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The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (formerly the *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*) is an official publication of Adult Learning Australia (ALA). It is concerned with the theory, research and practice of adult and community education, and to promote critical thinking and research in this field. Its prime focus is on Australia, though papers relating to other contexts are also sometimes published. Papers in the refereed section of the Journal have been blind peer reviewed by at least two members from a pool of specialist referees from Australia and overseas.

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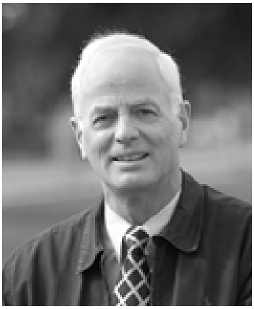

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

In rounding out 2011, this issue includes articles across a wide range of adult and community education activities. This range embraces adult learning within informal to non-formal to formal situations, of adults with intellectual disabilities to those in tertiary enabling programs to later life learners, adults located in community-based service organisations to vocational education and training institutions to universities, from Taiwan to New Zealand to Australia, and in areas from management to health to literacy. The issue truly encapsulates the diversity of the adult learning that occurs in society in a great many different and exciting contexts.

Informal learning activities are a very important, but often under-acknowledged and under-valued, component in adult learning—labelled 'formal learning's poor cousin' by Golding et al. (2009: 34). **Horng-Ji Lai**, **Ming-Lieh Wu** and **Ai-Tzu Li** analyse national statistics in Taiwan to gain a picture of the informal learning experiences of adults in that context, particularly with respect to key demographic characteristics. Based on data from 10,000 adults in a national survey, they discover differing patterns in participation according to gender, age, education and income. They note, too, an increasing trend to embed investigations of informal learning participation in the national adult education surveys of other countries. This is a healthy trend as such data can provide valuable information for policy-makers, researchers, adult educators and providers to understand more deeply the patterns of and barriers to participation in adult learning in various societies.

Contrastingly, a focus on educators rather than learners is the perspective taken in the next paper by **Jenny McDougall** and **Wendy Davis**. They maintain that much has been written about the transformative potential of adult education from the student perspective, but that little research has been undertaken on experiences of those who teach in such contexts. Drawing on in-depth analysis of qualitative data from three academics working in an enabling program in regional Australia, they explain how through a process of critical self-reflection (not unlike the activity they ask of their own students) they examined their underlying assumptions about their practice and how they are positioned within their broader university community. They conclude that this process of critical self-reflection has led to a heightened awareness, and has enabled them to articulate perceptions of professional and personal growth. The learning journey of the educator, as well as the learner, emerges as an area worthy of further investigation, they argue, particularly in the emerging landscape of a more integrated, tertiary education environment in Australia.

The common perception that becoming literate is not possible for people with intellectual disabilities is tackled by **Karen Moni**, **Anne Jobling**, **Michelle Morgan** and **Jan Lloyd**. They contend that, until recently, limited research has been undertaken to investigate the literacy skills of adults with intellectual disabilities, despite the importance of and advocacy for developing literacy skills for rewarding participation in the community. The authors employed a range of instruments to gather information on the actual literacy skills, needs and wants of older adults in a community-based service organisation in Queensland. Their findings support those of other studies that older adults with intellectual disabilities are engaged in literacy activities and are enthusiastic and interested in improving their skills. However, they found that literacy development and associated literacy activities were not highly valued in the programs they examined; literacy was considered to be something that was useful to include only at a rudimentary level, and as way to leverage external funding. Their study provides evidence that there are opportunities for providers to move beyond advocacy towards the introduction of literacy activities that have the potential to enrich clients' experiences in community-based service organisations.

The themes of informal learning and community activities are also taken up by **Peter Willis** in his paper on utopian scenario sketching. The author particularly focuses on imaginary and creative expression, on the capacity of playful stories around relevant learning themes to promote informal adult learning and capacity building in community settings. Informal and non-formal learning programs in community settings can often engage what the author calls 'reluctant and wounded people'. In community settings, people are often embarrassed, hesitant and nervous about being singled out. Yet stories of learners—even fictional ones—seem at least sometimes, he argues, to be able to create a kind of softening and optimistic experience, engaging educator and learner in a playful yet insightful experience relevant to some of the actual learning projects in which people are attempting to engage. The paper provides ideas on how this might be achieved, through the 'pedagogic power of scenario sketching'. Story telling seems as old as human culture, and it is helpful to revisit its power as well as its limits in the work of holistic pedagogy.

Transformative outcomes of a different order and in a different context are explored by **Steven Hodge**. Basic management training has not been the object of transformative learning research. Thus, drawing from his research on a competency-based, entry-level management course, the author examined the experiences of meaning perspective transformation (Mezirow 1978) within the vocational education and training (VET) sector. He was interested in the kinds of challenges raised by this program, in terms of both curriculum content and organisation and pedagogic practice, and how learners came to terms with these challenges. He was also interested in whether transformative experiences contributed to vocational outcomes. The study found that the management program did indeed produce challenges for a number of the participants that initiated phases of the transformative process such as disorientation and self-questioning, with direct consequences for their understanding of management and even their career trajectories. For some learners, the course contributed to significant discontent as they discovered that actual management practices in workplaces they took to represent the norm fell dramatically short of the model promoted in the training.

From management learning in VET to health learning in the community, **Susan Geertshuis** and **Helena Cooper-Thomas** examine the extent to which adults learn about their health from different sources and identify important psycho-cognitive variables that predict learning. They reason that it is important that patients need to understand their health conditions in order to make good choices. Using a survey design, they found from their sample of 196 adults that people higher in perceived health competence were lower in anxiety and took a more logical approach to decision making, while low perceived health competence was associated with avoidant decision making. Perceived health competence was thus a significant positive predictor of both learning from health professionals and of learning from other sources, such as the internet. Rational decision-making orientation and anxiety, however, were not associated with learning from medical professionals but were predictive of levels of learning from other sources. Highly dependent decision makers reported learning more from their medical professionals. The study contributes to a greater understanding of adult patient behaviour.

The findings highlight the importance of the efforts of adult educators who strive to develop independent learners able and confident in their ability to seek information and make decisions. From a practical perspective, the importance of having a variety of sources of information available is also underlined by this study, as very few participants relied solely on their professional carers for information.

The next two papers focus on later life learning. In the first paper, **Helen Russell** states that increased life expectancy in modern communities means that older adults will be faced with the existential questions of the purpose of their life, coupled with the tensions of the need to grow and develop. Her research investigated the lived experiences of 16 learners of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), whose ages ranged from the mid-70s to the early 90s. The study used a qualitative methodology in which participants were interviewed twice over a period of seven years from 2003 to 2010. Case study analysis provided data that drew on phenomenological interpretation to elicit themes. A significant finding from the study was that the existential concept of time lay at the core of the learning experiences and their need to develop and grow. The two aspects of time—having time on their hands and time is running out—are considered important in understanding and interpreting the lived experience of learning in later life.

The practice paper on this same theme, by **Rob Siedle**, discusses the work of the Universities of the Third Age (U3As) movement which provides educational, cultural and social services for mature-age people in Australia and internationally. His paper examines the purpose and nature of the educational services offered by U3As and focuses on two basic questions: What are the expectations of learners who enrol in these classes? and How can tutors best meet these expectations? The paper draws on some adult learning literature and on the views of a number of U3A tutors from Hawthorn, Victoria. U3A Hawthorn, founded in 1984, is open to anyone over 55 years of age, and currently offers 103 courses to about 1,200 learners and has

80 tutors. The author's major conclusion is that mature-age learning is very different from learning at universities and other tertiary institutions. Older learners demand a high level of control over what is happening in their classes, and they are at all times relating their learning to their own lives and academic experiences. Consequently, tutors cannot afford to simply impart knowledge and information. Their approach must be holistic, implying that they must recognise, and cater for, the human needs of learners, which can include educational, cultural and social needs.

The final practice paper by **Marina Falasca** summarises, from a review of the literature, barriers to adult learning and possible strategies to help overcome them. Barriers can be clustered in two main categories: external or situational, those over which the individual has little control, and internal or dispositional, those which reflect personal attitudes. Despite these barriers, the author argues that research has shown adult learners of any age *can* learn and succeed in their pursuits if they are afforded the opportunity, assistance and support they need—a theme clearly permeating all of the papers in this issue of our Journal. Two key considerations for adult educators are safety and engagement: creating a safe and supportive learning environment to help learners feel safe, and keeping motivation factors in mind to help learners engage with their learning. The paper concludes with: 'The more we know about adult learners, the barriers they face and how these barriers interfere with their learning, the better we can structure [educational] experiences that engage all learners and stimulate both personal growth and reflection'. A salutary ending to finish this 51st volume and to conclude the year!

Have a happy Christmas and a safe New Year.

Roger Harris
Editor

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Adults' participation in informal learning activities: Key findings from the adult education participation survey in Taiwan

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This study investigated the informal learning experiences expressed by Taiwanese adults (aged from 16 to 97) and examined their involvement related to selected socio-demographic characteristics. Data of the 2008 Adult Education Participation Survey in Taiwan and Fujian Area were used to look at different variables of adults' demographic characteristics in relation to their informal learning participation. Results were based on the responses of 10,000 adults to the survey. The key findings indicated that the percentage of adults who had, or had not, participated differed by gender, age, educational background and annual income. Taiwanese adults' preferred method of workplace informal learning was interpersonal communications and sharing. Similarities and differences between this study and past international research are also discussed.

Introduction

Lifelong learning has been recognised as a key instrument to foster the growth of the knowledge economy and higher living standards in the European Union (EU) and the Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Thus, national surveys focusing on the distribution and extent of adult learning have been conducted in many developed and developing countries around the world (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner 2007; Rubenson & Desjardin 2009). The results of these surveys provide useful information for policy-makers, adult education providers and the scholarly community to understand developments and trends in adult education, identify barriers affecting adults' participation in different formats of learning activities, and provide necessary assistance to those who are in need. Adult learning, according to the broad context of lifelong learning, can be classified as formal, non-formal and informal learning, and the informal learning is the most popular approach engaged in by adults (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner 2007). Informal learning has received considerable attention from adult education practitioners and researchers. Smith and Smith (2008) indicate that understanding adults' participation in informal learning is critical because successful informal learning experiences might lead adults to participate in formal and non-formal education. Therefore, it is definitely valuable to discuss and further examine the involvement of adults in informal learning activities from data in national surveys in order to better assist them to pursue formal and non-formal education and to design effective adult education and training programs.

In the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) began to ask questions about adults' informal learning participation in the National Household Education Survey (NHES), a national survey that specifically focused on adults' participation in educational activities, in 2005 (Smith & Smith 2008). In

Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics also posted informal learning questions in the adult learning section of the 2006–2007 Multi-Purpose Household Survey (MPHS) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a). An analysis report based on the results of the MPHS states that 'informal learning is particularly important to support disadvantaged adults who may face barriers in accessing more structured learning activities' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008b: 1). In Taiwan, the central government officially implemented The Lifelong Learning Act in 2002, and various types and programs of adult education/training have been offered and organised island-wide through public and private sectors. One of the obvious successes, in particular, is that the number of community universities, a kind of non-formal educational institution for adults, has blossomed significantly all over Taiwan. At the time of this study, there were 96 community universities (including 14 aboriginal community universities) spread across most of the major cities and counties, and the majority of learners are women whose age group is between 30–50 years. Also, social changes, such as the increase in the number of ageing people and new immigrants (mainly from South East Asia), have influenced the practical and policy aspects of lifelong learning development on the island (Wang 2008). Thus, various non-formal courses and informal learning events designed for seniors and new immigrants have been increasingly accessible at senior centres, community universities, vocational training centres and on the Internet. In order to better understand the situation of adults' participation in learning activities, the Ministry of Education decided to conduct the first national survey of adult education participation in 2008 based on recommendations from research conducted by Wu, Li and Lai (2005). A section, which consisted of six questions related to informal learning activities, was included in addition to formal and non-formal learning participation questions in the telephone interview survey (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2009). Through investigations of adult participation in informal learning activities, adult educators and policy-makers can have clearer ideas for crafting practical solutions on how to create better learning environments and opportunities for adults.

With the bulk of the related literature on adults' informal learning participation coming from a Western perspective, Taiwan, one of the four tiger economies in Asia, is an ideal setting for a probe on this topic given the substantial differences in economy, culture and various social characteristics when compared with Western countries. The present study analyses data drawn from the 2008 Adult Education Participation Survey in Taiwan and Fujian Area database provided by the Taiwan Ministry of Education. The objective of this research is to identify the major patterns of Taiwanese adults' participation in informal educational activities and to explore the relationships of participants' informal learning preferences and their demographics.

