students, undertaking a unit such as PLU introduces them to a new way of thinking that may be foreign but in turn challenges them to reflect deeply on themselves whilst applying new concepts and strategies. The participants shared many stories of personal growth, changes in self-belief, improved confidence in their academic ability, and deep impacts on their external situations.

Friedrickson (2001) shared that positive emotions predicted greater enjoyment of social activities and therefore, may have a deeper impact on the way people interact with each other. This was evident in the research with students sharing that their social and interpersonal skills had improved and they were more likely to step out and trust other students. Erez and Isen (2003) theorised that feeling a 'positive affect' activates the dopaminergic system in brain areas responsible for executive control and flexible thinking. The affect infusion model (Forgas, 1995) proposes that when people are engaged in open, substantive, interpersonal interactions that engage a positive affect, they produce pro-social behaviour through engaging positive emotions, positive memories and more positive interactions and interpretations of social cues and communication. When considering the word cloud and the words that students used to describe their experience in PLU, the words demonstrate the value of the unit. Words such as empowering, enlightening, transforming, affirming, fulfilling all used to describe the impact that PLU had on their lives personally, emotionally, mentally and academically.

## Conclusion

The overall mission of positive psychology as a branch of psychology is to better understand and foster the factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this paper, the vision was to investigate the impact that PLU had on students who undertook the unit whilst enrolled in an enabling program and to see whether it increased student's psychological wellbeing and reduced instances of stress. Through drawing on the tenets of Appreciative Inquiry, the study was designed to review the positive effects that this unit had on the students personally, emotionally and more broadly into their circles of influence. What was evident is that this unit had a profound effect on the students' sense of self and this had a flow-on effect into their personal sphere of influence. As their belief in self grew, so did the way they viewed the world, and the way they believe they can be a

better influence on the world around them. Their improved psychological well-being impacted on their own personal sphere, extended into their social sphere and enhanced their educational journey as well.

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# Support matters: Predictors of intrinsic motivation in older learners in Taiwan

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*Previous research has made it clear that older learners are mainly learning for learning's sake. However, few studies have explored the intrinsic aspects of older learners' motivation in detail; also, the factors that influence their learning motivation remain under-researched and under-theorised. To address this gap, this survey-based quantitative study investigated the learning motivations of 816 older learners from an intrinsic-motivation viewpoint, and explored the predictors of these motivations, including institutional as well as personal factors. The results indicated that these older learners rated their intrinsic motivations highly (3.97/5 overall), and that such motivations could be differentiated into cognitive-oriented and social-oriented motivations. The most important predictors of intrinsic motivations for the respondents were institutional variables, especially teacher support and peer support. Importantly, institutional predictor variables were found to diminish the negative impacts of both self-reported poor health and age on these older adults' overall intrinsic motivation to learn. These findings imply that, in Taiwan, providing more teacher- and peer support is likely to increase the intrinsic motivation to learn for vulnerable older adults who are disadvantaged by health problems and old age.*

Life expectancy and the number of older adults are increasing dramatically across the globe, leading to widespread scholarly and policy support for lifelong learning as a way to increase these citizens' health and well-being (Sloane-Seale & Kops, 2007). An important case in point is Taiwan, whose population aged 65 and older is expected to increase at a faster rate than in any other country, foreshadowing demographic trajectories that will eventually occur elsewhere as well and prompting extensive Taiwanese government support for older adult learning (Council for Economic Planning and Development, 2011). A considerable body of research on the reasons older adults participate in learning activities has produced a consensus that their primary motivation is intrinsic (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Bynum & Seaman, 1993; Fujita-Starck, 1996; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Scala, 1996): that is, that they engage in these activities for their own sake rather than for any type of external reward. This type of motivation is reliably related to psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, few studies have explored the intrinsic aspects of older learners' motivation in detail (e.g. Stephan, Fouquereau, & Fernandez, 2008; Szücs, 2001). Moreover, recent studies have identified low motivation to learn among older adults who are in poor physical health, live in rural areas (Caro, Caspi, Burr, & Mutchler, 2009; Mott, 2008; Sloane-Seale & Kops, 2007), and/or are in extreme old age. To shed additional light on these issues, the present survey-based quantitative study explored the motivations of a sample of older Taiwanese learners, focussing on intrinsic motivation (IM) to investigate its predictors.

## Motivation to learn

The most widely accepted theoretical framework for explaining adult and older learners' motivation is the typology devised by Houle (1961), which much subsequent research has tested and refined. In Houle's original landmark study, he interviewed 22 adults (12 men and 10 women) to understand the reasons they participated in continuing education activities, and identified three types of adult learners based on their motivations: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. Those who were goal-oriented had clear objectives, usually

related to social advancements such as job promotion. Activity-oriented adult learners participated in learning activities primarily for social reasons, with any given class's stated purpose being of secondary importance. Lastly, learning-oriented adults saw learning as good in and of itself, and experienced education as a constant rather than a periodic activity. Houle suggested that these three types were not mutually exclusive, and that the best way to represent them visually would be as three circles overlapping at the edges. Despite its widespread acceptance, however, Houle's typology has not been without its critics. For example, Boshier and Collins (1983) tested it with a large database, and found it was too simplistic to aid in understanding adults' motivation to learn (see also Gordon, 1993).

Nevertheless, in the past half-century, many instruments and studies based on Houle's taxonomy have collectively provided a reasonably clear general picture of adult and older learners' motivation to participate in education. Notably, Boshier's (1971) Education Participation Scale (EPS), which elaborated on Houle's typology, has become standard in the field and been used in numerous studies that have provided detailed information about older learners (Brady & Fowler, 1988; Bynum & Seaman, 1993; Furst & Steele, 1986; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Scala, 1996; Tasy, 2007; Tsu, 2004; Wolfgang & Dowling, 1981). In most of these studies, older learners' primary motivations can be grouped into three main categories: cognitive interest, self-development, and social interaction. Arguably the most important of these is cognitive interest (or a desire to learn), whether in non-formal educational settings (Brady & Fowler, 1988; Bynum & Seaman, 1993; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Scala, 1996; Tasy, 2007; Tsu, 2004; Wei et al., 2006) or formal settings, albeit this is most apparent at the college level (Dellmann-Jemkins & Papalia-Finlay, 1983; Kingston, 1982a; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1982). Kim and Merriam (2004) investigated 189 students at a Learning in Retirement institute and found that cognitive interest appeared to be the strongest motivator for learning, followed by social contact. In the specific case of southern Taiwan, Hsieh (2016) investigated 412 adult learners aged 65 and over and the results also revealed cognitive interest as their primary motivation for learning.

Some researchers have argued that personal growth and satisfaction should be among older adults' primary motivations for learning. The

terms used for sub-components of this motivational category have included enrichment, enjoyment, sense of accomplishment, and self-esteem (Furst & Steele, 1986; Little, 1995; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Pritchard, 1979; Steele, 1984). Additional studies have found that older adults tend to choose personal interest courses over other types of adult education activities, and to value learning as a form of self-development (American Council for Education, 2007). Scala (1996) suggested that cognitive interest and personal growth/satisfaction both represent IM, on the grounds that they 'lie within the act of learning itself, or are so closely related to it that the process of learning appears to be the goal' (Kingston, 1982b, p. 45).

Finally, some studies have focussed on the importance of social contact or other social interaction to older adults' learning motivation (Chen, 2004; Chiu, 1987; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Spouse, 1981), though Wolfgang and Dowling (1981) found that social contact motivated older students to a lesser degree than younger ones.

One important theme that has emerged from these studies is that older learners' motivation tends to be intrinsic, or as Houle's typology would categorise it, learning-oriented. However, as Boshier and Collins (1983) noted, Houle's typology is too simplistic to explain adult learners' motivation; perhaps for this reason, deep explorations of the learning-oriented motivation of older learners have been rare. Rather, most existing studies focus on older learners' reasons for participating in education, without giving due consideration to the reasons underlying motivational forces.

In short, the current literature suggests that older adults' motivation to learn is primarily intrinsic, especially in regard to cognitive interest/mental stimulation and self-development, though social contact may also play an important role. As such, a more detailed framework of motivational forces is needed to gain a fuller understanding of the intrinsic aspects of these learners' motivation to learn.

## IM and a conceptual framework

One popular approach in investigating learners' motivations is to determine whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic. According to Deci (1975), IM refers to engaging in an activity for its own sake, and/or the pleasure and satisfaction derived from such participation;

extrinsic motivation refers to a broad array of behaviours in which activities are engaged in not for reasons that are inherent in them but for instrumental reasons. Based on existing findings that older adults' learning motivation is an intrinsic tendency, IM theory was identified as the general framework to guide the present study. IM is a common measure of traditional learners' motivation. Specifically, the IM theory of Vallerand et al. (1989) was utilised because of its focus on cognitive-oriented motivations, which were found to be a primary motivation for older learners in previous studies. Vallerand et al. proposed a tripartite taxonomy of IM: IM to know, IM to accomplish things, and IM to experience stimulation. 'IM to know' was defined as engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction experienced while learning, and exploring or trying to understand something new; 'IM to accomplish' as deriving pleasure and satisfaction from trying to be better and reach new personal objectives; and 'IM to experience stimulation' as seeking stimulating sensations that arise from carrying out an activity (Vallerand et al.,1992). However, few researchers have adopted this perspective in exploring older learners' motivation. One noteworthy exception was Stephan, Fouquereau, and Fernandez's (2008) study of active retirees, which confirmed that participants' IM to know, to accomplish, and to experience stimulation were all higher than their extrinsic motivations.

However, Vallerand et al.'s (1989) work lacks one aspect of social interaction that is a vital part of older adult learners' motivation. For this reason, our study supplements Vallerand et al. with socioselective theory (SST) (Carstensen, 1991), which highlights the importance of social-emotional motivation of older adults and viewed it as their intrinsic motivations. According to Carstensen (1991), older adults' perception of time is present-oriented; therefore, there is increased salience of emotional motivation in later adulthood. In contrast, young adults' perception of time is future-oriented, so their motivation is toward acquiring new knowledge. In addition, Carstensen's theory argues that social emotional motivation is a drive to establish intimacy and good feelings about oneself, and can be subdivided into two parts: emotional regulation and generativity. The former refers to the better self-control of emotions in everyday life, and the latter to becoming a 'keeper of meaning' (Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980).

Thus, an extensive review of the literature on older adults' motivation to learn was used as the basis for this study's conceptual framework (see

Figure 1), including its sets of personal and institutional predictors. This review pointed to the existence of five IM constructs that could be utilised as a new framework for exploring older learners' motivation (Figure 1): learning for new knowledge, learning for a sense of accomplishment, desire for stimulation, emotional regulation, and generativity. Among these constructs, learning for new knowledge, learning for a sense of accomplishment, and desire for stimulation were derived from Vallerand et al.'s taxonomy of IM (1989); meanwhile, emotional regulation and generativity, which have been demonstrated to be salient for older adults, were derived from socio-emotional selectivity theory (Lang & Carstensen, 2002), since generativity goals have been found to be most prominent in later adulthood (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998).

Personal predictor variables:

-Age
-Gender
-Educational level
-Living setting
-Self-reported health
-Family support

Institutional predictor variables:

- Teacher support
- Peer support
- Type of Courses

Intrinsic motivation

☐ Learning for new Knowledge
☐ Learning for a sense of accomplishment
☐ Desire for sti mulation
☐ Emotional regulation
  Generativit y
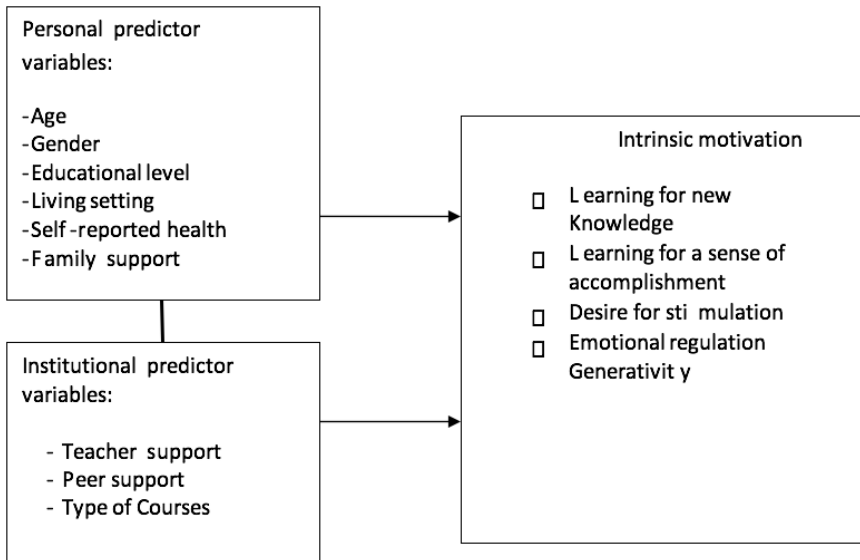
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

## Predictors of motivation

The demographic characteristics found to predict older learners' motivation to learn include being female, married, and highly educated (Bynum & Seaman, 1993; Kim & Merriam, 2004, Lamb & Brady, 2005; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; Manheimer et al., 1995; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Scala, 1996). Health status has also been found to play an

important role in influencing older adults' motivation to learn (Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). In addition, several researchers have suggested that learning environments, especially classroom support such as teacher or peer support, can disproportionately impact older adults' learning. Taylor and Rose (2005), in a study of strategies for the successful engagement and retention of ICT learners aged 45 and above, found that such learners highly value peer support, mentoring, and tutoring. Also, Chu's (2010) research on adult e-learners over 45 revealed that peer support and family support both had profound impacts on their learning. Furthermore, Chappell et al. (2003) suggested that it is important for facilitators to develop a supportive climate that is safe, non-threatening and less formal while guiding older learners.

Building on the literature cited above, the present study analyses the relationships of older learners' IM with two major categories of predictor variables – personal (namely age, gender, educational level, health status, living setting, and family support) and institutional (namely teacher support, peer support, and course type) – with the aim of exploring (a) the IM of older learners in Taiwan and (b) the separate and joint effects of these personal and institutional predictor variables on this group's IM.

## Methods

### *Setting*

The present study's sample was drawn from participants in classes at the Learning Resource Centers for the Active Elderly (LRCAE), the most organised and numerous education-oriented settings for older learners provided by the Taiwanese government (Ministry of Education, 2006). The classes that LRCAE offers are varied (e.g. life skill courses, expressive courses, volunteering-related courses, and spirituality-related courses) and most are offered free of charge. Because of LRCAE's wide geographic spread and large overall size, it is more representative of Taiwan's population of such learners than any other similar organisation.

### *Approach and sample*

This study adopted a quantitative, survey-based approach because a large sample size was desired and because of the ease of access and

dynamic interaction that such an approach provides (Dillman, 2000). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of University of Georgia in the US gave approval. Data collection consisted of a confidential, self-administered, web-based survey. The researchers sent letters and made phone calls to all LRCAEs in Taiwan in order to recruit participants, and those instructors who agreed to distribute the survey to their students were sent the electronic survey by email. The email included information for participants, a hyperlink to the survey's start page, and a consent form, which were then shared with the students. Of the approximately 2,100 adult learners who were approached, a total of 816 responded to the questionnaire.

The final sample was 32.4% male and 67.6% female, with an average age of 68.0 (age range 50–94; SD = 8.3). The average age of the male participants (M = 69.68 years old) was significantly higher than that of females (M = 67.06 years old) (p < .05). Nearly half (46%, n = 372) the participants of both sexes had less than an elementary-school diploma, and only 6% (n = 5) had a master's degree or above. This closely reflects the current educational distribution of older adults in Taiwan. These and other details of the sample's characteristics are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sample characteristics**

| Background characteristic | | Frequency | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | n | % |
| **Gender** | Male | 259 | 32.4 |
| | Female | 540 | 67.6 |
| **Educational level** | Little or no formal education Element | 109 | 13.7 |
| | Elementary | 263 | 33.0 |
| | Junior high | 127 | 15.9 |
| | High school | 158 | 19.8 |
| | Bachelor's | 135 | 16.9 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Master's and above | 5 | 0.6 |
| **Living setting** | Rural | 402 | 51.4 |
| | Suburban | 92 | 11.8 |
| | Urban | 288 | 36.8 |
| **Self-reported health status** | Excellent | 58 | 7.20 |
| | Good | 336 | 41.7 |
| | Fair | 359 | 44.6 |
| | Poor | 52 | 6.5 |
| **Course type** | Instrumental classes | 212 | 34.6 |
| | Expressive classes | 401 | 65.4 |

*Note.* Due to missing values, some of the within-category participant totals are all less than 816.

## Measures

The instrument used in this study was translated into Mandarin from English through a back-translation process completed by two bilingual advanced doctoral students in an aging-related field. It was divided into three sections covering IM, personal predictor variables, and institutional predictor variables, each of which is described more fully below.

## IM

The IM constructs were measured by 28 items rated via Likert-type scales, with responses ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Each construct's items were adapted from two psychometrically validated instruments. The IM constructs learning for new knowledge, learning for a sense of accomplishment, and desire for stimulation were each measured with five items adapted from Guay, Mageau, and Vallerand's (2003) Global Motivation Scale (GMS). A sample item for learning for new knowledge was, 'I like to make interesting discoveries'. A sample item for learning for a sense of accomplishment was, 'When I am learning, I feel proud of the things I can accomplish'. A sample item for the desire for stimulation was, 'I like to learn because it exercises my brain'. In addition, the six items covering emotional regulation (e.g. 'Learning helps me understand my own feelings') and the seven covering generativity (e.g. 'Learning enables me to teach other people important things') were all

adapted from Lang and Carstensen's (2002) instrument for measuring emotional regulation and generativity.

Items taken from the original sources were refined and reworded to render each item appropriate for adults aged 50 and over. The IM questionnaire was reviewed by academic professionals who provided feedback on the items, and revisions were made to the items and categories. The final version of the survey contained 28 items, with an overall inter-item reliability (Cronbach's α) of .88.

### Personal predictor variables

Personal predictor variables included six demographic variables: age, sex, educational level, living setting, family support, and self-reported health status. Self-reported health status was measured by asking the participant to rate his or her own health on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = poor health; 5 = excellent health).

### Institutional predictor variables

A total of twelve items covering two of these three variables – teacher support (seven items) and peer support (five items) – were adopted from Williams and Deci's (1996) Learning Climate Questionnaire; the Cronbach's α of these two dimensions were .91 and .88, respectively. Sample items included 'My instructor provides me choices and options', and 'My peers always give me positive feedback.' Each item was rated on the same five-point scale as the IM items. The course type was recoded from four categories (life skill courses, expressive courses, volunteer-related courses, and spirituality-related courses) into two groups (instrumental courses = '1,' expressive courses = '2') based on Londoner's (1971) taxonomy of adult learners' needs, as described in Table 1. According to Londoner (1971), expressive courses are related to experiences designed to increase one's enjoyment of life; instrumental courses are designed for effective mastery of old-age challenges.

## Results

### Intrinsic learning motivation of older Taiwanese adults

The respondents' average scores on all five of the questionnaire's IM

constructs were high (see Table 2). At 4.05/5, the highest mean score was of desire for stimulation. The lowest, at 3.90/5, was of learning for new knowledge. The two items measuring IM that received the highest scores were 'Learning makes me feel happy' and 'Learning gives me an opportunity to exercise my brain,' both of which were measurements of a desire for stimulation.

**Table 2. Ranking of Intrinsic-Motivation dimensions**

|  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Master's and above | 5 | 0.6 |
| **Living setting** | Rural | 402 | 51.4 |
|  | Suburban | 92 | 11.8 |
|  | Urban | 288 | 36.8 |
| **Self-reported health status** | Excellent | 58 | 7.20 |
|  | Good | 336 | 41.7 |
|  | Fair | 359 | 44.6 |
|  | Poor | 52 | 6.5 |
| **Course type** | Instrumental classes | 212 | 34.6 |
|  | Expressive classes | 401 | 65.4 |

*Note.* Due to missing values, some of the within-category participant totals are all less than 816.

The scree plots of the principal factor analyses of the respondents' five IM constructs showed that one main factor was generated; thus, all five constructs can be combined as one factor. Moreover, two factors' eigenvalues were > 1. The first, which the researchers named cognitive-oriented IM, included the items that targeted learning for new knowledge, desire for stimulation, and learning for a sense of accomplishment (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .94). The other, named social-oriented IM, included the items for generativity and emotional regulation (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .93).

### *The predictors of IM*

To analyse the relative predictive strengths of the selected personal and institutional predictor variables, the five constructs of IM were combined into an overall IM score. As shown in Table 3, Pearson correlations indicated that family support ($r$ = .45, $p \leq$ .01), self-reported health status ($r$ = .168, $p \leq$ .01), educational background ($r$ =

.075, p ≤ .05), teacher support ($r$ = .644, $p$ ≤ .01), and peer support ($r$ = .632, $p$ ≤ .01) were all positively and significantly correlated with older learners' overall IM. Conversely, age ($r$ = -.084, $p$ ≤ .05) was negatively correlated with IM. That is, those participants who were younger showed significantly greater overall IM.

**Table 3. Correlations of main variables**

|      | IN     | FS     | GE     | AGE    | HEA    | EDU    | LS     | CT    | TS     | PS  |
|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-----|
| IN   | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |     |
| FS   | .448** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |       |        |     |
| GE   | .069   | .083*  | 1      |        |        |        |        |       |        |     |
| AGE  | -.084* | .020   | -.130**| 1      |        |        |        |       |        |     |
| HEA  | .168** | .161   | -.007  | -.114**| 1      |        |        |       |        |     |
| EDU  | .075*  | .044   | -.060  | -.442**| .177** | 1      |        |       |        |     |
| LS   | .049   | -.063  | .120** | -.198**| .078*  | .459** | 1      |       |        |     |
| CT   | .033   | .091   | .122*  | -.003  | .132*  | .061   | .087*  | 1     |        |     |
| TS   | .644** | .459** | .055   | -.039  | .179** | .085*  | .038   | .068  | 1      |     |
| PS   | .632** | .481** | .030   | .006   | .163** | .002   | -.061  | .075  | .642** | 1   |

*Note.* IN: Intrinsic motivation; FS: family support; GE: gender; AGE: age; HEA: self-rated health status; EDU: educational background; LS: living setting; CT: course type; TS: teacher support; PS: peer support; **($p$ ≤ .01), *($p$ ≤.05)

To understand the significance of personal and institutional predictors of older adults' IM, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed based on the above findings, with cognitive-oriented IM, social-oriented IM, and overall IM as the dependent variables. Tables 4 and 5 present the results of regression analysis based on the proposed model.

**Table 4. Hierarchical regression, cognitive and social-oriented Intrinsic Motivation and predictors**

| Predictors | Cognitive-oriented intrinsic notivation | | Social-oriented intrinsic notivation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| | β | β | β | β |
| **Personal predictors** | | | | |
| Age | -.099* | -.088** | -.112* | -.097* |
| Gender | .024 | .025 | -.007 | .002 |
| Educational level | .018 | .001 | -.042 | -1.48 |
| Self-rated health | .168*** | .097** | .132** | .060* |
| Living setting | .120** | .089** | .107* | .084* |
| Family support | .366*** | .050 | .420*** | .109** |
| **Institutional predictors** | | | | |
| Course type | | -.046 | | -.075* |
| Teacher support | | .460*** | | .399*** |
| Peer support | | .282*** | | .334*** |
| *F* | 24.988*** | 72.554*** | 25.9*** | 71.287*** |
| *Adjusted R²* | .209 | .541 | .215 | .537 |

Note. ***($p \leq .000$), **($p \leq .01$), *($p \leq .05$)

**Table 5. Hierarchical regression, overall Intrinsic Motivation and predictors**

| Predictors | Over all intrinsic motivation | |
|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| | β | β |
| **Personal predictors** | | |
| Age | -.086* | -.061 |
| Gender | -.025 | -.014 |
| Educational level | .003 | -.011 |
| Self-rated Health | .127** | .061* |
| Living Setting | .061 | .044 |
| Family Support | .446** | .098** |
| **Institutional predictors** | | |
| Course type | | -.051 |
| Teacher support | | .430*** |
| Peer support | | .322*** |
| F | 29.624*** | 83.010*** |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .238 | .569 |

Note. ***($p \leq .000$), **($p \leq .01$), *($p \leq .05$)

As seen in Table 4, one regression analysis was conducted with cognitive IM as the dependent variable and one was conducted with social IM as the dependent variable. In Model 1 of both these analyses, gender, age, educational level, living setting, self-reported health, and family support were entered as personal predictor variables. The resulting $R^2$ in these analyses were .209 and .215, respectively, indicating that all these personal predictor variables taken together accounted for 20.9% and 21.5% of the variance in cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM, depending on the analysis. The coefficient value for age showed that it had an inverse association with cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM. The coefficient values for living setting, family support, and self-rated health, on the other hand, all indicated positive relationships with cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM.

In both regression analyses in Table 4, the institutional predictor variables of teacher support, peer support, and course type were added on top of the personal predictor variables, with cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM again being the dependent variable. The resulting values of $R^2$ were .541 and .537, respectively, indicating that the combined set of predictor variables accounted for 54.1% and 53.7%, respectively, of the variance in cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM. The increment due to adding the institutional predictor variables on top of the personal ones was also significant ($\Delta R^2$ = .331, $p \leq$ .000; $\Delta R^2$ = .321, p ≤ .000). The magnitude of the respective changes in $R^2$ in Model 1 to Model 2, .331 and .321, implies that the institutional predictor variables accounted for 33.1% and 32.1% of the respective variance in cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM. The coefficient value for age in Model 2 remained negatively associated with cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM, while those for self-reported health, teacher support, and peer support all had positive relationships with cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM.

The implications of the analyses shown in Table 4 are that the inclusion of the institutional predictor variables in the equation significantly improved the explanation for the variance in cognitive-oriented and social-oriented IM. Specifically, the magnitude of the age, self-rated health status, living setting, and family support coefficients are diminished from Model 1 to Model 2, revealing that institutional predictor variables diminish the impact between these variables and cognitive-oriented/social-oriented IM.

In Table 5, the dependent variable is overall IM. For the first model, the personal predictor variables of gender, age, educational level, living setting, self-reported health, and family support were entered in Model 1. The resulting value of $R^2$ was .238, indicating that all these personal predictor variables taken together accounted for 23.8% of the variance in overall IM. The coefficient value for age showed that this variable had an inverse association with overall IM. The coefficient values for family support and self-rated health, on the other hand, both indicated positive relationships between these variables and overall IM.

In Model 2 of Table 5, the institutional predictor variables of teacher support, peer support, and course type were added to the personal predictor variables, with overall IM again being the dependent variable.

The resulting value of R2 was .569, indicating that the combined set of predictor variables accounted for 56.9% of the variance in overall IM. The increment due to adding the institutional predictor variables to the personal ones was also significant (□R2 = .331, p ≤ .000). The magnitude of the change in R2 from Model 1 to Model 2, .331, implies that the institutional predictor variables accounted for 33.1% of the variance in overall IM. The coefficient value for age in Model 2 is no longer associated with overall IM, while the coefficient values for self-reported health and family support, teacher support, and peer support all had positive relationships with overall IM.

Thus, Table 5 shows that the inclusion of the institutional predictor variables in the equation significantly improved the explanation for variance in overall IM. Specifically, age is no longer significant, and the self-rated health status and family support coefficients are diminished from Model 1 to Model 2. This result reveals that institutional predictor variables diminish the impact of age, self-rated health status, and family support on overall IM.

## Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to explore older learners' IM, and its secondary goal was to identify the predictive power of personal and institutional variables such as peer support, teacher support, and course type. On both fronts, its important findings warrant attention from both researchers and practitioners.

First, the 816 sampled learners reported high levels of all five subtypes of IM (mean = 3.97/5), with desire for stimulation being the most important of these subtypes and learning for new knowledge the least important. This is consistent with prior findings that cognitive interest is the primary motivation of older learners (Hsieh, 2016; Kim & Merriam, 2004), and further suggests that this cognitive interest consists primarily of learning for stimulation as opposed to a desire for new knowledge. Additionally, consistent with socio-emotional selectivity theory, generativity was found to be more important than a desire for new knowledge, reinforcing the idea that social-emotional motivation is more salient in older adults. Interestingly, the item 'Learning makes me feel happy' received the highest score of any survey item in the present research. This should serve as a reminder that the emotional aspect of

motivation in older learners is very important, a point that warrants exploration in future research.

Second, the present study's factor-analysis results imply that older learners' IM consists of both cognitive-oriented and social-oriented aspects, and that these two components should be valued equally when considering older adults' motivation to learn. This is at odds with previous findings that cognitive interest is a stronger motivator for older learners; for example, Kim and Merriam (2004) and Hsieh (2016), the latter of which focussed on older learners in southern Taiwan.

Third, institutional variables – especially teacher support and peer support – can substantially affect older learners' IM in classroom settings, as confirmed by the hierarchical regression analysis. This echoes the work of Delahaye and Ehrich (2008) and Donaldson (1999), who found that older learners preferred encouraging instructors who were able to stoke students' learning motivations. In addition, the current study confirmed the importance of autonomy-supportive environments to increases in IM (Chappell, Hawke, Rhodes, & Soloman, 2003; Fry, 1992; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). This is an especially important point for educators, as it implies that teacher and peer support are key to enhancing older learners' motivation to learn.

Finally, the results show that institutional predictors, especially peer support and teacher support, can decrease the negative impacts of old age and poor self-reported health status on older adults' motivation to learn. These negative impacts were found in previous studies such as Mott (2008) and Sloane-Seale and Kops (2007). The latter, for example, compared active and non-active older learners and found non-active learners are generally older and less healthy. Our finding sheds further light on the importance of contextual/environmental factors to older adults' learning.

These findings have many important implications. To encourage more older adults to enjoy and persist in learning, it is important to recognise both the cognitive and social aspects of their IM. It is also crucial to provide an environment that includes the support of peers as well as teachers to enhance their learning experiences. Therefore, the training for the teachers of these adults should: highlight the teacher–learner relationship in learning settings; build teacher–learner and learner–learner relationships, and even relationships between teachers and

learners' families; and establish a collaborative learning process that supports continued learning for older adults.

The most important implication, however, is that vulnerable older adults' learning motivation should receive greater attention. Such learners – for example, those in poor health, and/or extreme old age – have lower motivation to learn, but the present study suggests that this motivation to learn can be enhanced with support from teachers, peers, and the learners' families. With this in mind, it is especially necessary to develop a support system for this group, which has the most to gain from learning motivation enhancement.

Despite these important findings, this study's potential limitations should be noted. First, no assessment of or comparison to extrinsic motivations was conducted. Future studies should also measure extrinsic motivations for a deeper understanding of older adults' motivation to learn. Second, the survey tool used in this study was adapted from elements of other tools, but was itself not subjected to psychometric testing, only validation by content experts. Third, the research design was cross-sectional, and thus did not allow for comparisons between those who persisted in their learning programs and those who did not. Future qualitative research could be conducted to complement these results and further the understanding of older learners' motivations. Lastly, the participants in this study were all recruited from Taiwan, and from a particular educational setting (LRCAE); therefore, the mechanisms and dynamics of their learning motivations might not be generalisable to older adults in other countries or different Taiwanese learning programs.

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# Emerging adulthood and its effect on adult education

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*It is during their late teens and early twenties that most students attend a university or other institution of higher education. Biologically, these students are adults. However, studies show that there is a delay in maturing. Arnett (2000) introduced the term "emerging adulthood" in reference to the stage of life between adolescence and adulthood. Adolescent behaviour can be observed well into the twenties, as confirmed by this study. In total, 118 participants, aged 21 to 65, from a statistics course were asked about their need for adult learning methods. The results show that there is a strong positive correlation between age and the need for methods of adult education, and that students younger than 28 are not necessarily ready for adult education.*

***Keywords:*** *emerging adulthood, teaching, adult education, andragogy*

## Introduction

A recent study on the importance of adult educational methods for teaching statistics courses (Meier, 2016) produced an important result.