Literature review

According to Marsick, Walkins, Callahan and Volpe (2006), the concept of informal learning was the key element in Dewey's (1938) theory of learning from experience and Lewin's (1951) field theory. Dewey (1938) believed that experience enabled learners to think reflectively during their learning process. The impact of reflective thinking develops great potential to lead to the occurrence of common, simple and everyday informal learning. In the workplace, Marsick and Watkins (1990) note that informal or incidental learning occupies a significant amount of learning opportunities in organisations because workers often set out learning intentionally and explicitly when they interact with others in the midst of work activities; sometimes, workers are only partially or completely not aware of it. Having acknowledged the value of informal learning in the lifelong learning context, Merriam et al. (2007: 35) indicated that informal learning occurs 'in our everyday activities whether we are at work, at home, or in community, and lacking institutional sponsorship, adults rarely label these activities as learning'. Smith and Smith (2008: 67–68) further explain informal learning activities by listing examples, such as:

> reading books or magazine articles; viewing do-it-yourself instructional videos; attending and participating in book clubs, health-related groups and organizations, cultural events, or conferences and conventions; or using television, computer software, or the Internet to learn about something of personal interest or to develop a skill for personal use.

The above examples fit well into Schugurensky's (2000) categories of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning and socialisation (tacit learning). Among the three types of informal learning, the theories and models of self-directed learning are well developed. The early research of Tough (1967, 1971) first provided a detailed explanation of the nature of self-directed leaning. The concept of 'andragogy' proposed by Knowles (1968) also includes self-directed learning as a crucial aspect in the assumptions about the adult learner. Merriam et al. (2007) note that self-directed learning has been identified as one of the major approaches that adults utilise to acquire knowledge and skills in their daily life, and its concept and practice have become a much studied area in the adult education domain. In recent years, the emergence of on-line technology has brought a huge impact to the investigations and applications of self-directed learning in school and workplace settings; thus, adult educators and human resource developers have gradually recognised the critical role of self-directed learning in developing learners' lifelong learning skills.

Although there is a tendency for our society to pay attention to the vast potential of informal learning, Foley (1999) argues that informal learning is still hard to recognise and evaluate because it often happens incidentally, and people are not aware of its influence.

Schugurensky (2000) indicates that adults sometimes internalise values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours through the process of unintentional learning and they are not aware that they are learning something. In workplace settings, informal learning is also of central interest for workplace learning, and yet, as observed by Eraut (2004), it is an area that is under-researched and under-discussed. Therefore, funding is always focused on formal and non-formal educational/ training initiatives in private and public sectors. Golding, Brown and Foley (2009: 48) state that informal learning 'holds less value and is less powerful by locating it outside policy priorities, and therefore situating it as excluded and a less economically profitable counterpart of formal learning'. This suggests that more research on informal learning, particularly in the adult education sectors, might help policy-makers to value the significance and contribution of informal learning in shaping the development of a learning society, and increasing the investment in adult education.

Related studies (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008b; Livingstone 2000; Merriam et al. 2007) show that informal learning activities contribute significant amounts of time in adults' total learning involvements. The findings of the first Canadian survey of informal learning practices state that over 95% of Canadians are involved in some form of explicit informal learning activities (Livingstone 2000). A recent national survey conducted in Australia also found that 74% of Australians undertook some type of informal learning within the 12 months in 2006–2007 which was much higher than non-formal learning (30%) and formal learning (12%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008b). In the USA, the 2005 NHES included six questions for participants to answer about their engagement in informal learning activities during the year prior to the survey conducted from January 23 to April 24, 2005, and the results of the survey revealed that about 70% of Americans reported participating in informal learning activities for personal interest (NCES 2005). Smith and

Smith (2008) conducted a secondary data analysis to identify the relationships of lower-education adults' participation in informal activities and selected demographic characteristics of the participants from the statistics of the NHES. They found that adults with the least education tended to engage less in informal learning activities than those with higher academic accreditation, and older adults participated in more informal learning activities than younger adults.

The present study adopts the research framework of Smith and Smith (2008). We analysed data from the 2008 Adult Education Participation Survey in Taiwan and Fujian Area database and were also especially interested in the informal learning section. It is hoped that the results of the research will contribute to identifying practical implications in developing better adult education programs in Taiwan and even in other countries.

Method

This research can be construed as a secondary data analysis study. According to Boslaugh (2007), secondary data analysis enables researchers to focus on selecting primary data that are appropriate to the research question being studied and the resources available to them. In this study, the source of the primary data was from the 2008 Adult Education Participation Survey in Taiwan and Fujian Area database. The survey data were comprised of 10,000 responses from adults living in Taiwan. All participants were contacted by telephone via a random digit dialing (RDD) system from 1 June through 1 July 2009 (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2009). The sample consisted of 4,180 (48.1%) males and 5,190 (51.9%) females, and their ages ranged from 16 to 97 years. Full details of the survey methodology can be found in *A report of the 2008 adult education participation survey in Taiwan and Fujian area* (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2009). The survey contained three sections: informal learning participation, formal and non-formal learning participation, and demographics. All participants were instructed to answer the survey queries about their engagement in learning activities during the previous year (2008). This study analyses only those responses to survey questions in the informal learning section.

This study considered the following three research questions:

- What are the distributions of Taiwanese adults' participation in major forms of informal learning activities?
- Is there a relationship between Taiwanese adults' participation in informal learning activities among the selected participants' demographic characteristics (gender, age, education background and annual income)?
- What are the major means of informal learning in the workplace for Taiwanese working adults?

In addition to reporting respondents' participation in informal learning activities, this study especially examines the relationship between participation in informal learning among these adults and selected demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational background and annual income). This was done to help adult educators and policy-makers understand the impact of adult learners' demographics in adult participation in informal learning activities, and furthermore, to assist them in developing sustainable adult education/training programs. To address research questions 1 and 3, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were employed to describe the distributions of respondents' informal learning participation and working adults' informal learning preferences in the workplace. To address research question 2, inferential statistics, such as the chi-square test of independence, were used to assess the association between the four selected demographics and participants' responses in informal learning activities.

Results

In the survey, six questions were asked regarding respondents' participation in informal learning activities. Five asked about respondents' participation through the following informal learning approaches: reading informative books/magazines, watching educational TV programs, listening to didactic radio programs, attending educational trips, and using the Internet for learning. The other question in the informal learning section was related to informal learning in the workplace. Participants, who were employed, expressed the major types of informal learning methods at their places of work.

Table 1 presents frequencies and percentages of participants' responses to the first five questions. More than half of the respondents (57.47%) watched educational TV programs followed by reading informative books/magazines (44.73%), used the Internet for learning (42.14%), attended educational trips (21.70%) and listened to didactic radio programs (12.36%). Results indicated that the majority of adults did some type of informal learning in 2008.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of participants' responses to informal learning activities

Informal learning activity type	**N**	**%**
Reading informative books/magazines		
Yes	4,473	44.73
No	5,527	55.27
Watching educational TV programs		
Yes	5,747	57.47
No	4,253	42.53
Listening to didactic radio programs		
Yes	1,236	12.36
No	8,764	87.64
Attending educational trips		
Yes	2,170	21.70
No	7,830	78.30
Using the Internet for learning		
Yes	4,214	42.14
No	5,786	57.86

To assess the relationships between participants' demographics and informal learning activities, chi-square tests were administered. The results (Table 2) showed that participants' demographics were significantly related to reading informative books/magazines. Effect sizes (Cramer's V) for each relationship were between 0.023 and 0.415. Analyses of the relationship between respondents' demographics and watching educational TV programs also showed significance (Table 3). Effect sizes were weak (all Cramer's V < 0.10). Significant associations, except for gender, were also found in the relationships between subjects' demographics and listening to didactic radio programs. Table 4 reports the results of the chi-square analyses. The values of effect sizes (Cramer's V) indicated weak relationships. There were also significant effects (all $p < 0.001$) on the relationships between respondents' demographics and two other informal learning activities (attending educational trips and using the Internet for learning). The results of the analyses are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

One of the research questions of this study was to identify the methods of informal learning that working adults utilised in their workplace. The most popular approach was interpersonal communications and sharing (27.17%) and the second favourable method was independent research on the Internet (21.59%), followed by reading information resource (21.28%), reflecting on past experiences (14.75%), mentoring (12.95%), observing (9.87%), individual experimentation (8.99%) and learning from role models (4.74%).

Table 2: Relationship between participants' demographics and reading informative books/magazines

Demographics		**Frequency (N)**		χ^2	**Effect size (Cramer's V)**
		Yes	**No**		
Gender	Male	2,093	2717	5.46*	0.023
	Female	2,380	2810		
Age	16–24	213	269	310.97***	0.211
	25–34	1,037	978		
	35–44	1,288	1171		
	45–54	1,165	1438		
	55–64	567	979		
	65 and above	203	692		
Educational background	Elementary school and less	110	1060	1722.25***	0.415
	Junior high school	218	818		
	Senior high (vocational) school	1,216	1993		
	Junior college	920	742		
	College	1,548	837		
	Postgraduate	461	77		
Annual income (in U.S. dollar)	No income	692	1656	869.06***	0.295
	Less than $6,250	437	1001		
	$6,250–9,350	604	869		
	$9,350–12,500	514	643		
	$12,500–18,750	823	671		
	$18,750–25,000	592	306		
	$25,000–31,250	293	194		
	$31,250–46,850	294	135		
	$46,850 and above	224	52		

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p<.01$. $^{***}p < .001$

Table 3: Relationship between participants' demographics and watching educational TV programs

Demographics		**Frequency (N)**		**χ^2**	**Effect size (Cramer's V)**
		Yes	**No**		
Gender	Male	2,700	2,110	6.78*	0.026
	Female	3,047	2,143		
Age	16–24	261	221	34.53***	0.059
	25–34	1,159	856		
	35–44	1,424	1,035		
	45–54	1,525	1,078		
	55–64	937	609		
	65 and above	441	454		
Educational background	Elementary school and less	538	632	80.47***	0.090
	Junior high school	572	464		
	Senior high (vocational) school	1,917	1,292		
	Junior college	966	696		
	College	1,432	953		
	Postgraduate	322	216		
Annual income (in U.S. dollar)	No income	1,249	1,098	50.57***	0.071
	Less than $6,250	781	657		
	$6,250–9,350	842	631		
	$9,350–12,500	678	479		
	$12,500–18,750	889	605		
	$18,750–25,000	575	323		
	$25,000–31,250	298	189		
	$31,250–46,850	260	169		
	$46,850 and above	175	102		

*$p < .05$. **$p<.01$.***$p < .001$

Table 4: Relationship between participants' demographics and listening to didactic radio programs

Demographics		**Frequency (N)**		χ^2	**Effect size (Cramer's V)**
		Yes	**No**		
Gender	Male	589	4,221	0.13	0.004
	Female	647	4,543		
Age	16–24	45	437	16.70**	0.041
	25–34	241	1,774		
	35–44	330	2,129		
	45–54	351	2,252		
	55–64	183	1,363		
	65 and above	86	809		
Educational background	Elementary school and less	101	1,069	56.78***	0.075
	Junior high school	106	930		
	Senior high (vocational) school	362	2,847		
	Junior college	213	1,449		
	College	353	2,032		
	Postgraduate	101	437		
Annual income (in U.S. dollar)	No income	238	2,109	59.72***	0.077
	Less than $6,250	160	1,278		
	$6,250–9,350	175	1,298		
	$9,350–12,500	148	1,009		
	$12,500–18,750	162	1,332		
	$18,750–25,000	159	739		
	$25,000–31,250	77	410		
	$31,250–46,850	64	365		
	$46,850 and above	53	224		

*$p < .05$. **$p<.01$.***$p < .001$

Table 5: Relationship between participants' demographics and attending educational trips

Demographics		**Frequency (N)**		χ^2	**Effect size (Cramer's V)**
		Yes	**No**		
Gender	Male	929	3,881	31.05***	0.056
	Female	1,241	3,949		
Age	16–24	96	386	36.79***	0.061
	25–34	455	1,560		
	35–44	576	1,883		
	45–54	553	2,050		
	55–64	361	1,185		
	65 and above	129	766		
Educational background	Elementary school and less	111	1,059	378.51***	0.195
	Junior high school	122	914		
	Senior high (vocational) school	601	2,608		
	Junior college	419	1,243		
	College	705	1,680		
	Postgraduate	212	326		
Annual income (in U.S. dollar)	No income	378	1,970	347.92***	0.186
	Less than $6,250	224	1,214		
	$6,250–9,350	271	1,202		
	$9,350–12,500	189	968		
	$12,500–18,750	382	1,112		
	$18,750–25,000	324	574		
	$25,000–31,250	148	339		
	$31,250–46,850	135	294		
	$46,850 and above	119	157		

*$p < .05$. **$p<.01$.***$p < .001$

Table 6: Relationship between participants' demographics and using the Internet for learning

Demographics		**Frequency (N)**		χ^2	**Effect size (Cramer's V)**
		Yes	**No**		
Gender	Male	2,128	2,682	16.69***	0.041
	Female	2,086	3,104		
Age	16–24	300	182	1216.58***	0.349
	25–34	1,275	740		
	35–44	1,258	1,201		
	45–54	926	1677		
	55–64	399	1147		
	65 and above	56	839		
Educational background	Elementary school and less	23	1147	2214.70***	0.471
	Junior high school	115	921		
	Senior high (vocational) school	1,144	2,065		
	Junior college	959	703		
	College	1,544	841		
	Postgraduate	429	109		
Annual income (in U.S. dollar)	No income	530	1,817	1015.90***	0.319
	Less than $6,250	400	1,038		
	$6,250–9,350	590	883		
	$9,350–12,500	519	638		
	$12,500–18,750	847	647		
	$18,750–25,000	572	326		
	$25,000–31,250	313	174		
	$31,250–46,850	272	157		
	$46,850 and above	171	106		

*$p < .05$. **$p<.01$.***$p < .001$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the major patterns of Taiwanese adults' participation in informal educational activities and to explore the relationships of participants' informal learning preferences and their demographics. The analyses considered merely those responses on informal learning participation from the survey. Although this survey only asked respondents about their engagement in five types of informal learning activities, the results showed that the rate of informal learning participation was satisfactory when comparing it with the rate (30.96%, ages between 16 and 64) of formal and non-formal learning participation in Taiwan (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2009). From results in similar surveys conducted in other Asian countries and regions, it is quite encouraging to learn that the participation rate of formal and non-formal education/training in Taiwan is higher than two other tiger economies—Hong Kong (25.1% in 2007) and Korea (29.8% in 2007) (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2009; Yang 2008).

As anticipated, the majority of Taiwanese adults acquiring knowledge informally did so through watching TV programs, because Taiwan has more than 100 TV channels, according to an investigation conducted by a Taiwan television database (nd). In addition, the findings of respondents' participation in informal learning were somewhat similar to the results of the 2005 NHES in the United States (NCES 2006), in which it was discovered that 28% of Americans used computers and the Internet for learning, 47% used books, manuals, audio-video and TV for learning, 53% read how-to magazines, 20% had joined book clubs or groups, and 23% attended conventions and conferences. Reading books/magazines and watching TV programs appears to be the most popular ways for adults to engage in informal educational activities. TV is a perfect platform, particularly the public television channel, to promote informal learning for adults, and more investments from public sectors in both hardware and software might receive positive outcomes. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) indicated that public financial support could be critical for overcoming barriers of formal/non-formal learning participation. The same holds true in informal learning environments. Smith and Smith (2008: 69) noted that ‘informal learning may eventually gravitate toward formal education and training programs’. At the time of this study, the Department of Social Education of Taiwan’s Ministry of Education launched a grant program to sponsor broadcasting companies and book publishers to produce lifelong learning series and materials for adults.

Examining the relationships between respondents’ demographics and their participation in informal learning activities also revealed some interesting points. There were statistically significant relationships existing between the four demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational background and annual income) and participation in some types of informal learning activities. The results are partially in accordance with the findings by Smith and Smith (2008), in which they discovered that three demographic variables (gender, income and age) of American adults and their participation in informal learning activities had significant associations. In Smith and Smith’s (2008) study, the effect sizes of the relationship between gender and informal learning activities were small (all < 0.1). This study also found that gender had a weak relationship with informal learning. This implies that males and females might equally value the importance of learning in order to keep up with the ever-changing world. However, female adults tended to enjoy participating in informal learning activities more than their counterparts. This finding is consistent with the composition of the learning population in Taiwan’s community universities. Macleod and Lambe (2007), based on their comparative study in the UK, showed that the proportion of females using home-based learning was higher than males because females were too busy to find time to learn in formal settings. Again, this discovery suggests that more high quality informal learning opportunities should be provided via different formats. It is also important to find strategies to help male adults to engage in learning through informal and even non-formal approaches.

The relationship between respondents' age and their participation in informal learning activities showed significant associations. Older adults, particularly the groups of 35–44 and 45–54 years, were more likely to participate in informal learning than younger adults and seniors. This finding is similar to Smith and Smith's (2008) finding. In their research, they found that older adults liked to read books, watch TV, and attend conferences or conventions because older adults 'have more opportunities along with greater responsibilities, and these opportunities may include participation in informal learning' (p.72). Educational background was also a significant factor affecting informal learning participation in this research. Adults who had higher academic degrees, especially those with college and postgraduate degrees, showed higher participation rates in all types of informal learning activities. This finding, again, is consistent with the findings of Smith and Smith (2008). This implies that supports and resources should be focused on those with the least educational attainment not just in institutional learning environments but also in informal learning settings. The factor of annual income appeared to be the strongest attractor in the relationships of participants' demographics and their preferences for informal learning activities. High-income adults, especially those with annual incomes at $46,850 and above, tended to enjoy participating in informal learning activities including reading books, listening to didactic radio programs and attending educational trips. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) suggest that a welfare system focusing more on the learning gap might be effective to reduce the barrier of learning participation between wealthy and low-income adults.

Workplace learning has become a research focus in recent years, particularly in studying less formal aspects of job-related learning

(Livingstone & Stowe 2007). In this study, participants reported their preferred method of informal learning in their workplace. Interpersonal communications and sharing were identified as the most popular approaches, followed by locating proper information on the Internet. Livingstone and Stowe (2007) articulated that the Internet has gradually enhanced the accessibility of relevant adult training courses in the workplace. This implies that web platforms, in addition to providing formal training courses, has the capability to provide informal learning opportunities for workers to share and exchange ideas. Thus, while designing a web portal for employees, an informal learning space, such as a discussion forum and knowledge base, should be provided.

Conclusion

The contribution of informal learning to lifelong learning is significant (Merriam et al. 2007), but 'informal learning often has been seen as formal learning's poor cousin' (Golding, Brown & Foley 2009: 34). Further insight regarding informal learning research and participation would increase its recognition in the future. In this study, we explored the patterns and relationships of Taiwanese adults' participation in informal learning activities by analysing data from the national survey database. There is a trend to incorporate investigations of informal learning participation in the national adult education surveys, such as the NHES in the United States and the MPHS in Australia. It is expected that other nations will include questions on informal learning participation in their upcoming adult education surveys. The results of the survey data can provide valuable information for adult educators, adult education providers and researchers to better understand the situation and barriers of adults' participation in informal learning activities.

The analyses and arguments from this research provide a snapshot in discussing the influence of informal learning in adult education development in Taiwan based on the 2008 national survey. This study expands the value of the adult education survey database by further in-depth analysis of the relationships related to participation in informal learning. Smith and Smith (2008) indicated that finding a balance between formal/non-formal and informal learning is essential in maintaining a productive learning environment. Thus, further research in this area, particularly in secondary data analysis of national surveys and comparative studies across countries, is certainly merited.

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Role reversal: Educators in an enabling program embark on a journey of critical self-reflection

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While much has been written about the transformative potential of adult education from the student perspective, little research has been done into the experiences of those who teach in such contexts. This paper draws on the reflections of three academics who work in an enabling program in regional Australia. We embarked on a process of critical self-reflection, not unlike the kind of activity we ask of our students, as we considered the challenges as well as the rewards inherent in our experiences. Brookfield's (1998) concept of critical reflection was used as a vehicle for examining underlying assumptions about what we do and how we are positioned within the broader University community. Though we are cautious about describing our learning as 'transformative', we contend that the process of critical reflection has led to a heightened awareness, and has enabled us to articulate perceptions of professional and personal growth.

Introduction

Transformative learning is written about extensively in the field of adult education, but almost exclusively from the position of the student journey. Little research has been done into how this concept might be applied to the educators who work in adult education. This paper seeks to explore this concept as it relates to a group of academics who work within an enabling program at a regional Australian university. In the first part of the paper, we interrogate the concept of 'transformative learning' in terms of how it has been used in the past, and how it might apply to the experiences of educators, as well as adult learners. Next, we describe our engagement with Brookfield's (1998) theory of critical reflection and describe how it was used to build our methodology. We identify a number of assumptions about who we are as educators and how we are positioned as academics within the broader University community. A discussion of these findings follows, in which we consider the benefits of critically reflecting on practice, as well as the broader implications in terms of future research into the experiences of other academics, and the transformative potential inherent in this line of work.

Transformative learning experiences of students

A common theme in the literature in adult education is that adult learners are different because of their capacity to expand their horizons in a way that comes with maturity and a broader set of life experiences than those of younger, inexperienced students. It is widely held that the learning that serves as a catalyst for transformation is dependent upon the adult's capacity for meaningful self-reflection (Cranton 2006; Mezirow 1990). Mezirow (1990: 13) coined the term 'perspective transformation' to encapsulate the way in which personal attitudes and mindsets can change through education. He asserts that many of the individual's assumptions and ideologies are formed uncritically during childhood, and adulthood is often the time when individuals reassess these assumptions.

Brookfield (1995c) is wary of attempts to portray adult education as a distinct field of learning, but concedes that one of its unique features may well be the capacity of adults to reflect critically upon their worldviews and assumptions.

Like Mezirow (1991), Cranton (2006) suggests that a learner's transformation can be mapped according to a number of stages or facets, and points to some event in a person's life that acts as a catalyst for change. Both Mezirow (1990: 13) and Cranton (2006: 20) refer to this milestone as a 'disorienting dilemma'. While these catalysts are often perceived as life-changing events, such as a divorce or loss of a job, Mori (2005: 2 of 6) argues that the process of change can be a more gradual one and prefers to view such occurrences simply as 'turning points'. However these events are constructed, there is an emerging theme from the literature that some kind of challenge or struggle, either sudden or gradual, can lead to an appraisal of one's beliefs.

While some aspects of transformation may be categorised as objective and rational, the more personal aspects of this process also need to be acknowledged (Coombes & Danaher 2006). Writers such as Dirkx (1997: 80) describe the emotional, even spiritual dimensions of transformative learning—the 'very personal and imaginative ways of knowing, grounded in a more intuitive and emotional sense of our experience'. Even Mezirow, in his later work, acknowledges the affective, emotional and social aspects of such change (Cranton 2006). From this perspective, transformative learning can be understood to be a complex interaction of cognitive, intuitive, emotional and social sensibilities.

The principles of transformative learning explicitly inform Skills for Tertiary Education Preparation Studies (STEPS), an enabling program offered at CQUniversity in Rockhampton, Queensland. Like other enabling programs, it provides an alternative pathway for adult learners into undergraduate studies. Students in STEPS study academic writing, mathematics, IT skills and study skills as either full-time students in one term, or part-time students over two terms, to help give them the skills and understandings necessary to succeed in tertiary study. Many of the students who come to STEPS have experienced disadvantage in some way, including unfavourable socio-economic circumstances, difficult personal situations, and negative and/or disrupted schooling experiences. While the original program was designed to be delivered face-to-face, since 2006 it has been offered externally as well.

The discourse of 'transformation' is used openly in this program; students are encouraged to consider ways in which their thinking and attitudes might change throughout their studies. In line with the literature that advocates the documentation of thoughts and feelings as a potential vehicle for transformation (Cranton 2006), students are invited to keep learning journals to write about their learning experiences. To assist students in these reflections, they are introduced to Campbell's (1993) concept of the 'hero's journey'. This metaphor highlights the stages inherent in the journey of the archetypal hero, with the inevitable struggles culminating in the ultimate triumph. Students are encouraged to apply these concepts to their own learning journey to help them accept the challenges of university life as well as the rewards (Simpson & Coombes 2004). As a reflective tool, the 'hero's journey' also resonates with Dirkx's (1997: 79) take on transformative learning as 'a heroic struggle to wrest consciousness and knowledge from the forces of unconsciousness and ignorance'. The STEPS experience is based on holistic principles and the curriculum model used is designed to 'give credence to students' inner landscapes while at the same time developing their academic skills' (Simpson & Coombes 2004: 4). Therefore, the development of self-awareness and a capacity for self-reflection are viewed as keys to becoming a confident and successful student.

Transformative learning experiences of educators

While much has been written about the transformative potential of enabling programs such as STEPS in terms of the student journey (e.g. Seary & Willans 2004; Simpson & Coombes 2004), the impact of working in such an environment has largely gone unexplored. As Cranton (2006) points out, it is still relatively uncommon to discuss the business of adult education as a potentially transformative experience. As teaching is, in itself, a dimension of lifelong learning, then surely there is a role for educators to reflect upon the ways in which *they* have been challenged by, and grown from, their teaching experiences. Such processes facilitate the formation of an individual philosophy of teaching: 'naming and describing our frame of reference about education and our role within that world is a part of our transformative journey as an educator' (Cranton 2006: 193). As Simpson and Coombes (2001: 7 of 9) point out, even teachers 'sometimes have to leave their comfort zones and confront their self-doubts'. If we accept that critical self-reflection can lead to positive transformation in students, then it seems reasonable to assume that educators can also use this as a vehicle for professional growth.