The research identified strong support for the assumption that the cultural process of growing up lags behind the biological process of becoming an adult. This observation is in line with another recent study about American adolescents (Twenge et al., 2016). Within the field of adult education, this is a significant conclusion because it makes little sense to use adult education methods when the target group is not yet adult in its behaviour and does not show a distinct need for the methods. It is therefore important to consider age when teaching adults. As this research shows, this applies particularly up to the age of 28.

The goal of this paper is to provide evidence of a statistically significant relationship between age and the need for teaching methods as stipulated in adult-education theories.

## Emerging adulthood and adult education

Lifelong learning has become an important field in modern society, and adequate teaching methods, as postulated in theories of adult education, are needed to support it. What most educational theories disregard, however, is the question of when adulthood begins, and thus the focus is seldom on a clear delineation between early adulthood and full adulthood. The most common age for legal adulthood is 18 (Wikipedia, n.d.). Biologically, adulthood begins slightly earlier, somewhere between the ages of 16 and 17 (Gehlbach, 2014).

In 2000, Jeffrey Arnett coined the new term, "emerging adulthood". Arnett (2015) states:

> *Emerging adulthood is defined primarily by its demographic outline. Longer and more widespread education, later entry to marriage and parenthood, and a prolonged and erratic transition to stable work have opened up a space for a new life stage in between adolescence and young adulthood, and 'emerging adulthood' is what I have proposed to call that life stage (p. 8).*

Another exponent of emerging adulthood, Elmore (2012), writes of a gap between legal and cultural adulthood:

> *Educators and social scientists are mourning today's generation of kids who have postponed growing up. They lament students'*

*delayed entrance into adulthood. Adolescence, in fact, has been prolonged among millions of teens and young adults. I have lost count of the number of university deans who've told me: 'Twenty-six is the new eighteen'. In a nationwide survey, young adults agree (p. 1).*

As early as 1973, Malcolm Knowles introduced his theory of andragogy as a concept distinct from pedagogy. Knowles was of the opinion that adults have different learning needs from children or adolescents. Within his model, he states that there is a culturally induced lag in growing up, and notes:

*But it is my observation that in the American culture (home, school, religious institutions, youth agencies, governmental systems) assumes – and therefore permits – a growth rate that is much slower (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 42).*

**Figure 1. Curves showing the prolonged practice of pedagogy**



Relation Degree of Dependency versus Age
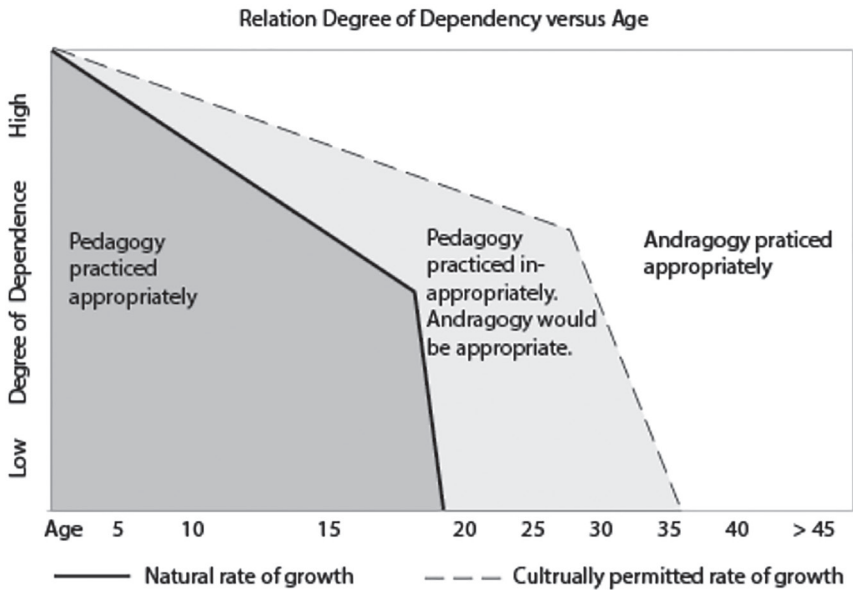
(Note: From *The adult learner*, by Knowles et al., 2015, p. 42)

Figure 1 exemplifies the slower growth rate through two different curves of decreasing dependency, where the first curve shows biological

development and the second shows the culturally allowed, slower development. The difference between the two curves means that, biologically, human beings reach adulthood before the age of 20. Coming of age, however, is a function of culture, and in our modern society adolescent behaviour can be observed until a much later age.

This assumption is particularly relevant to theories of adult education. If a 23-year-old student still displays the learning patterns of a teenager, teachers cannot rely on adult-education theory alone. Thus, when exploring patterns of adult learning, it is important to investigate the correlation between age and adult education principles.

## Correlation between andragogical needs and age

Andragogy is a term that was primarily used by Knowles from the early 1980s onward (Knowles, 1980). His theory of andragogy laid out different principles that were essential for teaching adults. Through these principles, he wanted to establish a clear demarcation from methods of pedagogy. Knowles was certainly not uncontroversial in his thinking (see, for example, Grace, 1996; Rachal, 2002; Houde, 2006), and his theory is still questioned today. It was precisely because of this controversy that Meier (2016) chose to examine Knowles's individual principles through an empirical study in order to determine whether they could be confirmed. Meier also investigated whether there were certain factors, such as gender, field of study, or age, that influenced the andragogical principles. As mentioned, age showed a particular influence, as younger learners were less receptive to adult learning methods. This article will look specifically at the relationship between age and andragogy.

## Data

The sample was drawn from individuals enrolled in statistics courses at the University of Zurich. The 118 participants were between the ages of 21 and 65 and had all voluntarily enrolled in the courses. The large age range of the participants makes this dataset particularly valuable. Often only narrow age groups are examined, especially within academic environments. With this sample, we had the opportunity to compare adults across a broad age range, from early education to retirement. The distribution in the histogram in Figure 2 illustrates this fact.

**Figure 2. Distribution of age**
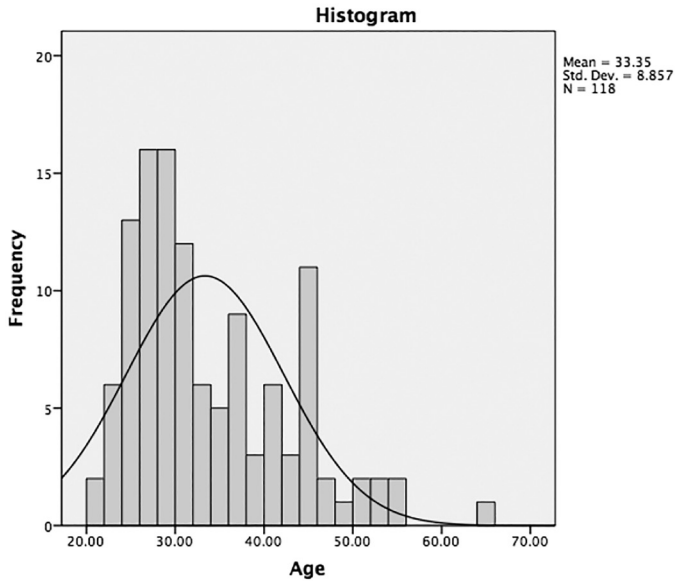


While the age distribution was very heterogeneous, there was a remarkable degree of homogeneity in motivation, since all participants were there only because they had to do statistical analysis. That heterogeneity in the sample is principally based on age means that we can more easily identify differences that depend on age alone.

The statistics courses in which the participants were enrolled were offered as continuing education courses through the university's information technology services. The students were asked to complete an online questionnaire, and 118 responses were collected. Three groups of individuals were identified from these responses: students, employees, and doctoral students (see Table 1).

Though limited in size, this sample was appropriate because it differed from the general university student population, who study not merely because they want to learn, but because they want to pass their courses and get promoted (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 42). Respondents in this study participated in further education as typical adult learners.

**Table 1. Groups of respondents**

| | Frequency | Per cent | Valid per cent | Cumulative per cent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student | 67 | 56.3 | 56.3 | 56.3 |
| Employee (researcher or similar) | 31 | 26.1 | 26.1 | 82.4 |
| Doctoral student | 21 | 17.6 | 17.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 119 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

These data are important because they include people who voluntarily participated in a course. One major bias of adult research is that it often involves people who are forced to participate in a course. Because one prerequisite of adult education is intrinsic motivation, the classical principles of adult education apply only to a limited extent when students learn due to outside pressures.

## Data collection

All data were collected through an online questionnaire, which included questions regarding personal background, current situation, and learning preferences, as well as questions framed by Knowles's et al. (2015) principles of andragogy.

## Constructing the items for andragogy

One part of the questionnaire collected data concerning andragogy. The goal of this section was to find answers regarding Knowles's six postulates: motivation, readiness, need to know, self-concept, orientation, and experience. A factor analysis was performed to determine whether the total of all items could be structurally grouped into six categories. A reliability analysis was then conducted to test the internal consistency of the categories. Of the six individual postulates, a generalised variable, "andragogy", was created to represent the mean of the six individual postulates. This generalised variable made it possible to clearly show a complete view of the strength of individual participants' needs for andragogical principles.

## Findings

Knowles's et al. (2015) theory posits that andragogy slowly begins to replace pedagogy toward the beginning of adolescence. The theory also states that, in Western culture, this process lags slightly behind biological development. Therefore, one should expect that age will influence the perception of andragogy. When participants are grouped into older and younger categories (older than 27.5 and younger than 27.5), a clear difference can be found. Table 2 clarifies this difference for the mean values for the attribute andragogy.

**Table 2. The means of two age categories for andragogy**

| Age | Mean | N | Std. deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| < 27.5 | 6.82 | 22 | 1.42 |
| > 27.5 | 7.38 | 60 | 0.90 |
| Total | 7.23 | 82 | 1.08 |

(Note: The theoretical maximum mean is 10.)

It is also important to note the relationship between age and andragogy, as the correlation is low ($r = 0.204$, $p = 0.68$) and not significant. The reason for the low correlation lies in our use of the whole sample. The situation changes when the results are viewed within a particular age group, as in Figure 3. Among younger participants, a high correlation ($r = 0.661$, $p < 0.001$) can be found, whereas no correlation ($r = 0.045$, $p = 0.734$) exists among the group of older participants. For a better understanding, the two groups are compared in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlation and regression for age by andragogy among groups of younger and older participants, without the identified outlier**

| Age | Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. error of estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Younger than 27.5 | 1 | 0.661[a] | 0.437 | 0.407 | 1.106 |
| Older than 27.5 | 1 | 0.045[a] | 0.002 | –0.015 | 0.907 |

(Note:[a] Predictors: (Constant), Age)

This pattern is displayed in a scatter plot (Figure 3) with a line representing each group. The group that contains course participants younger than 27.5 years shows a steep slope. Participants older than 27.5 years display a line with nearly no slope.

**Figure 3. Relationship between age and andragogy among two groups**
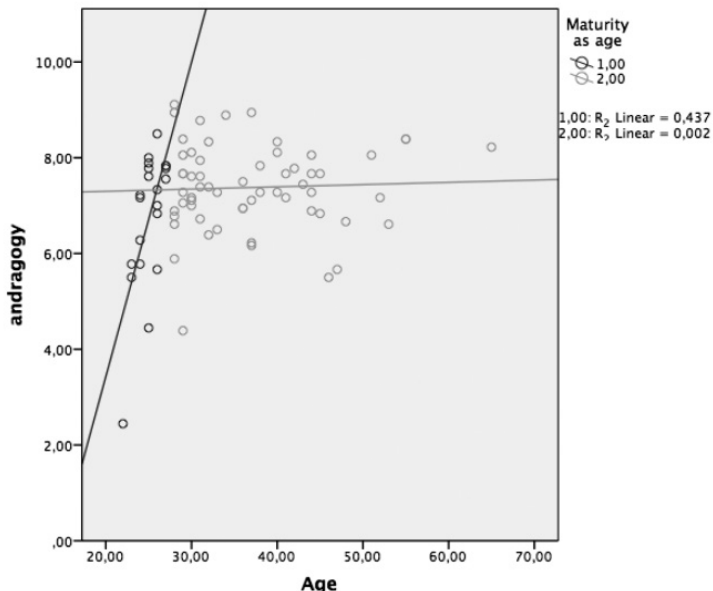


Figure 3 suggests that age can influence andragogy only to a certain point, specifically up to between 27 and 30 years of age. Once this threshold has been reached, age no longer has an influence on andragogy, which leads to the conclusion that the need for adult education is a maturing process. While a person is undergoing this process, the need for andragogy continues to grow; however, once maturity is reached, the process stops.

These findings confirm the hypothesis that there is a correlation between age and andragogy. More specifically, the results suggest that this relationship is confined to young adults. The correlation between age and andragogy is strongest in the first age category, which includes participants up to 27.5 years old. Participants in the second age category were all older than 27.5 years, where there is no such correlation.

Based on the above results, we analysed the data using floating age groups, beginning with the first group of participants, who were younger than 24 years old. The next group contained participants up to 25 years of age, the following group participants up to 26, and so on. Twenty-five

such age groups were formed, and for each group, a correlation analysis was conducted for age and andragogy. The results summarised in Figure 4 were unexpected. The graph shows an initial negative slope, which slowly decreases and ends with a mostly constant horizontal line.

**Figure 4. Floating correlations for Age by Andragogy**

| | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 27.5 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 45 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corr B | 0.896 | 0.726 | 0.618 | 0.661 | 0.661 | 0.548 | 0.438 | 0.426 | 0.439 | 0.414 | 0.368 | 0.405 | 0.405 | 0.337 | 0.267 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.301 | 0.291 | 0.296 | 0.291 | 0.277 | 0.26 |
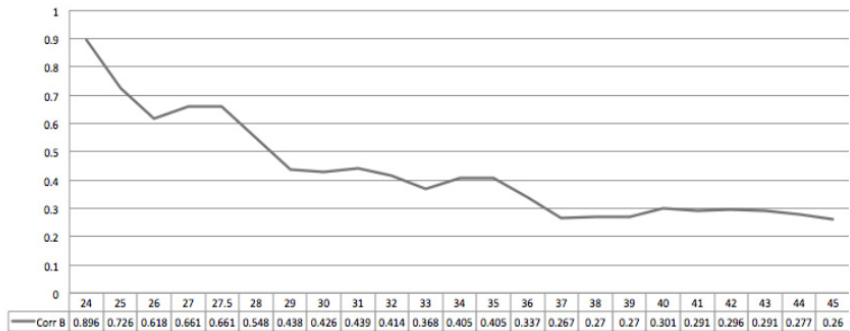
Figure 4 illustrates that the groups of younger adults display a high correlation between age and andragogy, while the groups of older adults display a lower correlation. In groups with an upper age limit of approximately 35 years, there is only a slight correlation. The group with an upper age limit of 35 years shows a mean age of 27.6 years. One possible interpretation is that after the age of 28, andragogical preferences stabilise and do not increase further with age. This interpretation implies that, in younger adults, these andragogical preferences are growing and are not yet fully developed. As mentioned earlier, this result suggests that there is a maturity process. Until the age of about 28, adolescents' preferences continue to mature. After that point, adolescents have reached maturity, and no further changes can be observed.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide reasonable evidence that the principles of adult education, as first stipulated by Knowles (1973), depend on age. The research revealed that older adults rate the importance of adult-education methods significantly higher than younger adults. It was shown that only after the threshold of about 28 years of age do adult education methods seem to be generally accepted by the participants and are perceived as the appropriate means of

teaching adults. This could be interpreted as a kind of maturation process towards andragogy. Arnett (2006) has coined the term "emerging adulthood". In his definition, it is the space in a new stage of life between adolescence and young adulthood. It is significant that the defined stage of life for emerging adulthood is almost exactly the same as the phase of increasing importance for andragogic principles we found. Arnett (2006) states:

> *I have described emerging adulthood as lasting from about age 18 to age 25, but always with the caveat that the upper age boundary is flexible. Twenty-five is an estimated age that does not apply to everybody. For some people the end of emerging adulthood comes earlier, and for many it comes later, which is why I often use age 29 as the upper age boundary (p. 311).*

Hill et al. (2015) propose that structural and cultural boundaries may limit the extent to which emerging adulthood is experienced in any given country or society. They specifically point out that groups with low socioeconomic status might experience emerging adulthood differently. Our results are limited to university students and researchers, and thus, further conclusions from this study can be made mainly within this environment.

The present study did not further investigate the reasons for the differences between age groups. It only states that there is a connection between age and andragogical principles. The next step in this research would be to investigate the reasons for this difference. A qualitative approach would help to uncover hidden patterns which a purely quantitative method cannot.

## Conclusion

For Elmore (2012) adolescence is not merely a doorway into adulthood, but an extended season of life. Arnett (2015) states that emerging adulthood encompasses the time span between the ages of 18 and 25. The results of this study confirm this extension of adolescence within the context of adult education and clearly show that participants have a real need for methods of adult education only from the age of 27 onward. This also supports the claim in Knowles (1973) that young people are growing up more slowly today than before. We can conclude that this research supports both Arnett's (2015) and Knowles's (1973) theories.

For those who educate adults, it is important to be aware that, up to the age of 28, young adults are not necessarily ready for methods of adult education. In a more moderate formulation, methods of adult education may be useful to a limited extent for students younger than 28. However, educators should also consider that there is a high variance within the age range of 21 to 28 years. It cannot be concluded that it is necessarily wrong to apply adult-education methods when teaching students who are younger than 28, but these methods are adequate only to a limited extent. Further research is needed to examine adult education methods more closely from the perspective of emerging adulthood. This could lead to the development of a specific or adapted teaching style for university students. In view of the societal and monetary importance of university education, this is a thought worth considering.

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## Data

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## About the author

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# Developing a case-based experiential learning model at a program level in a regional university: Reflections on the developmental process

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*This article reflects on the developmental process of a case-based experiential learning model: the Federation University model, in an undergraduate community and human services program at a regional university. There is abundant literature that addresses the use and need for introducing experiential learning at the subject/unit level in community and human services/social work content. However, despite the expansion of research on experiential learning, there is limited literature that bridges the gap between course/program level teaching philosophy and using experiential learning activities in individual subjects. The article will demonstrate how Kolb's four stage cycle (Kolb, 1984) and case-based experiential learning were integrated to develop curriculum at a program level. It will also demonstrate how a move to experiential learning facilitated better alignment with face-to-face and online learning. As a way of argument, we suggest that case-based*

*experiential learning is very relevant and useful to human services/ social work education because of its emphasis on bridging the theory and praxis nexus and providing graduates with an opportunity to work effectively in a complex, fluid and ever-changing sector.*

**Keywords:** *welfare education and pedagogy, case-based experiential learning, experiential learning in a regional context*

## Introduction

Literature on experiential learning has grown significantly in the last three decades (Banach, Foden, Brooks, 2018; Clem, Mennicke, Beasley, 2014; Glennon, 2004). There is a number of strands. Some authors focus on the pedagogical use of experiential learning in practice-based professions (Humphrey, 2014; Teater, 2011), others with the definition and theorising of experiential learning and its applicability as a pedagogical design (Georgiou, Zhan, Meria, 2008; Neuman & Blando 2000), whereas a few are interested in its applicability at a program level (Gray & Gibbons, 2002). Social work educators have been active in adopting various components of experiential learning at the unit level to teach group work, field-based learning and advocacy skills. Despite the use of different experiential learning designs in social work/human service education, what is common in the application is the continuous learning cycle in which students learn and the unique subject position students bring to their analysis, reflection and evaluation of cases and/ or problems.

Until recently, the focus has been on the use of technology and Learning Management Systems (LMS) in social work/human services education, primarily concerned with distance or online learning (Holmes, Tracy, Painter, Oestreich, & Park 2015; Allwardt, 2011; Wolfson, Marsom, & Magnuson, 2005). The efficacy of the flipped classroom in a recent study suggested that there is potential to enhance and promote shared learning and increase active collaborative work among students (Holmes et al, 2015). Other studies (Ross, Lathouras, Riddell, Buchanan, Puccio, 2017) investigate the value of immersive technologies and authentic case studies and argue that there is scope to build further knowledge in this space. Thus, there is potential strength in the use of LMS

and other technologies in order to facilitate experiential learning in both on-campus and distance modes of study. Interestingly, what is common across all strands of the literature is that much of the focus is on designing learning materials at a unit level. For the purposes of this paper, unit level refers to individual subjects taught (for example, 'Advanced counselling' or 'Group work') and program/course level refers to all core and elective subjects that are taught within a degree program (for example, 'Bachelor of Community and Human Services'). As such, there is limited research that reports on using experiential learning as a teaching philosophy at a program level. In order to address this gap, this article reports on the development of an experiential learning framework in an undergraduate community and human services program at an Australian regional university. Before we turn to the literature review that informed the development of an experiential framework, we will provide a brief context to the undergraduate program at a regional higher education institution.

The undergraduate community and human services program is offered through multi-modal delivery across three campuses. The undergraduate program underwent an internal review that involved input from staff, students, industry collaborators and independent benchmarking against the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) standards. The key findings were:

a) the absence of a consistent pedagogical framework at the program level and the unit level;

b) the need to introduce active learning materials, such as cases based on real world scenarios, into weekly activities;

c) a strengthening of course content that encourages critical reflection as part of the integration of theory to practice;

d) assessments that are scaffolded and clearly benchmarked against the learning objectives;

e) consistency in the structure of the teaching and learning materials to cater to multimodal forms of delivery (fully online and blended).

The findings relate to the design of the teaching and learning materials in units, the assessments and consistency of program philosophy and learning experiences between modes of delivery. From this basis, the curriculum development team set out to create a new learning

framework at the program level, in order to address these findings and meet the challenges present in the current higher education and community service sector environments.

### *Literature review: Experiential learning in community and human services education*

Within social work and community and human service education, there is a variety of learning models and strategies used that can be described as occurring within an experiential learning framework. Extensively used in social work education since the 1990s across the United States and United Kingdom, experiential learning has also been described as active learning and/or experience based learning (Venema, Ravenhorst Meerman, & Hossink, 2015; Huerta- Wong & Schoech, 2010). Experiential learning is characterised as a continuous learning cycle in which students learn by relating, observing and reflecting upon abstract concepts (theory) and applying these to concrete experiences.

Experiential learning values the unique subjective base each student brings to a situation and encourages critical thinking and the reflection and analysis of each learner's own biases (Lee & Caffarella, 1994). It encourages learners to connect their existing beliefs and knowledge to the new knowledge and information they are presented with (Lee & Caffarella, 1994). Consistent amongst understandings of experiential learning is a move towards more active methods of teaching that engages the student as an active agent in their own learning and in a process of critical reflection.

The values and philosophy of experiential learning along with the suggested teaching strategies are congruent with education practices traditionally considered fundamental to community and human service education, such as case studies, clinical vignettes and role-playing (Clem, Mennicke, & Beasley, 2014; Gray & Gibbons, 2002). Community and human service work, like social work, is a practicing profession and graduates require education and learning that provides them with knowledge and skills they can apply in practice (Teater, 2011). The most obvious use of an experiential learning strategy in community and human service education is the connection of course content with field placements in the sector, a longstanding practice in community and human service education (Jewell & Owens, 2017). Increasingly though,

the learning outcomes achieved in these real-world placements are being replicated through classroom-based experiential learning.

### Use of experiential learning in human service education units

Experiential learning is currently applied within human service education coursework in a variety of ways. Experiential learning is employed as a strategy in the development of practice values in students. DeLuca and Benden (2019) used active and experiential learning to foster learner's empathy towards marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the community and as an impetus for students to understand their own power and privilege. Similarly, Clem, Mennicke, and Beasley (2014) suggest that experiential learning increases student learner engagement, practical skill development and improvements in student ethical reasoning and judgement (Clem, Mennicke & Beasly, 2014). Glennon (2004) identified that active learning methods can be delivered within a variety of pedagogical frameworks. He utilised active learning methods to teach students social justice as a foundational principle of social work. He identified that experiential learning can be applied to the teaching of social justice where a transformational approach that questions the status quo is required (Glennon, 2004).

Howarth and Thurlow (2004) used experiential learning solely as a way to facilitate the use of evidence-based practice in child welfare services and explicitly to increase student's ability to apply theory to practice in complex work environments. In this case, there was no element focused on student values or beliefs. In contrast, Rocha (2000) used experiential learning primarily to increase student ability to undertake policy related tasks and to increase knowledge of the link between policy and social work practice. Rocha (2000) also had a third intended outcome of increasing student's participation in democratic community change activities, incorporating a value component into the application of experiential learning outcomes.

Another area of community and human service practice that has documented the use of experiential learning is in the teaching of group work (Banach, Foden & Brooks, 2018; Humphrey, 2014). Banach et al (2018) found that applying an experiential learning model to group work increased the confidence of students in facilitating groups and in the development of group work skills. These findings supported those

from Humphrey's (2014) study on the use of experiential learning in group work that also demonstrated an increase in skill development and student confidence. A notable difference between the two studies was an increase in student's cultural competency achieved in Banach, Foden and Brooks (2018) study.

The use of experiential learning to affect attitude change in community and human services education is again evident in the work of Quinn (1999) who used an experiential learning framework to challenge student's beliefs and values related to ageism. Similarly Cabiati and Folgheraiter (2019) used experiential learning based activities with students in the first year of social work study to develop empathy. They used an activity where students were invited to nominate and undertake their own change activity to better understand the process of change from client and community perspectives (Cabiati & Folgheraiter, 2019). This was a voluntary opt-in activity and not required to be undertaken by all students and students who undertook the activity reported it was insightful and were able to draw connections to how they would use this experience to inform their future practice work (Cabiati & Folgheraiter, 2019).

Additionally, experiential and active learning is identified as a model that is adaptable, and this includes the potential to support the use of technology (Holmes, Tracy, Painter, Oestreich, & Park 2015). Huerta-Wong and Schoech (2010) found that experiential learning was the preferred teaching technique for social work students in both face-to-face and online environments. Holmes et al (2015) suggest that technology is used as a means to facilitate student's active participation in their learning rather than as a replacement for face-to-face learning, thereby potentially creating greater synchronicity between the learning experiences of online students and campus-based students.

### *Use of experiential learning at the program level*

Despite abundant literature on the applicability of experiential learning at a unit level in human services/social work education, the only identified implementation of an experiential learning model at a social work or community and human service program level study that the authors were able to identify was undertaken 17 years ago by Gray and Gibbons (2002). They reported on the implementation of an experience-based learning model across the social work program at a regional

Australian university. Students in this program reported feeling that it equipped them with skills in critical thinking and group work. They also reported being strongly aware of the theory to practice process and were confident in their abilities to traverse the challenges of praxis. Gray and Gibbons (2002) did note that the implementation of experiential learning models did cause difficulties for staff and students. This generally focused on student and educator's ability to transition to a new way of learning to one that promoted critical thinking and required learners to be self-directed.

This challenge encountered by students and educators alike transitioning to experiential based learning to adapt to a new and different way of learning is worthy of consideration. However, its use at a program level shows promise. A criticism of experiential learning is that if it is implemented as a series of activities or strategies the experience for students can be disjointed and confusing (Itin, 1999) and experiential learning is best approached as a teaching philosophy and implemented as larger curriculum change versus a range of teaching strategies or activities. This supports the use of experiential learning at a program level, rather than simply being used for specific learning activities only.

To summarise, the research indicated an eclectic application of experiential learning across community and human service education to achieve a wide range of learning outcomes. This highlighted the importance of experiential learning approaches needing to be implemented and evaluated to ensure correlation between curriculum intentions and learning outcomes. The research also drew attention to the potential for experiential learning to meet the needs of community and human service educators in a wide range of areas of human service and social work practice. However, there is limited research that bridges the gap between program level teaching philosophy and using experiential learning activities in individual units. As such, there is a need to develop a model that connects the teaching philosophy at a program level with principles that underpin the development of experiential learning activities at the unit level. In other words, to link the epistemology, ontology and praxis together into a consistent overarching teaching philosophy. We address this gap, next through reflecting on the developmental process of the University Model.

## The Federation University model

This section will examine the process of development of the new teaching model at a regional university. The process of developing the model occurred iteratively, however, it is presented here in a linear process for ease of discussion. The section is presented in three parts:

a) Conceptualisation of the teaching model - the thinking;

b) Principles guiding the development of the teaching model – the doing; and

c) Blended and online learning and the Active Learning Framework – the acting.

### *Conceptualisation of the pedagogical model – The thinking*

A review of the literature in the aforementioned section suggests that experiential learning as a potential philosophical approach to teaching can strengthen linkages between learning outcomes and teaching strategies and promote consistency across delivery modes. The development of experiential teaching philosophy is linked to the work of Kolb who suggests that, (cited in Georgiou, Zahn, & Meira, 2008, p. 810) "[T]o understand knowledge, we must understand the psychology of the learning process, and to understand learning, we must understand epistemology – the origins, nature and methods and limits of knowledge". So understanding the epistemologies is important in structuring learning in programs. Therefore, the next step for the curriculum development team was to undertake the thinking behind the new model, in order to consider the approach from the epistemological level.

The prominent influences that have shaped pedagogies in designing the community and human services curriculum is social constructivism. Constructivists argue that individuals learn through the creation of "cognitive structures that include the established concepts and principles of the domain" that are also a "function of culture, values, background and experiences" (Neuman & Blundo 2000, p. 25). So learning through meaning making among individuals is not only based on "cognitive structures" but by what von Glasersfeld (cited in Cobb 1994, p.14) argues, "constitutive activity [that] occurs as the cognising individual interacts with other members of a community". Combining,

the constructivist and social elements in our teaching pedagogy allows for the development of ways of knowing at a more micro-level but also the adaption of how socially constructed and/or situated meanings inform an individual's thinking. (Franklin cited in Neuman & Blundo, 2000, p. 24).

Such an experiential model assumes that individuals create "unique cognitive structures" and/or individual interpretations that are based on values and norms (Neuman & Blundo, 2000, p. 25). These values and norms are situated in broader "environmental, social and historical context" (Neuman & Blundo, 2000, p. 25). This means an experiential model assumes that learner's individual experiences combined with an emphasis on developing a student's critical thinking and decision-making skills (Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips, & Keary, 2006) will allow them to manage complex multi-factorial and multi-layered real-world situations in the human services sector.

This framework informs the instructional methodology of experiential learning of case-based teaching. Briefly, case-based teaching is an instructional method that relies on challenging learners to absorb, share, process, analyse and apply cases based on real-world scenarios (Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips & Keary, 2006). Learners are introduced to real-world scenarios through cases that are simple, structured and/or scaffolded. The structure and the content of the cases play an important educational role. We will now turn to case-based teaching as an instructional tool to consider the doing phase of the process – the operationalisation of the new teaching model.

### *Principles guiding the development of the experiential case-based teaching model – the doing*

To operationalise the teaching philosophy into practice, the curriculum development team moved from consideration of the epistemology of the approach, to the pedagogical principles used to guide teaching practices. The University experiential case-based learning model suggests that learning as a continuous process in which students are able to bring, relate, observe, reflect and develop an understanding and/or interpretation of knowledge. Kolb (1984) calls for an integrated, holistic approach that structures learning. Some of the guidelines based on Kolb (1984) that determined the development of curriculum are:

1.  Experiential learning allows learners to connect with "the existing knowledge, beliefs and affective characteristics" (Lee & Caffarella, 1994, p. 43) to the new knowledge and/or information they are presented with.

2.  Each learner brings a unique experiential base to the instructional situation (Lee & Caffarella 1994).

3.  Learning takes place in the context of a multi-dimensional approach that is the capacity to bring one's own concrete experience, observe, review, reflect, analyse abstract conceptualisation and apply it to respond to real world scenarios or cases (Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Kolb, 1984).

4.  The power base shifts from the teacher to the learner. The learner assumes greater responsibility for their learning and teachers act as facilitators (Lee & Caffarella, 1994).

The University Model uses the aforementioned guidelines in conjunction with Kolb's (1984) four-stage cycle. Kolb and Kolb (2009, p, 1–2) argue that an integrated holistic perspective allows the learner to "touch all the bases' – experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned". The four stages are; Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) and, Active experimentation (AE) (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). This recursive process, *inter ilia*, is based on understanding how the four stages can be operationalised using case studies from real world scenarios.