The idea that critical reflection can facilitate transformation is obviously appealing to educators who work in the area of adult education. However, the limitations of transformative learning theory also need to be acknowledged. There is a 'rose-coloured glasses' mindset that permeates much of the writing about adult education and its link to profound, life-changing experiences. We therefore acknowledge that 'transformation' is an emotion-laden term with links to lofty educational aspirations. Brookfield (2000: 98) warns of 'the relentlessly upbeat rhetoric surrounding much exposition on empowerment, liberation, emancipation and transformation' in the context of adult learning. There may be a tendency to romanticise our findings out of a desire to perceive the work we do in a positive light. Therefore, we align our view with Cranton who constructs transformation as the development of 'self-awareness through consciousness-raising activities' (2006: 182). In Brookfield's words, we are engaging in critically reflective practice; that is, we are standing outside of our practice to see what we do from a wider perspective (1995a: 7 of 11).

Critical reflection: in theory

Brookfield defines critically reflective practice as 'a process of inquiry, involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work' (1998: 197). He warns that not all reflection is critical and that at the heart of this process lies a preoccupation with understanding 'how considerations of power undergird, frame and distort so many educational processes and interactions' (Brookfield 1995a: 4 of 11). This means acknowledging that some teaching practices may be well-intentioned, but actually end up perpetuating an hegemonic agenda. So it seems the job of critical reflection, from the educator's perspective, is not simply to ask questions like 'what did I do today?' or 'did it work well?'. Rather, the work of critical reflection is to try and disclose the power relations and unquestioned assumptions that structure our teaching practices, particularly those that we may not have been aware of previously.

The question remains as to how one goes about engaging in productive critical reflection. According to Brookfield (1998, p. 197), critical reflection is a 'puzzling and contradictory task' but necessary if we are to see what we do from a broader perspective. One of the ongoing difficulties in this process is that we must rely upon 'our own interpretive filters to become aware of our own interpretive filters' (Brookfield 1998: 197). Brookfield (1998) believes such limitations may be overcome, in part, by drawing upon four complementary lenses: the autobiographical lens; the lens of learners' eyes; the lens of colleagues' perceptions; and finally, the lens of theoretical, philosophical and research literature. If it is true, as Brookfield suggests, that ‘the most distinctive feature of the reflective process is its focus on hunting assumptions’ (Brookfield 1995a: 1 of 11), then these different lenses can provide different viewpoints for revealing a range of assumptions. We acknowledge that there are other aspects of our STEPS experience that could be included in a critical reflection. These might include our reflections on the teaching process or various assumptions about the curriculum. However, our focus in this paper is the potential transformative experiences for educators in enabling programs. It is for this reason that we consider Brookfield’s framework for a holistic approach to critical reflection to be of greatest relevance.

Rather than following Brookfield’s dictates without question, however, we have adapted these lenses to suit our own purposes. We use the autobiographical lens, for example, to create a frame of reference that draws upon our learning experiences as educators, rather than using our past learning experiences as students. In so doing, we are acknowledging the unique subjectivities that each of us brings to this teaching experience in terms of our personal and professional backgrounds, as well as our beliefs about our practice. The second lens that we use is that of our colleagues, since one of the key aspects of this process has been to share our reflections with each other. As Brookfield (1998) notes, colleagues can help us identify assumptions, especially those pertaining to power structures, in a way that encourages more democratic processes. We have also drawn upon our reading from the literature around adult learning and transformative learning theories. This theoretical lens has helped us ‘investigate the hunches, instincts and tacit knowledge that shape our practice’ (Brookfield 1995b: 1 of 9), as well as assisting us in developing a method for our study. However, we have elected not to draw on learners’ viewpoints as the fourth lens in this study. Our reasoning is that there has already been considerable research into the student perspective in the context of transformative learning and that our purpose here is more about the educator's role in a broader sense, rather than simply the improvement of teaching practice.

Critical reflection: in practice

As a starting point for our reflections, as a group, we decided on a set of questions that would guide us in our reflections about our individual autobiographies, that is, our personal experiences in, and beliefs about, working as educators in an enabling program. Our familiarity with concepts in the literature around adult education and transformation helped us to formulate questions that challenged us to think about our worldviews and teaching ethos, as well as the challenges and rewards associated with what we do and what we have learnt. Some of these questions were similar to the kinds of questions we ask of our students to guide them in their own reflections about their learning journeys. Each of us took the time to answer these questions without formally consulting each other:

1. Describe your educational qualifications and work experience prior to STEPS.
2. Describe the teaching and administrative roles you have experienced working the STEPS program.
3. Compare the STEPS teaching experience to other work experience in terms of its particular challenges and rewards.
4. What have you learned about yourself as an educator from working in the STEPS program?
5. Has your worldview changed in any way as a result of teaching with the STEPS program? If so, how?
6. Has your understanding of Australian society changed in any way as a result of teaching with the STEPS program?

Once that process had been completed, the responses were gathered and collated and we began a series of discussions about these findings via phone and email. In order to make sense of the data, we engaged in a broadly thematic analysis in line with the method described by Bernard (2010). Using this approach, a 'theme' is a form of 'expression' that connotes fundamental concepts being described: 'In selecting one set of terms over others, we surely ignore subtle differences, but the basic ideas are just as useful under many glosses' (Bernard 2010, p. 55). It is understood that the first stage in generating themes is often at the time when guiding questions are formulated, usually in the context of interviews, but in this case, questions for self-reflection were drafted. As we became more familiar with the work of Brookfield, we turned our attention to identifying underlying assumptions as a specific kind of unifying 'theme'. We also tried to explore more explicitly the power relations implicit in these responses, focusing more on our positioning as academics in the broader University community. Thus we added the following to our original list:

1. Has teaching in the STEPS program changed your views on what it is to be an academic?
2. What do you think are the particular assumptions made of you as a STEPS teacher?
3. What assumptions are there about STEPS students in the wider University community?
4. Have your initial assumptions about STEPS students been challenged in any way?

In this way, the process of reflection took on a more 'critical' edge rather than simply providing an opportunity to identify shared (and contrasting) viewpoints about our teaching experiences. Therefore, the methodological approach employed became a reiterative process that involved both inductive and deductive reasoning. The assumptions that we identified were induced from the data in our hunt for repetition of ideas, similarities and differences, and key-words-in-context (Bernard 2010), but deductive reasoning was also used in that our guiding questions and analyses were informed by theoretical perspectives. Using each other as ‘critical mirrors’ (Brookfield 1998: 200) became particularly crucial at the stage of analysing our findings; in quizzing each other about our reflections, we were able to draw out the assumptions that underpinned our responses to the questions that we had posed.

There were three academics involved in this research project. Two currently still teach in STEPS while the third has since left the program due to a family relocation. Further background details are represented in the table below:

Background	**Profile 1**	**Profile 2**	**Profile 3**
Experience in schools	As music instructor	As high-school teacher	As primary school teacher
Experience teaching in undergraduate	In cultural studies	In education	In Australian history
PhD	In cultural studies	In curriculum reform	In Lebanese history
Years working in STEPS	4	4	10

We have all had teaching experiences in schools, as well as in undergraduate programs, before coming to work in an enabling program. In the STEPS program, each of us has taught Language and Learning, a subject that develops the skills and thinking needed for academic writing, and two of us have taught in Tertiary Preparation Skills, which may loosely be described as a subject that teaches study skills and promotes self-awareness. Those who teach within the

STEPS program are employed as 'academics' rather than 'general staff'. Accordingly, postgraduate qualifications are encouraged and there is an expectation to be active in research, though lecturers in the program with doctoral qualifications are in the minority.

Critical reflections and hunting assumptions

Since Brookfield argues that the critical dimension of reflection lies in 'hunting assumptions' (1995a: 1 of 11), we decided that the logical way to hone our thematic analysis was to identify underlying assumptions in the data: about our frames of reference as educators, and how our experiences in this program might have changed us. Not all of these assumptions unearth implicit power relations, but they are significant in this context in that all are representative of the perspectives and beliefs that underpin the work we do. While our initial focus was to look at ourselves as teachers, it soon emerged that our broader role as academics, engaged in research as well as teaching activity, was just as pertinent to issues around personal and professional growth. Therefore, in writing our responses, and the ensuing analysis, we refer to ourselves as both educators and as academics, the latter being used to denote a role that encompasses a range of scholarly activities beyond 'teaching'. In questioning the various aspects of our work, we allow for the possibility that our perspectives may have already changed, but we also argue that the process of identifying underlying assumptions and beliefs is, in itself, a consciousness-raising exercise. After careful examination, a number of key, inter-related assumptions emerged: the mandate of transformation, equity, acceptance of diversity, 'otherness', and teaching over research.

The mandate of transformation

One assumption that emerged from our reflections is that adult learners in an enabling program are generally perceived as 'ripe for change' and ready to embrace all that the program has to offer. While it may be true that many students in the program are ready for such a change and committed to succeeding, there are those whose motivation appears to be lacking. In some cases, the behaviour of students does not indicate that they are even committed to achieving academic success, least of all personal transformation: *they don't turn up to class, they are late with assessment, their classroom etiquette is less than desirable* and so on. Even with the most concerted of efforts on behalf of the teaching staff, such students can take up a lot of time and energy, and can have a negative effect on the classroom climate. At some level, all STEPS students are ready for change or they would not have enrolled in the program, but this is not necessarily reflected in their attitude to their work in the longer term.

Because personal transformation is articulated as part of the STEPS philosophy, we felt that there is an expectation on us, as lecturers, to facilitate such change. Transformation is openly discussed with students and the role of self-reflection given considerable priority. Though students are not graded on it, writing a 'hero's journey' reflection at the end of the program is a compulsory activity. However, not all teachers in the program are entirely comfortable with this expectation:

> While I believe that all forms of learning are invaluable and that for the individual education is a wonderful asset, I have not always been comfortable with what could be termed 'mandatory transformation'. The Hero's Journey, for example, is useful and it is a good experience for students to keep a reflective journal, but it is important to avoid creating overt pressure to transform as a central goal of the course.

As teachers, we can also experience a sense of failure when our students do not embrace the concepts behind the 'hero's journey', or show any evidence that they are anything but superficially engaged in the program. The reality is that for some of our students, the STEPS program represents a ticket into university, rather than a life-changing experience. Furthermore, in making this kind of critical self-reflection mandatory, we risk taking advantage of our positions of authority, since not all students are comfortable with the level of emotional exposure that activities such as personal journalling require.

Despite some unease with the assumption that students will transform, we also recognise that many students do appreciate the opportunity afforded to them. Seeing how many students 'blossom' is clearly one of the biggest rewards of working in such a program: *Teaching in STEPS is very rewarding—it is a privilege to be a part of the learning journeys of our students, especially those who are so earnest in their efforts to make a difference in their lives*. Despite any reservations about assumed transformation, it cannot be denied that the changes experienced by some students are quite dramatic, and witnessing these journeys serves to provide inspiration to us as educators and as people, as well as broadening our understandings of human potential.

Equity

Related to this capacity for transformation is a belief that our work helps to achieve equity for students who have experienced genuine disadvantage. In making such a claim, it must be acknowledged that there are no guarantees that education can ever fully compensate for the disadvantage that characterises the backgrounds of many non-traditional university students. However, each of us reflected that the STEPS program does at least provide opportunities for students from a broad range of backgrounds to develop their academic potential:

> My experience teaching Language and Learning in STEPS has reaffirmed my long held conviction that access to education is an essential element of civil democratic societies. The wonderful aspect of STEPS is that it allows people who may not previously have had the opportunity or inclination to pursue further studies to do so.

This philosophical commitment to the program is also evident in the following comment:

> The social justice aspects of this work really appeal to me. We have some very capable women come through this program—those who are in their 40s or 50s but who were never given the chance to pursue their education when they were younger because of gender issues. It is really satisfying to see people like this just blossom in the program.

Therefore, the opportunity to help some students overcome disadvantage is another of the more rewarding aspects of our work and aligns with our personal beliefs about education and social empowerment.

Acceptance of diversity

Closely related to the concept of 'equity' is the assumption that working in STEPS means working with students from a wide range of backgrounds, many of which will be disadvantaged. One consequence of such diversity is that students bring with them an array of social and emotional problems. Therefore, one of the challenges for STEPS teachers is dealing with *the 'baggage'—psychological and otherwise—that STEPS students bring with them—often right into the classroom*. While the exploration of the personal is encouraged in STEPS, this openness also means the emotional and personal aspects are always close to the surface. In some cases, students present with serious emotional conditions and this can make the 'mentoring' role of the teacher quite challenging. Unless carefully managed, some students can develop an emotional dependence upon our support which can become a situation difficult to sustain.

However, we also acknowledge that dealing with this diversity has expanded our perspectives, as educators and as people. Not only have we had to develop our personal communication skills, but we have also developed a broader tolerance of, and appreciation for, the human experience. In some cases, the depth of the struggle of some individuals has made a lasting impression:

> It has been a great experience to work with so many students from so many backgrounds and I have been deeply impressed by the students who, despite great hardship and difficulties, have been determined to pursue their educational goals.

As educators who come from relatively protected, middle-class backgrounds, we realise that we have encountered a broader spectrum of people than we might otherwise have done, as a direct result of working within the STEPS program. This has broadened our outlook on society by inviting us to question our judgments of people, who at first glance may present with less than favourable academic, social and emotional backgrounds. It also highlights the contrast between our own lives and our students:

> Teaching in STEPS has also given me an insight into how tough some people are doing it… It makes me appreciate how privileged I am in terms of the opportunities I have been given in life.

'Otherness'

Though there are clearly many ways in which working in the STEPS program is a privilege, another assumption to emerge from these reflections is that working in an enabling program is perceived as a marginalised activity from a University-wide perspective. STEPS, along with the other access programs offered at the University, is frequently overlooked when it comes to teaching and learning policies and procedures:

> There is an assumption that learning support is the 'remedial' part of university and that the students are less than capable … that we are working on the fringes of the university, with the fringes of society.

We felt that such perceptions of the program have an impact on our standing as academics, that we are somehow removed from traditional constructions of university academia, as evidenced by the following comment:

> There would seem to be an assumption that this [distinction] makes STEPS teachers less credible in the sense of academic kudos, even though many of them are similarly or better qualified and experienced than some employed in Faculties.

Though the program for the most part enjoys a good reputation for the outcomes that are achieved for its students, the academic status of the lecturers involved does appear to be compromised.

The career path of the academic within an enabling program like STEPS also emerges as a disadvantage. While academics in STEPS are encouraged to have a higher degree, and a good proportion take on leadership roles and/or research projects, there are limited promotional opportunities:

> There are no senior lecturers within our ranks, so there is no established career path for lecturers with a strong research, admin or teaching profile, seeking promotion.

Furthermore, the longer a lecturer remains within the program, the harder it may be for them to make the transition back into some discipline areas:

> I do recognise that the longer I teach with STEPS, the less likely it is I would be considered for a position in [my discipline area] as my experience in teaching in that area is fading into the distance.

Maintaining a healthy research profile was perceived as one way of insuring against that possible outcome.

Teaching over research

Related to the sense of 'otherness' experienced is the assumption that, as academics in the STEPS program, we are teachers first and foremost, and research is something that is fitted in and around commitments to students:

> Teaching comes first at the expense of all other academic activities. This means that research activity is often non-existent for long periods of time, and then hurriedly rushed together in down time (which itself has proved to be somewhat of a myth).

Though staff are encouraged to participate in research by those in senior management, it is not usually factored into the academic's workload. What is more, there is a 'nine-to-five' mindset about working in STEPS, with teachers being expected to be available to students most of the time, and, unlike being an academic in other parts of the University, working off-campus is not condoned. A sense of frustration with these expectations is evident in the following comment: *Within STEPS, I think there is an assumption that you will provide students with almost unlimited access.* The expectation is that lecturers interested in research will pursue such activities in 'down-time' between teaching terms.

The assumption that research work is a diversion from the teaching work seems to be taking a narrow view of these activities. Being an active researcher can have direct benefits on teaching activity, even when the discipline area is not directly linked to 'teaching and learning'. For example, our own writing and researching activity has given us a depth of understanding of these processes which reflects in our teaching of these processes. What is more, our involvement in these activities provides a model of academic life for our students and, at a grassroots level, has enabled us to empathise with our students because we are also actively involved in writing and researching.

Despite the perception that research is not highly prioritised, it would be unfair to suggest that it was not valued at all or that there was no research culture within this part of the University. There exists a core group of academics who are involved in research and/or post-graduate study, and collaborative research projects are quite common. While most of us are relatively inexperienced from a research perspective, there is evidence of collegiality and mutual respect from which we benefit:

> I have had the opportunity to work with dedicated educators and have learnt a great deal from my colleagues. Through a reading group, I had the opportunity to study intellectual ideas which have influenced the way I think and write.

It should also be noted that academics within the program have been generously funded to go to local and overseas research conferences over the years. A recent positive initiative is allowing academics to take on reduced teaching responsibilities in order to pursue research projects or meet study commitments. Such developments enable these academics to develop their research profiles and, in some cases, to participate more fully in the research culture within the broader University.

Implications

The process of identifying and questioning assumptions that underpin our work has helped us stand outside of our practice and gain fresh perspectives. It has been a consciousness-raising activity from two aspects: firstly, it has given us an insight into the kind of reflection we expect of our students, and secondly, the process of identifying assumptions has encouraged us to question our own perspectives, and perhaps finetune our initial impressions. The process of analysing our reflections and sharing them with each other has helped us to see that the challenges associated with being an educator in STEPS are, in some cases, also intrinsically linked with the opportunities. For example, the assumption that all STEPS students should ‘transform’ may seem unrealistic, and yet it is this same possibility for genuine transformation that provides us with inspiration and also broadens our understanding of human potential and resilience. Similarly, in looking at our broader role as academics, we identify certain frustrations associated with the view that we are marginalised and that research activity is not part of our core business.

However, working within this part of the University has enabled us to grow in other ways, and we have welcomed the opportunities to contribute to a productive and collegial research culture. The other positive aspects, such as developing a broader appreciation for diversity, and helping to achieve equity, may also be directly linked to personal and professional growth.

We recognise that, in articulating this set of beliefs, we represent a privileged group in comparison with other groups of learners, and are therefore cautious about making claims of transformation. Our engagement with critical self-reflection does not compare with the 'vocation of becoming more fully human' which was the focus of Freire's work (1972: 41) with the peasants of South America, nor are our new insights as dramatic as the kinds of life-changing experiences that our own students often talk about (Simpson & Coombes 2001). While the challenges identified in these assumptions do not necessarily have the same impact as the 'disorienting dilemmas' (Cranton 2006; Mezirow 1990) described in transformative learning theory, they do bring to light perceived tensions, and also reveal certain vulnerabilities on our part. In so doing, such reflections afford opportunities for adjusting assumptions about who we are as educators and what we do.

These findings also raise questions about the role of the academic, particularly in enabling programs. With Australian universities under pressure to broaden their access, as articulated in the Bradley Review (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008), enabling programs are increasingly likely to come under the spotlight. If universities wish to recruit and retain high-quality academics to such programs, then there is a need to review their role in this context and how this might conform with or challenge constructions of the academic's role in more traditional areas. The nexus of teaching and research has emerged as an area of concern, since it is clear that, for some academics at least, research activity is considered an integral aspect of their professional growth. We also acknowledge that the challenges and rewards identified in this context are not necessarily unique to those working in enabling programs. Therefore, the issues raised in this study can provide a starting point for further research into the role of the academic, both within and outside of enabling programs, and the challenges and opportunities that characterise this career path.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the concept of transformation and how it might be applied to a group of educators working in an enabling program in an Australian regional university. In order to do this, we engaged in a reflective process, not unlike the one we ask of our students, in which we considered our beliefs about the work we do and their impact on us as individuals. Brookfield's (1998) theory of critical self-reflection was adapted to develop a methodology that enabled us to stand outside of our own practice by identifying common assumptions about our role and what we have learnt. Though our original intention was to look at our experiences as teachers, broader issues such as our contribution to research and our positioning as academics in the University community emerged as significant in exploring the transformative potential of our work.

While we are cautious about ascribing the term 'transformation', we assert that the process of articulating our beliefs about our work and the program itself, comparing our thoughts with colleagues, and using literature in the field as a frame of reference, has led to a heightened awareness about who we are as academics. This initial exploration highlights the fact that we are constantly learning: our experiences in this program have expanded our professional knowledge as well as broadening our personal worldviews and attitudes. A number of challenges and frustrations were revealed and these might suggest that the status of the academic working in an enabling program is compromised in some ways. However, these reflections also reveal the privileges associated with the work we do and the valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth. The learning journey of the educator (or academic), as well as the student, emerges as an area worthy of investigation, particularly in light of the broadening landscape of tertiary offerings.

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Promoting literacy for adults with intellectual disabilities in a community-based service organisation

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Despite the importance of and advocacy for developing literacy skills for successful and rewarding participation in the community, there remains a common perception that becoming literate is not possible for people with intellectual disabilities. Until recently, limited research has been undertaken to investigate the literacy skills of adults with intellectual disabilities. In particular, research related to opportunities for lifelong learning in community-based organisations, and to the kinds of literacy activities that might be both developmentally and socially appropriate to assist adults with intellectual disabilities to remain active as they age, is limited in relation to older adults with intellectual disabilities. This exploratory project used a range of instruments to gather information about the literacy skills of older adults to identify their literacy needs and wants, and to consider opportunities to enhance and maintain literacy skills existing in an ongoing activity program in one community-based service organisation.

Introduction

The development of literate citizens is considered crucial to the sustainability of a democratic society (Ehrens, Lenz & Deshler 2004). Thus, there have been many government initiatives and policies to advance the literacy learning of a range of groups within society (see MCEETYA 2008; Erickson 2005), recognising that all citizens have the motivation and capability to continue learning and developing literacy throughout life (Kearns 2005). Internationally, UNESCO designated the years 2003 to 2012 as the Decade of Literacy, stating that:

> Literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all [and] creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals or eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy. (UNESCO 2006: 19)

Within this broader social policy context, the role of literacy in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities has been marginalised. Until recently, limited research has been undertaken to investigate the literacy skills of adults with intellectual disabilities as there remains a common perception that becoming literate is not possible for people with intellectual disabilities (Kliewer, Biklen & Kasa-Hendrickson 2006). However, there is now a growing body of research that has reported the continuing literacy development among groups of post-school aged individuals with intellectual disabilities. This research has challenged and refuted generalised educational myths related to the plateaux of learning that were traditionally thought to occur for individuals with intellectual disabilities (e.g. Moni, Jobling & van Kraayenoord 2007; Morgan, Moni & Jobling 2004; Pershey & Gilbert 2002; Young, Moni, Jobling & van Kraayenoord 2004). Findings suggest that individuals with intellectual disabilities can develop literacy skills and that these will continue to develop through adolescence and beyond (e.g. Bochner, Outhred & Pieterse 2001; Moni & Jobling 2001; van den Bos, Nakken, Nicolay & van Houten 2007). Research has found that literacy has the potential to add significantly to the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disabilities both academically and emotionally, contributing to the development of skills in problem-solving, choice-making and communication which are required for full participation in the community (Ashman & Suttie 1995; van den Bos et al. 2007).

However, while literacy is a lifelong skill that is highly valued in the community, opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to develop literacy across the lifespan are limited in Australian society. Post-school options for individuals with intellectual disabilities focus primarily on work placement and community access through sport and recreational activities, and access to these and to educational opportunities for individuals in adulthood, continues to be very limited (Abells, Burbridge & Minnis 2008; Davis & Beamish 2009; Hart, Gregal & Weir 2010; Rubenson 2002).

Technical And Further Education (TAFE) is the main provider of literacy courses offered for adults with intellectual disabilities (Meadows 2009). However, there is limited evidence that the literacy courses developed by this sector are planned beyond the requirements of basic adult education courses to meet literacy needs, or cater developmentally for the range of skills that adults with intellectual disabilities possess. Thus, individuals with intellectual disabilities who enrol in these courses may not achieve success, or require more support than their non-disabled peers to be successful (Cavallaro, Foley, Saunders & Bowman 2005). The main post-school option open for many adults with intellectual disabilities is to attend activities and programs provided by community-based organisations and small registered training organisations.

While the notion of continued learning is inherent in many of the programs offered by these organisations in terms of learning life skills to enhance independence, the development of literacy skills that underpin many of these life skills is not evident. In addition, research related to opportunities for lifelong learning in these programs, and to the kinds of literacy activities that might be both developmentally and socially appropriate to assist adults with intellectual disabilities to remain active as they age, is particularly limited in relation to older adults with intellectual disabilities (Boulton-Lewis, Buys & Tedman-Jones 2008).

This exploratory project was developed to gather information about the literacy skills of older adults to identify their literacy needs and interests, and to consider opportunities to enhance and maintain literacy skills existing in an ongoing activity program in one community-based service organisation.

The project

The aims of the project were, first, to assess the literacy abilities and interests of the clients attending programs in a community-based service organisation, and second, to identify opportunities that might exist in the activities provided for continued literacy development within current programs.

The project gathered data about the literacy abilities of a group of older adults with intellectual disabilities who accessed activity centres provided by a large community support organisation in Queensland, Australia. These centres provide a range of daytime training and recreational activities for adults with intellectual disabilities. The project was conducted over a two-month period. During preliminary meetings with organisation staff to discuss the nature of the project and its aims, the scope of the project and the requirements for staff and clients were explained, and subsequently two Activity Centre managers, two support staff and 13 clients aged between 29 and 56 agreed to be involved with the project.

After ethical clearance was granted, letters of consent were sent to the two Centre managers and a conference call was arranged to explain the project, after which the managers were asked to distribute the material on the project and letters of consent to interested staff and clients. Informed consent was obtained from both the clients and, where appropriate, their care-givers.

Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments for the project were selected to collect data about the literacy abilities and interests of the clients and also to collect data about the literacy environment of the Centre and its existing literacy practices. They comprised both formal standardised literacy assessments and informal, qualitative instruments.