A framework for operationalising the University case-based learning was developed and this framework is interdependent on integrating theory and praxis. Figure 1 explains the pedagogical framework of experiential learning as articulated in Kolb's four stage model and the instructional tools of cases to achieve this at the program level. The learning process within this framework should be interpreted as continuous and iterative. Kolb and Kolb (2009) argue that concrete observation and abstract conceptualisation allow for providing a link to grasping experience while, reflective observation and active experimentation allow for transforming the experience (Fig. 1).

University Experiential Case Based Model

Thinking - Epistemology
Social constructivist, Human Service work

Doing – Teaching model
Kolb four stage learning cycle, case based teaching

Active Expermintaion — Concrete experience

Grasp

Transform — Experience

Experience

Abstract Conceptulisation — Reflective Observation

(Kolb, 1984)

Case Based Teaching
Content | Structure | Attributes | Process

(Kim et al. 2006)

Acting- Learning design & delivery
Active learning framework (Pre- workshop activity, active learning, post active learning)

The instructional tool that allows the two emergent properties of deductive and inductive learning is case-based teaching (Fig.1). Case-based teaching challenges learners to analyse, evaluate, review and develop assessments to real worlds and complex situations (Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips, & Keary, 2006). Whilst, there are different approaches on how to organise cases (see Shulman, 1992), the approach used in the University Model is based on the preparation of well-constructed problem cases (Kim et al. 2006; Georgiou et al., 2008). The cases are relevant to various fields of practice, including mental health, child and family services, social supports, disability, family violence and aged care. Problem cases, following Kolb's cycle allow the learners to experience, reflect and develop solutions for practice. The process employed in the construction of these cases as instructional tools (Fig. 1) is based on the conceptual structure developed by Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips and Keary (2006). The cases use the following conceptual elements to structure the information:

a)  content (levels of the learner, goals and objectives, setting of case narrative, distractors, authenticity, multiple perspectives, rich case content, difficulty);

b)  structure (gradual disclosure of the cases, branching of content, case structure and multiple cases);

c)  attributes (relevant, realistic, engaging and challenging); and

d)  process (instructional, assessments, feedback) (Kim, Phillips, Pinsky, Brock, Phillips, & Keary, p. 869).

An integration of Kolb's four-stage model and experiential case-based learning allows us the development of learner's skills for reflective practice that engenders in learners the skills to integrate thinking, being and doing or the three streams of knowledge constructions namely, epistemology, ontology and praxis.

### *Blended online teaching and the Active Learning Framework (ALF) – the acting*

As the major purpose of the new teaching model was to provide consistency and quality teaching across all modes of delivery, it was important for the curriculum development team to consider how the teaching model would be implemented in online and blended environments.  There is a growing trend in the use of online technologies to deliver experiential pedagogy (Gates & Dauenhauer, 2016; Ayala, 2009). Combining online technologies with face-to face and traditional education has been trialled in social work foundational units at the Bachelor and Master's level programs (Aguirre & Mitschke, 2011) as well as in interviewing skills (Ouellette, 2006). A study by Gates and Dauenhauer (2016) reported that a comparative study between face-to-face and blended learning suggested no comparable difference in the learning outcomes for students.

Using these insights and definitions blended learning, in the context of this study, refers to combining several instructional methods, including digital resources, scaffolded learning through the structured organisation of individual and group tasks and importantly shifting the role of the teacher from the expert and/or product of knowledge to the facilitator (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). It also allows students to conduct self-paced and collaborative learning (Singh cited in Güzer & Caner, 2014).

In the next phase of the development process, the team considered the acting, or the tools to assist teaching practices and developed the Active Learning Framework (ALF). This assisted in integrating the learning content with the learning design and delivery. In the online and blended

learning space, the Learning Management System (LMS) provides an important foundation for the online teaching practices that follow. The LMS used at the University is Moodle[i]. The ALF is divided into three components, namely, pre-workshop learning, active workshop learning and post workshop consolidation. This represents a move away from a lecture-tutorial model to an active learning based model for face-to-face and online learning. These three components work towards integrating structured learning activities that reflect the iterative process of Kolb's cycles and the case-based framework. Each component of the learning framework has principles guiding the development and organisation of the learning materials on LMS.

### *Pre-workshop learning*

Pre-workshop learning replaces the current one-hour lecture format. The delivery of content, core knowledge or didactic learning is based on one to three short videos of up to 20 minutes combined with learning activities that use different types of case-based teaching. Resources developed as pre-workshop material combine abstract conceptualisation (AC) including discussion of key concepts/features/ definitions/ ideas/ perspectives/ theories with questions or activities that allow learners to reflect on concrete experiences (CO). These learning activities include quizzes, discussion forum questions and reflective journal entries or blogs designed to assist with understanding weekly content and as part of scaffold learning to address assessment tasks.

## Active workshop learning

The active workshop learning component consists of learning activities based on core disciplinary knowledge or weekly content using varied case-based teaching models. Some cases are simple and direct and in other scenarios, a single, complex case can be embedded through the 12-week teaching period in a structured and scaffolded way across the weekly modules. Activities developed for active learning support learners to unpack and apply theories to case examples (reflective observation (RO) to active experimentation (AE)) and to draw out competing theoretical positions and the implications for practice (abstract conceptualisation (AC) to active experimentation (AE)). Educators use activities such as in-class or online forum debates, individual and collaborative group work and journals to consolidate learning.

### Post workshop consolidation

Post workshop consolidation provides students the closing link in the iterative cycle once they complete a weekly module. It consists of either questions to test if students have achieved the learning objectives for the week or activities that use the knowledge learnt to evaluate, integrate and provide solutions (moving from CE-RO–AE-AC). The ALF works to meld the development of a range of reading materials and discussions that are accessible to both face-to-face and online students. Simultaneously, it allows students (face-to-face and online) to continue the process of critical thinking and engagement outside the classroom through ongoing discussion that occur in the online environment (Aguirre & Mitschke, 2011). It also encourages students to engage in active learning through exploring, sharing, processing, generalising and applying (University of California, 2011) in all stages of learning with the teacher being the facilitator.

## Practice implications

The establishment of the University Model has a number of implications for curriculum development and general teaching practice in the human services/social work context. The first of these implications, relates to the development of a coherent teaching philosophy across a program area (Itin, 1999). The University Model explicitly and deliberately explains the link between knowledge, the learning process and epistemology (Kolb cited in Georgiou et al., 2008). This is done through identifying the social constructivist elements of the teaching model (Neuman & Blundo, 2000) and the integration of the learning process (Kolb's four-stage cycle) with case-based experiential activities (Kim et al, 2006). The model allows educators to integrate knowledge production (i.e. experience of phenomena), the learning process (the way in which learners interpret, reflect, relate to the phenomena) and practice (cases that allow learners to develop solutions for practice). In other words, it integrates three aspects of the knowledge making process, namely, *thinking, doing and acting*.

A further implication relates to the development of the how and what, that is the instructional tools and resources needed to implement the model. Much of the literature identified in the literature review section focused on discussing findings at the unit level through an examination

of instructional tools and there is very little literature that directly relates to developing a model through which learning and teaching activities can be structured. The University Model is able to explain how we know what we know (epistemology) and develop instructional tools that speak to how and what (acting/doing).

The experiential case-based tools speak to the how and what of curriculum development. An experiential teaching philosophy needs to be congruent with the development of instructional methods and the learning activities (Georgiou et al., 2008). Georgiou et al. (2008) argue that the nature of case-based teaching has consequences for the way experiential teaching activities are designed. Combining insights from Kim et al. (2006) and Georgiou et al.'s (2008) work, the University Model develops guidelines for the development of scenarios that are open ended and require learners to work through the various stages of Kolb's cycles. The continuous and iterative process of learning with the educator as a facilitator of this process allows graduates to gain insights and awareness of practice as well as expose them to varied meanings and the contested nature of social constructions.

Additionally, the *how* and *what* of the curriculum relates to melding the active learning framework with the LMS (Gates & Dauenhauer, 2016; Ayala, 2009). The University Model outlines the ways in which the ALF is integrated into design and delivery in order to lessen the gap between face-to-face and online students. Experiential and active learning is valued as a model that facilitates the use of technology. The ALF is integrated with learning design to facilitate online student's active participation in their learning rather than as a replacement for face-to-face learning. This potentially creates greater synchronicity between the learning experiences of online students and campus based students (Holmes, Tracy, Painter, Oestreich, & Park, 2015).

A further implication related to the acting component of curriculum design is the role of the instructor. In experiential active learning models, the power base shifts from the teacher to the learner. The learner assumes greater responsibility for their learning; facilitates better "establishment of student ownership and voice in the learning process; and recognition of the importance of self-awareness" which leads to the transformation of hierarchies (Lee & Caffarella, 1994; Neuman & Blundo, 2000, p. 29).

In reflecting on the developmental process of the University Model, we suggest that the model deliberatively works towards developing experiential teaching philosophy using blended learning at the program level by linking *thinking, doing and acting*. This provides a clear and consistent teaching approach across the program for online and face-to-face learners. The University Model is being implemented throughout the Bachelor program in community and human services in 2019 and will be evaluated using student surveys and interviews to ascertain the effectiveness of the model in contributing to student learning and effective discipline based professional education[ii] .

While, evaluation of the teaching experiences of designing the curriculum, and student experiences of studying within the new case-based experiential learning will add important insights, it is too soon to collect valid and meaningful data. Anecdotally we are aware that the new model has had positive and negative impacts for teacher and student experiences. As 2020 is the second year of the new design, the next stage of the project will focus primarily on the implications of case-based experiential design from the teacher and student's standpoint.

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[i] The learning management system at Federation University is Moodle. Moodle is described as providing 'a convenient place for students to access lecture materials, but has been designed around social constructivist teaching principles that allow staff and students to communicate freely and share understanding through the use of activity plugins. Assessment tools are also available to provide progress quizzes, assignment drop boxes, plagiarism checking and rapid feedback' (Federation University https://federation.edu.au/staff/learning-and-teaching/elearning-hub/moodle-lms).

[ii] We would like to acknowledge Professor John McDonald who was the initiator and encouraged us to undertake this project. We also thank colleagues in the community human services discipline who worked assiduously towards developing the learning and teaching tools. We are grateful for the advice and support provided by Kellie Macneil and her colleagues in the Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice.

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# Promoting quality learning and teaching pedagogy: Evaluating a targeted localised academic induction program (AIP) for the impact on continuing professional development

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*Despite their position as providers of tertiary education, universities sit beyond normalised discourses of education where qualifications, registration, and continuing professional development are concerned. In this case study, we explore how participation in an academic induction program (AIP) builds foundational andragogy knowledge and skills and fosters individual commitment to continuing professional development (PD) for the critical engagement, maintenance, and enhancement of quality teaching practices. Through a poststructuralist lens, we gathered triangulated evidence via surveys (n=32) and attendance data (n=190). Our findings indicate a positive correlation between AIP attendance and initial PD engagement but identifies a 35% decline in PD uptake six-month post-AIP. Survey responses indicate that while an AIP is a valuable tool for prompting initial engagement in learning and teaching PD, the role and function*

*of teaching within universities needs to be elevated in order to support a career-long commitment to academic enhancement.*

**Keywords:** *Academic development, academic induction, learning and teaching, professional development, lecturer development*

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## Introduction

Traditionally, the purpose of universities has been to create intellectual spaces of inquiry, where academics critique, innovate, and contribute to scholarly literature that extends the dominant ideologies of a society (Giroux, 2016). The traditional value of these intellectual spaces has been situated within the opportunities afforded to students to build their social and intellectual capital around particular discourses while developing essential knowledge and skills for particular professions (Inglis, 2016). The intellectual capital gained by students as they undertake a university degree is said to impact positively on their critical thinking skills and provide them with greater access to higher economic opportunities (Matricano, 2019). However, as government bodies, or agencies funded by them, have been positioned increasingly as the legislative authorities of higher education in neo-liberal 21st Century societies, discourses of consumerism, performance management and capitalism have come to dominate core university functions (Tinto, 2006). Appearing to be at odds, at least in part, with the traditional values and purpose of universities. Such neo-liberal ideologies shift the focus from intellectual advancement to product quality and control.

In the age of metric-driven, competency-focussed, evidence-based education systems, the ideological shift away from intellectual advancement has resulted in the zealous assessment of quantitative data to a measure of the success and quality of undergraduate programs as dependent on students' experiences and perceptions. The definition of quality in these contexts, however, often lacks definition and becomes a contested term where conflated meanings arise (Warner, 2016). In this paper, we use the term to describe the ways in which pedagogy focussed on equity aligns with student learning needs and outcomes, teaching platforms, and accreditation requirements to facilitate success. The concentration on success and quality is due largely to the impact-for-investment conditions

of government funding consistent with neo-liberal agendas. Under this system, how satisfied students feel about their tertiary education experiences from one semester to the next, and rates of retention, have come to function as normalised validity tools that measure the effectiveness of teaching practices – albeit absent of personal, academic, or disciplinary context. Over the past 20 years, the link between student retention and quality teaching practices has become a key neo-liberal concern for university governance (Weuffen, Fotinatos, & Andrews, 2018).

One way in which universities have attempted to address and improve the perception of teaching quality, and by extension students reported-levels of satisfaction of the teaching they receive, is via implementation of Academic Induction/Development Programs (AI/DPs) (Boyd, 2010; Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Martinez, 2008; Roxa & Martensson, 2017). The purpose of these AI/DPs is to acknowledge and address significant deficits in andragogy possessed by newly employed tertiary teachers (TT), and their pre-existing attitudes, beliefs, and views of learning (Christie et al., 2015). In doing so, AI/DPs focus on developing foundational pedagogical skills, knowledge, and practices for successful transition from industry, or completion of Ph.D. degrees. The need for AI/DPs is particularly pertinent as Logan et al. (2014) state, because many TT underestimate "the [academic] role [as] challenging [and the importance of ongoing] support for the development of teaching skills" (p. 42). Within this context, we present a case study situated in regional Victoria, Australia that foregrounds the voices of TT to examine the capacity to which participation in an institutionally-focussed AI/DP builds foundational andragogy knowledge and skills, and fosters communities of practice focussed on continuing professional development for the critical engagement, maintenance, and enhancement of quality teaching practices.

## Literature

The literature surrounding the need for AI/DPs appears to be encapsulated around three interwoven topics. First, the increased funding associated with student success data has resulted in a growing concern by university governance for the provision of quality student learning experiences (Wellings et al., 2019). Within neo-liberalist ideologies, the focus of student satisfaction surveys as the absolute quantitative measure by which teaching quality is assessed, positions students as consumers and teachers as the deliverer of an education product (Boyd, 2010; Chalmers & Gardiner,

2015; Martinez, 2008; Roxa & Martensson, 2017). This shifts frameworks of understanding of teaching quality away from the establishment and enhancement of intellectual capital. In order to supply the student consumer with a superior education product in the competitive tertiary education sector, universities have increasingly implemented mandated professional development (PD) sessions focussed on improving the quality of teaching (Reddy et al., 2016). While in general, the acquisition and enhancement of practice is a standard endeavour, the perception that PDs focussed on improving teaching quality will impact student retention rates, silences the associated benefits for staff, such as, increasing foundational andragogy knowledge and skills, and creating reflexive communities of practice focussed on enhancement (Christie et al., 2015).

In June 2019, the Australian Minister for Education announced that in order to create more accountability for the spending of public money and enhance the development of quality learning and teaching (L&T) experiences, financial incentives based on performance metrics would be implemented in 2020. The reasoning was to to ensure Australian universities perform "strongly, sustainably, and responsibly" (Wellings et al., 2019, p. xii). We assert, that a focus on the four student-centred measures – student success, equity group participation, graduate outcomes, student experience – within the grant scheme appears to perpetuate neo-liberal ideologies of universities as capitalist endeavours, with teaching quality viewed as a measurable product of the business by its consumers.

Concern for teaching quality in the politically controlled, yet institutionally competitive nature of the tertiary education sector, has led to notions of quality education and career outcomes being considered essential markers of student achievement (Bennett et al., 2018; Tinto, 2016). In the Australian context, triangulation of student satisfaction and achievement data, from the quality indicators for learning and teaching (QILT) (https://www.qilt.edu.au/) and Australian Government Department of Education and Training respectively, is used as "the yardstick by which teaching quality should be assessed" (Coe et al., 2014, p. 2). Over the past twenty years, however, there appears to have "been no major change, upwards or downwards, in student retention rates internationally" (Weuffen et al., 2016, p. 2). This assessment is supported by the latest data for the period 2005–2015 highlighting that success rates for undergraduate students have fallen only by 0.61 with retention down nationally 0.82 (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Therefore, the use of this data alone to determine whether or not a

TT's practice is considered quality is problematic. It implies that the impact of teaching may be observed, and entirely dependent, on students' self-reported perceptions and levels of satisfaction.

As a means of reinforcing the dogma that student retention is to be addressed by improving teaching quality, whether portrayed overtly or not, universities employ various strategies to address attrition (Bowles et al., 2014; Lau, 2003; Fotinatos & Sabo, 2018). Given the increasing non-traditional student cohorts – students over 25 years of age – enrolling in undergraduate programs over the past thirteen years – an average growth of 58% compared to traditional undergraduate cohort growth of 18.5% (see Figure 1), Milheim (2005) argues that universities "must respond to [their] needs as effectively as possible in order to remain competitive and accessible" (p. 122). With this in mind, the literature highlights a need to examine and evaluate ways in which academic teachers may be supported to develop better L&T experiences through continuing PD for the purposes of good teaching as realigned to the quintessential purposes of universities as intellectual spaces of inquiry. This is because there has been a tendency to focus on evaluation and impact, which as Amundsen and Wilson (2012) argue, "may not be the best questions to ask [if we want to] deeply understand practice and build a solid foundation for further practice and research" (p. 111).

| | Under 25 | 25-30 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | Over 60 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ 2018 | 216,602 | 23,580 | 24,466 | 11,238 | 5,840 | 1,350 |
| ■ 2005 | 179,928 | 18,262 | 18,230 | 8,458 | 2,265 | 339 |

■2005  ■2018
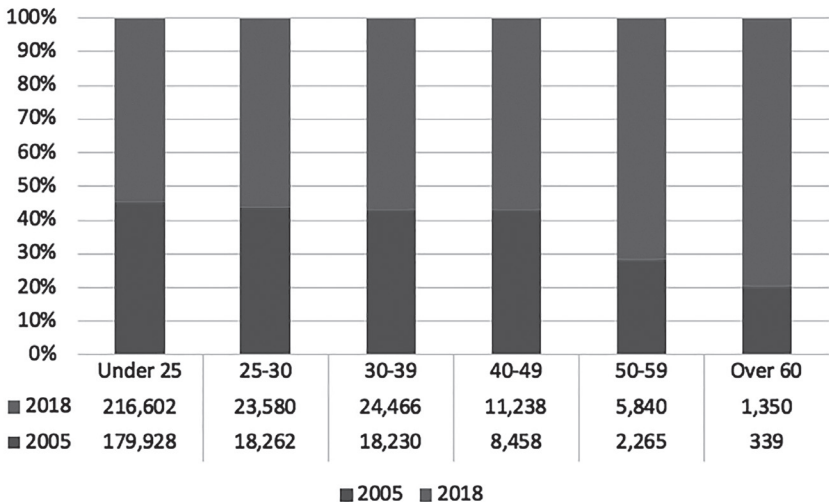
**Figure 1: Commencing undergraduate students by age and year in Australian universities (Australian Government, 2019)**

## Educating academic teachers

The notion of academic teacher training as a means of supporting individual pedagogical growth and institutional development has gained momentum during the last 20 years (Silander, & Stigmar, 2018). Perhaps this is in response to the reality that employment as a TT in Australian and International universities requires no formal education qualification, nor is there a formal registration body, or mandated minimum PD hours, to ensure the maintenance of high-quality contemporary pedagogical practice. Rather, TTs within universities are employed overwhelmingly because of their industry expertise and/or research output (Bennett et al., 2018). Yet, in a study conducted by Dunkin (1991) nearly twenty years ago, TTs reported that as their careers progressed, tasks associated with either teaching and research intertwined to become the brick-and-mortar of teaching quality.

In Australia, formal education qualifications, registration with a central regulatory body, and evidence of ongoing PD are required for employment as a teacher within all areas of education; early childhood, primary and secondary schools (Victorian Government, 2015), and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) (Victorian TAFE Association (2019), but not higher education institutions. The assumption seems to be made within the university sector:

> *That once an academic holds a Master's degree or PhD in their discipline, they can share knowledge and teach students effectively … [but, this results in] many lecturers feeling like they have been thrown in the deep end at the start of their careers (Quinn & Vorster, 2015).*

As a means of addressing the increased calls for teaching quality accountability, one way in which universities are attempting to assist the provision of better L&T experiences for students is by way of Academic Induction/Development Programs (AI/DPs) (Boyd, 2010; Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Martinez, 2008; Roxa & Martensson, 2017).

Scholarly analysis of the literature indicates that explorations of the role of AI/DPs internationally have also gained momentum over the past 20 years. The focus of these studies has tended to centre around analysing the impact of AI/DPs on the perceived role of TT (Chadha, 2014; Owens, 2015), and effectiveness to facilitating pedagogical enhancement

(Higgins & Harreveld, 2013; Stein et al., 2012), with recent research focussed on benchmarking and contextualising AI/DP programs across Australia (Hicks et al., 2010; Sugrue et al, 2017). In general, studies tend to use interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or narrative self-study to gather participant satisfaction data relating to AI/DP attendance and the perceived influence on pedagogical changes. While the bulk of studies report positive correlations between AI/DPs attendance and changes in pedagogical practice, Chalmers and Gardiner (2015) argue that evaluation techniques exploring the impact of AI/DPs lack rigour. They state:

> *Without a rigorously developed and relevant education instrument, the effectiveness of teacher development programs will continue to be assessed through limited tools such as participation satisfaction surveys which do not provide evidence of the immediate and long-term impact of the programs on teaching, learning, and the institutional culture related to teaching and learning (p. 55).*

Despite the tools used, the major theme relating to the need for, and attendance at, AI/DPs appeared to be situated on the notion of teacher's transition from industry / other education sectors to the university environment. The reason being to maintain quality teaching practices within higher education particularly where blended pedagogy is concerned (Nguyet Diep et al, 2019).

The key tenant of transitionary challenges that emerges for TT is the notion of survival skills. Isaacs and Parker (1997) identified that newly employed academic teachers considered practical information on how to teach, over theoretical aspects of academia, as most valuable to supporting transition. This is supported by Martinez (2008), who highlighted that TTs face major challenges when transitioning from classroom / industry to campus, in particular, the development of knowledge and confidence relating to the normative universities' work, research, and promotion culture. In order to support transition, Ambler et al. (2016) argue that better processes for mentoring ought to be employed as a means of facilitating increased job satisfaction and a culture of professional learning. Because of this, there is a need to develop AI/DPs that are a:

> *Well-articulated, integrated package that better reflects the lived experiences of new academics juggling the demands of teaching, research, administrative and service components of their new work (Martinez, 2008, p. 49).*

While Logan et al. (2014) identified that mandatory AI/DPs within their study were perceived as having little value to the transition journey from industry to academia, Reddy et al. (2016) highlight the "importance of deliberate institutional intervention in developing" (p. 1830) a culture of academic PD. A prominent suggestion is for more longitudinal research to be conducted that focusses on investigating conducive processes of transition and induction (see Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Roxa & Martinez, 2017; Stein et al., 2012).

In the international arena, formal AI/DPs have been designed, implemented, evaluated, and reviewed regularly, to address the issue of teaching quality specifically (Jaaskela et al, 2017). In the United Kingdom, for example, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (Advance HE, 2018) has established their position as the "national body that champions teaching excellence". Through fellowship programs, the HEA supports AI/DPs for individual teaching and support staff in universities, with the express purpose of "raising the quality and status of teaching" (Advance HE, 2018). Tertiary staff wishing to apply for a fellowship are required to progress through a rigorous application and registration program that "demonstrates a personal and institutional commitment to professionalism in L&T in higher education" (Advance HE, 2018). While it is beyond the scope of this manuscript to explore the HEA in depth, we raise it here as a means of highlighting the juxtaposition between international and Australian education spaces in promoting and enhancing ongoing participation with L&T PD to enhance teaching quality in universities.

In the absence of an Australian national body for teaching excellence, the Australian Government Office of Learning and Teaching offered[1] fellowships to "advance learning and teaching in higher education by supporting leading educators to undertake strategic, high-profile activities in areas of importance to the higher education sector" (Australian Government, 2017). In 2016, Kym Fraser was awarded a fellowship for the program: "A national, open-access learning and teaching induction program for staff new to teaching", with an aim to "develop a self-

paced, semester long, national, open-access Learning and Teaching Induction Program for teaching staff in the Australian Higher Education Sector" (Australian Government, 2016). Delivered as a massive open online course (MOOC), the "teaching induction course provides key introductory L&T concepts and strategies for those who are in their first few years of university teaching" (Canvas Network, 2018). Critical analysis of the MOOC indicates that the program presents generic pedagogical approaches to L&T via content such as: theories, assessment and feedback, quality teaching practices, and designing curriculum for diverse learners. However, generic approaches to standardising academic professional induction are problematic because they "result in a dislocation from experience that makes little concession to individuality or to institutional context or conditions" (Daniels, 2017, p. 170).  Rather, the literature suggests that solutions lie with "the need for a balance between immediate and ongoing support offered through continuous development programs" (Reddy et al, 2016, p. 1825), in order to reduce TT's "sense of being overwhelmed and frustrated at being unable to meet the diverse demands of the job" (Logan et al. 2014, p. 43).  Nevertheless, AI/DPs as a survival kit for the commencing TT raises questions about the capacity to which participation in such programs builds foundational andragogic knowledge and skills and continuously supports development of quality L&T practices for career longevity.

## Project context

Federation University Australia is a multi-campus, regionally-focussed, dual-sector tertiary education provider in Victoria, Australia, and a member of the Regional Universities Network (RUN). According to the 2017 Student Experience Survey National Report (QILT, 2018), Federation University is ranked above the national average (80.9%) for teaching quality, with 82.9% (n=3167) undergraduate students indicating a positive experience. The university is recognised as placing "great emphasis on the quality of our teaching and learning, [by] delivering a range of innovative programs" (Universities Australia, 2018). This emphasis is reflective, in part, to figures highlighting that over 29% of students come from a low socioeconomic status and are often first-in-family to attend university (Devlin & McKay, 2017). However, these figures should be not be viewed through a deficit lens because students from these backgrounds are often "hardworking, high

achieving, and determined to succeed" (Devlin & McKay, 2017, p. 359). Federation University's commitment to providing high quality L&T environments is perhaps cognisant also of the anecdotal evidence that a proportion of the academic teaching population is also first-in-family; the authors themselves are predominantly first-in family.

The Federation University AIP was implemented in 2015 to provide newly employed academic teachers with centrally-based information, resources, supports and services to assist in the survival of the first teaching semester, and to provide a foundation on which to build ongoing quality L&T practices. Since 2015, the AIP has undergone rolling reviews to maintain contemporary pedagogical relevance and the evolving needs of newly employed academic teachers. For the period June 2015 – December 2017, the AIP was delivered as a face-to-face two-day workshop, however in February 2018, due to the increasing regional multi-campus reach of the university, the AIP was, and continues to be, delivered as a one-day facilitated face-to-face workshop, with 8 hours of self-paced online learning. Face-to-face workshop topics focus on introducing principles of quality L&T in a range of learning environments, navigating the learning management system (LMS), and promoting academic resources, supports, and PD opportunities. Online self-paced topics focus on introducing learning, teaching, and assessment frameworks and structures, student diversity and embedding academic support programs, promoting enhanced scholarly pedagogical practice, and providing online supports – forums and virtual learning sessions – to address transitional issues.

## Methods

This case study employs a poststructuralist framework to examine staff perceptions regarding the capacity to which the Federation University AIP fosters ongoing participation in L&T PD. Poststructuralist concepts, such as normative discourses and power/knowledge relations (Foucault, 1977) are used as an overarching lens to critique the purpose of AI/DP's within the higher education sector; highlight ways in which university governance positions responsibility for teaching quality squarely on the shoulders of TT, and explore how TT themselves take up their constructed roles. To explore the capacity to which the AIP builds foundational andragogy knowledge and skills, and fosters continuing professional development for quality teaching practices, the research

team decided that collection of triangulated and trustworthy attendance data with self-reported perceptions about changes in L&T was essential to "gain more than one perspective" (Zeegers, 2015, p. 80), and "check the credibility of data [to] minimise the distorting effects of personal bias upon logic of evidence" (Lather, 1986, p. 86). The project received Federation University Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval in June 2018 (B18-094).

Attendance data of newly employed academic staff (n=190) completing the AIP, and attending centrally-offered and internally-facilitated PD sessions was collected by the central L&T unit (Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice (CLIPP)) between the period of 2015–2018, and recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. In order to qualify for selection, TT's needed to be newly employed in any capacity (ongoing, contract, sessional) at the university for the AIP operational period of 2015–2018.

Data relating to staff perceptions about the participatory value of the AIP was generated via an online anonymous survey hosted by LimeSurvey (https://www.limesurvey.org/#). The survey consisted of n=33 questions, presented as a range of Likert scales, yes/no selection, and multiple-choice questions, designed in four major sections. The first section was designed to capture information relating to the educational / industry background of staff participating in the AIP, their perceptions of quality L&T, and the capacity to which they participated. The subsequent three sections were designed to invite dialogue and develop discourse about their perceptions, values, and engagement of a) PD to enhance L&T practices, b) networks and services to advance L&T practices, and c) student study support resources and services to support improved student learning outcomes. The survey questions were validated by the research team in collaboration with the AIP program leader.

Invitations to participate were disseminated via email by a CLIPP staff member who was not part of the project team. No remuneration for participation was offered or provided. A total of n=32 responses were received, indicating a below average response rate (17%) compared with similar non-incentivised research projects employing surveys (Deaker, Stein, & Spiller, 2016). Despite the small effect size, given that we conducted simple calculations and grounded thematic analysis through the lens of poststructuralism, in combination with the responses and

statistics feature of LimeSurvey, participant experiences, rather than taken-for-granted assumptions, about TT's participation in the AIP and subsequent L&T PD is a trustworthy method for this project. Triangulation through the lens of trustworthiness – over validity as a positivist tradition – is used throughout the project to "check the credibility of data and minimises the distorting effects of personal bias upon logic of evidence" (Lather, 1986a, p. 86), and to "gain more than one perspective on what is being investigated" (Zeegers, 2015, p. 80).

## Findings and discussion

A thorough analysis of data highlights a positive association between AIP attendance and PD engagement. Staff completing both the face-to-face familiarisation component, and the online introduction component of the AIP, were more likely (58%, n=190) to engage with at least one type of L&T PD. Of this cohort, 63% (n=70) undertook general L&T focussed PD opportunities within their respective schools / departments, 37% (n=41) undertook award/non-award L&T PD offered centrally within Federation University, with respondents indicating a preference for self-paced units of learning (56%, n=18).

### Participation

In general, PD for continuing improvement of employee practice is not a new phenomenon. In the tertiary education sector, programs focussed on enhancing L&T pedagogy via continuing PD engagement are beginning to gain momentum (Canvas Network, 2018; Advance HE, 2018); there exists a resounding silence of a collective academic voice around any sector-driven requirements. When asked to consider the minimal annual hours of PD that should be undertaken by academic teachers to support the development of quality L&T practices, 25% (n=8) of survey respondents cited between 11–30 hours per calendar year were required to maintain contemporary relevance. A smaller percentage (16%, n=5) suggested that staff with a formal education qualification should not be required to complete any PD at all, or that hours should be negotiated with line managers. While PD as a form of continuing development is a normative function of industry practice, the relative silence of academic voices in relation to sector-driven requirements constructs, and continuously reinforces the notion, that PD is not an essential endeavour for tertiary academic teachers. Yet at

the same time, programs such as the UK's HEA push back against such normative discursive practices to construct counter-narratives that posit PD as essential to the enhancement and advancement of L&T pedagogy. The importance of engaging in PD, and perhaps even mandating a minimum number of hours per annum for staff in our study, is highlighted by the following anonymous survey response:

> *Even if you have teaching qualifications and you've been teaching for years – it is still extremely important to maintain currency and up-to-date knowledge of teaching practices. New technologies are available every year. In many cases now, the students are coming from high schools better equipped and using the latest types of platforms for learning; learning is not like it used to be 30 years ago.*

Such responses reflect Torrisi-Steele and Drew's (2013) presupposition that PD in the education sector ought to support the "transformation of practice [that] facilitates integration of technology to create innovative or improved student-centred, meaningful learning experiences" (p. 378). When counter-narratives emerge suggesting that PD is essential to the transformation and enhancement of L&T pedagogy, discourses of tertiary teaching are disrupted; the quintessential image of the professor as the privileged knowledge holder orating their superior content knowledge to a lecture hall of ignorant students is laid open for interrogation. This enables the mobilisation of other discourses that foregrounds the importance of working in partnership with students, aligns curriculum to modern industry requirements, and integrates contemporary L&T pedagogical practice for the advancement of teaching in universities.