Formal assessments

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-111A (PPVT-IIIA) (Dunn & Dunn 1997) was used to determine the receptive oral language age equivalent of clients. This standardised test is a test of listening comprehension for the spoken word. It is an individually administered, un-timed and norm-referenced test, designed for ages 2.5 to 90+ years. The test presents a raw score that can be scaled into an age equivalent score.

The Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd edition (NARA) (Neale 1999) was used to assess the accuracy, comprehension and rate of clients' reading on a series of levelled texts. This standardised assessment has been used successfully in a post-school literacy program with younger clients (Moni & Jobling 2001).

The Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd edition—Diagnostic Tutor (Neale 1999) was used with those clients who were unable to attain base-line levels on the *NARA* to attain data about the their skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, auditory discrimination and blending.

Informal assessments

Concepts About Print Test (Clay 1979) was used to assess clients' knowledge of reading behaviour (such as knowledge of parts of a book, reading directionality, knowledge of letters, words and punctuation). This simply administered assessment is user friendly and enables the assessor to collect information on reading behaviour.

A writing sample was collected from each client with the use of a concrete prompt in the form of a personal photo. The researcher encouraged the client to talk about the photo, the occasion, and the people in the photo and then to write down their verbal responses. Clients were asked to write as many words as they could, and in some cases assistance was given with spelling and writing words for the clients to copy. There was no time limit. The sample was then scored using the Clay (1979) scoring for writing behaviour.

A literacy interest survey (Gunn, Young & van Kraayenoord 1992) was undertaken using a conversational style of administration. The assessor talked to the clients about the print types that they may like to read using the survey items as a guide. All items on the survey were discussed.

Centre assessments

For each Centre, three instruments were used to gather information about the environment in which the clients spent their day. Specifically, information was gathered about the environment for literacy and the opportunities for interactions around literacy as well as staff perceptions.

An *Environment Literacy Audit* (Moni, Jobling & van Kraayenoord 2002) was used by the researchers to collate the text types available (e.g. magazines, posters, manuals) in a particular location of the Centre as well as the accessibility, readability of those text types and number of literacy opportunities for clients to access such texts.

Semi-structured staff interviews were undertaken to gain information about the clients at the Centre and the literacy environment created for them. These interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. Themes around the interview questions were formulated using inductive coding.

Observations of the context in which literacy activities could take place were examined in each Centre across two of the daily activity sessions. It was anticipated that these observations would help the research team to understand more fully the context and operation of the existing programs.

Procedure

Two Activity Centres volunteered to participate in the project. There were eight consenting clients from one Centre and five from the other. Staff involvement and consent was also obtained from two staff members from each centre who volunteered to be interviewed.

Two researchers visited each of the Centres on three mornings to collect data. Staff and observational data were collected before the client data. This was done to familiarise the clients with our presence in the centre prior to being required to interact with the researchers. On the first visit, the researchers interviewed the two staff members. Staff interviews took place in a quiet room away from the general activity of the Centre. One staff member at each Centre was the Centre manager. Data from an environmental literacy audit and opportunities for literacy from observations of two activity sessions were collected. Each researcher observed one activity session. These were undertaken to ascertain the accessibility and readability of text types available to the clients at each centre. On the second and third visits, the client assessments were undertaken. The assessments were conducted individually in a quiet room. All clients co-operated well with the researchers during the assessments.

Results

There were a total of 13 clients (eight from Centre 1 and five from Centre 2) ranging in age from 29 to 56 years. Six clients were female and seven were male. The clients at the two Centres lived mainly in the northern and southern suburbs of Brisbane and there was a range of ethnic backgrounds (Greek, Italian and Aboriginal). The level of independence in travel to the Centres varied, with Centre 1 having six clients and Centre 2 18 clients who travelled independently on public transport. At Centre 2, most clients lived at home, and were of middle class status, while at Centre 1 there were a range of living arrangements and these were mainly the family home and supported accommodation service. Socio-economic status was also mixed.

Results of standardised assessments of clients from Centre 1

Five clients were selected by Centre managers at Centre 1 for participation in initial assessments. The results from these assessments are reported below.

Table 1: PPVT—IIIA (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) Initial Assessment Results

Client	Age (years and months)	Raw score	Age equivalent score (years and months)
Mandy	38.10	124	9.05
Frank	32.00	49	2.07
Kay	30.07	88	6.06
Stanley	32.08	81	6.01
Isobel	40.06	74	5.07

Note: All names are pseudonyms

The results in Table 1 show that the raw scores for the five clients from the *PPVT IIIA* ranged from 49 to 124. Their age equivalent scores for receptive oral language ranged from 2 years 7 months to 9 years 5 months, which were well below their chronological ages.

Table 2: Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd ed. (NARA) (Neale, 1999) Initial Assessment Age Equivalent Results

Client	**Age (years and months)**	**Accuracy (years and months)**	**Comp (years and months)**	**Rate (years and months)**
Mandy	38.10	9.07	8.09	8.01
Frank	32.00	6.00	6.02	6.05
Kay	30.07	7.05	7.04	7.04
Stanley	32.08	11.09	8.09	12.06
Isobel	40.06	6.02	-	6.08

The results in Table 2 show that the five clients ranged in age from 32 years to 40 years 6 months. All five clients attained age equivalent scores for accuracy and rate, with four clients (Mandy, Frank, Kay and Stanley) also attaining age equivalent scores for comprehension. The age equivalent scores for accuracy ranged from 6 years to 11 years 9 months. The scores for comprehension ranged from 6 years 2 months to 8 years 9 months, while the age equivalent scores for rate ranged from 6 years 5 months to 12 years 6 months. All of the reading age equivalent scores attained by the clients on this assessment were well below their chronological ages.

As all of the clients reached baseline on this assessment, *The Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd edition—Diagnostic Tutor* was not administered.

Results of standardised assessments of clients from Centre 2

Eight clients were selected by Centre managers at Centre 2 for participation in initial assessments. The results from these assessments are reported below.

Table 3: PPVT—IIIA (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) Initial Assessment Results

Client	Age (years and months)	Raw score	Age equivalent scores (years and months)
Betty	51.09	104	7.08
Bob	41.00	94	7.00
George	33.07	101	7.05
Ian	50.03	96	7.01
Louise	29.03	102	7.06
Michael	44.04	70	5.04
Simon	32.00	75	5.08
Wendy	56.00	56	5.05

The results in Table 3 show that the raw scores for the eight clients from the *PPVT IIIA* ranged from 56 to 104. Their age equivalent scores for receptive oral language ranged from 5 years 5 months to 7 years 8 months, which were well below their chronological ages.

Table 4: Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd ed. (NARA) (Neale, 1999) Initial Assessment Age Equivalent Results

Name	**Age (years and months)**	**Accuracy (years and months)**	**Comp (years and months)**	**Rate (years and months)**
Betty	51.09	9.06	8.09	8.05
Bob	41.00	-	-	-
George	33.07	7.10	7.02	8.00
Ian	50.03	-	-	-
Louise	29.03	8.05	7.04	8.01
Michael	44.04	-	-	-
Simon	32.00	-	-	-
Wendy	56.00	6.02	-	8.08

The results in Table 4 show that the eight clients ranged in age from 29 years 3 months to 56 years. Four of the clients (Betty, George, Louise and Wendy) attained age equivalent scores for reading accuracy and rate, and three of the clients (Betty, George and Louise) also attained age equivalent scores for comprehension. The scores for accuracy ranged from 6 years 2 months to 9 years 6 months. Age equivalent scores for comprehension ranged from 7 years 2 months to 8 years 9 months, while the age equivalent scores for rate ranged from 8 years to 8 years 8 months. Betty achieved a reading age equivalent of 9 years 6 months for accuracy, 8 years 9 months for comprehension and 8 years 5 months for rate. George achieved a reading age equivalent of 7 years 10 months for accuracy, 7 years 2 months for comprehension and 8 years for rate. Louise's reading age equivalent was 8 years 5 months for accuracy, 7 years 4 months for comprehension and 8 years 1 month for rate. Wendy achieved a reading age equivalent of 6 years 2 months for accuracy, and

8 years 8 months for rate. She did not attain base-line levels for comprehension. All of the reading age equivalent scores attained by the clients on this assessment were well below their chronological ages.

The remaining four clients (Bob, Ian, Michael and Simon) did not reach base-line levels for accuracy, comprehension or rate on this assessment and thus *The Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd edition—Diagnostic Tutor* was administered. These results are reported below.

Results from The Neale Analysis of Reading—3rd edition—Diagnostic Tutor

Bob

Bob had limited phonemic awareness skills. He could name most of the letters of the alphabet, recognising both lower and upper case. He showed confusion between the lower case letters b, d and q. His spelling, auditory discrimination and blending skills were limited.

Ian

Ian had limited skills in phonemic awareness, letter recognition in both lower and upper case, spelling, auditory discrimination and blending.

Michael

Michael had limited skills in phonemic awareness, letter recognition in both lower and upper case, spelling, auditory discrimination and blending.

Simon

Simon had some skills of phonemic awareness, particularly with initial letter sounds. He could recognise and name most of the letters of the alphabet in both lower and upper case but his knowledge of letter sounds was limited. His skills in spelling were limited and he experienced difficulty understanding the meaning of same and different and thus his results on the test of auditory discrimination and blending were inconclusive.

Results from informal assessments of clients from both Centres

Informal assessments were also undertaken with all participating clients administered at both Centres.

Concepts About Print Test. The results from this assessment showed that most clients understood how to read a book (Betty, aged 51, for example, fluently, accurately and prosodically read the whole text)—the parts of a book and the directionality of the print. However, most of the clients had limited letter/sound recognition, and limited knowledge of the purpose of capital letters or punctuation.

The *writing samples* were scored using the Clay (1979) scoring system. Scores ranging from 1 to 4 indicate that the writing content is not yet satisfactory, while scores of 5 to 6 indicate that the writing is satisfactory for the three areas assessed—language level, message quality and directional principles. Most clients attained scores from 1 to 4; however, all were able to recall and retell events depicted in a photograph. For example, George (aged 30) began to write using a picture of his dog as a prompt:

> ‘I love my German Shepherd. They nice dogs.’

Then he changed his story and continued to write independently, without a prompt, about his cousin. George printed his text in capitals and his writing sample is reproduced below.

> TO MY COUSIN SOPHIE
> FROM GEORGE
> SHE LOOK BEAUTIFUL
> NICE LADY
> HER HAIR BLACK BLACK HAIR
> SOPHIE HAIR WAS CURLY HAIR
> I GOT A PHOTO OF SOPHIE

The clients were also motivated to write. Betty, for example, hand wrote a response to one of the interview questions without further prompting, and in cursive writing. This is reproduced verbatim below:

> I enjoy reading, writing and sewing and going out shopping. I used to do tapestry but just recently I have another job putting names on peoples clothes and am going to get paid for it.

Some clients demonstrated some knowledge of spelling but most had limited knowledge of punctuation. The correct use of upper and lower case letters in their writing was mixed and two clients (including George) wrote using only upper case. Only Betty used cursive writing, while all others printed.

The literacy interest survey revealed that there was a range of literacy interests. Magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly*, DVD labels, TV guides, menus from fast food restaurants such as *McDonalds*, recipes and bowling score-sheets were the items which most clients cited as their reading interest. Engagement with their interests in these texts could be built on and be incorporated into their daily activities.

The context for literacy at the Centres

The context and opportunities for literacy activities in the Centres were observed and recorded by two project staff. Observational data varied between each Centre. An environmental audit was conducted in the games room, the main room and the sewing room.

Environmental literacy audit

In both Centres, the print displayed was primarily multi-purpose materials such as fire-drill procedures, disability posters and notices about workplace practices. There were displays at each Centre's entrance. These comprised a combination of pictures (some photos) and text. They were interesting and engaging but not readily accessible for the clients, with the language used being too difficult for most of the clients to read and understand. At each Centre, the environmental print was somewhat disorganised and predominantly above the literacy levels and interests of the clients. Some items were of particular client interest, such as items about recent trips or events. However, their relevance and access for literacy were limited. For example, in Centre 1, while there was a display that was in accessible language in the designated sewing room, the clients only had access to this room on Tuesdays and under supervision, and recipe books in the kitchen in Centre 1 were labelled 'For staff'. In Centre 2, instructions in the designated literacy room were beyond clients' literacy levels, and a poster of tenpin bowling scores, that featured some of the clients, was two years out of date.

Semi-structured staff interviews

The two staff members who were interviewed at each Centre reported that the clients could participate in a wide range of activities that were offered across the week. These included craft (wood and painting), cooking, recreational activities such as bowling, golf and swimming, music once a week, and a significant level of community access to concerts, shopping centres, and meals on wheels. However, the manager of Centre 2 believed that at times it was a logistical problem organising 31 people into 50 activities over 5 days.

Both Centres had a work preparation program that operated within the Centre. One Centre shredded paper for recycling, while the other Centre prepared newspapers for delivery.

At Centre 1, the staff (manager and one other staff member) discussed some specific aspects of their Centre and its program. The staff reported that their clients enjoyed literacy activities, especially writing their name, but felt that had only limited literacy skills. For example, the support worker said: *"No-one can read … they know letters and can recognise their name and a few words"*. The clients enjoyed rugby league, a range of television programs that included soap operas, with other interests including food and birthday celebrations. Some individual work on writing and word recognition (15 minutes per week) was undertaken with a small group of clients who worked with a volunteer. When asked about computer skills, they believed that the clients had limited skills but were enthusiastic about learning more. Staff reported that all clients could recognise their names but experienced difficulty writing their own names. They felt that for many clients, learning to write their own name would be seen by them as ‘a grand achievement’ (staff member A, Centre 1).

Weekly activities were mainly vocational or recreational, for example, spending a day playing putt-putt golf, lawn bowls and general shopping for a weekly barbeque. Community outings occurred every fortnight and clients chose the locations for these outings.

When asked to consider what parts of the program could include literacy activities, the two staff members suggested shopping, library, workplace health and safety, and cooking. Activities suggested were using computers, oral and written communication across a range of contexts, and reading. However, none of these activities were included in the program schedules in either Centre.

At Centre 2, the staff (manager and one other staff member) reported some specific aspects of their Centre and its program. Indoor bowling was a favourite regular activity and other regular community access activities included shopping, attending concerts, golf, lawn bowls and aged care. Art programs were also popular. Some clients accessed the community for work trials and two females attended work placement in hairdressing salons. The staff planned the activities to include 50% learning and 50% leisure. The manager reported that literacy was included for the purposes of obtaining funding. This Centre has a partnership with a TAFE college and two days per week TAFE staff attend during the school term to conduct sewing and woodwork classes with the clients. A competency-based assessment is used with the clients as per TAFE requirements.

Support staff encouraged the clients to choose their activities and set their own goals for activities each year. This frequently informed the program content, however the logistics of catering for individual choices was difficult to overcome. This process and the format of the day, which was similar to that of a school day, has been the same for 10 years.

The literacy interests of the clients comprised viewing TV programs such as *Prisoner*, watching sport, listening to music CDs and watching DVDs. With regard to watching TV programs, one staff member commented:

> We have five or six clients who are obsessed by *Prisoner*. It is a fun obsession for them. They realise it is a funny show because of the way things happen in it and they obviously realise it is not real. (staff member C, Centre 2)

To further the literacy aspects of the Centre, a play station was recently purchased. Staff reported: 'It is just fantastic. They get more exercise in front of that than they do at gym' (staff member B, Centre 2). The Centre used board games, bingo, measurement and reading recipes in the cooking program. Computers at the centre were also used for story writing. The clients usually typed their stories and 'just use lots of words'. One client had a particular interest in writing stories and wanted to publish them. When asked about the abilities of the clients in their Centre, interviewed staff reported that reading was one of the aspects of literacy to which clients were drawn. While staff considered their clients to be capable, independent, tolerant and sociable with each other, some problem behaviours were also observed.

Discussion

Findings from this study demonstrated that these clients in two community-based service facilities, who are well beyond school age, had an interest in literacy and its associated activities as well as a range of basic literacy skills that potentially could be developed. Their skills in reading, for example, based on the different forms of the *NARA* (1999) ranged from emergent to primary school levels of comprehension. In addition, interviews and writing samples revealed that these clients were interested in writing, and had reasons to write, demonstrating abilities to write independently about familiar topics and experiences that were relevant to them. These findings support those of previous research that older adults with intellectual disabilities are engaged in literacy activities and are enthusiastic and interested in improving their skills (Boulton-Lewis, Buys & Tedman-Jones 2008). However, literacy development and associated literacy activities were not highly valued in the programs offered at the Centres. Literacy was considered to be something that was useful to include at a rudimentary level (15 minutes per week), and as way to leverage external funding.

Evidence gathered from the environmental and literacy audits and interviews revealed that displays were above the literacy levels of the clients, disorganised and staff oriented. This represents a lost opportunity to create an environment where literacy is valued and accessible, and where clients can participate in activities that incorporate literacy within current programs. More explicit inclusion of literacy materials into current activities and into the environment, for example, by providing more accessible texts, would provide more opportunities for clients to share ideas, writing and experiences through use of existing displays and photo boards. These displays could potentially provide a ready opportunity for the clients to recall, read and write about the trip or event that could easily be integrated into the current program.

Staff in both Centres commented that they did not believe that their clients had many literacy skills and had low expectations for their development. For example, they recognised and acknowledged their clients' interests in literacy, but perpetuated the traditional view of life skills as being recreational and vocational.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that community-based organisations could be doing more within their current structures and programs to support the maintenance and development of literacy skills. For many years, the training of functional skills for independent living such as cooking and employment have dominated community programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities, with limited recognition of the role literacy can contribute to these programs and to quality of life through ongoing learning. This case study of one community-based service organisation has provided evidence that there are opportunities for community-based service providers to move beyond advocacy towards the introduction of literacy activities based on the needs and interests of learners that have the potential to enrich clients' experiences of community-based service organisations.

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Utopian scenario sketching: An imaginal pedagogy for life giving civilisation

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This paper argues that learning for human flourishing needs a balance between small-scale, convivial experiences, imaginary and creative expression, logical, rational planning and autonomous, purposive practices. It is the second one—imaginary and creative expression—which is particularly of interest in this paper. The focus is on the capacity of playful stories around relevant learning themes to promote informal adult learning and capacity building in community settings. Informal and non-formal learning programs in community settings can often engage reluctant and wounded people for whom the learning projects—language, health care, childcare and the like—are as necessary as they are difficult. People in community settings are often embarrassed, hesitant and nervous about being singled out and shamed. In these contexts, stories of learners—even fictional ones—seem at least sometimes to be able to create a kind of softening and optimistic experience, *engaging educator and learner in a playful yet insightful experience relevant to some of the actual learning projects in which people are attempting to engage.*

Introduction

Utopia was an imaginary place of human flourishing described in the book of the same name by Thomas More in 1516. The word continues in the meaning given here to refer to ideal human personal, social and biological circumstances which some adult and community educators have been concerned to promote, particularly in lean times of national obsession to promote learning exclusively for vocational purposes. I have been involved in designing learning projects promoting what has been called life giving civilisation against powerful entropic forces such as excessive competition, consumerism and philistinism.

In this paper, I want to explore the pedagogic leverage of *utopian scenario sketching* as one useful way to promote life giving civilisation as something satisfying and exciting to which people may aspire. This paper is linked to the educational project mentioned, entitled *Learning for a life giving civilisation*. It is an eclectic, aspirational and essentially unfinished project which seeks to identify and promote ways to promote learning for a compassionate and humanistic civilisation. This humanistic quality is referred to here as 'life giving', following and considerably modifying an idea from Kenneth Clarke (1969) in his TV series on Civilisation.

In a previous paper (Willis 2010), I spoke of how a form of narrative pedagogy could be useful in evoking human compassion and justice. I spoke of prophetic confronting stories, here referred to as *compunction narratives*, and their capacity to precipitate critical and compassionate self-reflection. This time the narrative approach concerns *scenario sketching* in the context of promoting a life giving civilisation. It is more upbeat, more concerned with beneficial possibilities. It seeks to complement the need for struggle in the face of weakness and wrong doing.

According to John Armstrong (2010: 4), the many meanings of civilization can be clustered around four general characteristics of a society: firstly, its common values and manners; secondly, its economic, political and technological systems; thirdly, the way it cultivates refinement in aesthetic and sensual pursuits; and finally, its intellectual and artistic excellence. A humanistic version of these four elements of civilisation, promoted by Armstrong but not directly articulated as such, emerges as: *inclusive belonging, life giving material progress, artful and courteous living and spiritual prosperity*. The life giving version of civilisation proposed here seeks largely to promote John Armstrong's humanistic ideal, but modifying a possible tendency to aesthetic coolness and detachment by compassionate practices built around empathy and the golden rule as developed by Karen Armstrong (2009) and grounded in creative action as explained by David Gauntlett (2011) in his book, *Making is connecting*.

In his recent review of Niall Ferguson's book and TV series, *Civilisation—the West and the Rest*, William Charles (2011: 26) cites Ferguson's suggestion that six factors gave Western civilisation a competitive advantage over other civilisations: *dynamic competition, science, property rights and the rule of law, medicine, the consumer society and the work ethic*. The life giving civilisation project pursued here wants to infuse the achievement concerns embedded in these elements with courtesy, collaboration, kindness and 'soul' while seeking to avoid too much sentimentality and insularity.

The life giving civilisation project seeks to inform all elements of human living, which can be seen to have seven general areas of human action that often overlap in practice. They are: clarification of ideas and ideals; communication; production and distribution;

power and authority; technology and making; ecology and wellbeing; and expressive and aesthetic activities. Each of these activities can be informed by all kinds of agendas depending on the dispositions of those involved. The cultivation of a disposition towards life giving civilisation is the agenda of this project using a form of imaginal pedagogy called *scenario sketching*. Imaginal pedagogy and its link to mythopoetic knowing is discussed below.

The educational processes evolving in the life giving civilisation project seek to involve the whole gamut of human personal and social life. Building on an interpretation of Heron's (1992) fourfold notion of the knowing process, educators are invited to develop processes which acknowledge, evoke and balance four modes of knowing and learning which are envisaged as following each other in human personal and social life: awakeness, image awareness, analysis and praxis. Building on these four modes the educational processes of life giving civilisation need to evoke four voices:

- The voice of awakeness and connection: *mindful knowing*, listening, tasting and feeling. It invites learners to ask the questions: What is it like? How does it make you feel?
- The voice of image awareness and gut reaction: *imaginal knowing*, dwelling on. It invites learners to ask the questions: What does it remind you of? What images come into your heart and mind at this time?
- The voice of critical inquiry: *logical, rational knowing*, logic, classifying. It invites learners to ask the questions: What kind of thing is it? What caused it? What laws govern its activities?
- The voice of deliberate reflective action: *empirical, action knowing*, science, or groundedness. It invites learners to ask the questions: What happened when I did what I decided to do? How will I proceed if I choose to act to achieve a similar outcome again?

In direct application to the required learning implicit in the life giving civilisation project, the fourfold pedagogy of this project begins with *evoked awakeness*, around foundational acts of life giving civilisation that can be felt in greeting, cooking, eating, making, playing, dancing and so on, and the many bodily and physical acts of civilised life. The second, which is of direct interest in this paper, is *imaginal pedagogy* implemented in invited mythopoetic contemplation and creative expression through rituals and stories of life giving civilisation. The third, the critical pedagogic approach, invites *analytical and logical reflection and dialogue* around ways of examining, classifying and regulating the necessary choices and interactions of a life giving civilisation. The fourth is *empirical pedagogy*. It involves inviting learners to take compassionate and courteous action required to build a life giving civilisation.

Imaginal pedagogy, the second approach, can be seen as highlighting the existential foundation of choices for a life giving civilisation since it is understood to be the hidden seat of human visions and desires, the imaginal arena discussed below. Narrative approaches are seen here as a useful pedagogic strategy to arouse this part of the human heart and mind. It underpins the *scenario sketching* pedagogy which is implicit in the stories about 'messing about in boats' and 'banging about in sheds' which are discussed later in this paper. The following section develops ideas from my earlier writings (Willis 2010, 2011).

Imaginal pedagogies

Imaginal pedagogy in images, confrontations and scenarios avoids attempting directly to instruct learners or even to make a case for some desirable policy or practice. Imaginal pedagogy focuses on 'evocation', creating resonances in the imagination. One of its major vehicles is stories. Frank (2000: 354) suggests that narrative is a more abstract term for the structure of a story rather than its full reality which is contained in the idea of story. According to Rappaport (1995: 803),

> Stories [in everyday language use] are descriptions of events over time. They usually have a beginning, a middle and an end. They usually have main and secondary characters. They usually have a point.

Bochner (2002: 80), following Rappaport, suggests that stories have a number of common elements: people are represented as *characters* in the action, there is some kind of *plot,* things and events are placed in temporal order and there is some kind of *point*. Baumeister and Newman (1994: 679) focus on this last element—the point. They distinguished two general categories of agenda: firstly, *affecting* listeners in some way and, secondly, *making sense* of experiences.

Imaginal stories

Stories used in narrative imaginal pedagogy tend to have features of both agendas: affecting and making meaning but, as will be pointed out briefly below, with a strong mythopoetic character in the kinds of affect and meaning being evoked. This is the first element. The stories of narrative imaginal pedagogy need to resonate with great 'mythic' themes in human life like birth and love, forgiveness and death. In doing this, they contribute to the mythopoetic agenda by which people become aware of the myths that they are living by and their links to the great myths of their culture. Stories in narrative imaginal pedagogy need to carry a certain *gravitas* as contributing to mythopoetic life, and such imaginal stories, when used in mythopoetic pedagogy, need to be told with great unction and credibility, seeking a deep heartfelt response.