### Correlation between AIP attendance and PD engagement

Attendance data collected by CLIPP indicates that a total of n=190 academic teachers completed the AIP, 58% (n=111) of which attended one form of central PD or another, between the period 2015–2018.
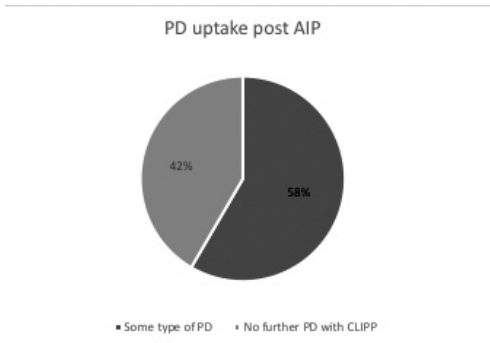
**Figure 2: PD update post AIP participation**

Of participants undertaking L&T-focussed PD post-AIP completion (n=111), 30% (n=33) studied a formal award qualification via the Graduate Certificate in Education (Tertiary Education) (GCETE) only, 55% (n=61) undertook non-award L&T PD in the form of blended teaching modules, peer-enhancement workshops, and faculty specific workshops only, with 15% (n=17) undertaking both award and non-award PD. A break-down of attendance rates, per award / non-award category is provided in Figure 3.
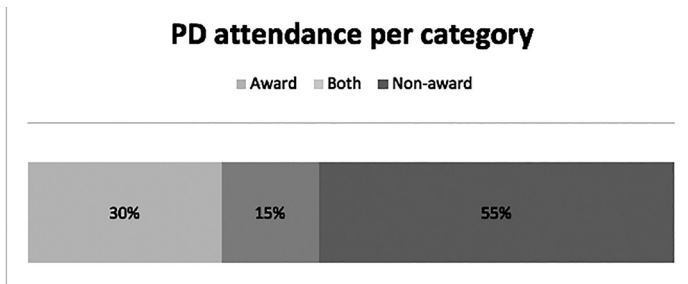


**Figure 3: Break-down of AIP attendees at PD per category**

As a means of examining whether participation in PD as a result of AIP attendance drops-off for our cohort, we asked participants to report on the types of PD attended within the first semester of employment and compared this with attendance in the last 12-months; for some participants this may be two-years post AIP engagement, but for others only one year. The break-down of PD participation per type is provided in Figure 4.
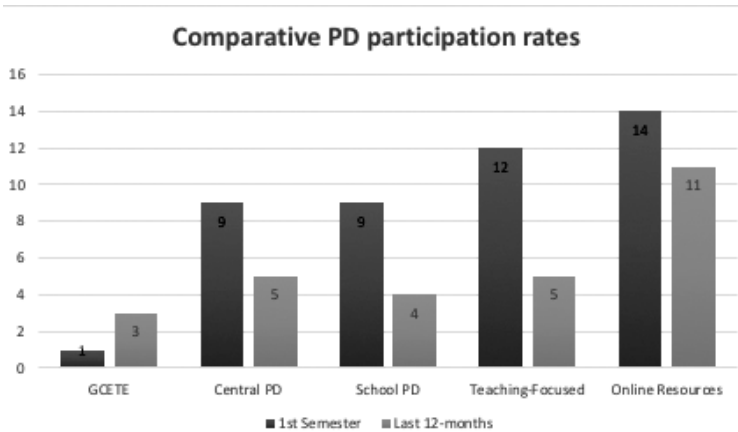
**Figure 4: Comparative PD participation rates of survey respondents**

Analysis of Figure 4 indicates that participation rates in L&T PD are higher on average in the first six-month period post-AIP attendance. Anecdotally, this is possibly due to the influence of direct sign-posting provided by facilitators in the AIP, as an:

> *[i]deological commitment that teaching needs to accomplish much more than simply detailing what we know and establishing a familiarity with the basic techniques of the domain (Duschl, & Osborne, 2002, p. 40).*

The function of facilitator sign-posting of L&T PD opportunities within the AIP could be considered an action of resistance to the dominant research versus teaching positioning of universities. While such actions may not be enacted consciously by the facilitator, the push and pull factors against such positioning challenge the perceived dominance of research practice. As Thorndyke et al (2006) express:

> *The sink-or-swim mentality that was previously the modus operandi of academia is slowly being replaced by the concept of stewardship or investment, and the need for faculty development in now increasingly appreciated (p. 668).*

A small number of survey participants indicated that they did not undertake any PD in the first semester of employment (n=3), or the past-twelve month period (n=2), with one reason cited for nil

engagement centring on conditions placed on sessional employment[2], as highlighted below:

> *I am a sessional staff member. My faculty only allowed me to do the AIP once they knew I would likely be continuing to work for them. They have not encouraged me to do any professional development at all.*

> *I am sessional and not [been] encouraged to participate in any professional development. I have had meetings with CLIPP staff when I have had specific needs regarding the use of Moodle[3].*

While it is beyond the scope of this manuscript to explore the complexities of sessional employment and impact on PD engagement, previous studies note that discourses of precariat contractual employment and expectations of unpaid labour are significant contributing factors  (Andrews et al., 2016; Whelan et al., 2013). Despite this, analysis of participation rates suggests that newly employed academic teachers' participation in the AIP correlates positively to a higher uptake of subsequent L&T PD opportunities, particularly within the first six-month of employment.

Survey results indicate a 38% decline in PD engagement between the first six-month (total n= 45) and the previous 12-month period (total n=28); consistent with other studies (see Reddy et al, 2016; Spowart et al., 2016). Perhaps this decline is reflective of Warhurst's (2006) claims from over 10-years ago that systematic development of L&T practices and engagement in PD occurs more effectively when embedded within group learning activities. Our analysis of participation, however, demonstrates that regardless of the adversarial positioning of research versus teaching in universities, the AIP is a valuable tool to foster academic teachers' continuing participation of L&T PD, which consequently impacts positively their knowledge of, and engagement in, L&T pedagogy. We put forward the proposition that the focus of foundational andragogy knowledge and skills support for L&T provided by AI/DPs in general needs to shift from focussing on the practicalities of teaching and research – *the how* – to critiquing and analysing the possible different pedagogical approaches – *the why*.

## Limitations and future research

There are several limitations that frame this study. As is the nature of case study research, all of the data presented in this manuscript is collected from, and concerned with, one institution. The small survey response rates raises potential limitations for generalisability. It would be valuable for future research to undertake interviews with those participants who undertook multiple forms of PD to determine the contributing factors that encouraged / supported their ongoing attendance in a wide range of PD. While it is beyond the scope of this initial manuscript, supplementary interview data with those who attended multiple offerings and consistently, as well as the non-attenders, would provide more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

The other limitation of this project is the collection of data relating to PD engagement as a result of participation in the AIP. Future research capturing data from staff attending AIPs, but not participating in L&T PD, would provide greater understanding of trends and verify whether the positive correlation between AIP and ongoing PD attendance to enhance L&T pedagogy identified in this study exists for the non-attending cohort.

## Implications and conclusions

Despite their position as providers of tertiary education, universities sit beyond normalised discourses of education where qualifications, registration, and continual professional development are concerned. While there has been an increasing defendable correlation between teaching quality and student success outcomes, universities continue to employ academic teachers largely on the basis of their content / industry expertise, over pedagogical skills and knowledge gained from formal education qualifications. This results in higher employment of academic teachers who lack foundational pedagogical knowledge for teaching cohorts of adult learners, yet at the same time tasks them with the responsibility of addressing student attrition. While AI/DPs support the development and promote the benefits of continuing L&T PD, an argument could be made that in reality they function as a band-aid solution to greater issues of pedagogy deficits within universities. Yet, as these programs are delivered with the express aim of advancing and enhancing academic teachers' L&T pedagogy, the dominant nature of research is challenged

to include Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoLT) practice. This in turn elevates the role and function of teaching within universities to a space where education qualifications, registration, and opportunities for professional development are considered essential to academic teachers' employment and the ongoing enhancement of student learning.

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# Adult community education: Australian environmental scan

## Adult Learning Australia

## Executive summary

Adult community Education (ACE) is a recognisable education sector that offers accessible lifelong learning opportunities that are learner-centred and needs based.

The Australian ACE scan profiles the sector in terms of its programs, features and provider types. The scan outlines ACE program participants, outcomes and the policy areas they support. It also explores the challenges facing the sector in terms of sustainability. This scan builds on the work completed in Adult Learning Australia's previous ACE scans (2014; 2015; 2016a; 2017).

Comprehensive analysis of ACE is impacted by the lack of complete data on all of the work that ACE does. However, this report provides a contemporary profile of the sector through desktop research and analysis of existing data.

## Key findings

ACE organisations are not for profit providers of accessible learning opportunities for adults, which are both learner-centred and place

based. Adult community education is a distinct sector in Australia's education system – providing vital links across educational settings, workplaces and communities.

There are roughly 2500 ACE providers in Australia (the exact number is unknown). All offer personal enrichment/interest learning. Most offer adult basic education in language, literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundation skills. A significant number (between 250–400) also offer formal vocational education and training (VET). ACE providers that offer formal VET are largely concentrated in Victoria and NSW.

State and territory governments define and support ACE in different ways. Most recognise and support ACE as programs in informal and non-formal personal enrichment and adult basic education. In Victoria and NSW, ACE providers deliver all types of learning programs, including formal VET.

The increased vocational orientation of ACE is supported nationally by all jurisdictions, particularly to assist disadvantaged or disengaged adults to pathway into learning for work-related outcomes or to keep them in the workforce.

## Enrichment

Personal enrichment programs offer many adults pathways back into learning by supporting social inclusion and impacting positively on health and wellbeing.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1.1 million Australians participated in structured personal interest learning from all sources. However, it is conservatively estimated that at least 200,000 adults participate in personal interest learning programs through ACE each year (ABS 2017).

ACE personal interest or enrichment learning includes learning new skills, as well as learning for enjoyment or personal development. It can be seen as a preventative health and wellbeing measure, which is significant given the focus of successive governments on efficiencies to improve our health and wellbeing. Healthy, productive ageing is a key government policy that ACE personal enrichment programs contribute to directly. Funding personal enrichment learning for low income learners is a major challenge for ACE providers.

## Foundation

ACE basic adult education programs are aimed at adults with limited formal education or English language skills. These programs cover language, literacy, numeracy, basic digital skills and enterprise skills such as communication, problem solving, presentation and self-management. These programs are offered with high levels of support. They may be non-formal (non-accredited) or formal (accredited).

### *Non-accredited*

National data on adults participating in non-accredited adult basic education programs delivered by ACE providers is currently not collected, which presents a significant barrier to building a complete picture of ACE.

One study (Dymock, 2007) showed that thousands of Australian adults participate in non-accredited adult basic education programs to improve their self-confidence and capacity to interact with the wider community. This study also showed that improved literacy led to further training or employment outcomes. Dymock also identified strong continuing demand for non-accredited community-based language, literacy and numeracy courses, and suggested this should be acknowledged through funding support.

### *Accredited*

VET outcomes are reported within the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. NCVER publish two VET outcomes datasets:

• Government-funded VET

• Total VET Activity (reporting commenced 2015).

Government-funded VET reports outcomes on all VET activity delivered by government providers. However, TAFE outcomes include domestic fee for service but government-funded VET activity delivered by community education and private providers, does not include fee-for-service.

Total VET Activity (TVA) reports on government-funded VET and domestic fee for service VET at TAFE, university, community education providers (ACE) and private providers. There are also differences in the

reporting scope between these two collections. Non-accredited training activity (which is a significant proportion of ACE provision in the government-funded collection) is out of scope in TVA, but included in the government-funded collection.

In 2018, there were 13,426 program enrolments in government-funded adult basic education programs at ACE RTOs / community education providers (identified using AVETMISS FOE 12 Mixed Field Programs). This accounts for 7.3% of program enrolments, and includes the highest percentage of enrolments by many equity groups including people who are unemployment, people with a disability or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Over 15 years, (2003–2018), program enrolments in government-funded accredited basic adult education have halved. However, subject enrolments have increased by around 30%. Training hours have also increased by 13%. There is a continuing trend towards subject-only training in basic adult education. With the load pass rate at around 68% – showing an increase of 15% between 2003–2018. This is over 5% higher than the equivalent success rate in this area at other VET providers.

There were 19,241 TVA program enrolments in adult basic education programs at ACE RTOs in 2018, representing 8.8% of all TVA problem enrolments.

ACE providers require increased support to respond to Australia's significant literacy challenge. Identifying effective interventions in adult literacy education for disadvantaged learners in ACE settings is an important first step.

Flexible delivery of foundation skills training is key for adults that do not want or need full qualifications in this area. Also, foundation skill gaps training integrated with vocationally focussed subjects or qualifications delivery.

## Vocational

In 2018, 481,200 students were enrolled in nationally recognised training at ACE providers. Fifty-five per cent of program enrolments at ACE providers in government-funded VET were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers.

For government-funded ACE VET program enrolments in 2018 (where ACE providers often achieve equivalent or better outcomes):

- 36% were in regional and remote areas
- 46% were unemployed
- 21% had a disability
- 21% were from non-English speaking backgrounds.

According to NCVER, in 2018 there were 41,401 program enrolments in government-funded VET programs at ACE providers, accounting for 3.2% of the total enrolments – and 27,975 or 2.5% excluding basic adult education FOE12.

In 2018, there were 102,486 TVA program enrolments at ACE providers, accounting for 3.9% of total program enrolments – and 82,745 excluding basic adult education FOE 12, or 3.4%.

The number of government-funded ACE program enrolments in accredited VET, excluding adult basic education, has decreased substantially over the past fifteen years. Reported training hours delivered have increased by 8% showing a marginal trend towards increasing quantities of training delivery per enrolment.

The number of TVA ACE program enrolments has remained steady since reporting began in 2015. However, subject enrolments have increased by 90% and training hours delivered have increased by around 27% –showing a significant trend towards increased quantities of training delivery per enrolment.

Government-funded ACE program enrolments in accredited VET, other than adult basic education, include most equity groups at higher levels than other providers. Graduate student outcomes are comparatively equal with consistent outcomes (time series 2015–2019) when compared with other training providers.

According to the VET Student Outcomes 2019 report, students enrolled in VET at ACE providers account for the most significant shift from unemployment to employment after their training (16.7%), showing better results than all other providers. Students with ACE providers are also the most satisfied with the overall quality of their training. These are exceptional results, given the barriers that disadvantaged learners need to overcome with assistance from their ACE providers.

To reverse the unintended adverse effects of competitive funding models on ACE providers and the vulnerable learners they serve, government should outline specific and complementary roles for the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers. A national community social service obligation fund and quarantining of foundation skills funding for community and public providers may be necessary.

There are also ACE providers that are not RTOs but who assist with formal VET delivery by entering into partnerships with RTOs that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments; making judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and issuing awards. Partnering, rather than competing, is proving a useful model to achieve equity in VET.

ACE organisations provide strong pathways from non-formal learning programs into formal VET programs. Research suggests that supported learning pathways may be best for many Australians of working age; particularly those with low levels of formal education or poor experiences of formal education.

The available data on actual transitions made by students at ACE providers from non-formal learning programs into formal VET programs reveal their high capacity to perform a 'pathway' role. For example, in Victoria data from Deloittes (2017) shows that learners who attend an ACE RTO have higher transition rates than ACE organisations that are not RTOs. However, the number of ACE RTOs continues to decline in the face of policy shifts that undermine their viability.

Delivering VET programs in local community settings is advantageous for disadvantaged adult learners, so an effective strategy would be to increase the number of ACE RTOs or facilitate the provision of accredited programs in ACE environments.

> '[S]mall providers often see themselves as working with individuals not suited to a TAFE environment. This is especially true of higher-need learners, who require close support and attention' (Lamb et al, 2018, p. 47).

More broadly, the ACE sector achieves strong outcomes in many policy areas beyond education; for example, in health, human services, employment, industry and business and community and regional development.

## Report structure

This report builds on a framework developed in previous ACE scan's (ALA, 2016a and 2017) for reporting on ACE education programs in Australia. However, the time series data in this report completely replaces previous ACE scans (ALA, 2016a and 2017) due to NCVER's changing data extraction methodology. This update contains consistent time series data from two NCVER collections: government-funded and Total VET.

ACE continues to play an important role in educating many adult Australians; particularly disadvantaged adults. However, data on the impact of non-accredited ACE programs must be collected to develop a strong evidence base. The sector also needs ongoing support from state and federal governments to sustain its work and build on its potential.

In order to create a broader profile of ACE in Australia, data must be collected from various sources. This ACE scan update covers the following areas:

- An overview of ACE in Australia in terms of its activities and providers
- ACE provision by state, territory and national perspectives
- ACE programs, including key features and data on the participants, outcomes and national policies supported
- A new data framework to draw conclusions on where to next for Australian ACE
- Trends over time to identify issues affecting the sustainability of ACE.

## Introduction

This report aims to build the recognition of adult community education as a distinct education sector in Australia by profiling the diversity of ACE providers, programs, participants and outcomes.

## History of ACE

ACE can be traced back to the late 1880s, where it was established to provide education options that met the needs of ordinary Australians. ACE

organisations, such as Mechanics Institutes, offered lectures, courses and books on a wide range of topics and disseminated new ideas and stimulated debate. They broadened people's horizons at a time when there were few other channels through which this could be done (SSCEET, 1991).

As formal education was established in Australia, through schooling, vocational education and training and universities, ACE education programs were largely sidelined. However, ACE developed alongside and outside of the three formal education sectors to provide informal learning for adults through their participation in social activities and through non-formal structured learning programs of interest to adults for personal development outcomes.

In the early 1990s the work of ACE received national recognition through the 'Come in Cinderella' report on ACE (SSCEET, 1991). 'The view expressed in "Come in Cinderella" was that ACE had become a potent education and training network that needed to be capitalised on Australia wide and with adequate data on patterns of participation, provision and expenditures to be achieved' (SSCEET, 1991, p. 157).

Overarching national policy statements on ACE followed. The Commonwealth, all state and territories and ministers with responsibility for education endorsed the first national Ministerial Declaration on ACE in 1993 (MCEETYA, 1993) and have endorsed updated statements in 1997 (MCEETYA, 1997), 2002 (MCEETYA, 2002) and 2008 (MCVTE, 2008) to accommodate changes in the education and training environment that had occurred.

The early Declarations expressed commitments concerning the value of ACE in developing social capital, building community capacity, encouraging social participation and enhancing social cohesion.

The later Declarations reaffirmed this commitment and extended acknowledgement of the value of ACE beyond these areas to its potential to respond to changed industrial, demographic and technological circumstances.

The Declarations encouraged a collaborative approach to ACE to allow the sector to make a greater contribution to supporting the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) productivity agenda for skills and workforce development. It also identified ACE as a key player in the response to the Australian Government's social inclusion policy agenda.

The latest 2008 Ministerial Declaration called for ACE to become more vocationally oriented as ACE had already started to do in response to community demand. The idea was that ACE would serve a value-adding role in VET by bringing in its distinctive qualities; particularly to assist adults disadvantaged in learning into and through the VET system as well as serving a generic role of offering VET to all adults (Schofield & Associates, 1996).

There have been significant changes in the education and training environment since 2008 but no updated national Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

The work and underpinning philosophy of ACE continues to this day largely through community centres, community colleges and neighbourhood houses – though differently structured in each state and territory.

## ACE scope and scale

ACE in Australia has distinctive characteristics and features, offering accessible, learner centred adult education programs in local community settings.

## Distinctive features of ACE

ACE has distinguishing features that have been maintained throughout its long history. The theme of 'ACE is different' runs deep and strong through much of the literature on ACE in Australia. It has a distinctive focus, set of values and learning practice, and is delivered by a distinctive type of organisation.

## Individual and inclusive learning

The ACE sector focusses on the needs of the adults in the particular community in which it operates. ACE's starting point is providing learning opportunities that meet the needs of adults in local communities, and to build local capacity for community development. ACE takes a strong advocacy role to ensure local learning needs are met. The ACE sector is an enabler of inclusive learning.

ACE has a welcoming, caring and non-judgmental culture to facilitate access by everybody and offers learning programs in friendly, community settings that cater for adults of varying abilities and

backgrounds. ACE seeks to be a gateway for all adults to return to learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience or attainment. ACE starts where the learner is at, providing learning programs that build on their existing skills and knowledge and delivering desired new knowledge and skills and other outcomes, including motivation to go on to bigger and better things.

Townsend (2006) argued that ACE has the capacity to build and connect communities; decrease social isolation; extend community networks and build social capital. ACE is also recognised for its work with second chance and vulnerable learners using inclusive pedagogy and practice with learners who have had prior negative experience of learning (Ollis et al, 2017). In addition, ACE offers learning opportunities to learners across a lifespan including older adults (Ollis, et al, 2018).

### A learner-centred approach

ACE recognises that there is no 'traditional student', only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be taken into account in learner-responsive pedagogical design. ACE is about learning approaches that engage adults in the process and foster personal, social and intellectual development.

ACE uses adult learning principles that encourage learners to take ownership of the learning process through active participation; hands-on learning and real-time demonstration of skills; co-learning through shared tasks and appraising their experiences and changes in their own perceptions, goals, confidences and motivations for learning in the future (Sanguinetti, Waterhouse, & Maunders, 2004).

### Community owned and managed

ACE providers are community owned and managed, not for profit organisations that have adult education as a primary focus. While there are numerous other community-owned and managed organisations that deliver some adult education within their primary service orientation – such as rural fire brigades, sporting clubs, churches and Landcare organisations, as well as health, migrant, women and aged care centre – these are not usually identified as ACE providers.

ACE providers are highly networked within their local communities; particularly with human services providers. Through their partnerships, ACE providers access their clients and/or facilitate referrals for their clients to ensure appropriate support services are combined with their adult learning provision. Their partnerships strengthen the capacity of the local community to lead place-based, community development.

Volunteering is also an important activity for ACE providers because it aids low cost service provision. Involvement in volunteering can be a stepping stone to other work.

The distinctive features of ACE are recognised by ACE participants as key strengths. To illustrate this point, Table 1 provides the results obtained from 373 ACE VET students and also 69 ACE VET provider personnel in NSW, who were asked to rate the significance of various features commonly referred to as 'strengths of ACE'. The magnitude of the percentages confirms the perceptions of these features as strengths (and hence advantages) of ACE.

**Table 1: The strengths of ACE as perceived by ACE providers and their students**

| | ACE students rating | ACE providers rating |
|---|---|---|
| Feature nominated as a strength | % | % |
| Informal, friendly, non-threatening environment | 96 | 88 |
| Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of needs, skills and backgrounds | 86 | 80 |
| Able to respond to special needs of students and employers | 86 | 81 |
| The trainer is a helper rather than a learning authority | 86 | 82 |
| Minimum of bureaucracy | 85 | 77 |
| Emphasis on mastering skills and knowledge rather than completing course in set time | 83 | 83 |
| Often locally managed | 76 | 70 |
| Students may enter and leave learning programs easily | 74 | 72 |
| Able to provide a wide range of learning formats | 74 | 82 |
| Good physical accessibility | 65 | 80 |

(Source: Saunders, 2001, Table 9 & 10, pp. 30–31)

Both the providers and students surveyed chose 'Informal, friendly and non-threatening environment' as the most important feature of ACE followed by 'Capacity to accommodate students with a wide range of needs, skills and backgrounds'.

The only notable difference between the responses of the students and providers was that students ranked the item 'Able to provide a wide range of learning formats' more highly than providers. The following summaries describe the key features of ACE in Australia.

> *'ACE is held together in its diversity by its commitment to, and ownership by the community, as well as by its distinctive approaches to adult learning with a central focus on the learners and their needs. ACE is ... based around the learning needs of adults in local, neighbourhood or regional communities'* (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001, p. 5).

> *'ACE learning can be simply summed up as comprising highly focussed programs, often short in length, aimed at providing learners with the desired knowledge and skills in a friendly, supportive environment'* (Saunders, 2001, p. 28)

Rooney (2011) found that ACE has the capability and freedom to 're-shape' while retaining particular values, offering a broad range of locally focussed adult education programs that have a significant impact on individuals and communities but not well 'captured by the mechanisms that report on adult community education'.

## ACE activities

ACE traditionally provided personal interest/enrichment activities. However, ACE has undergone significant change in its activities in the last few decades in response to community demand. For years, ACE primarily delivered hobby courses and personal enrichment learning programs. This changed around four decades ago.

> *'First came the introduction of adult basic education in ACE courses designed to provide basic language and living skills to help people participate in and contribute to society. As it became apparent that students were applying adult and community education skills to employment, the sector began to offer specific vocational education and training courses, creating VET ACE'*

> (Walstab, Volkoff, & Teese, 2005, p. 17).

Today Australian ACE delivers in four key areas:

1. Personal enrichment informal and non-formal learning activities – the traditional focus of ACE

2. Adult basic education non-formal and formal – a common focus

3. Formal vocational education and training – an additional focus for some ACE providers in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE

4. Pathways from one type of learning program to another, and from non-formal learning to formal learning for vocational purposes – a focus in line with the latest Ministerial Declaration on ACE.

The position of ACE within the Australian education landscape has changed. Today ACE delivers formal training inside the VET sector (that includes the school aged) to contribute to work skills and economic development, as well as adult basic education for both life and work purposes and personal enrichment courses for personal development purposes.

Australian ACE provides a nexus between adult education and community development and adult education and economic development. ACE offers a bridge between social inclusion and workforce and productivity agendas. However, capability across providers varies (Bowman, 2011). This report primarily focusses on the three economic roles of ACE as providers of education:

1. Platform builders

2. Bridge builders

3. Work skills developers.

**Figure 1: Contemporary roles of ACE providers**
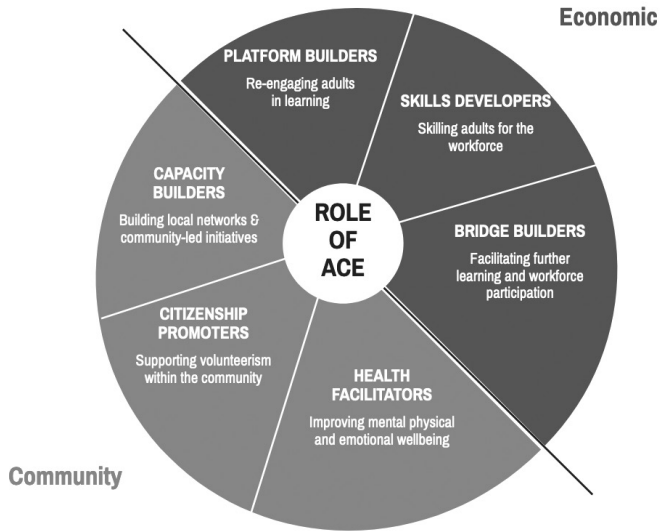


(Source: Adapted from Bowman 2006 by Allen Consulting)

## ACE is diverse

ACE providers are a disparate group that go by various names including: neighbourhood house, community centre, community men's shed, university of the third age, community college and various other names.

We do not know precisely how many ACE providers there are in Australia as there is no single registration arrangement for ACE providers. We do know the ballpark number of ACE providers by the following key sub-types and the key activities of ACE they focus on.

## Neighbourhood Houses and Centres

There are approximately 1000 Neighbourhood Houses and Centres nationally according to the results of the first national survey of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) undertaken in late 2010/early 2011 (ANHCA, 2011). The NH&Cs are located in metropolitan areas (47%), regional centres or large county towns (26%) and in rural/remote areas (27%).

The 2011 National NH&C Survey Report gives a breakdown of the range of programs and activities provided by NH&Cs in order of popularity. It shows that NH&Cs provide an extensive variety of services and activities in their communities:

- Information and referral were the most popular activities (92%) then community development (80%)

- Recreation and leisure, art and craft, health and wellbeing courses came in next (70–80%)

- Public computer/internet access, self-help groups, student work placements, personal development courses and volunteer community services (60–65%)

- Pre- or non-accredited adult education and training and literacy programs were a priority focus for between 40–45% of the NH&Cs

- Accredited training adult education and vocational training courses was also a focus for just under 30% (ANHCA, 2011, Table 4, p. 13).

NH&C's provide opportunities for social inclusion and learning through formal and informal education programs that are developed for people with diverse life experiences.

> *Participants are generally on low incomes, socially isolated or at risk of social isolation, and with low levels of formal education. Consequently, the courses offered are widely varied, reflecting the demographics of the local community and local needs and interests.*

> (Ollis et al. 2017)

Most NH&Cs remain focussed on personal enrichment learning and adult basic education. With a minority extending into formal (VET) as well. The 2011 national survey of NH&Cs indicates that women are the predominant users of NH&Cs, with those aged between the ages of 45–64 most highly represented (ANHCA, 2011 p. 11). However, the number of male participants in ACE has increased markedly in recent years. A stimulus to higher rates of male participation has been the offer by NH&Cs of computer classes, foundation skills classes and skills development classes. Skill development programs have been particularly valuable in boosting participation rates of males (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013).

## ACE registered training organisations

Formal vocational education and training (VET) is an additional focus for some ACE providers including some NH&Cs, all Community Colleges (in NSW and Vic) and a segment of ACE providers (many of which are also Learn Local providers) in Victoria. To be a provider of formal VET, an organisation must meet the standards for RTOs. The number of RTOs with registration type 'community-based adult education provider' as at the 1st of January 2019 was 245 according to training.gov.au – the official national register on VET in Australia and authoritative source of information on RTOs, training packages, qualifications, accredited courses, units of competency, skill sets, etc. Since 2005, the total number of ACE RTOs recorded by training.gov.au have significantly decreased by around 50%.

Figure 2 shows a sharp decline in ACE RTOs in 2006. The numbers stabilised until 2011 when there was another sharp decline and while reasons for this decline can only be speculated, the creation of the national quality assurance agency for VET – the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) around mid-2011 may have caused some attrition. Initial incorrect classification and then reclassification is another possible reason. Indeed an historical report on ACE RTOs (training.gov. au, 2016) shows 44 reclassifications from ACE RTOs to other categories of RTO. The earliest incidence of this happening was mid-2011.

**Figure 2: Number of ACE RTOs**
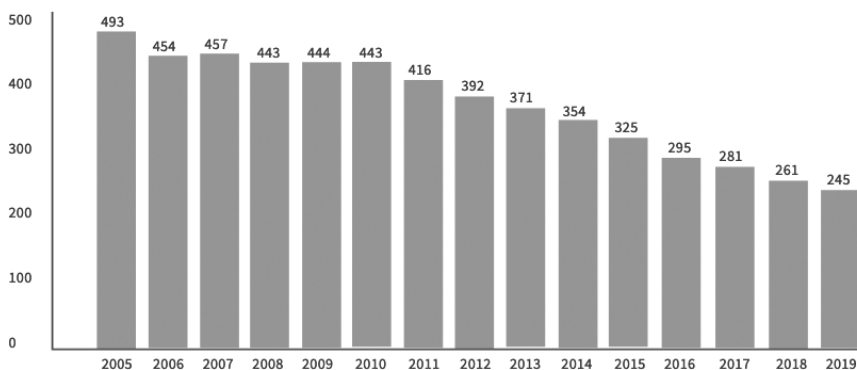


(Source: Data request training.gov.au 2019)

## Universities of the Third Age

U3A's offer non-formal, personal interest learning programs – academic, cultural, physical and social – to older Australians. These programs offer stimulation and development to people in active retirement. They meet the needs of their members through a peer-learning model. All tutors are volunteers who come from U3A groups across Australia. Learning is pursued without reference to criteria, qualifications, assessments or rewards. It is a climate free from discrimination and there are no exams. There are 297 national and 36 international sites (U3A Online website: U3A sites listed, November 2019).

## Community Men's Sheds

Men's Sheds originated in Australia in the 1990s to provide a space for constructive and social activity, informal and non-formal adult education, as well as offering a place to make friends and regain a sense of purpose. The Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) has approximately 950 member Sheds, but there are around 1000 Men's Sheds across Australia (Siggins Miller, 2016). Men's Sheds have boosted the number of males participating in ACE. Some Sheds are associated with NH&Cs while others are independent. A total of 55% of Shed members live in regional Australia (AMSA, 2011).

Also ACE RTOs have been amalgamating to adopt more sustainable business models in response to changes in VET policy and towards more competitive training markets in which all RTOs compete for the available government funds. For example, ACE RTOs in NSW, known as Community Colleges, have reduced from 70 over a decade ago to around 34 today through mergers, re-alignment of service focus and closures.

There are discrepancies that exist between the point-in-time numbers of ACE RTOs in the national register for VET (training.gov.au) and the numbers of ACE RTOs reported as delivering government-funded VET in any one year by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), who manage national VET data collections. For example, in 2018 according to training.gov.au there were 261 ACE RTOs (refer Figure 2) whereas the NCVER reported 357 ACE RTOs delivering government funded VET (refer Table 2).

**Table 2: Government-funded VET training providers by reporting provider type 2010–2018**

| Provider type | 2010 | | 2011 | | 2012 | | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % |
| TAFE | 58 | 2.8 | 59 | 2.6 | 59 | 2.8 | 58 | 2.8 | 57 | 2.8 | 53 | 2.7 | 40 | 2.1 | 40 | 2.1 | 35 | 2.0 |
| Other govt | 12 | 0.6 | 13 | 0.6 | 14 | 0.7 | 12 | 0.6 | 14 | 0.7 | 14 | 0.7 | 13 | 0.7 | 10 | 0.5 | 10 | 0.6 |
| ACE | 477 | 22.7 | 492 | 21.9 | 311 | 14.8 | 424 | 20.3 | 420 | 20.3 | 387 | 19.6 | 379 | 19.6 | 358 | 19.1 | 357 | 20.4 |
| Other RTOs | 1627 | 77.4 | 1762 | 78.4 | 1810 | 86.1 | 1666 | 79.7 | 1646 | 79.5 | 1589 | 80.4 | 1560 | 80.8 | 1525 | 81.4 | 1403 | 80.3 |
| Total | 2101 | 100 | 2248 | 100 | 2103 | 100 | 2091 | 100 | 2070 | 100 | 1977 | 100 | 1931 | 100 | 1874 | 100 | 1747 | 100 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2019)

Totals are distinct counts. Some providers may be reported against multiple categories. Sum of numbers may not equal total. Percentages may sum to greater than 100%.

Total VET activity from all funding sources reported by NCVER for the first time in 2015 indicates there were 282 ACE providers in 2015 (refer Table 3).

**Table 3 Total VET training providers by provider types 2015–2018 (data only available since 2015).**

| Provider type | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % |
| TAFE | 53 | 1.3 | 41 | 1.0 | 41 | 1.0 | 36 | 0.9 |
| Universities | 15 | 0.4 | 15 | 0.4 | 13 | 0.3 | 13 | 0.3 |
| Schools | 437 | 10.8 | 418 | 10.3 | 396 | 10.0 | 393 | 10.3 |
| ACE | 282 | 7.0 | 263 | 6.5 | 246 | 6.2 | 237 | 6.2 |
| Enterprise providers | 193 | 4.8 | 170 | 4.2 | 146 | 3.7 | 142 | 3.7 |
| Private training providers | 3088 | 76.1 | 3150 | 77.8 | 3101 | 78.6 | 3009 | 78.6 |
| Total | 4057 | 100 | 4051 | 100 | 3943 | 100 | 3830 | 100 |

(Source NCVER Special data request 2019)

Totals are distinct counts. Some providers may be reported against multiple categories. Sum of numbers may not equal total. Percentages may sum to greater than 100%.

The definitions in the NCVER managed National VET Provider Collection specifications for the Training Organisation Type Identifiers are broad enough that organisations may identify themselves incorrectly, skewing the numbers (ALA, 2015, p. 6).

NCVER has indicated that there are two key reasons why ACE providers are higher in government-funded collection, compared to the total VET activity (TVA) collections.

1.  There are differences in the reporting scope between the two collections. Non-RTOs and non-accredited training activity (which make up a significant proportion of the ACE providers in the government-funded collection) are out of scope for reporting in total VET activity, but included in the government-funded collection.

2.  SA (up to 2016) and NSW have separate data submissions for ACE training in the government-funded collection. Training submitted by SA and NSW is reported as being delivered by community education providers, irrespective of the training provider identifier.

In summary the best we can say about the number of ACE providers that are also RTOs or formal VET providers, is that there are somewhere between 250–400 providers.

## ACE activity focus

Overall, data suggests that there are at least 2500 ACE providers in Australia. All deliver personal enrichment/interest learning. Many also provide adult basic education. With a significant minority offering formal vocational education as well.

## ACE jurisdictions

Australian ACE provision is diverse and tailored to the local community in which it operates. It is also influenced by state and territory governments who have primary responsibility for ACE. There are significant differences in how each jurisdiction views and funds ACE.

### Australian Capital Territory

In the ACT, ACE is funded through a grants program, which has been available since 1998. In 2019, new arrangements to the programs included two year funding agreements and an increase in the grant funding from $200,000 to $500,000. Eligible ACE providers can apply for grants of up to $50,000 for individual projects and $100,000 for joint projects.

The ACE Grants Program delivers accredited and non-accredited foundation skills learning programs that are focussed on 'individual empowerment and development' as well as pathway programs for participants who are 17 years of age and older.

The new ACT ACE Grants Program is designed to support sustainability; optimise capacity and to establish an evidence-base that shows the sector's contribution to education and training in the ACT. The revised grants program also seeks to 'maximise the vocational intent of non-accredited education and training' and 'outcomes sought by the National Partnership Agreement on Skilling Australians Fund (Source: skills.act.gov.au)

### *New South Wales*

NSW focusses its ACE funding on a network of ACE VET providers branded as 'Community Colleges' (including three original Workers Education Associations).

Community Colleges offer accredited and non-accredited vocational learning, along with a range of other learning opportunities, including lifestyle and cultural learning courses. These learning programs and activities work to build self-esteem, re-engage early school leavers or provide a social network for older or vulnerable people (CCA, 2014a). A significant percentage of Community Colleges in NSW are based in regional or rural communities.

There are around 34 organisations that use Community College branding in NSW that are members of Community Colleges Australia. However, the term 'community college' in Australia is not only associated with the community education and VET sectors. There are also other organisations, such as schools, that refer to themselves as community colleges.

As all approved ACE providers in NSW are RTOs, they can apply to deliver Smart and Skilled funded training in the same way as any other eligible RTO. In addition to this, Community Colleges and TAFE are the only organisations that can apply to deliver full foundation skills qualifications under the Smart and Skilled Entitlement Foundation Skills stream.

The NSW Government also provides ACE program funding to approved ACE providers to deliver training and support that 'cannot be effectively

addressed through Smart and Skilled programs'. ACE program funding is for training up to and including Certificate III and targets disadvantaged cohorts, including those located in rural and regional areas. This funding can be used to 'provide intensive support' to eligible participants to help them pathway into further training and employment (training.nsw.gov.au/ace).

ACE program funding includes Tech Savvy for Small Business, which is subsidised accredited and non-accredited training in business, information technology and foundation skills in support of small business. Approved ACE program providers are largely Community Colleges, with the exception of the Deaf Society which is also a registered training organisation that delivers ACE programs.

### Northern Territory

The Northern Territory is the only Australian state or territory to have no specific statement, policy or strategy for ACE or any direct application of government funding to the sector (ALA, 2014). There are examples of community-based adult learning and family literacy programs such as the Home Interaction Program for Parents & Youngsters (HIPPY) which exist across the Northern Territory in Indigenous community organisations, charitable organisations, public libraries, seniors centres, Working Women's Centres and U3As. The extent of this community education is not fully known nor reported.

The NT Government does offer Equity Training Grants targeted towards specific equity groups. The focus of these grants is to re-engage/engage Territorians in employment or further training programs.

Key equity groups targeted through this initiative include: people with a disability; parents returning to the workforce after an absence of five years or more; long-term unemployed migrants; refugees, mature-aged people; very long-term unemployed people, or those at risk of becoming very long-term unemployed.

Equity Training Grants are available to incorporated organisations, schools and RTOs.

Funding is also available for pre-employment training programs that develop practical skills to help participants get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship. This funding is available to:

1. training providers

2. industry associations

3. community groups.

Programs that lead to employment in skills shortage areas or hard to fill jobs are prioritised.

Aboriginal Employment Programs includes Aboriginal Workforce Grants to maximise employment outcomes and Aboriginal Responsive Skilling Grants for training that leads to job outcomes including VET programs that 'cannot be funded through any other source' (Source: skillingterritorians.nt.gov.au).

### *Queensland*

In QLD, the Certificate 3 Guarantee (C3G) offers eligible people access to subsidised training places, 'up to and including their first post-school certificate III qualification' (desbt.qld.gov.au). Foundation skills and lower-level vocational qualifications may also be delivered as part of this intiative. Under C3G foundation skills training is an enabling program that can be delivered through an individual unit, a module or full qualifications in accordance with the learner's needs.

'Skilling Queenslanders for Work' (SQW) is a Dept of Employment, Small Business and Training initiative introduced in 2015–16, which has a total six-year funding commitment of $420 million up until 2020–21, with $80 million available under Skilling Queenslanders for Work in 2019–20 period.

The SQW initiative includes tailored community-based and supported pathway programs for young and mature aged job seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, women re-entering the workforce, Australian Defence Force veterans and ex-service members and people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. SQW is supported by a regional network that works with and builds partnerships with community-based organisations and local employers to 'determine local skills and entry-level industry and labour needs' (DESBT, 2019). SQW funds:

• Community Work Skills including job preparation and foundation skills

- Work Skills Traineeships – paid work placements on projects where participants undertake a work skills traineeship that integrates with on-the-job skills

- Ready for Work – 6–8 week basic job preparation and employability skills courses for unemployed youth

- Get Set for Work – intensive employment and training assistance targeting early school leavers and disadvantaged young people

- Youth Skills – supports 15–24 year olds with Youth Justice Services or QLD Corrective Services

- Work Start incentives – employer incentives for participants in other SQW programs

- First Start – subsidised traineeships for local government and community-based organisations

ACE programs in QLD are delivered by a wide variety of organisations including:

- community owned or operated RTOs

- TAFE QLD

- school based parent and citizen associations

- professional associations, libraries and senior citizens associations

- specialist literacy groups and computer clubs

- University of the Third Age

- English conversation groups

- parenting associations and sporting clubs

- adult education organisations, community and neighbourhood houses

- job placement organisations and workplace learning programs

- volunteering programs, churches and spiritual groups

- special interest and environmental groups

- university extension and local governments

- men's sheds and drop-in centres

- community service organisations.

Source: www.qld.gov.au

### *South Australia*

In South Australia, ACE programs are funded by the Department for Innovation and Skills. They are delivered through community centres, neighbourhood houses, a Workers Education Association, local government, libraries and other community-based organisations. Funded ACE programs in SA are place-based and support people to:

- develop life skills

- participate in further learning/training

- get a job

- pathway into formal learning settings.

ACE programs focus on the development of foundation skills including language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. They also build employability skills for modern workplaces such as collaboration, problem-solving, self-management, learning and information and communication technology.

A thorough review of ACE was conducted in South Australia in 2017. The review involved multiple stakeholders and resulted in increased government funding to the sector. This included the appointment of pathway coordinators located throughout the state to work with the sector on developing pathways for learners and promoting ACE more broadly. Funding priorities moved away from ACE programs with the change of government in 2018.

In the last quarter of 2019, Community Centres SA, the state peak body, was commissioned by the Department for Innovation and Skills to undertake a sector-wide engagement process with stakeholders with a view to informing the Sector and Workforce Development Plan. The Department of Innovation and Skills has recently proposed changes to ACE policy to focus adult education on getting people 'work-ready'.

SA ACE has an active fee-for-service delivery model alongside government funded ACE programs.

### Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government funds ACE through a range of organisations and programs. However, the term 'ACE' is not commonly used to define a particular sector in Tasmania. Libraries Tasmania offer and support a wide range of programs and activities through its 45 service points across the state. Informal and formal lifelong learning opportunities promote learning for enrichment, foundation and vocational reasons. This includes adult education classes, adult literacy and numeracy support, family literacy and digital literacy programs. Libraries Tasmania hosts 26TEN, a 10-year strategy to engage the broader community and private sector in improving adult literacy and numeracy in Tasmania.

Through its grant program, 26TEN funds employers and communities to contribute to lifting the literacy and numeracy skills of Tasmanians. These are delivered through a network of adult literacy providers, business and community organisations, and neighbourhood houses.

Independent community managed Online Access Centres, funded by a grants program, also exist across the state to support adults to navigate and use digital technology.

Other education programs are offered through Tasmania's neighbourhood house network but these are largely fee for service, auspiced programs or contingent upon the house securing ad-hoc small grant funding.

Skills Tasmania offers grants to endorsed RTOs through its Adult Learning Fund. The Adult Learning Fund supports pathways to employment programs including skillsets training through to accredited qualifications. The Adult Learning Fund includes Jobseeker and Pre-jobseeker streams. The Pre-jobseeker stream targets people with barriers that prevent them from accessing employment opportunities. These programs are delivered through employment providers and private RTOs as neighbourhood houses and community centres in Tasmania are not RTO and therefore do not offer accredited learning programs.

### Victoria

The ACE sector in Victoria is the largest and oldest in Australia. In Victoria, the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board – a statutory authority under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 –

funds ACE organisations (known as registered Learn Local providers) to deliver education and training programs that target people with limited prior access to education, including pre-accredited programs.

Pre-accredited programs are short modular courses that are primarily focussed on creating pathways for participants to further education and training or employment. Pre-accredited programs target:

- women seeking to re-enter the workforce or who have experienced or are experiencing family violence

- early school leavers, both mature and youth

- low skilled and vulnerable workers

- Indigenous people

- unemployed and underemployed people

- people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds

- disengaged young people

- people with a disability.

Learn Local providers are governed by voluntary committees of management whose members are drawn from the local community. They offer programs ranging from basic adult education through to diploma-level qualifications. Learn Local providers are a diverse group that includes community centres, community learning centres, community colleges and neighbourhood houses.

They also include training centres managed by large not-for-profit organisations such as Yooralla, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Jesuit Social Services and Melbourne City Mission, and a number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) specialist providers such as Adult Multicultural Education Services. The Centre for Adult Education also receive Learn Local funding.

Through the ACFE Board, the Victorian Government funds Learn Local providers to deliver programs in adult basic education (both non-accredited and accredited) and Learn Local RTOs also have access to VET funding.

The Victorian Government introduced the Skills First Reform in 2017 to strength the government-funded VET system. Skills First's aim is to

remove low quality providers, better align industry needs with training activity and make TAFE more sustainable.

In 2019, the Victorian Government introduced the Free TAFE initiative for priority and pre-apprenticeship courses in growth industries. The Free TAFE initiative impacted some Learn Local RTOs delivering VET programs in the nominated 'Free TAFE' priority areas as funding was quarantined to TAFE. However, the Victorian ACE sector and Learn Local providers in particular have been positively acknowledged by the Victorian Government for the 'important role they play in the Victoria education and training landscape' (ACE sector statement, 2019).

Currently the ACFE Board is working within a strategic framework articulated in its 2020–25 Strategic Plan and the Future of Adult and Community Education in Victoria 2020–2025 Ministerial Statement, which recognises the integral role ACE plays within the post-secondary education system and its role in providing skills for work, further education and life.

Through its strategic plan, the ACFE Board has renewed its commitment to leading literacy, numeracy, English language, employability and digital skills education and training for adult learners in Victoria.

The Reconnect program is another aspect of the Skills First initiative. Reconnect supports learners with barriers to learning to help them transition into the workforce. The program targets long-term unemployed adults between the ages of 20–64 who have not completed high school and young people aged 17–19 who are early school leavers.

Learn Local RTOs delivering the Reconnect program must undertake outreach and engagement activities to identify and attract disengaged, high-needs learners and developed a learning plan to transition participants to further training or employment.

Participants have access to support services and are assigned a Reconnect coach who assists them to identify educational or employment opportunities. This funding is only available to TAFE and Learn Local RTOs.

Reconnect prioritises the following groups:

- parents returning to work

- Indigenous Australians

- people with a disability
- people with low literacy and numeracy
- people who are physically isolated
- young mothers
- highly marginalised groups such as offenders, drug and alcohol dependents or homeless

The ACFE Board also offers Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) grants to Learn Local providers, which gives them the opportunity to develop and run learner-centred projects that increase participation and attainment in Learn Local pre-accredited training programs.

CAIF grants are available to registered Learn Local providers or Adult Education Institutions with a current ACFE approved Business and Governance Status assessment or 2019 Skills First contract.

Not all Victorian ACE organisations are Learn Local providers and the sector also has an active fee-for-service delivery model alongside other government funded ACE programs.

(Source: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/ learnlocal/Pages/funding.aspx)

### Western Australia

In WA, ACE includes both accredited and non-accredited training, with accredited training focussed on providing pathways for re-engagement with education, training and employment, and non-accredited training having the broader aims of developing individuals' skills and knowledge and encouraging social participation.

Government-funded training is delivered by RTOs registered with the Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) as 'preferred providers', who are eligible to apply for competitively allocated funding. To become a 'preferred provider', an RTO needs to demonstrate that they have the organisational (governance and financial) and operational capacity to meet the training needs of students and industry.

The state government also supports skills development through a $2 million Regional Traineeship Program, which supports Community

Resource Centres (CRCs) and eligible local government authorities (LGAs) to provide training, skills and employment opportunities in their local area.

Grants of up to $30,000 are available to assist CRCs in the Western Australian Community Resource Centre Network. In addition, 22 smaller LGAs across regional WA that don't have a CRC within their municipality can apply for funding to support VET for their local communities.

Adult literacy and numeracy support is provided through Read Write Now (RWN), which is a volunteer mentoring program funded by DTWD and sponsored by North Metropolitan TAFE. RWN tutors complete four weeks of training so they can confidently assist adults. Over 600 volunteers work with RWN across metropolitan and regional WA.

Other ACE programs are funded on a case by case basis by individual LGAs and through a fee-for-service model. Funding for Linkwest, the state ACE peak body for 150 registered Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres ceased in 2015.

### National

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE called for a stewardship role to be adopted at all levels, including:

> [G]overnments working together and providing leadership to optimise the capacity of ACE through a national approach, with jurisdictions providing policy settings and developing practical strategies that will allow ACE to flourish.

<div align="right">(MCEETYA, 2008).</div>

Currently the Commonwealth supports this stewardship role through support for Adult Learners Week activities. Selected ACE RTOs are preferred providers of the Commonwealth's Skills for Education and Employment, which support job seekers address language, literacy and numeracy barriers; as well as the Adult Migrant English Program.

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult and community education. Federal funding for ALA's core activities ceased in 2016. However, ALA continues to support the ACE sector through professional development, advocacy, its 60 year old, peer reviewed journal the Australian Journal of Adult Learning, and through Quest magazine, which highlights the grass roots work of the sector.

ALA maintains international relationships with the adult education sector through its membership of and participation in the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic Adult Education (ASPBAE).

### Summary

ACE providers are spread across Australia making ACE accessible to a large number of Australians. Victoria has the largest and most diverse ACE sector in Australia. It also provides a useful model to optimise the sector for greater outcomes across Australia; particularly in rural and regional areas. ACE RTOs are largely concentrated in VIC and NSW – accounting for 70% of the ACE RTOs in the country.

How an ACE provider in the Queensland outback supports its community and how an inner city Melbourne migrant community centre meets local needs may be different, but both types of organisations share a commitment to the provision of education and activities that:

- reduce social isolation

- increase pathways to work, community and social engagement.

## ACE programs

There are four main programs of ACE that provide a framework for describing all of the work of Australian ACE. This section details their key features, providers, participants and characteristics, and the outcomes achieved with trends in performance over recent years.

1. Enrichment – hobby, recreation and personal enrichment programs (non-formal, non-accredited)

2. Foundation – (adult basic education programs (non-accredited and accredited)

3. Vocational – vocational education and training program (formal accredited)

4. Pathways – between the three main types of activities above

## Personal enrichment learning

## Key features

Personal enrichment learning is a core service of ACE and its traditional focus.

ACE personal enrichment learning programs cover a range of topics: history, languages, politics, science, arts, crafts, health, personal development and many others. They are short, structured learning programs that do not lead directly to formal qualifications or awards.

They are fee for service, with government grants for particular policy agendas that enable fees to be reduced or waived for those who are financially disadvantaged. They are considered to be non-vocational, however, the intent of the learner may well be vocational.

**Figure 3: Program logic of personal enrichment learning**
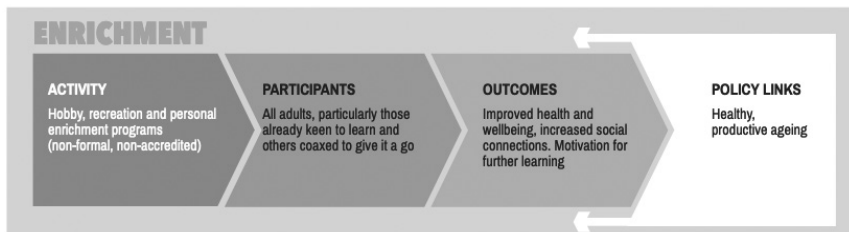


All ACE providers offer personal enrichment learning. Indeed for some (generally the smaller providers) this is the only type of learning they provide. All adults may participate in ACE personal enrichment programs.

Estimates can only be provided on the numbers of adults participating in personal enrichment learning in ACE providers alone and some details on the characteristics of the participants. There is firmer data on the scale of all personal enrichment learning in Australia and the characteristics of the participants.

> *[M]any students who undertook courses commonly labelled as general interest, leisure, enrichment or personal development realised upon completion of their course that they could apply the knowledge and skills learned to their jobs.*

> *[W]hile the ACE courses were not identified as vocational, they did have vocational application. [It] appears that many students are now enrolling in ACE courses not identified as 'vocational' with the specific intention of learning vocationally applicable skills and knowledge.*

<div align="right">(Saunders, 2001, p. 85)</div>

## Who participates?

The ABS undertook a survey of participation in personal interest learning across Australia from all sources in 2016–7 (ABS, 2017). Personal interest or enrichment learning was defined as 'structured learning that does not lead to a recognised qualification and is not related to employment' and is therefore largely undertaken through self-motivation for a range of reasons including the pursuit of knowledge, personal development, interest and enjoyment'. The ABS estimated 1.1 million Australians (or 6.1% of all Australians) had participated in structured personal interest learning, which was a decrease of 2.3% from the 2013 ABS survey (ABS, 2013). A profile of the 1.1 million personal interest learners showed:

- more women (7.3%) than men (5.0%) participated and the gender difference was more marked in older age groups
- people aged 35–55 participate at the highest rate, with 6.7% in this age group participating
- 45–54 years and older people aged 65–74 years also participate in high numbers, with 6.4% in this age group participating.

The main reasons reported by respondents for participating was to learn and improve skills (36.6%) followed by enjoyment or interest (33.8%) and then personal development (25.5%).

Data found on participants in personal enrichment learning at ACE providers is piecemeal, and shown below by ACE provider type. The following ACE providers only offer personal enrichment learning so we can include all of their participants.

### Community Sheds and U3As

There are about 175,000 men currently participating in community

men's sheds most of whom are older men, with the mean age 69 years (median=70) and an age range from 23 to 100 years (AMSA, 2011). The only data found in the public domain on the numbers of participants in the U3As is in a report by Swindell et al (2010). The total membership base for U3As reported was 64,160 (for 62% of all U3As who responded). Scaling this up membership for all U3As comes to about 100,000 in 2008.

### Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs)

All Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) offer personal enrichment learning but participants in this learning were not separated from participants in other types of learning in their national survey of Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) undertaken in late 2010/early 2011. However, it may be fair to assume that most of the participants in NH&Cs are involved in personal enrichment learning.

The survey found that on average each week 320 people participate in activities at a Neighbourhood House or Centre. Nationally that equates to 320,000 people engaged in activities each week and converts to approximately 14,500,000 visits per year across the entire (NH&Cs) sector. Unique visits were not stated (ANHCA, 2011). As to the characteristics of those involved, 98% of the NH&Cs reported engaging people on low incomes, socially isolated people or those at risk of social isolation and people with low levels of formal education and training (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Percentage of NH&C respondents reporting the demographic listed**
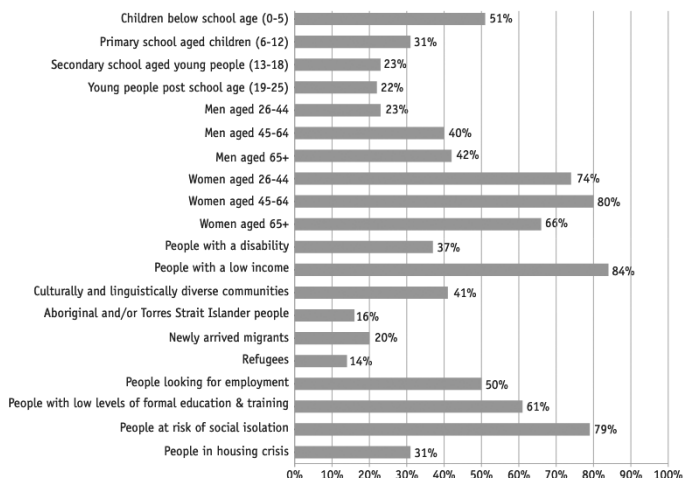


(Source: ANHCA, 2011, Table 3, p. 11)

## ACE registered training organisations

Data on personal enrichment learning from ACE RTOs delivering government-funded VET is available from the National VET Provider Collection. This data is not of interest to the VET sector and therefore removed from national VET reports by NCVER – also it is unclear how complete it is because ACE RTOs are not compelled to provide fee-for-service data. The 2004–2014 data shown in Table 4 provides ballpark figures. The substantial decrease over the period shown may, in fact, be due to a drop in data provision rather than representing an actual decrease.

**Table 4: No. students involved in personal enrichment learning among ACE RTO providers receiving government funding for their VET activity**

| Year | No. students |
|------|--------------|
| 2003 | 187160 |
| 2004 | 177550 |
| 2005 | 151195 |
| 2006 | 163420 |
| 2007 | 159280 |
| 2008 | 144795 |
| 2009 | 89455 |
| 2010 | 78850 |
| 2011 | 63095 |
| 2012 | 81835 |
| 2013 | 49340 |
| 2014 | 37750 |

(Source: NCVER (2016). NCVER data request 2016. After 2014, ACE RTOs were not compelled to provide this data post 2014.)

## What are the outcomes?

Comparing the estimated 1.1 million Australians involved in personal enrichment learning in 2016–7 from all sources with estimates on participant numbers in personal enrichment learning in ACE organisations suggests that they are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia, with many of the participants from disadvantaged groups. We can add at least 175,000 men involved in men's sheds; at least 10,000 involved in U3As and

at least 37,750 students involved in ACE VET as personal enrichment learning among ACE RTOs as these data sets do not overlap. There are also many adults involved in personal enrichment learning in NH&Cs.

Personal enrichment learning yields personal benefits that improve individual health and wellbeing. For example, a survey (Flood & Blair, 2013) conducted of the 1436 men's shed members found that social interaction is the main reason men join the sheds and is perceived as the greatest benefit – 45% of men's sheds members surveyed mentioned 'getting out and socialising' as the greatest benefit of the sheds and 41% mentioned 'making friends'. Learning or passing on skills is the next most often mentioned benefit (20%); including learning or passing on 'trade skills', 'computer skills', 'people skills' and 'learning about health issues'. Health benefits are not highly ranked by men's shed members but social interaction has significant impacts on personal health and wellbeing by combatting the effects of social isolation; providing men with a sense of purpose and self-esteem; improving physical health and mental wellbeing and increasing help seeking behaviour. This was shown when men's sheds members were compared with a similarly profiled non-shed sample who are less socially active. The shed members scored significantly higher physical functioning, physical roles, general health, vitality, mental health and mental wellbeing than non-shed members as measured by the Short Form (12) Health Survey (SF-12) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) instruments (Flood & Blair, 2013).

There is also strong international evidence showing that participation in adult education contributes to positive changes in health and attitudes. A recent review and update of research into the wider benefits of adult learning in the UK, focussed on studies with methodologies able to account for causality found that:

> [T]he main wider benefits of adult learning show up in health, mental health and job-related outcomes. Both formal and informal types of learning tend to matter, suggesting that participation in learning in itself is important …
>
> 'Adult learning has more than twice the impact on self-confidence than does being employed. This is an especially large effect and there are potential positive spillovers for a range of market and non-market outcomes from feeling better about oneself.

(Dolan, Fujiwara & Metcalfe, 2012, p. 8)

Good health is a fundamental for all and most important for our ageing population to keep them active members of the community and workforce. Healthy, productive ageing is a key government policy that personal enrichment programs contribute directly to but these programs also can increase motivation for further learning and be a gateway for participants into other learning activities.

## What are the challenges?

> *The challenge for most ACE providers is how to keep funding their personal enrichment learning programs when they are not funded by government; particularly as many of their customers are in the lowest income brackets and these programs are an important gateway back to learning for many disadvantaged learners.*

People who had wanted to participate in personal interest learning but did not, or who had participated but wanted to do more were asked about the main barriers to participation. The answers included: too much work or no time (44.7%); financial reasons (26.1%); personal reasons (10.9%) and course not available (5.7%).

Two-thirds (65.5%) of those who participated in personal interest learning incurred costs for their most recent course, with 11.0% incurring costs between $1 and $99, 11.2% between $100 and $199 and 43.3% incurring costs of $200 or more.

## Adult basic education

### *Key features*

Many ACE organisations offer non-accredited and accredited adult basic education, in addition to recreation and personal enrichment programs. These programs include language, literacy, numeracy, basic computing skills and other foundation skills including communication, problem solving, self-presentation and time management. Accredited and non-accredited adult basic education programs are offered with high levels of support.

Non-accredited literacy and numeracy programs may be standalone or embedded in other courses such as English through cooking, language of childbirth and healthy eating.

Accredited programs may be standalone or integrated into a vocational area so that opportunities to explore the world of work and learning pathways to work are also provided. They may be full qualifications, subjects only and/or skill sets to fill gaps.

**Figure 5: Program logic of adult basic education**
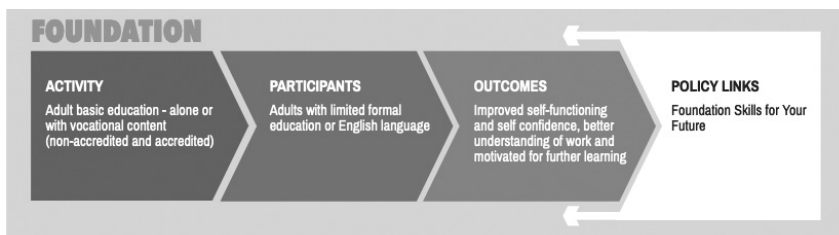


### Non-accredited adult basic education

Adult basic education programs are particularly for adults with limited formal education or English language skills. There is no data collection on Australian adults involved in non-accredited basic education programs delivered by ACE providers. We do know from a one-off study that thousands of Australian adults are involved (Dymock, 2007).

### Who participates?

Dymock (2007) attempted to gauge the extent of non-accredited literacy and numeracy training provision across Australia. Dymock's data includes courses and activities where students received a statement of attainment or participation, but not accredited qualifications, in:

- language, literacy or numeracy embedded in other courses
- adult English as a second language
- adult literacy for native speakers of English
- adult numeracy.

The way Dymock reports the data collected via a national survey makes it difficult to arrive at an accurate figure of the number of students who were receiving non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy help. However, there appeared to be around 4,000 students engaged with the 125 providers from across Australia, except the Northern Territory. The students in these courses were mostly aged between 30–49 years, with strong representation from cohorts between 20–29 and 50–59 years.

Providers in Dymock's (2007) research reported a range of reasons as to why adults participate in non-accredited adult basic education programs:

- They want to learn English for everyday purposes.

- They are looking for social contact and want to take more control over their lives.

- They want to improve their self-confidence and capacity to interact with the wider community.

- They would struggle with accredited adult basic education courses.

Around one-quarter of the study's program coordinators believed that students participated in non-accredited adult basic education primarily for employment-related reasons, and two-thirds of providers said they had partnerships, links and networks with training and employment organisations and agencies. Other data indicated that:

- 26% of respondents stated that up to 10% of their students went on to other training and 28% to work

- 22% of respondents stated that up to 25% of their students went on to other training and 21% to work

- 17% indicated that up to or about 50% of their students went on to other training and 13% to work

- 12% of respondents stated that up to 75% of their students went on to other training and 7% to work.

A significant number of providers didn't know.

Overall, Dymock (2007) found strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses in Australia, and that many adults choose this form of assistance because they either do not need or would struggle with accredited courses.

Dymock suggested that the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses to both personal development and social capital should receive greater attention and acknowledgement, particularly through funding support (Dymock, 2007).

**Figure 6: Dymock survey respondents' estimate of learner pathways**

| To other training | Estimated percentage of learners | To employment |
|---|---|---|
| Respondents (%) | | Respondents (%) |
| 2.5 | None | 6.9 |
| 26.4 | Up to 10% | 28.4 |
| 21.5 | Up to 25% | 20.7 |
| 10.7 | Up to 50% | 7.8 |
| 6.6 | About 50% | 5.2 |
| 11.6 | Up to 75% | 6.9 |
| 2.5 | Up to 100% | 1.7 |
| 18.2 | Not known | 22.4 |
| 100.0 | | 100.0 |

(Source: Dymock, 2007a, Table 5, p. 19.)

## Accredited adult basic education

Accredited adult basic education programs are delivered by ACE VET providers and reported within the mixed field programs category in the National VET Provider Collection managed by the NCVER. The Field of Education (FOE) Type 12: Mixed Field Programmes are made up of general education programs, social skills courses, employment skills courses and other mixed field programmes.

Current NCVER data on government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12: Mixed Field Programmes in ACE VET providers shows that in 2018 there were 13,426 ACE enrolments, which represents 7.3 per cent of total government-funded FOE 12 enrolments (refer Table 5).

**Table 5: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2003-2018**

| Year | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE 000 | 29.1 | 19.8 | 17.8 | 20.1 | 22.7 | 23.5 | 18.4 | 14.8 | 16.2 | 18.2 | 17.5 | 14.6 | 13.4 | 13.7 | 13.4 | 13.4 |
| Total 000 | 209.6 | 201.2 | 206.6 | 236.0 | 254.9 | 252.2 | 268.7 | 270.7 | 283.3 | 347.4 | 376.2 | 241.3 | 176.7 | 169.7 | 177.6 | 185.1 |
| % | 13.9 | 9.8 | 8.6 | 8.5 | 8.9 | 9.3 | 6.8 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.3 | 4.6 | 6.1 | 7.6 | 8.1 | 7.6 | 7.3 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Current NCVER data on total VET program enrolments in FOE 12: Mixed Field Programmes in ACE VET providers shows that in 2018 there were 19,741 ACE enrolments, representing 8.8 per cent of total VET FOE 12 enrolments (Refer Table 6).

**Table 6: Total VET program enrolments in FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2015–2018**

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE 000 | 19.2 | 17.5 | 20.2 | 19.7 |
| Total 000 | 229.4 | 225.6 | 235.1 | 223.7 |
| % | 8.4 | 7.7 | 8.6 | 8.8 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection

Program enrolments in government-funded accredited adult basic education in ACE providers have significantly decreased over the past 15 years (refer Figure 7). However, subject enrolments have increased by around 30% and training hours have increased by around 14% in the period (refer Figure 8 & 9).

**Figure 7: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by program enrolments 2003–2018**
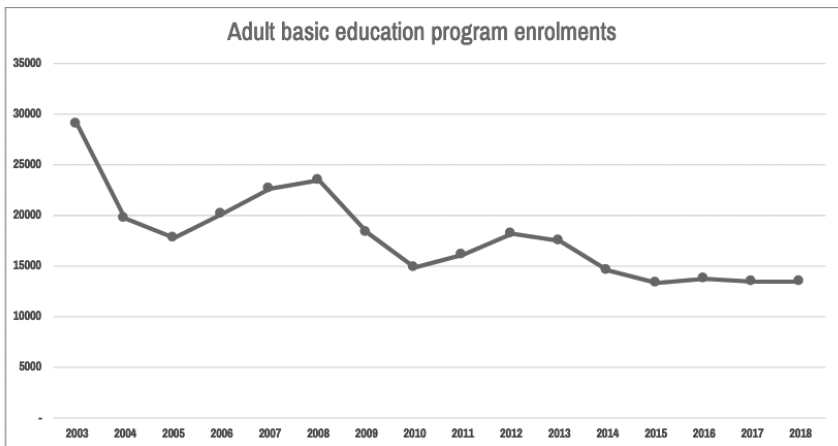


(Source: National VET provider collection

**Figure 8: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by subject enrolments 2003–2018**
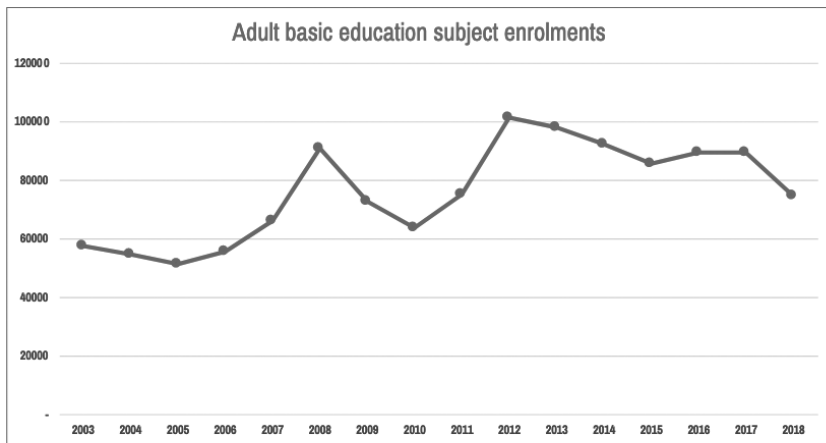


(Source: National VET provider collection

**Figure 9: Trends in government-funded ACE FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by training hours 2003–2018**
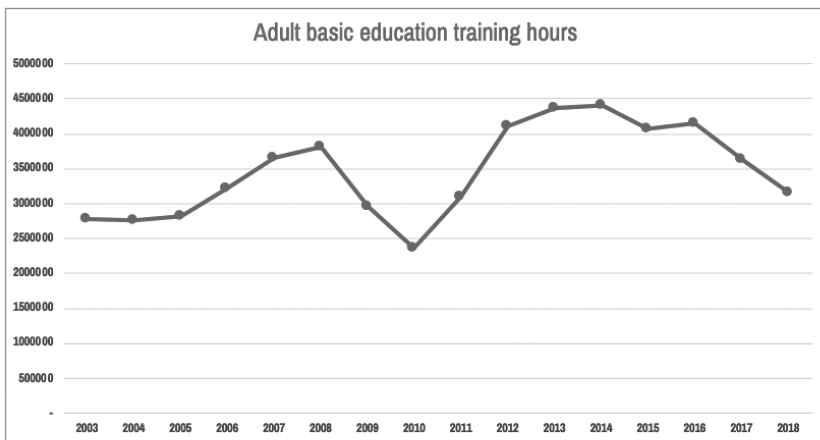


(Source: National VET provider collection)

There have also been increases in the average subject enrolments per program in government-funded adult basic education at ACE VET providers from two (2) enrolments per program in 2003 to six (6) in 2018. Average training hours per program have increased from 96 in 2003 to 235 in 2018.

Total VET program enrolments, subject enrolments and training hours have remained steady between 2015 and 2018 (refer Table 7).

**Table 7: Total VET program enrolments in ACE FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2015–2018**

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACE providers** | | | | |
| **Program enrolments** | 19,241 | 17,467 | 20,209 | 19,741 |
| **Subject enrolments** | 139,436 | 130,936 | 144,623 | 130,366 |
| **Training hours** | 4,921,977 | 4,888,613 | 4,443,501 | 3,990,599 |
| *Subjects per enrolment* | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| *Training hours per program* | 256 | 280 | 220 | 202 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection)

Notes: FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes based on program field of education for all measures, including subject enrolments and hours.

There has also been a trend towards AQF program enrolments in accredited adult basic education at ACE training providers – from 3.2% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2018 (refer Table 8).

**Table 8: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by provider type 2010–2018**

| Provider | 2010 no. '000' | % | 2011 no. '000' | % | 2012 no. | % | 2013 no. | % | 2014 no. | % | 2015 no. | % | 2016 no. | % | 2017 no. | % | 2018 no. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TAFE** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 85.5 | 31.6 | 104.1 | 36.8 | 163.9 | 47.2 | 180.5 | 48.0 | 113.2 | 46.9 | 81.5 | 46.1 | 79.8 | 47.0 | 86.4 | 48.6 | 82.4 | 44.5 |
| Non-AQF | 144.0 | 53.2 | 131.2 | 46.3 | 112.0 | 32.2 | 100.6 | 26.7 | 53.9 | 22.3 | 35.5 | 20.1 | 35.9 | 21.1 | 42.3 | 23.8 | 58.8 | 31.8 |
| Total | 229.4 | 84.8 | 235.3 | 83.1 | 275.9 | 79.4 | 281.1 | 74.7 | 167.1 | 69.2 | 117.0 | 66.2 | 115.6 | 68.1 | 128.7 | 72.5 | 141.2 | 76.3 |
| **OTHER GOVT** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 8.1 | 3.0 | 9.7 | 3.4 | 15.2 | 4.4 | 12.5 | 3.3 | 6.8 | 2.8 | 6.6 | 3.8 | 7.9 | 4.7 | 7.8 | 4.4 | 8.2 | 4.4 |
| Non-AQF | 6.6 | 2.4 | 8.1 | 2.9 | 4.8 | 1.4 | 3.4 | 0.9 | 2.2 | 0.9 | 2.4 | 1.4 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 2.1 | 1.2 | 2.8 | 1.5 |
| Total | 14.7 | 5.4 | 17.8 | 6.3 | 20.0 | 5.8 | 15.9 | 4.2 | 8.9 | 3.7 | 9.0 | 5.1 | 10.4 | 6.1 | 9.9 | 5.6 | 11.0 | 5.9 |
| **ACE** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 8.8 | 3.2 | 10.2 | 3.6 | 13.7 | 3.9 | 12.8 | 3.4 | 9.8 | 4.0 | 8.8 | 5.0 | 9.0 | 5.3 | 9.7 | 5.5 | 9.4 | 5.1 |
| Non-AQF | 6.1 | 2.2 | 6.0 | 2.1 | 4.6 | 1.3 | 4.7 | 1.3 | 4.9 | 2.0 | 4.5 | 2.6 | 4.7 | 2.8 | 3.7 | 2.1 | 4.1 | 2.2 |
| Total | 14.8 | 5.5 | 16.2 | 5.7 | 18.2 | 5.3 | 17.5 | 4.6 | 14.6 | 6.1 | 13.4 | 7.6 | 13.7 | 8.1 | 13.4 | 7.6 | 13.4 | 7.3 |
| **OTHER RTOs** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 7.7 | 2.9 | 9.0 | 3.2 | 27.0 | 7.8 | 57.9 | 15.4 | 45.2 | 18.7 | 31.0 | 17.5 | 23.7 | 14.0 | 21.7 | 12.2 | 16.5 | 8.9 |
| Non-AQF | 4.0 | 1.5 | 4.9 | 1.7 | 6.3 | 1.8 | 3.8 | 1.0 | 5.4 | 2.2 | 6.3 | 3.6 | 6.2 | 3.7 | 3.9 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 1.6 |
| Total | 11.7 | 4.3 | 13.9 | 4.9 | 33.3 | 9.6 | 61.7 | 16.4 | 50.7 | 21.0 | 37.3 | 21.1 | 30.0 | 17.7 | 25.6 | 14.4 | 19.5 | 10.6 |
| **TOTAL PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 110.1 | 40.7 | 133.1 | 47.0 | 219.7 | 63.2 | 263.7 | 70.1 | 175.0 | 72.5 | 128.0 | 72.4 | 120.4 | 71.0 | 125.6 | 70.7 | 116.4 | 62.9 |
| Non-AQF | 160.6 | 59.3 | 150.2 | 53.0 | 127.7 | 36.8 | 112.5 | 29.9 | 66.3 | 27.5 | 48.7 | 27.6 | 49.2 | 29.0 | 52.0 | 29.3 | 68.6 | 37.1 |
| Total | 270.7 | 100 | 283.3 | 100 | 347.4 | 100 | 376.2 | 100 | 241.3 | 100 | 176.7 | 100 | 169.7 | 100 | 177.6 | 100 | 185.1 | 100 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection, 2019.)

*AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses. Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statement of attainment courses, and 'not elsewhere classified'

Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statements of attainment (part courses), and not elsewhere classified.

Total VET AQF program enrolments at ACE providers have remained consistent at around 7–8% between 2015–2018 (refer Table 9).

**Table 9: Total VET program enrolments in FOE 12 – Mixed fields program by provider type 2015–2018**

| Provider | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % |
| **TAFE** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 102.8 | 44.8 | 97.0 | 43.0 | 101.3 | 43.1 | 93.7 | 41.9 |
| Non-AQF | 18.0 | 7.9 | 20.8 | 9.2 | 19.1 | 8.1 | 29.2 | 13.1 |
| Total | 120.8 | 53.7 | 117.9 | 52.3 | 120.5 | 51.2 | 122.9 | 55.0 |
| **UNIVERSITIES** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 7.9 | 3.4 | 7.5 | 3.3 | 6.8 | 2.9 | 6.1 | 2.7 |
| Non-AQF | .6 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.6 | 0.3 |
| Total | 8.5 | 3.7 | 8.1 | 3.6 | 7.2 | 3.0 | 6.7 | 3.0 |
| **SCHOOLS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 21.7 | 9.5 | 26.5 | 11.7 | 19.8 | 8.4 | 19.4 | 8.7 |
| Non-AQF | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Total | 21.9 | 9.6 | 26.7 | 11.9 | 19.9 | 8.5 | 19.5 | 8.7 |
| **ACE** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 17.6 | 7.7 | 15.9 | 7.0 | 18.6 | 7.9 | 17.5 | 7.8 |
| Non-AQF | 1.6 | 0.7 | 1.6 | 0.7 | 1.6 | 0.7 | 2.3 | 1.0 |
| Total | 19.2 | 8.4 | 17.5 | 7.7 | 20.2 | 8.6 | 19.7 | 8.8 |
| **ENTERPRISE PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 5.0 | 2.2 | 4.0 | 1.8 | 5.2 | 2.2 | 4.8 | 2.2 |
| Non-AQF | 0.9 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 1.0 | 0.4 |
| Total | 5.8 | 2.5 | 4.3 | 1.9 | 5.5 | 2.4 | 5.8 | 2.6 |
| **PRIVATE TRAINING PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 46.9 | 20.4 | 43.5 | 19.3 | 55.7 | 23.7 | 44.7 | 20.0 |
| Non-AQF | 6.2 | 2.7 | 7.6 | 3.4 | 6.0 | 2.6 | 4.3 | 1.9 |
| Total | 53.1 | 23.1 | 51.1 | 22.6 | 61.8 | 26.3 | 49.0 | 21.9 |
| **TOTAL PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 201.9 | 88.0 | 194.4 | 86.2 | 207.5 | 88.3 | 186.2 | 83.3 |
| Non-AQF | 27.5 | 12.0 | 31.2 | 13.8 | 27.5 | 11.7 | 37.5 | 16.7 |
| Total | 229.4 | 100.0 | 225.6 | 100.0 | 235.1 | 100.0 | 223.7 | 100.0 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2019.)

Enterprise providers are registered training organisations whose primary business is not the delivery of training and development.

Accredited adult basic education students include people from various equity groups. Table 10 shows that ACE organisations are significant providers of accredited adult basic education to key equity groups; for example:

• People with a disability and the unemployed are significantly more

highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers than all other VET providers.

- Students from a non-English speaking-background (NESB) are also more highly represented in accredited adult basic education program enrolments at ACE providers.

- The percentage of students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions has been decreasing across all providers over the past 10 years. However, ACE providers showed an increase in program enrolment for this cohort from 2017 to 2018.

**Table 10: Government-funded program enrolments in FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018**

| Equity group / Year | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students with a disability (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 16.1 | 15.9 | 21.5 | 21.9 | 22.1 | 21.0 | 21.5 | 25.9 | 28.3 | 28.0 | 28.6 | 34.5 | 40.6 | 40.3 | 38.1 | 34.6 |
| All other providers | 16.3 | 16.2 | 16.5 | 16.8 | 16.1 | 16.2 | 15.8 | 16.3 | 16.5 | 15.1 | 13.9 | 16.0 | 15.7 | 16.0 | 14.8 | 14.4 |
| **Indigenous students (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 4.3 | 3.4 | 4.8 | 4.3 | 6.7 | 5.9 | 8.1 | 8.5 | 7.2 | 4.3 | 5.4 | 4.9 | 4.5 | 3.9 | 4.5 | 4.8 |
| All other providers | 10.1 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 10.8 | 9.4 | 7.5 | 6.2 | 7.4 | 8.5 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.5 |
| **Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 20.7 | 32.7 | 33.7 | 31.7 | 29.0 | 34.6 | 32.1 | 32.6 | 33.2 | 33.5 | 36.3 | 40.2 | 44.6 | 43.7 | 44.1 | 51.0 |
| All other providers | 20.6 | 21.9 | 23.1 | 22.7 | 28.2 | 28.1 | 26.8 | 27.7 | 27.7 | 29.2 | 31.1 | 38.7 | 43.9 | 44.6 | 45.8 | 43.9 |
| **Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | N/A | N/A | N/A | 7.1 | 7.0 | 6.9 | 10.4 | 14.1 | 6.7 | 4.5 | 6.0 | 3.8 | 3.1 | 3.6 | 3.4 | 4.6 |
| All other providers | N/A | N/A | N/A | 16.5 | 17.4 | 18.1 | 18.5 | 19.2 | 14.6 | 12.1 | 10.6 | 10.1 | 10.2 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.2 |
| **Students who are unemployed (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 22.1 | 25.4 | 27.3 | 29.6 | 29.4 | 31.5 | 32.2 | 31.9 | 38.8 | 45.3 | 43.1 | 44.9 | 46.9 | 49.9 | 48.9 | 48.2 |
| All other providers | 27.2 | 26.5 | 25.6 | 25.4 | 25.5 | 25.3 | 26.6 | 28.9 | 29.0 | 29.9 | 32.8 | 33.1 | 31.3 | 29.7 | 27.6 | 25.0 |
| **Students not in the labour force (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 23.4 | 27.7 | 32.8 | 31.6 | 29.6 | 29.0 | 28.5 | 29.9 | 32.6 | 27.6 | 32.0 | 31.0 | 34.4 | 32.5 | 33.1 | 34.9 |
| All other providers | 24.7 | 24.2 | 24.0 | 24.1 | 27.1 | 27.3 | 27.6 | 27.8 | 26.7 | 25.0 | 23.5 | 28.0 | 32.1 | 35.1 | 38.4 | 37.3 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection. Note: N/A not collected)

Total VET program enrolments tell a similar story (refer Table 11)

showing that people with a disability and the unemployed are more highly represented in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers than all other VET providers.

**Table 11: Total VET program enrolments in FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018**

| Equity group / Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students with a disability (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 29.3 | 33.1 | 29.3 | 27.0 |
| All other providers | 12.0 | 12.2 | 11.7 | 11.2 |
| **Indigenous students as** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 7.2 | 6.6 | 5.5 | 6.8 |
| All other providers | 7.0 | 7.6 | 7.7 | 7.4 |
| **Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 33.7 | 34.7 | 35.3 | 43.1 |
| All other providers | 43.3 | 44.2 | 48.0 | 48.0 |
| **Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 5.6 | 5.5 | 6.9 | 8.1 |
| All other providers | 10.9 | 10.5 | 9.8 | 9.2 |
| **Students who are unemployed (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 38.8 | 41.8 | 45.3 | 45.2 |
| All other providers | 25.4 | 24.5 | 24.3 | 22.4 |
| **Students not in the labour force (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 31.0 | 30.6 | 27.6 | 27.9 |
| All other providers | 29.3 | 29.4 | 32.7 | 32.7 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection.

Successfully completed hours in accredited adult basic education in ACE VET providers and in other VET providers have been calculated and 'load pass rates' determined (Tables 12 and 13). A load pass rate is the ratio of hours studied by students who passed their subject(s) to the total hours committed to by all students who passed, failed or withdrew from the corresponding subject(s).

In other words, a load pass rate can be thought of as the ratio of 'profitable hours' to the total hours undertaken by students.

**Table 12: Government funded load pass rates (%) in FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes by reporting provider type, 2003–2018**

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE providers | 52.0 | 53.4 | 52.0 | 51.7 | 47.3 | 46.0 | 46.7 | 51.9 | 50.8 | 56.8 | 56.3 | 57.7 | 62.4 | 65.0 | 64.1 | 66.7 |
| Other providers | 59.6 | 60.3 | 62.6 | 63.9 | 65.1 | 65.4 | 66.3 | 66.1 | 67.2 | 70.1 | 72.1 | 66.9 | 64.4 | 64.0 | 61.9 | 61.3 |
| **Total** | **59.2** | **59.8** | **62.0** | **63.1** | **63.8** | **63.7** | **65.1** | **65.3** | **66.1** | **69.1** | **71.0** | **66.1** | **64.2** | **64.1** | **62.1** | **61.9** |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

**Table 13: Total VET load pass rates (%) in FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes by provider type, 2015–2018**

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE providers | 67.5 | 71.7 | 70.3 | 72.4 |
| Other providers | 67.4 | 69.3 | 67.5 | 66.7 |
| **Total** | **67.4** | **69.5** | **67.8** | **67.3** |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

## What are the outcomes?

Table 12 shows that in 2018, students in government-funded accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have been successfully completing 67% of the total hours of training they signed up for. This rate of success is above that for students at all other VET providers by a margin of around 5%. Table 13 shows that in 2018, students in total VET accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have been successfully completing 72% of the total hours of training – a success rate that is 6% above that for students at all other VET providers.

Accredited adult basic education programs assist people to cope with the demands of everyday life. They boost the functioning, confidence, and self-esteem of educationally disadvantaged adults and can motivate them to do further study (Foster & Beddie, 2005).

Adult basic education programs can help people find and keep work, and when combined with vocational subjects they can offer a greater understanding of the world of work.

There is a high literacy challenge in Australia that ACE providers are responding to, in order to achieve social equity and inclusion. Almost

half of Australia's adult population has literacy and numeracy skills levels below those required for effective functioning in the workplace and modern life in general (ABS, 2008 and OECD, 2013).

There is a 'foundation learner type' who needs to further develop in key areas such as literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills in order to undertake further study.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults is a ten-year framework for improving education and employment outcomes for working age Australians with low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

The Strategy recognises that literacy development is a lifelong activity with life-wide implications. Governments aim to have two thirds of working age Australians having the literacy and numeracy skills levels required to function effectively in workplaces and modern life generally by 2022. The Strategy acknowledges 'providers of adult education in community settings' as critical to providing diverse foundation skills programs for adults, including through pre-vocational and bridging programs' (SCOTESE, 2012, p. 12).

## What are the challenges?

The contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses for both personal development and social capital should receive greater attention and acknowledgement, particularly through funding support. Finding ways of assessing and acknowledging the full range of outcomes achieved from non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy courses may aid achievement of this support (Dymock & Billet, 2008).

Given the significant outcomes achieved in basic adult education by ACE providers, it's important to further investigate the capacity of the sector to lead in the delivery of foundation skills programs; particularly those aimed at key equity groups.

Ensuring flexibility in the delivery of basic adult education training is important. Not all adults need full qualifications training in this area, rather they want skills-gap training that can be standalone or integrated with vocationally focussed learning programs. ACE providers require support to build the skills of their adult basic education practitioners to ensure that disadvantaged learners have access to foundation skills.

### Formal vocational education

Some ACE organisations deliver formal vocational education and training as well as adult basic education and personal interest learning. These ACE providers have registered training organisation (RTO) status to deliver formal or accredited VET subjects, skill sets and whole qualifications, and issue recognised Australian VET qualifications and other awards.

There are also ACE providers that are not RTOs but who assist with formal accredited VET delivery by entering into partnerships with other RTOs that take responsibility for assuring the quality of assessments and judgements about competence or outcomes achieved and the issuing of the final VET awards.

**Figure 10: Formal VET in ACE program logic**
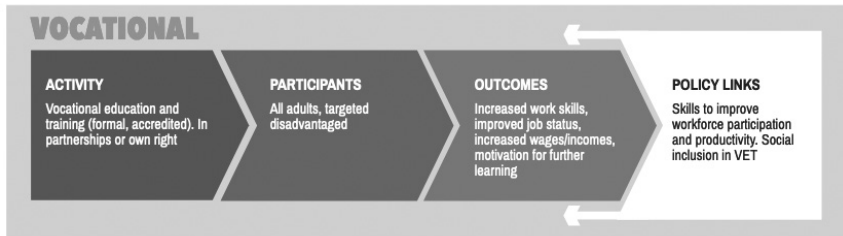


### Key features

ACE providers in the formal VET system serve a generic and a value-adding role (Schofield & Associates, 1996). The generic role of ACE in VET is to offer VET to all adults. The value-adding role of ACE is to bring in its distinctive qualities to VET, which are identified as strongly local, community-based, flexible, market-driven, learner-centred and focussed on assisting disadvantaged students into and through the VET system. It is the value-adding role that distinguishes ACE providers in VET and makes ACE VET both complementary and supplementary to the VET provision by other VET providers. For example, Harris & Simons (2007) compared data they collected on a sample of ACE providers (84) with a sample of other private RTOs (330). The data painted a picture of the sector's distinctiveness. It showed that ACE providers:

- were more embedded in their local communities, usually delivered in one state only

- offered markedly different programs

- were more socially oriented with high percentages of their courses
  in mixed field programs such as literacy and numeracy, information
  technology and in the fields of society and cultures, education and
  creative arts

- offered more pastoral care, education support and personal/career
  counselling services than private providers

- relied more heavily on government funding for their nationally
  accredited training and on part time and casual staff and so they
  'skate on relatively thin ice'

<div align="right">(Harris & Simons, 2007).</div>

## Who participates?

In 2018, 4.1 million students were enrolled in nationally recognised VET
programs. Of these:

- million (71%) were enrolled at private providers

- 777,100 (19.1%) were enrolled at TAFE

- 481,200 (11.8%) were enrolled at ACE providers

- 116,600 (2.9%) were enrolled at enterprise providers

- 105,100 (2.6%) were enrolled in schools

- 69,200 (1.7%) were enrolled at university.

<div align="right">(NCVER, 2018, p. 12)</div>

### Government-funded VET

NCVER data on government-funded program enrolments in all VET shows
that in 2018 there were 41,401 program enrolments at ACE providers, which
accounts for 3.2% of the total, and shows a decrease of around 8% from
2003–2018 (refer Figure 11). In 2018, around 55% of these enrolments were
students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile
2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers (NCVER, 2018).

Thirty-six per cent of ACE enrolments were from students in regional
and remote areas and just under 32% were 45 years and over (compared

with around 16.5% for all other providers). Significantly 21% of enrolments were from people with a disability (compared with 7% for all other providers) (NCVER, 2018).

**Figure 11: No. government-funded program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2003–2018**
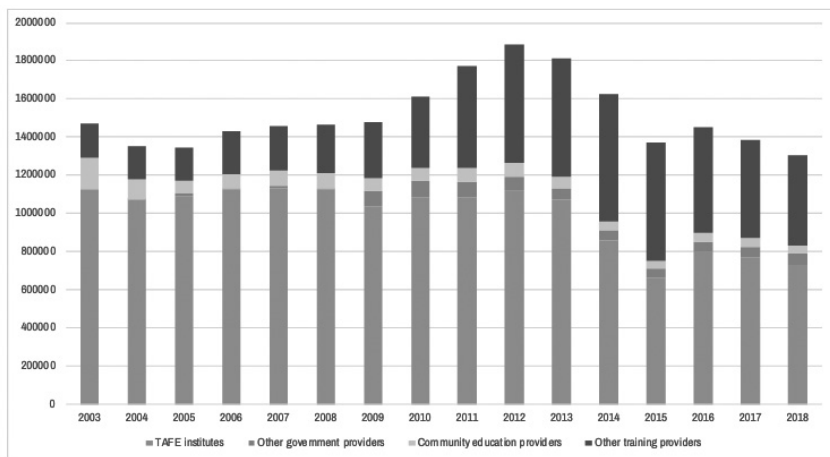


(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

## *Total VET*

Total VET data shows that in 2018 there were 102,486 program enrolments at ACE providers, which accounts for 3.9% of the total, and shows an increase of 0.6% from 2015 (refer Figure 12).

**Figure 12: No. government-funded program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2003–2018**
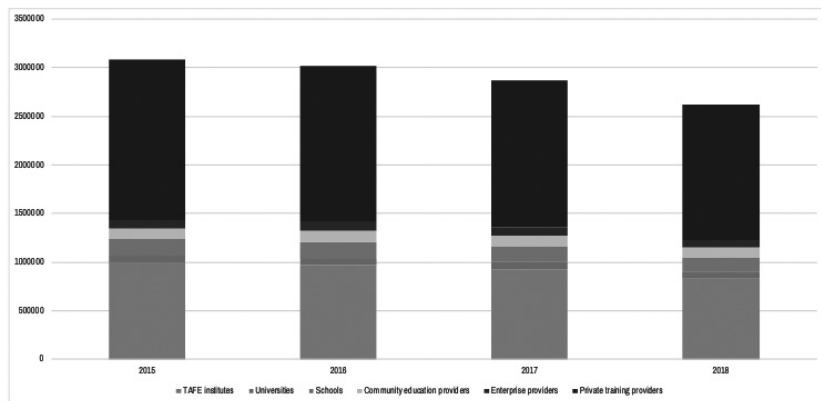


(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

## Vet other than adult basic education

NCVER data on ACE VET provision in all fields of education (other than
FOE 12 adult basic education) shows that in 2018 there were 27,975 (or
2.5%) government-funded program enrolments at ACE VET providers
(refer Table 14) and 82,745 (or 3.4%) of total VET program enrolments
(refer Table 15).

**Table 14: Government-funded program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 –
Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type, 2003–2018**

| Year | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE 000 | 138.0 | 84.6 | 50.3 | 51.7 | 55.5 | 52.1 | 48.9 | 48.7 | 52.4 | 54.0 | 38.2 | 34.2 | 27.6 | 28.4 | 28.8 | 28.0 |
| Total 000 | 1266.5 | 1148.4 | 1137.4 | 1199.2 | 1204.0 | 1211.2 | 1213.7 | 1345.2 | 1492.4 | 1538.9 | 1436.5 | 1385.1 | 1194.5 | 1282.2 | 1209.9 | 1120.4 |
| % | 10.9 | 7.4 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.6 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.5 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020)

**Table 15: Total VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field
programmes) by reporting provider type, 2015–2018**

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACE 000 | 82.4 | 101.5 | 87.1 | 82.7 |
| Total 000 | 2850.6 | 2791.4 | 2633.4 | 2398.9 |
| % | 2.9 | 3.6 | 3.3 | 3.4 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection, NCVER 2020

From 2003–2018, programs enrolments in government-funded VET
at ACE providers (excluding FOE 12) have significantly decreased
(refer Figure 13). Subject enrolments peaked in 2012 but have steadily
decreased (refer Figure 14), and training hours have tapered off (refer
Figure 15).

**Figure 13: Trends in government funded ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018**

ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12)
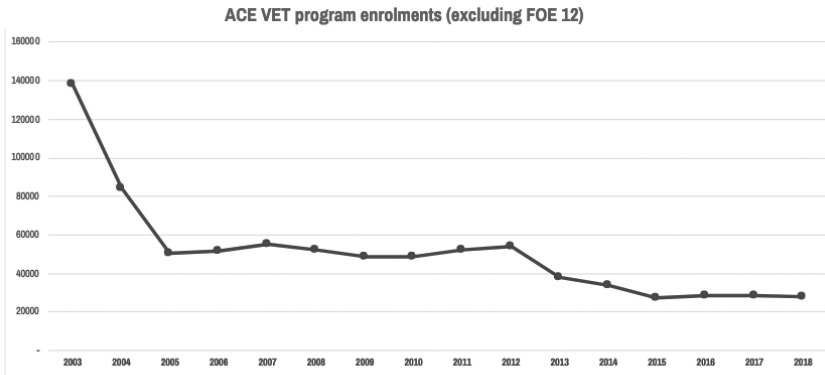
(Source: National VET provider collection

**Figure 14: Trends in government funded ACE VET subject enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018**

ACE VET subject enrolments (excluding FOE 12)
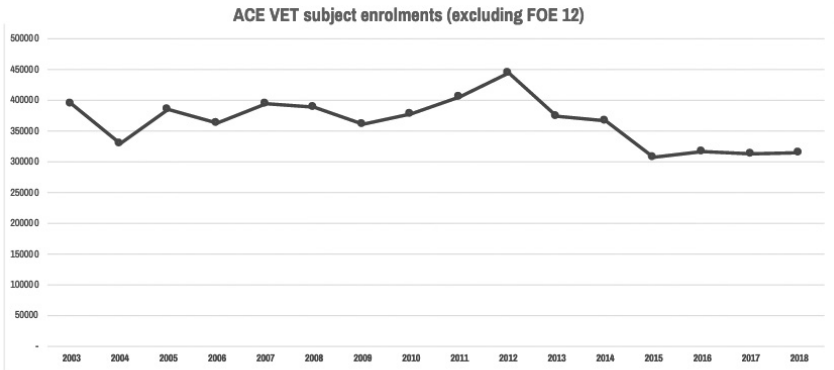
(Source: National VET provider collection

**Figure 15: Trends in government funded ACE VET training hours (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) 2003–2018**
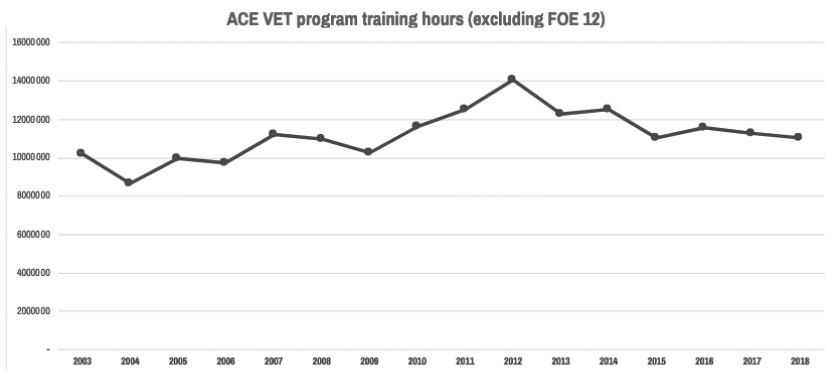


(Source: National VET provider collection)

There were increases in average subject enrolments per program from three (3) per program in 2003 to eleven (11) in 2018. Average training hours per program have increased from 74 in 2003 to 395 in 2018 (Refer Table 16).

**Table 16: Government funded VET (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) 2003–2018**

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACE providers (000)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Program enrolments | 138 | 85 | 50 | 52 | 56 | 52 | 49 | 49 | 52 | 54 | 38 | 34 | 28 | 28 | 29 | 28 |
| Subject enrolments | 396 | 330 | 386 | 363 | 396 | 390 | 361 | 379 | 407 | 445 | 374 | 368 | 308 | 317 | 314 | 315 |
| Training hours | 10200 | 8650 | 9952 | 9734 | 11215 | 10960 | 10256 | 11653 | 12503 | 14066 | 12305 | 12548 | 11044 | 11548 | 11261 | 11052 |
| Subjects per program | 3 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| Training hours per program | 74 | 102 | 198 | 188 | 202 | 210 | 210 | 239 | 239 | 260 | 322 | 367 | 400 | 407 | 391 | 395 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

Total VET program enrolments have remained steady. Subject enrolments and training hours have increased substantially from 2015–2018. Subject per enrolment have increased from 10 to 19 and training hours have increased from 291 to 369 (refer Table 17).

**Table 17: Total ACE VET (excluding FOE 12 - Mixed field programmes) 2015–2018**

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACE providers** | | | | |
| **Program enrolments** | 82,403 | 101,536 | 87,138 | 82,745 |
| **Subject enrolments** | 797,091 | 1,459,344 | 1,459,344 | 1,550,135 |
| **Training hours** | 23,996,381 | 30,077,397 | 32,142,771 | 30,551,352 |
| *Subjects per enrolment* | *10* | *14* | *18* | *19* |
| *Training hours per program* | *291* | *296* | *369* | *369* |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection)

There has been a slight trend away from AQF program enrolments at ACE training providers – from 3.5% in 2010 to 2.2% in 2018 (refer Table 18), which is consistent across all providers. ACE AQF program enrolments in total VET have remained consistent at 2.8% (refer Table 19).

**Table 18: Government-funded program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type and level of education, 2010–2018**

| Provider | 2010 no. '000' | % | 2011 no. '000' | % | 2012 no. | % | 2013 no. | % | 2014 no. | % | 2015 no. | % | 2016 no. | % | 2017 no. | % | 2018 no. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TAFE** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 798.3 | 59.3 | 804.9 | 53.9 | 808.3 | 52.5 | 759.4 | 52.9 | 633.5 | 45.7 | 493.2 | 41.3 | 510.7 | 39.8 | 534.9 | 44.2 | 513.3 | 45.8 |
| Non-AQF | 57.3 | 4.3 | 47.2 | 3.2 | 36.3 | 2.4 | 34.7 | 2.4 | 55.9 | 4.0 | 52.0 | 4.4 | 174.1 | 13.6 | 108.9 | 9.0 | 79.8 | 7.1 |
| Total | 855.6 | 63.6 | 852.1 | 57.1 | 844.6 | 54.9 | 794.1 | 55.3 | 689.4 | 49.8 | 545.2 | 45.6 | 684.8 | 53.4 | 643.8 | 53.2 | 593.1 | 52.9 |
| **OTHER GOVT** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 72.3 | 5.4 | 63.2 | 4.2 | 53.3 | 3.5 | 42.6 | 3.0 | 44.7 | 3.2 | 42.0 | 3.5 | 42.3 | 3.3 | 44.8 | 3.7 | 44.2 | 3.9 |
| Non-AQF | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | | | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 0.1 | 1.1 | 0.1 | 3.1 | 0.3 |
| Total | 72.9 | 5.4 | 63.5 | 4.3 | 53.6 | 3.5 | 42.6 | 3.0 | 44.7 | 3.2 | 42.2 | 3.5 | 43.6 | 3.4 | 45.9 | 3.8 | 47.3 | 4.2 |
| **ACE** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 47.6 | 3.5 | 50.8 | 3.4 | 52.3 | 3.4 | 37.7 | 2.6 | 32.7 | 2.4 | 25.7 | 2.1 | 25.3 | 2.0 | 24.9 | 2.1 | 24.8 | 2.2 |
| Non-AQF | 1.1 | 0.1 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 1.7 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 1.9 | 0.2 | 3.0 | 0.2 | 3.9 | 0.3 | 3.2 | 0.3 |
| Total | 48.7 | 3.6 | 52.4 | 3.5 | 54.0 | 3.5 | 38.2 | 2.7 | 34.2 | 2.5 | 27.6 | 2.3 | 28.4 | 2.2 | 28.8 | 2.4 | 28.0 | 2.5 |
| **OTHER RTOs** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 365.3 | 27.2 | 522.1 | 35.0 | 584.5 | 38.0 | 559.3 | 38.9 | 614.6 | 44.4 | 576.6 | 48.3 | 521.2 | 40.6 | 485.4 | 40.1 | 440.9 | 39.4 |
| Non-AQF | 2.7 | 0.2 | 2.2 | 0.1 | 2.3 | 0.1 | 2.4 | 0.2 | 2.3 | 0.2 | 2.9 | 0.2 | 4.2 | 0.3 | 5.9 | 0.5 | 11.1 | 1.0 |
| Total | 368.0 | 27.4 | 524.3 | 35.1 | 586.7 | 38.1 | 561.7 | 39.1 | 616.8 | 44.5 | 579.5 | 48.5 | 525.4 | 41.0 | 491.3 | 40.6 | 452.0 | 40.3 |
| **TOTAL PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 1283.5 | 95.4 | 1441.0 | 96.6 | 1498.4 | 97.4 | 1399.0 | 97.4 | 1325.4 | 95.7 | 1137.4 | 95.2 | 1099.5 | 85.7 | 1090.0 | 90.1 | 1023.2 | 91.3 |
| Non-AQF | 61.7 | 4.6 | 51.3 | 3.4 | 40.6 | 2.6 | 37.6 | 2.6 | 59.7 | 4.3 | 57.1 | 4.8 | 182.7 | 14.3 | 119.9 | 9.9 | 97.2 | 8.7 |
| Total | 1345.2 | 100.0 | 1492.4 | 100.0 | 1538.9 | 100.0 | 1436.5 | 100.0 | 1385.1 | 100.0 | 1194.5 | 100.0 | 1282.2 | 100.0 | 1209.9 | 100.0 | 1120.4 | 100.0 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection – NCVER data request 2020.) *AQF training is all Certificate I and above qualification courses. Non-AQF training includes courses at secondary education level (Year 11 & 12), non-award courses, subject-only enrolments (i.e. not enrolled in a course), statement of attainment courses, and 'not elsewhere classified'.

**Table 19: Total VET program enrolments (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed fields program) by provider type 2015–2018**

| Provider | 2015 | | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % | no. '000' | % |
| **TAFE** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 832.3 | 29.2 | 799.3 | 28.6 | 776.7 | 29.5 | 690.9 | 28.8 |
| Non-AQF | 35.8 | 1.3 | 48.5 | 1.7 | 33.3 | 1.3 | 19.3 | 0.8 |
| Total | 868.1 | 30.5 | 847.8 | 30.4 | 810.0 | 30.8 | 710.2 | 29.6 |
| **UNIVERSITIES** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 65.0 | 2.3 | 61.3 | 2.2 | 61.2 | 2.3 | 59.8 | 2.5 |
| Non-AQF | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.0 |
| Total | 66.3 | 2.3 | 61.8 | 2.2 | 62.1 | 2.4 | 60.9 | 2.5 |
| **SCHOOLS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 154.2 | 5.4 | 144.5 | 5.2 | 138.5 | 5.3 | 124.5 | 5.2 |
| Non-AQF | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| Total | 154.3 | 5.4 | 144.7 | 5.2 | 138.7 | 5.3 | 124.6 | 5.2 |
| **ACE** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 80.1 | 2.8 | 71.3 | 2.6 | 72.5 | 2.8 | 67.0 | 2.8 |
| Non-AQF | 2.3 | 0.1 | 30.2 | 1.1 | 14.6 | 0.6 | 15.7 | 0.7 |
| Total | 82.4 | 2.9 | 101.5 | 3.6 | 87.1 | 3.3 | 82.7 | 3.4 |
| **ENTERPRISE PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 62.0 | 2.2 | 76.3 | 2.7 | 72.5 | 2.8 | 64.0 | 2.7 |
| Non-AQF | 18.7 | 0.7 | 18.2 | 0.7 | 15.7 | 0.6 | 14.0 | 0.6 |
| Total | 80.7 | 2.8 | 94.5 | 3.4 | 88.2 | 3.4 | 78.0 | 3.3 |
| **PRIVATE TRAINING PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 1529.6 | 53.7 | 1459.0 | 52.3 | 1349.6 | 51.3 | 1227.0 | 51.2 |
| Non-AQF | 69.3 | 2.4 | 82.1 | 2.9 | 97.6 | 3.7 | 115.4 | 4.8 |
| Total | 1598.9 | 56.1 | 1541.1 | 55.2 | 1447.2 | 55.0 | 1342.4 | 56.0 |
| **TOTAL PROVIDERS** | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 2723.3 | 95.5 | 2611.7 | 93.6 | 2471.1 | 93.8 | 2233.2 | 93.1 |
| Non-AQF | 127.2 | 4.5 | 179.7 | 6.4 | 162.3 | 6.2 | 165.6 | 6.9 |
| Total | 2850.6 | 100.0 | 2791.4 | 100.0 | 2633.4 | 100.0 | 2398.8 | 100.0 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection, NCVER 2020.)

## *Equity groups*

In government-funded programs, 2018 NCVER data highlights ACE RTOs as significant providers of VET to key equity groups. Particularly significant is the percentage of unemployed people enrolled in VET programs at ACE providers, accounting for just over 40% of the total. ACE providers also work with higher percentages of people with disability (13.8%); and people from non-English speaking backgrounds (20.9%) (refer Table 20). These results are similar for total VET program enrolments (refer Table 21).

**Table 20: Government-funded ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes) by reporting provider type & equity group, % of total, 2003–2018**

| Equity group / Year | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students with a disability (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 4.6 | 4.9 | 5.2 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 7.5 | 7.9 | 7.8 | 8.6 | 8.8 | 8.5 | 9.7 | 11.3 | 13.6 | 14.0 | 13.8 |
| All other providers | 5.5 | 5.8 | 6.0 | 6.2 | 6.1 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 8.1 | 8.2 | 8.6 |
| **Indigenous students as (%of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 1.9 | 2.5 | 4.2 | 4.6 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.6 | 8.0 | 7.5 | 5.5 | 6.0 | 7.1 | 6.6 | 8.0 | 7.8 | 8.5 |
| All other providers | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.9 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.6 | 6.2 | 6.7 | 7.3 | 7.7 |
| **Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 9.0 | 9.2 | 12.7 | 12.0 | 11.9 | 12.6 | 8.2 | 9.5 | 10.5 | 12.8 | 15.9 | 17.1 | 22.6 | 20.3 | 21.8 | 20.9 |
| All other providers | 12.8 | 12.7 | 12.6 | 12.9 | 12.4 | 13.2 | 12.7 | 12.6 | 13.1 | 13.6 | 14.7 | 16.0 | 15.2 | 14.7 | 14.3 | 13.8 |
| **Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | N/A | N/A | N/A | 13.9 | 26.2 | 27.4 | 33.8 | 32.3 | 23.8 | 17.2 | 20.3 | 18.0 | 14.7 | 16.1 | 12.0 | 11.3 |
| All other providers | N/A | N/A | N/A | 18.1 | 20.7 | 19.8 | 19.0 | 18.8 | 14.9 | 14.7 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 14.9 | 14.2 | 14.3 | 14.1 |
| **Students who are unemployed (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ACE providers | 10.9 | 14.9 | 17.9 | 19.3 | 21.5 | 24.8 | 27.4 | 29.6 | 28.8 | 29.6 | 28.3 | 36.2 | 39.0 | 38.8 | 43.3 | 40.2 |
| All other providers | 15.8 | 15.2 | 13.8 | 13.2 | 12.4 | 12.5 | 14.8 | 16.9 | 18.1 | 17.9 | 19.6 | 22.7 | 21.9 | 21.3 | 20.7 | 19.3 |
| **Students not in the labour force (% of total)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| All other providers | 11.7 | 11.0 | 8.1 | 8.9 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 6.9 | 8.1 | 8.4 | 8.1 | 7.4 | 8.3 | 9.9 | 11.2 | 10.9 | 9.7 |
| All other providers | 9.3 | 9.3 | 8.8 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 9.0 | 9.3 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 9.1 | 8.8 | 9.0 | 9.9 | 10.9 | 11.1 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection. Note: N/A not collected)

**Table 21: Total ACE VET program enrolments (excluding FOE12 – Mixed fields programmes) by reporting provider type and equity group, % of total, 2003–2018**

| Equity group / Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students with a disability (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 7.9 | 7.9 | 9.5 | 9.7 |
| All other providers | 5.2 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.9 |
| **Indigenous students as** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 6.6 | 5.7 | 6.2 | 6.7 |
| All other providers | 4.7 | 4.8 | 44.9 | 4.9 |
| **Students from a non-English speaking-background (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 14.7 | 11.8 | 14.5 | 15.1 |
| All other providers | 14.7 | 15.0 | 16.6 | 17.6 |
| **Students from outer regional, remote and very remote regions (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 16.6 | 14.0 | 13.5 | 12.8 |
| All other providers | 13.6 | 13.0 | 12.7 | 11.8 |
| **Students who are unemployed (% of total)** | | | | |
| ACE providers | 26.9 | 22.6 | 27.2 | 26.7 |
| All other providers | 17.7 | 17.1 | 16.1 | 15.5 |
| **Students not in the labour force (% of total)** | | | | |
| All other providers | 6.6 | 6.1 | 8.7 | 8.2 |
| All other providers | 7.7 | 8.0 | 8.6 | 8.9 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection; National VET in Schools Collection.

## What are the outcomes?

Successfully completed hours in VET (excluding FOE-12) at ACE providers and other providers have been calculated and 'load pass rates' determined (refer Tables 22 and 23). Table 22 shows that in 2018, students in government-funded VET at ACE providers have been successfully completing around 87% of the total hours of training they signed up. The rate of success is above that for students at other providers by around 3%. Table 23 shows that in 2018, students in total VET at ACE providers have been successfully completing 91% of the total hours of training – a success rate that is 6% above that for students at all other

VET providers. Again, this is significant due to the equity cohorts that ACE providers are delivering programs to (refer Tables 20 & 21).

**Table 22: Government funded load pass rates (%) (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by reporting provider type, 2003–2018**

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACE providers** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 79.5 | 82.7 | 79.8 | 79.1 | 78.3 | 78.5 | 83.8 | 84.2 | 88.4 | 87.5 | 85.9 | 85.7 | 85.3 | 86.4 | 88.4 | 89.1 |
| Non-AQF | 79.0 | 73.3 | 76.9 | 69.5 | 71.0 | 65.6 | 70.7 | 77.3 | 78.4 | 79.7 | 80.3 | 84.3 | 80.5 | 78.6 | 80.8 | 77.0 |
| Total | 79.4 | 81.2 | 79.5 | 78.2 | 77.5 | 77.2 | 82.6 | 83.3 | 87.3 | 86.7 | 85.1 | 85.6 | 84.8 | 85.4 | 87.7 | 87.2 |
| **Other providers** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 79.1 | 79.6 | 80.1 | 80.3 | 80.6 | 81.6 | 81.8 | 82.4 | 84.1 | 84.4 | 84.7 | 85.0 | 85.2 | 84.5 | 84.6 | 84.5 |
| Non-AQF | 74.9 | 76.2 | 78.9 | 78.4 | 80.4 | 80.0 | 78.6 | 78.9 | 79.5 | 79.0 | 79.9 | 86.4 | 87.8 | 82.1 | 81.0 | 85.0 |
| Total | 78.9 | 79.4 | 80.0 | 80.2 | 80.6 | 81.5 | 81.7 | 82.3 | 84.0 | 84.3 | 84.6 | 85.1 | 85.2 | 84.3 | 84.4 | 84.5 |
| **Total providers** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| AQF | 79.1 | 79.6 | 80.1 | 80.3 | 80.6 | 81.5 | 81.8 | 82.4 | 84.2 | 84.3 | 84.8 | 85.1 | 85.2 | 84.5 | 84.7 | 84.7 |
| Non-AQF | 75.2 | 76.0 | 78.8 | 78.0 | 79.9 | 79.1 | 78.0 | 78.7 | 79.3 | 79.1 | 80.0 | 86.1 | 86.6 | 81.9 | 81.0 | 84.1 |
| Total | 78.9 | 79.4 | 80.0 | 80.1 | 80.5 | 81.4 | 81.7 | 82.3 | 84.1 | 84.1 | 84.7 | 85.1 | 85.2 | 84.4 | 84.5 | 84.6 |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

**Table 23: Total VET load pass rates (%) (excluding FOE 12 – Mixed field programmes) by provider type, 2015–2018**

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACE providers** | | | | |
| AQF | 87.0 | 88.6 | 89.2 | 88.8 |
| Non-AQF | 76.2 | 94.0 | 92.1 | 94.1 |
| Total | 85.0 | 90.5 | 90.3 | 91.0 |
| **Other providers** | | | | |
| AQF | 81.1 | 80.1 | 81.9 | 83.3 |
| Non-AQF | 94.6 | 92.5 | 93.5 | 94.7 |
| Total | 82.4 | 81.6 | 83.5 | 85.0 |
| **Total providers** | | | | |
| AQF | 81.2 | 80.4 | 82.2 | 83.5 |
| Non-AQF | 93.6 | 92.6 | 93.3 | 94.7 |
| Total | 82.5 | 82.0 | 83.7 | 85.3 |

(Source: Table 24 & 25 – National VET Provider Collection –These numbers include skill sets and other training where the program field of education is not assigned.)

VET student outcomes are taken from the National Student Outcomes Survey (SOS). The SOS is an annual survey of VET graduates and subject completers. The SOS has gathered data on government-funded VET since 1999. From 2017, it also reported on all outcomes; including fee-for-service students. The SOS is undertaken in the year following training, meaning that respondents will have finished training between approximately 5 to 18 months prior to undertaking the survey.

SOS data relates to all VET students in mixed field programs, adult basic education programs and other VET fields of education. The 2019 SOS (refer Table 25) identifies a significant increase in employment outcomes for students at ACE VET providers. These results were considerably better than all other VET providers; particularly notable given that equity groups that ACE providers work with. Just under 17% of ACE VET training graduates moved from unemployment to employment as a result of their training – accounting for the most significant shift. Compared with:

- 10.1% of TAFE graduates

- 9.5% of private for-profit training providers

- 7.9% of university VET providers.

- The 2019 SOS also found that:

- 89% of graduates were satisfied with the overall quality of training at ACE providers

- 92% of graduates would recommend their provider

- 83% of employed graduates found that their training was relevant to their current job; the greatest percentage of all providers

- 62% of graduates had improved their employment status after their training.

Of the subject completers at ACE providers:

- 87% were employed after their training and 89% were employed or in further study after training

- 94% were satisfied with their teaching and 95% were satisfied with their assessment and the overall quality of their training

- 95% identified that they achieved their main reason for doing the training –the largest percentage of all providers

- 97% would recommend their providers and 81% found their training relevant – the largest percentage of all providers.

ACE providers deliver predominantly mixed fields or adult basic education programs (refer Table 24, which shows ACE program and subject enrolments by field and level of education in 2018).

**Table 24: ACE VET program enrolments by field of education and level of education 2018**

| Field of education by program enrolment | Govt funded no. | % Total | TVA no. | % Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 - Natural and physical sciences | 50 | 1.0 | 305 | 2.5 |
| 02 - Information technology | 705 | 3.0 | 1310 | 2.0 |
| 03 - Engineering and related technologies | 610 | 0.3 | 1710 | 0.5 |
| 04 - Architecture and building | 625 | 0.5 | 2605 | 1.2 |
| 05 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies | 2065 | 5.1 | 3605 | 5.8 |
| 06 - Health | 1020 | 1.7 | 15715 | 9.2 |
| 07 - Education | 5240 | 6.7 | 7365 | 5.6 |
| 08 - Management and commerce | 3510 | 2.0 | 12225 | 2.1 |
| 09 - Society and culture | 10925 | 5.9 | 25740 | 5.9 |
| 10 - Creative arts | 250 | 0.9 | 1160 | 1.7 |
| 11 - Food, hospitality and personal services | 2025 | 1.8 | 8080 | 3.9 |
| 12 - Mixed field programmes | 13425 | 7.3 | 19740 | 8.8 |
| Not assigned | 960 | | 2935 | |
| **Program level of education by program enrolment** | **Govt funded no.** | **% Total** | **TVA no.** | **% Total** |
| Diploma or above | 2820 | 3.5 | 7540 | 1.8 |
| Certificate IV | 5560 | 4.9 | 12490 | 2.9 |
| Certificate III | 13100 | 4.7 | 32590 | 3.5 |
| Certificate II | 6275 | 5.5 | 21215 | 4.4 |
| Certificate I | 6390 | 10.7 | 10660 | 7.1 |
| Statement of attainment | | | 17995 | 8.9 |
| Other recognised programs | 5805 | 5.0 | | |
| Non-award programs | 1455 | 5.0 | | |
| **Total** | **41405** | | **102495** | |
| **Field of education by subject enrolment** | **Govt funded no.** | **% Total** | **TVA no.** | **% Total** |
| 01 - Natural and physical sciences | 880 | 1.6 | 3930 | 1.7 |
| 02 - Information technology | 1935 | 11.4 | 1435 | 0.4 |
| 03 - Engineering and related technologies | 6915 | 1.4 | 19795 | 0.6 |
| 04 - Architecture and building | 2645 | 1.1 | 9285 | 0.7 |
| 05 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies | 7495 | 9.1 | 16980 | 3.0 |
| 06 - Health | 50730 | 8.3 | 999110 | 14.8 |
| 07 - Education | 15290 | 19.4 | 24060 | 4.6 |
| 08 - Management and commerce | 42935 | 5.5 | 117760 | 2.4 |
| 09 - Society and culture | 87875 | 10.22 | 186790 | 5.3 |
| 10 - Creative arts | 10070 | 20.89 | 21725 | 3.5 |
| 11 - Food, hospitality and personal services | 15030 | 5.8 | 45595 | 3.0 |
| 12 - Mixed field programmes | 147955 | 19.7 | 234030 | 6.9 |
| **Program level of education by subject enrolment** | **Govt funded no.** | **% Total** | **TVA no.** | **% Total** |
| Diploma or above | 31220 | 5.7 | 73080 | 1.9 |
| Certificate IV | 45975 | 6.6 | 93855 | 2.5 |
| Certificate III | 107710 | 5.0 | 253735 | 3.1 |
| Certificate II | 39160 | 7.9 | 133660 | 3.7 |
| Certificate I | 41365 | 30.2 | 62635 | 9.1 |
| Statement of attainment | | | 46255 | |
| Subject not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program | | | 1017290 | |
| Other recognised programs | 20475 | 33.3 | | |
| Non-award programs | 4050 | 90.0 | | |
| No programs level | 99800 | 51.1 | | |
| **Total** | **389755** | | **1680510** | |

(Source: National VET Provider Collection)

**Table 25: Key findings for graduates and subject completers, by provider type 2018, (2019) (%)**

| | TAFE institutes | Universities | ACE providers | Private providers | All students |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Graduates** | | | | | |
| Employed before training | 61.2 | 65.4 | 53.6 | 70.8 | 66.7 |
| Of these: Employed at a higher skill level after training | 21.5 | 23.4 | 18.4 | 16.0 | 18.0 |
| Of these: Better job after training | 40.3 | 39.3 | 38.3 | 36.0 | 37.5 |
| Not employed before training | 38.8 | 34.6 | 46.4 | 29.2 | 33.3 |
| Of these: Employed after training | 40.5 | 39.8 | 47.5 | 52.0 | 46.8 |
| Improved employment status after training | 60.9 | 61.2 | 62.4 | 69.1 | 65.8 |
| Employed after training | 71.3 | 73.3 | 70.4 | 80.3 | 76.6 |
| Employed or in further study after training | 85.2 | 89.9 | 80.1 | 86.0 | 85.6 |
| Enrolled in further study after training | 36.3 | 45.3 | 29.8 | 26.1 | 30.3 |
| Developed problem-solving skills | 79.2 | 80.1 | 79.7 | 76.9 | 77.9 |
| Improved writing skills | 54.7 | 52.4 | 60.4 | 50.8 | 52.6 |
| Improved numerical skills | 50.1 | 46.6 | 46.2 | 42.9 | 45.6 |
| Satisfied with teaching | 86.8 | 84.0 | 87.9 | 87.0 | 86.9 |
| Satisfied with assessment | 88.9 | 86.3 | 90.4 | 89.4 | 89.2 |
| Satisfied with the overall quality of training | 88.3 | 86.9 | 89.4 | 88.0 | 88.1 |
| Achieved main reason for doing the training | 81.9 | 81.4 | 84.7 | 85.0 | 83.9 |
| Recommend training | 90.8 | 88.8 | 91.7 | 90.5 | 90.6 |
| Recommend training provider | 90.0 | 88.0 | 88.5 | 88.4 | 88.9 |
| Of those employed after training: | | | | | |
| Found the training relevant to their current job | 79.3 | 73.0 | 83.2 | 81.3 | 80.5 |
| Received at least one job-related benefit | 83.5 | 79.9 | 87.5 | 84.2 | 84.0 |
| **Subject completers** | | | | | |
| Employed before training | 69.7 | 68.8 | 84.6 | 81.9 | 81.0 |
| Of these: Employed at a higher skill level after training | 12.0 | 11.0 | 6.6 | 8.6 | 8.6 |
| Of these: Better job after training | 26.0 | 23.8 | 14.0 | 21.8 | 21.3 |
| Not employed before training | 30.3 | 31.2 | 15.4 | 18.1 | 19.0 |
| Of these: Employed after training | 36.1 | 36.2 | 40.3 | 47.7 | 45.2 |
| Improved employment status after training | 58.2 | 57.4 | 61.0 | 64.2 | 63.3 |
| Employed after training | 75.0 | 74.6 | 87.4 | 85.4 | 84.6 |
| Employed or in further study after training | 77.2 | 82.5 | 89.2 | 86.9 | 86.3 |
| Enrolled in further study after training | 6.9 | 22.8 | 8.0 | 7.7 | 7.8 |
| Developed problem-solving skills | 71.2 | 74.4 | 78.0 | 75.0 | 75.0 |
| Improved writing skills | 42.4 | 37.9 | 21.6 | 31.0 | 31.1 |
| Improved numerical skills | 39.2 | 34.5 | 17.9 | 28.0 | 28.1 |
| Satisfied with teaching | 83.2 | 80.8 | 93.5 | 90.3 | 90.0 |
| Satisfied with assessment | 85.2 | 83.5 | 94.6 | 91.9 | 91.6 |
| Satisfied with the overall quality of training | 81.9 | 83.3 | 95.0 | 92.1 | 91.4 |
| Achieved main reason for doing the training | 81.3 | 82.3 | 95.2 | 91.9 | 91.3 |
| Recommend training | 86.3 | 87.4 | 96.9 | 94.3 | 93.9 |
| Recommend training provider | 86.8 | 87.9 | 96.7 | 93.6 | 93.3 |
| Of those employed after training: | | | | | |
| Found the training relevant to their current job | 72.2 | 70.5 | 81.1 | 79.2 | 78.8 |
| Received at least one job-related benefit | 73.5 | 72.9 | 67.3 | 72.9 | 72.3 |

(Source: NCVER 2019a VET Student Outcomes))

## What are the challenges?

Competitive funding models in VET, particularly the student entitlement funding models introduced in 2009 resulted in a shift in VET provision away from ACE and public providers (TAFEs) and towards private RTOs (refer Figure 16). The percentage of ACE provider program enrolments

was around 11% of the total in 2003 and this has dropped to 3.2% in 2018. The share of total VET program enrolments for ACE providers has remained fairly consistent between 2015 and 2018, and in 2018 was 3.9% of the total (Figure 17). Some specific impact data on ACE of the demand-driven individual choice approach to VET was found for Victoria (in a 2014 briefing paper entitled 'Impact of skills reform on adult and community education (ACE) providers' endorsed by several ACE peak organisations – ACEVic, ALA, CCA and NH Victoria). The briefing paper reveals that since Victoria's demand-driven individual choice in VET funding model was introduced in 2008, there has been a 27% drop in ACE providers delivering government-funded VET across the state and enrolments in pre-accredited pathways programs aimed at disadvantaged learners have dropped 25% (DECD, 2013). The briefing paper called for reconsideration of the question of how to accommodate disadvantaged students in VET within competitive VET funding models and to reverse the unintended adverse effects on its ACE providers and the vulnerable learners that these models are having. The paper suggested that governments:

1. Outline specifically the separate and complementary roles of the public TAFE system, not for profit community providers and private for profit providers; and in particular not to treat ACE RTOs the same as private providers as they have a fundamentally different model (see Figure 18).

2. Introduce some form of 'community social/service obligation' fund (other than the existing standard loadings for Indigenous/regional/disabled learners) for providers who work with students who require substantial additional educational time.

3. Quarantine future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only.

4. Ensure that regional ACE providers are given additional funding that gives key local industries the opportunity to train their staff.

**Figure 16:  Government-funded program enrolments by reporting provider type, 2003-2018**
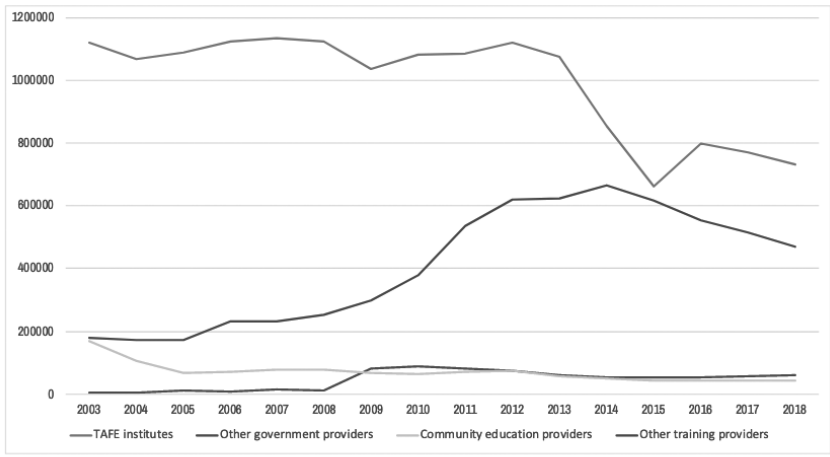


Source: National VET Provider Collection

**Figure 17:  Total VET program enrolments by provider type, 2015-2018**
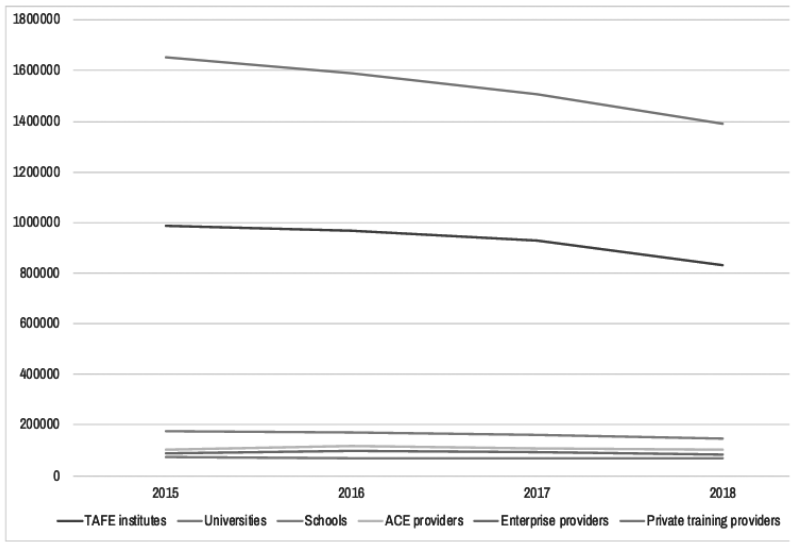


Source: National VET Provider Collection

**Figure 18: Characteristics of ACE VET providers compared to private VET providers**

| Private RTOs | ACE RTOs |
|---|---|
| Profit focussed and driven | Not for profit |
| Responsible to owners, directors, & shareholders | Responsible to a committee and a membership representing the local community |
| Targets niche training to large areas | Responds to local community needs |
| Industry focus – often specific industry | Learner focussed |
| High volume and formal training methodology | Flexible and accommodating to learner needs and issues |
| Access to private financing, equity and bank loans | Limited access to capital; especially if in council premises |
| Limited access to teachers, high level of self-paced and assessment only delivery | Small classes with committed teachers, additional learning and educational assistance provided face-to-face |
| Mostly capable students – often delivering to those in work and in industry settings | Mostly low socio-economic, retrenched, more mature, disabled, CALD, unemployed students |
| High percentage of income spent on marketing | Student recruitment through outreach and word of mouth |
| Accredited courses only | Pre-accredited (and entry level accredited) |
| Often deliver skills building and deepening courses | Mostly delivering foundation skills courses and entry level VET |
| VET delivery only | VET offered with a range of social supports & services (childcare, counselling, health & wellbeing courses, informal groups, a meeting place) |

In 2019, the Victorian Government made a commitment to ACE through a Ministerial Statement that acknowledged its essential role and unique strengths in developing core foundation skills for work, further study and in enabling people to participate in society as valued citizens. The Statement outlines a plan for building the capacity and recognition of the sector as the third pillar of post-secondary education alongside TAFE and universities.

In NSW, the government has 'community social service obligation' funds for ACE providers and quarantined future foundation skills funding applications for ACE and TAFE providers only (Bowman & McKenna, 2016). However, this may change. VET funding models remain dynamic in all jurisdictions. For example, in 2020 the NSW state government foreshadowed that the private sector will play a bigger role in VET.

In 2018, the federal government announced an independent review of the VET sector, which resulted in Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System more commonly referred to as the Joyce Review. Amongst other recommendations, the Joyce Review proposed a 'regional study hubs' model for use by

the VET sector, which would require collaboration between providers, external agencies and community networks to support the successful participation of students in regional and rural locations.

The ACE sector could play a strong role in this, particularly in providing increased support for people with low levels of education, language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills. A major initiative of the Joyce Review accepted by the federal government was the formation of the National Skills Commission to provide the statistical basis for Australian government funding decisions and the establishment of the National Careers Institute for career information and guidance. The federal government developed the Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow strategy and established a VET Stakeholder Committee, which includes ACE representation from Adult Learning Australia, and plans to expand ASQA's role to provide more education to the VET sector.

There is a high need to engage more young Australians in VET, with 1 in 4 not meeting important education and employment milestones. Figure 19 (Lamb et al, 2015) shows that young people who fall behind can recover. However, Lamb's data also shows that more advantaged learners are not only less likely to fall behind in the first place, they are more likely than their disadvantaged counterparts to catch up again if they do.

**Figure 19: Index of educational opportunity for young people, Australia**
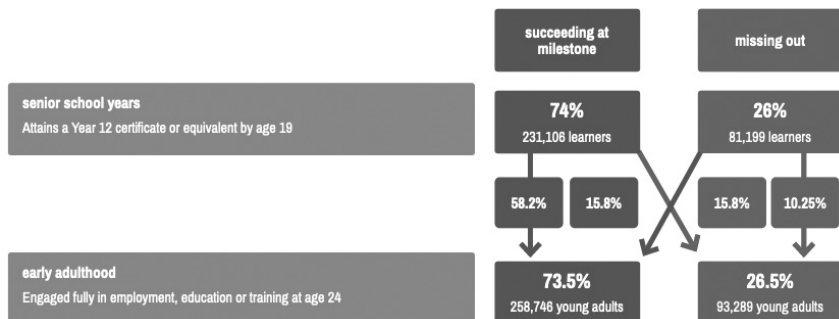


(Source: Lamb et al 2015)

There also are many older Australians suffering job losses due to industry restructuring for whom the ACE approach to VET is well suited. Australia's manufacturing industry has a disproportionate share of retrenchments that have occurred (Murtough & Waite, 2000) and are to continue to occur (Manufacturing Skills Australia, 2014). The

manufacturing industry has high numbers of older and lesser skilled workers in need of tailored VET programs with support services (Callan & Bowman 2015).

There will also be a significant need to train, upskill and educate our communities, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and the newly unemployed as a result of the impact of COVID19.

The ACE sector as an enabler of inclusive learning allows the learner to re-engage, and re-connect with learning at any stage along the learning time line no matter their age, gender, culture, ability or previous educational experience. The existence of an ACE sector provides individuals with choice in where they can access their learning; how they will learn; what additional services they can tap into and finally how much they will need to pay for the learning. Government funding of a competitive community service grant (CSG) fund in VET to support disadvantaged learners in local contexts is an option worthy of consideration. Governments should articulate objectives for CSGs, and then invite selected providers to submit proposals. The selected providers should be highly capable and possess the necessary expertise and breadth to support the students targeted and have a history of quality training and student support with vulnerable students. The CSGs must be cognisant of the fact that many of the providers catering for disadvantaged learners are small.

They are part of the long tail of small providers within the total VET providers in the Australian VET system (Korbel & Misko, 2016). Small VET providers should not be discriminated against on the basis of administrative management costs. Their effectiveness and efficiency should be the key criteria.

Australian ACE is a recognisable fourth sector of education providing accessible 'lifelong and life-wide learning' opportunities responsive to the needs of adults within the local community it serves.

## Pathway programs

The extension of ACE to include more vocationally orientated offerings and formal VET programs has increased opportunities for people to move from one type of learning program to another within the supportive learning environment that ACE offers. The program logic of

learning pathways provision in ACE is to provide adults several learning experiences that each build on the previous experiences and step them through the four critical steps in the adult learning journey.

**Figure 20: Learning pathways provision program logic**
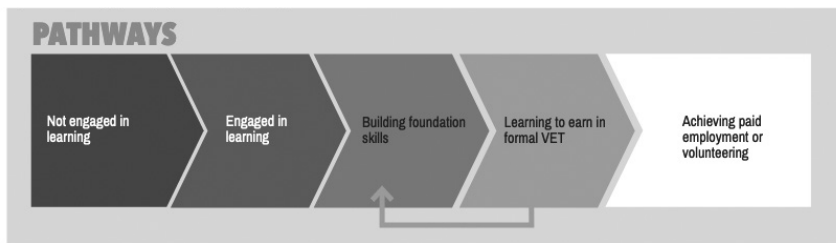


## Key features

ACE focusses on learning opportunities that create the potential for further learning and skills development through a stepping stone approach to learning (refer to Figure 21).

## Participant pathways

### *Step one: Re-engage adults in learning*

This requires activities that target an individual's personal interests and social needs. To be engaged in learning is a major milestone for some adults that can build confidence in learning and encourage adults to participate in further learning. For example, Kearns (2006) found from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning a recurring theme was that personal outcomes – confidence, self-esteem and the aspiration to engage in learning – are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'. Miller (2005) confirms that personal outcomes from VET act as the platform for the achievement of education outcomes and, in turn, for the attainment of employment and community-related outcomes.

**Figure 21: Australian ACE – a framework for reporting educational programs**

| Distinctive features | Focus – local adult learning needs for local community development |
| --- | --- |
| | Values – welcoming, friendly, caring, non-judgemental, socially inclusive, accessible to all |
| | Learning practice – learner centred and holistic (with appropriate support services), delivered in community settings, focused on positive learning experiences to foster further learner engagement |
| | Organisation type – ACE is delivered through community based, owned and managed, not for profits that go by various names, are of various sizes and vary in activity focus in part due to them operating in state bound systems |

| Scope | 1. Traditional focus → | 2. Common new focus → | 3. Additional focus, sometimes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Learning activities | Hobby, recreation and personal enrichment programs (non-formal, non-accredited); | Adult basic education – alone or with vocational content (non-accredited and accredited) | Vocational education and training (formal, accredited) |
| Participants | All adults, potentially | Adults with limited formal education or English language | All adults potentially Targeted disadvantaged |
| Outcomes Immediate – for individual and their family | Improved health and wellbeing; Increased social connections Active citizenship | Improved self /family functioning; Improved self confidence; Better understanding of work; Motivation for further learning | Increased work skills; Improved job status; Increased wages /incomes; Motivation for further learning |

**4. Pathways between the three main types of activities**

Re-engagement in learning → Identity development as a learner → Learning to Earn
Social Inclusion through Education

| Outcomes Longer term for society and economy | Decreased health costs; Increased community cohesion | Decreased call on welfare services | Increased taxes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Policy links | Healthy, productive ageing; Social inclusion through education | National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults; Social inclusion through education | Skills for workforce participation and productivity; Social inclusion through education |

| National Ministerial Declaration on ACE (2008) State and Territory ACE policies (continually updated) |
| --- |

## *Step 2: Build foundation skills*

This often is part of the process of building identity and confidence as a learner because gaps in these skills limit effective participation in formal vocational education, training and work. Palmeri (2007) overviewed many research studies focussed on disadvantaged learner groups and identified common factors for their successful engagement: motivating the learner – through negotiating learning that is of interest to them and relevant to their world; providing an informal learning environment to give a level of comfort given their lack of confidence; offering low intensity learning or training – at least at first – that is not assessed because assessment can be threatening; using quality teachers; and supporting the learner through

peer learning and personalised support by tutors and mentors. Merit has also been found in re-joining the disadvantaged in learning through the delivery of preparatory vocational programs. These programs usually include literacy and numeracy, employment preparation activities and some basic vocational skills training.

Barnett and Spoehr (2008) found VET can assist the welfare-to-work transition if it addresses students' needs in a holistic way and that for most students this involves providing a preparatory pathway prior to engagement with 'mainstream' VET programs to ensure that effective training outcomes are achieved, therefore increasing the capacity to obtain high-quality employment.

Oliver and Karmel (2012) showed that pre-vocational programs are providing pathways into traineeships in the same way that pre-apprenticeship programs are an established route into apprenticeships in the traditional trades. Trainees in lower-skilled occupational categories such as sales workers, labourers, machinery operators and drivers are more likely to complete their training if they have completed a pre-vocational course beforehand.

Researchers have also found that it can take several engagements in basic adult education before an adult who has been disadvantaged in learning or a long time away from it may move to the third step (Dymock, 2007; Dawe 2004).

'[L]earners from disadvantaged backgrounds who enrol in VET are less likely to complete by comparison with their non-disadvantaged peers' (McVicar & Tabasso, 2016). However, despite the obvious success of its pathway and vocational programs for disadvantaged cohorts, ACE continues to be marginalised in terms of policy and resources.

### Step 3: Directed formal VET learning

With gaps in basic skills filled, the learner may then move on to undertake study for specific job-related outcomes (formal vocational learning) and towards achieving the fourth step.

### Step 4: Achieving an employment outcome

This may be achieved through volunteering in the ACE organisation or elsewhere to gain work experience (Bowman, 2007).

Overall, research evidence suggests that a supported learning pathways approach may be best for many working aged Australians; particularly those with low levels of formal educational attainment and/or poor previous experiences in formal education. Pathways provision has the potential to aid disadvantaged learners to make the transition from informal learning for leisure and self-improvement to more formal learning to build basic or foundation skills and vocational skills, steps they may not have contemplated previously through lack of confidence in their ability to cope with formal study.

ACE providers start with the needs of the learner and provide learning programs that build on their existing skills and knowledge and actively engage them in the development of their own future learning directions. They engage people who are socially and educationally disadvantaged, providing opportunities to access pathways to formal education, training and/or jobs.

## What are the outcomes?

The SOS report for ACE providers 2019 shows that:

- 30% of 2018 ACE VET graduates were enrolled in further study after training. This is the same for all VET graduates (30%)

- 80% of ACE VET graduates were employed or in further study after training

- 89% of ACE VET subject completers were employed or in further study after training

- 85% of ACE VET graduates and 95% of subject completers reported that they had achieved their main reason for training – better results than all other training providers.

A longitudinal study of ACE students in Victoria followed up 846 participants first surveyed in 2004 when they were enrolled in a course at an ACE provider. The study demonstrates the high capacity of its ACE providers to engage adults in foundation education and provide pathways to formal vocational education and work.

- Of the 846 respondents in the 2005 survey cohort, 36 per cent (302 respondents) were engaged in study in 2005. Of these, 57 per cent of respondents who were studying in a new course remained in the ACE

sector. However, an additional 8 per cent had returned to school, 19 per cent were studying in TAFE, 10 per cent with private providers and 6 per cent had entered university.

- The 201 respondents studying in the ACE sector in 2005 comprised 83 learners continuing their 2004 course and 118 who had enrolled in a new course. Learners staying in the ACE sector strongly endorsed their 2004 ACE study, with 88 per cent reporting that their experiences in their 2004 course encouraged them to apply for a new course. Those moving into the TAFE sector also valued their 2004 ACE study highly with 79 per cent reporting this link, as did 55 per cent of those who moved into a private provider.

The study pathways of those who stayed in ACE showed a progression in the level of study for a substantial proportion of the cohort. For example:

- 43% of subject only students in 2004 continuing in study were doing so at a full qualification or award level

- 74% of Certificate I graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate II or above

- 59% of Certificate II graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate III or above

- 53% of Certificate III graduates continuing in study had progressed into Certificate IV or above

(Walstab et al, 2005)

A study by Teese et al (2013) on the reach of Victorian ACE provider pre-accredited courses into the community and their impacts found pre-accredited courses offer a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market:

- re-accredited courses drew disproportionately on groups who are economically vulnerable.

- Every third completer of a pre-accredited course went on to further study, but workforce-vulnerable learners were much more likely to do so (40–47%). This finding is important because it shows that high-need groups build on their pre-accredited course participation and that a pathway is being used to improve location in the workforce.

- Pre-accredited courses offer a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market.

- Victorian research conducted by Deloitte Access Economics (2017) shows:

- Participation in pre-accredited (non-formal) learning significantly increases completion rates for those transitioning to accredited training where 64% directly attain a qualification with a further 14% indirectly attaining a qualification. This compares to the average Victorian VET completion rate of 47.3%. Given that 90% of pre-accredited learners in Victoria experience multiple instances of disadvantage, the result is all the more significant.

Other one-off studies on learning pathways by disadvantaged students into and through VET at all provider types include:

- The Phan and Ball (2001) report on VET enabling courses or lower-level preparatory or pre-vocational courses that have a large proportion of students from disadvantaged groups. They found positive outcomes for most students who completed enabling courses. Over 20% of the enabling course graduates went on to enrol in a VET course the following year. Of these graduates, a third enrolled in a course at a higher level of qualification, less than a tenth in a lower level qualification while almost half of these graduates had enrolled at the same level of qualification as their previous course.

- Dawe (2004) followed up the work of Phan and Ball and investigated the reasons why some students remain at the same level of qualification or re-enrol in the same enabling course in following years. Overall Dawe found that the return of students to enabling courses was a positive outcome. It is just that students who lack self-esteem or maturity may take longer to find their area of interest and so try several enabling courses before achieving the self-confidence or motivation to continue with studies for a higher-level VET qualification.

Recent case studies of adult learning in Neighbourhood Houses in the regions of Geelong and South Western Victoria provide qualitative data on second chance learners and their transition pathways to higher education, such as TAFE and University, and also on later life learners engaging with personal enrichment learning for social and community connection.

The interviews reveal the transformative nature of the participants'

engagement with the Neighbourhood Houses. Participants speak about their changed relationships in their families and friendship groups and importantly with themselves.

Participants no longer see themselves as 'silly' or as struggling learners. They speak of what they have learned about the world in which they live and their ongoing relationships with the centres, with the people in them and with learning. Many participants speak of taking on administrative and organisational roles, both volunteer and paid, within the centres and about joining committees of management, giving the distinct impression that these particular skills will carry over into engagement with other community organisations (Ollis et al, 2016).

### *Policy links*

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE encourages ACE to offer a pathways approach to VET:

> *ACE offers highly supportive pathways into learning, further education and training, and work and, as a result, is well-placed to engage those with low levels of educational attainment.*

> *Participation in non-accredited education and training for example, can serve to build the self-esteem, motivation and confidence many struggling to engage require to move into further education and training or employment. The non-threatening adult environment also makes ACE an attractive option to those marginalised from the more formal education system, and provides opportunities for the development of the foundation skills that are critical for effective educational, labour market, and social participation.*

> *This capacity of ACE to support the re-engagement of Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds in learning and work is the key to its crucial role in supporting the Australian Governmentís social inclusion agenda.'*

> (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 3)

The work of the former National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) through its Good Practice project of 2010 also identified examples

of programs and initiatives that are achieving positive outcomes for disadvantaged learners and that learning pathways is one of them. Indeed, embedding pathways planning into the VET system is a recommended key reform area (no. 5) of the National VET Equity Blueprint 2011–2016 prepared by NVEAC (NVEAC, 2011).

## What are the challenges?

For a learning pathways approach to work the supply line of students from non-formal (non-accredited) programs needs to be maintained to allow student passage into formal learning. Increased government investment in non-formal ACE personal learning and adult basic education is required especially for the many customers of ACE who are in the lowest income brackets.

In addition, and once they have built their foundation skills and confidence, there needs to be formal VET opportunities available for these learners to enter either within ACE providers or through ACE–VET partnerships that need to be encouraged. In addition, and to help justify a learning pathways approach, ACE needs to track its learners' success in the particular ACE program they are on and the transition they make afterwards using measures that show progress for the individual.

There is a need is to recognise and acknowledge small transitions and improved quality of life as important milestones for learners with low level initial skills. For those who experience disadvantage in VET these may be personal or social in nature in the early programs undertaken rather than or in addition to work related and economic in nature.

NVEAC (2010)

One approach being taken to improve reporting on outcomes in pre-accredited ACE is Results Based Accountability (RBA). Community and neighbourhood centres in cooperation with Community Centres SA are sharing, learning and improving their practice using the RBA framework. They are also supporting collaborative approaches to RBA with other services providers to their adult learners to achieve effective collective impact approaches that can assist government to use cross-sector community and service organisation's power to bring about measurable results in a community setting and progress in programs through a focus on results (Adult Learning Australia, 2016).

## Other findings

> *[D]isadvantaged people turn to adult learning as a means of overcoming the consequences of significant social, industrial and economic change in their communities, [but] some sites for adult learning are somewhat less visible.*

<div align="right">

(Rooney, 2004)

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Learning in the ACE sector is associated with a range of positive outcomes for individuals and their families as has been discussed in this report. These outcomes cascade to positive impacts for the Australian society and the economy as a whole and that include:

- Income gains for the individual and tax revenues to government and community

- Improvements in health and wellbeing for the individual (Hartley & Horne, 2006)

- Decreasing calls on welfare services and significant cost savings in these services

- Lifting of the overall workforce participation rate and productivity (see Figure 21)

The wider and full value that flows to the community as a whole from Australian ACE is less researched but two examples were found as follows.

## Example 1

### *Economic value of the ACE sector in Victoria.*

Victoria, has, as explained earlier, the largest, most diverse ACE sector in Australia that has been well funded over many years and delivers in all four program areas of ACE.

A 2008 report describes and quantifies the economic benefits resulting from all ACE activity then in Victoria to assist the Victorian Government to evaluate the contribution of ACE to the achievement of policy objectives and to the economies of local communities, regions and Victoria as a whole.

The benefit categories of the model included 'market benefits' that are traded in the market economy that result from the additional productivity of

Victorians who have increased their human capital by participating in ACE.

The other category was non-market benefits that are not traded in the market economy, such as benefits to the health and wellbeing of ACE participants, that while not as readily quantifiable, are real and substantial, and should not be overlooked when estimating the value of ACE.

- The market benefits were estimated to amount to an increase in GSP of $16 billion, and tax benefits of $21.7 million over the period 2007 to 2031 in then net present value terms.

- The non-market benefits were suggested to be of at least a similar magnitude. These benefits are achieved relative to a Victorian Government investment of $741 million over twenty-five years (in discounted terms)

(Allen Consulting, 2008)

## Example 2

### *Economic value of ACE in South Australia.*

South Australia provides an example of an ACE sector with a more traditional focus – on personal interest informal and non-formal learning activities, and adult basic education non-formal and formal – and also facilitating pathways to formal VET.

An impact Study of the Community and Neighbourhood/Community Centres Sector of SA was conducted in 2013 (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013). The principal objective of this study was to provide evidence as to the overall impacts of community centres.

The interest was particularly in assessing the following outcomes:

- employment, participation in education (including accredited and non-accredited courses), volunteering pathways, return to work, skills transference

- social inclusion especially for people with a disability, new arrivals, the older demographic including retirees

- health and wellbeing, family resilience

- the scale of volunteering and participation in centre's activities.

The research found that:

- the number of visitations to centres is over 2 million per annum

- the value of the volunteer contribution is between $32 million and $43 million

- crèche services provided either free or for a very small donation are valued (conservatively) at $1.3 million

- the conduct of ACE programs have a positive wage/income impact and a value in delivery of up to 4 times their cost

- the ability of centres to leverage up other funds is 3.5 times what they are provided but the cost of grant applications some for very small amounts is quite high, estimated conservatively because it does not include cost of acquittal to be between $231,000 to $385,000

> (SA Centre for Economic Studies, 2013, Table E.2 p. iii).

## Summary

Australian ACE is a recognisable education sector that offers accessible lifelong learning opportunities that respond to the needs of adults within local communities. The scope of ACE in Australia includes personal enrichment learning that all ACE providers deliver. Most ACE providers also offer adult basic education (foundation skills) programs and a significant minority offer formal vocational education.

ACE providers are significant providers of all personal enrichment learning undertaken in Australia offering adults pathways back into learning by supporting social inclusion and impacting positively on health and wellbeing.

ACE providers support many adults to improve basic foundation skills and provide pathways into work or further vocational learning. In 2018, ACE providers accounted for 7.3 % of all program enrolments in government-funded and 8.8% of total VET accredited adult basic education programs.

ACE organisations are significant providers of accredited adult basic education to key equity groups; such as, people with a disability and the unemployed. These cohorts are significantly more highly represented at ACE providers than all other VET providers of adult basic education.

Also students in accredited adult basic education at ACE providers have a rate of success above that for students at all other VET providers.

In 2018, 481,200 students were enrolled in nationally recognised training at ACE providers.

55% of program enrolments at ACE providers in government-funded VET were students from SEIFA quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged) and SEIFA quintile 2, which is around 10% higher than all other providers. For government-funded ACE VET program enrolments in 2018, where ACE providers often achieve equivalent or better outcomes:

*   36% were in regional and remote areas

*   46% were unemployed

*   21% were people with disability

21% were people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

ACE VET enrolments account for the most significant shift from unemployment to employment after their training, showing better results than all other providers. Students at ACE providers are also the most satisfied with the qualty of their training.

The ACE sector achieves outcomes against multiple policy areas including education, health, human services, employment, industry and business, and community and regional development. The sector plays an important role educating many adult Australians; particularly the disadvantaged, in learning but needs increased and ongoing support from all tiers of government to sustain and grow the sector's efforts.

## Recommendations

ACE education in all of its diversity remains the single most efficient and effective way to address educational deficiencies which increasingly deny employment opportunities and negatively impact the lives of many adult Australians. Ongoing government support for ACE is necessary to fulfil this role.

Further research is required to determine exactly how many ACE providers there are in Australia and the extent of their service provision. National data should be collected on adults participating in ACE personal enrichment learning and non-accredited foundation

skills programs to form a more complete picture of their impact. ACE partnerships with RTOs and the adults supported by these arrangements should also be mapped.

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# Post-qualitative research and innovative methodologies

Reviewed by Margaret Malloch
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This provoking volume is one of the *Bloomsbury Social Theory and Methodology in Education Research Series*, a series which charts innovative developments in social theory research and sociology, particularly in education. The series makes a solid contribution bringing insights into theory and aspects of education; for example, education research, teacher education, sociology, politics, governance, leadership and approaches to research. The series reinforces the importance and value that the social sciences bring to our society, analysing our past and present and exploring the future.

It is in looking to the future that Thomas and Bellingham's volume, *Post-qualitative research and innovative methodologies*, is positioned. The book is created from a keen interest to test new thinking and what

could be offered to education and the world beyond as compared to education they describe reductive, competitive and economically driven.

An enthusiasm to move outside the everyday agendas of education and the academy is demonstrated. There is a questioning as to how methodological and theoretical concerns meet and how social theory shapes research quality. The concern of the editors and authors is for democratic research and exploration of theory as a transformative force. The writing is peppered with excitement, with an eagerness to 'glow', to engage with vitality, energy and enthusiasm for change and for moving beyond existing framing of theory, to imaginings and new possibilities.

Post-qualitative research is not defined in concrete terms, but rather we are guided to the chapters that explore new interpretations of relations and concepts. New configurations, and defamiliarisation of concepts and methodology. There is a sense of play, of experimentation in presenting qualitative research differently, more imaginatively, with a rethinking of relating and co-responsibility.

The book addresses questions of the application of habitus, subjectivation and performativity in educational research contexts. It is structured around three concerns, subjectivity, agency and identity, time, space and materiality, and entanglements of innovation and methodology.

The editors invited both emerging and established researchers from Australia, England, Scotland, New Zealand and America, to contribute chapters that cross disciplinary boundaries to be what is described as 'intra-disciplinary' and 'co-emergent'. The researcher is similarly 'entangled' and 'embodied' within the data and research.

A different lens is held up to our perceptions of research into society. Two chapters have been selected to provide examples of innovation and imaginative interpretations of qualitative research, demonstrating interpretations of post-qualitative research.

Mary Dixon's chapter: 'Who is in my office and which century/centuries are we in? A pedagogical encounter' explores the learning of her doctoral students and her own learning as supervisor. She invites us into her office, decorated with a gold brocade lounge suite. It is certainly not the average academic office. The three students arrive, one after the other, and another supervisor. Black holes, in which time and space are collapsed, are used as an analytic device to explore the events through

which the pedagogical encounters are mapped. The lead actors have arrived for this exploration of learning, accompanied by the imagined presences of the researchers informing the students' theses. We are the invited into this elegant salon, privileged to observe the learning taking part. The personal voice of the author through journal reflections, and the use of Deleuze's (2003) black holes to interpret the learning, conceptualisation of learning as an event, combine to provide an innovative and imaginative experience of times past, present and of moving beyond the everyday, into a creative, inspirational space.

Thomas' chapter, 'Swarms and murmurations', presents a case study of the connections made by teachers and students in Australian secondary schools between their professional lives, consumption of popular culture, and recognition of organisational structures in education.   The methods included being filmed during a semi-structured interview particularly to note their movements, and to watch and respond to a film made by the researcher which featured cultural iconographic images. The participants' positionalities are sought from their responses.

Critical pedagogy, through the Critical Videographic Research Method, provides an opportunity to gain insight into the relationship between the imagery in the film, and the interpretations by the individual participants. We learn of the connections the teachers make, particularly to conformity and adapting to limitations.

Thomas' use of the swarm, framing murmuration, with methodology and method entangled, designed to produce a pattern of difference, which he describes as appropriate for 'critical scholarship in posthuman times'.

Thomas refers to a research murmuration, a metaphoric flock of starlings, a context with changes in the patterns, fluid and emerging, and which, in its application to the analysis of the data, provides many themes and insights, including conformity and subversion.

Reading these two chapters in particular, evokes memories of walking through a gallery; starting with glowing French impressionist works from the 1880s, for example, the salons depicted by Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, people meeting over tea and discussion. This art of the period is filled with light and movement, creative, works that have moved away from the conventional, darker, more restrictive works of the previous century. The journey through the gallery arrives at the cubists,

including Picasso's Guernica. This work takes skills developed from earlier periods, questions and challenges assumptions, and transforms concepts into fragmented, rearranged and reimagined images.

The book provides an opportunity to question assumptions upon which research and society are built. Like the impressionists and cubists, they are rejecting a representation of society as  static, bound by conformity and conventions to imagine and innovate a world that glowed with light. The natural world, seen in the examples of the swarms, murmuration, and black holes, are woven into qualitative research, imaginatively interlinked with existing qualitative methodology and methods, extending them and providing an innovation, a disruption, which, it is argued, is for posthuman, post-qualitative times.

The editors and authors are to be congratulated for developing and presenting a book that takes us to see research with different eyes, to imagine new forms and terms, to be intrigued by the intersecting of humanity with the natural world, and to envisage further changes that are moving into the world of Artificial Intelligence.

## Reference

Deleuze, G. (2003). *The logic of sense, trans. M Lester with C. Stivale*, New York: Columbia University Press.