A second element is *appropriate literary artistry*. The audience has to feel and be caught up in the invitational undertones of different kinds of imagery and media. (cf. Willis 2005).

A third element is *dramatic form*. The imaginal pedagogic narrative with its tacit contradictions is given aesthetic strength by music and poetry and drama. Dramatised stories were used by August Boal (1992, 1995) and collaborators in his work on the 'drama of the oppressed' which were highly mythopoetic and challenging.

A related fourth element is *delayed and dramatic denouement*. Narrative imaginal pedagogy seeks to create dramatic tension and delayed resolution of the themes and plots at play in the story being told. As Hamlet (Hamlet Act 2, Scene 2) said, in an aside to the audience before the performance of a play to be performed for the royal court which he had modified for his imaginal agenda: 'The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King'.

Imaginal stories: Compunction engaging & scenario sketching

Imaginal pedagogy draws on the work of James Hillman (1981), James Macdonald (1995) and Jamie Bradbeer (1998). It uses images and stories by which learners are invited to put themselves in various ways into an imagined world. While some of these are full of playful fantasy, others can have an important task when learners are invited to become part of the story and open to its discoveries and feelings.

Some of these can be linked to *compunction*, when people are invited to dwell with focused imagination on the feelings and fears of others. This is one of the generators of empathy and is of considerable interest in building compassion. In an earlier paper (Willis 2010), I recalled how in the Bible, the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 11) used his imaginal talent to tell a story of cruelty to touch the heart of the kindly, passionate and wayward King David and bring him to acknowledge and repent of his wrong-doing. Nathan's pedagogic strategy is referred to here as a *compunction narrative*.

Another way that narrative can be used is to sketch interesting scenarios which engage the imagination of the learners, not so much with empathetic feelings for the characters in the story, but rather in the set of social and ecological arrangements that respond to longings for a particular way of life. The narrative pedagogy using this approach can be called *scenario sketching*.

Over a few years during and after the Second World War, Thomas Merton, the poetic monk, wrote in his autobiography, *Elected silence* (Merton 1948), of his attraction to the monastic life. What he described so evocatively was his mythopoetic feelings and 'gut' reactions to the social and architectural environment of the monastery, its ceremonies and rhythmic activities. Many young men, particularly returned soldiers, were caught up in the scenario of peace and deep meaning he sketched and entered the monastery enchanted by the imaginal scenario created in their minds and hearts. In the following years, other forms of reflection came up against the imaginal scenario that had precipitated their desire to join the monastery. This was the 'awareness knowing', the first and most elemental level of Heron's four modes. Some monks began to notice what the monastic life was like for them as an actual lived experience and as an environment for their actual personalities and style. Some discovered at that level that they were not suited for a permanent monastic life and returned to other life pursuits. Others, like Merton, stayed and contributed to the monastic life in its adjustments to and dialogue with the modern world.

The point being made here is that, without scenario building, not much happens to people for whom the imagination with all its power is one of the main sources of human enthusiasm. The other three forms of knowing, awakeness knowing, critical reflection and empirical action, provide three significant cautionary frames which protect people from too many wild goose-chases, but so much human action and enterprise seems to begin in the second form, mythopoetic imagining. It seems to be the raw engine room of human action in feelings of desire, love, hatred and compassion so often generated by different kinds of scenario building, as the advertising and public relations industry amply demonstrates.

The suggestion of this paper is that educational projects inviting action for a life giving civilisation can be enriched by evocative scenario sketches of the creation and recreating of elements of a desirable civilisation. Examples of this are the forward scenario sketches, called here *Messing about in boats* and *Banging about in sheds.*

Messing about in boats concerns the adventures of social living in natural environments with the tacit interest in the convivial dimension of life giving civilisation. B*anging about in sheds* tells stories of the adventures of making useful and decorative things from physical materials like wood, stone, metal and plastic. This is highlighted as a key factor in the embodied and grounded 'making' side of a life giving civilisation.

Scenario sketching for a life giving civilisation

Messing about in boats

'Messing about in boats' is a phrase spoken with satisfaction by the urbane and worldly Rat the water rat, to the similarly eponymous Mole. Mole and Rat are significant players in *The wind in the willows,* Kenneth Grahame's classic fantasy (1908) of the life of a group of anthropomorphic animals in rural England. This springtime story, which is half parable and half fantasy, tells of an informal learning journey (almost an informal pilgrimage) that the ordered and solitary Mole pursues when fed up with his predictable and comfortable life. Lured by the smells and sights of the new life of spring, he leaves the comfort of his snug burrow in search of adventure. He is prepared to have a go at new activities and take on the related physical skills required like rowing and roughhousing with the cunning stoats. He is also very good at maintaining his friendships in kindness and service and is not afraid to seek advice and explanation for mysterious life events hitherto unknown to him.

Besides creating a kindly and interesting world, elements of adult learning, the fear of being laughed at or excluded can all be seen in this endearing, playful story and can perhaps indirectly encourage reluctant learners. In inviting learning, educators can assist with such encouraging ‘readings’ of Mole and Rat and their companions.

Messing about in boats in the story is about people learning to get along, while living very simply and not really setting goals or being concerned much about achieving things. The point is appreciating, getting along, rejoicing and appreciating the moment. The rhythm seems to be that one protagonist, usually the flamboyant and erratic Toad, has an adventure in which he needs to be rescued; he is joined by collaborators who enter into the critical moment with support and friendly critique. There is some kind of resolution, followed by the return to companionability: eating and chatting together in the warmth of home.

The general style of *The wind in the willows* has people living together and fitting into a somewhat cultivated ‘nature’ distinct from the ‘wild wood’. There is an ecological accepting and celebrating of what is in the present moment. It is about playing and letting go. It foregrounds the value, importance and challenges of a courteous and kindly human social culture. All the elements of such compassionate and civilised social interaction are given an airing in the whimsy and elegance of these tales. Mole, the key character, is by far the least pushy. He is the one who benefits from and enriches the friendship and comradeship of his fellows in his capacity to share and to listen, to appreciate and to rejoice. He is the respectful appreciator, with an endearing sense of unworthiness, who is agreeably surprised when he is accepted and welcomed into the group initially as a friend of Ratty and later in his own right as his courtesy and forbearance, his accepting and open character and his dogged courage is revealed.

A few years ago, I attended a conference in England in July and visited a friend on my way back to Australia. I was invited to a picnic with a group of friends near a river in Sussex. I was unaware of the finesse that shaped and ordered the waterways in southern England and was enchanted to find that our picnic site was near a weir with a side channel to cater for potential overflow and to channel off water to surrounding fields. The greenery, the dappled light around our picnic site and the different sounds of falling water from the weir and overflow channel created a gentle framing for our conviviality. It is the imaginal leverage of revealed beauty and conviviality to encourage emulation. I remember looking about the reeds at the bank of the river in case Mole or Rat were nearby in their boat. Here were images and messages of the infectious joy of a simple coming together in a beautiful spot that could be dwelt on and promoted with the right kind of pedagogy. I realised that, in the spirit of Rat and Mole and their friends close and less close, we were reproducing a few evocative moments of life giving civilisation in the company of our friends and acquaintances in much the same way.

Banging about in sheds

'Banging about in sheds' is a term I have coined to refer to stories written about people who make things alone or together with others of like interest. Most of the people in this narrative are older men and most of the action takes place in sheds. One of the main storytellers around this agenda is South Australian, Mark Thomson, Research Director of the 'Institute for Backyard Studies', author of *The complete blokes and sheds* (2002), *Rare trades* (2002), *Makers, Breakers and Fixers* (2007) as well as a couple of books concerning the shadowy figure of Henry Hoke (2007). Besides his own storytelling gift, which could be called a modern version of the Australian Bush Yarn popularly linked to Henry Lawson, he also has the enviable talent of the adventure writer. He is 'onto something' and takes the reader with him on his narrative quest for shed understanding and illumination.

‘Banging about in sheds’ is about making things: different materials, functional tools, shapes and beautiful things. It is about a very fundamental notion of instrumental culture—of making and shaping the world. The general theme of Thomson’s stories is the human value of making and improvising, and the importance of human creativity. He tells the story of his journeys into the world of men’s sheds where enthusiastic amateurs and craftspeople had found places where they could ply their trade, indulge their human desire to make things, to understand how things worked, to fix things, to invent things. Thomson’s books are full of black and white pictures of gnarled men and their friends and family, the textures of their ‘making spaces’, their tools, their improvisation from wire and left over parts of other things pressed into a new life, their endless ‘works in progress’ and their occasional gleaming finished items.

There is in these scenario sketches, a respectful and joyful attention to human potential and actuality—what people can do with the resources at their disposal: creating, making, improvising using tools, skills, precision, style, design. Thomson’s stories speak of shed work as solitary and then as a kind of freemasonry of makers and their designated sheds where they work on their projects, meet friends, eat and drink and converse and laugh. His text is straightforward, often with the cadence of the many conversations with shed people he meets and illuminated with powerful photographs of the people, their sheds, friends and activities. The photo story books bring the richness and attraction of shed culture to life. It seemed to me that these books could act as a kind of evocative scenario sketches—ways of creating the convivial ‘making’ elements of a life giving civilisation.

The final question is to explore ways in which the evocative potential of these scenario building narratives can be realised and so build up interest in and commitment to the ideal of life giving civilisation. Allowing for their structure as scenario sketches aimed at creating imaginal learning, the reading and presentation of these stories needs an attentive mythopoetic attention. This can be called ‘listening reading’, where the tendency to de-construct is resisted, the story is asked to speak for itself and the listeners are present and ready to be taken into the story-teller’s world.

Listening reading: Dwelling in the story

The imaginal pedagogy in story-telling involves the story-teller and their story and, significantly, the attentive listening readers. Joel Magarey, author of the journey narrative *Exposure,* felt his words had not been rendered alive until affirmed by the reading and response of Penny his lover and muse. He writes (2009: 183):

> As I imagine myself saying the words to Penny, they seem to gain the significance I want them to have, as if only when I tell her of these solitary experiences will they come to truly exist.

Such ‘listening’ reading allows the author to speak to the imagination and the heart. It is not a substitute for a cool and more critical reading, but it can be an aesthetic source of precious enrichment. It can be the warm flesh on the bones of the human search for wisdom and truth, making the quest more desirable as well as more convincing.

In her recent book on the reading she pursued while living with illness and its disruptive treatment, Brenda Walker (2010) remembers a special kind of reading she did at university with her kindly tutor when she was nineteen. When they were reading Beckett, her tutor encouraged her to be attuned to his voice and the story he was telling to avoid too early analytical and deconstructive critical ‘readings’. Such variations in reading were highlighted nearly half a century ago by Georges Poulet, who suggested in his book *The phenomenology of reading* (1969: 54) that, in reading, he was

> … aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the one I automatically assume in every human being I encounter, except that in this case the

> consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard of licence, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels.

As readers connect with the ideas and images contained in imagistic scenario writing, they can surrender to the parallel possible and inviting world opening up before them, dwelling in this world and allowing themselves to become imaginally present to its narrative and images.

Mythopoetic reading was pursued in the so-called ‘lectio divina’ of the Christian monks who spent time each day slowly reading the bible and other sacred texts seeking to become what could be called ‘mythopoetically attuned’ to the sacred images and their link with the heart. The logical rational mode of knowing was deliberately avoided in this ‘listening’ reading.

This imaginal mode can have a light or deep version. In the light version which can be called diversionary reading (or even airport reading), readers allow themselves to enter light-heartedly into an imaginary world without dwelling too much on the significance of the images being evoked. Crime novels and some sentimental romance writing have often been read in this way, where there is a suspension of disbelief and the enjoyment of a kind of light and undemanding pleasure. In a deeper and more mythopoetic reading, readers seek not to be diverted but mythically awakened. The word ‘myth’ here does not mean ‘untrue’, but rather ‘resonative with significant and archetypal images’ in the deep part of the psyche linked to powerful longings, fears and desires. This can be the reading of the attentive heart, or ‘listening reading’, by which the reader is *heart-struck* by being led into self-confrontation or *enchanted* by an evocative scenario, such as in *The wind in the willows* and *The complete blokes and sheds,* which has been under consideration in this paper. To get from enchantment back to the ground of real life and its demands is another challenge and the enchanted reader, in this holistic pedagogy, can be invited to create a story in reply, a so-called back story.

Back stories: The listener's reflective story of reception

Not all writers are concerned with the texture and intrinsic meaning of stories. Nor are they concerned only with the evocative ways stories that might impact powerfully on listeners/readers. McKillop (2005) is interested in them as what he calls a reflective tool. In this case, the story telling process is used by people to reflect on aspects of their life, to shape and modify future action. In the life giving civilisation project, reflective story telling emerges as a key process as a way for citizens, who are surrounded by media encouraging them to consume passively, to become back story tellers, to tell their own stories. Some back stories appear on internet sites where consumers of a product or service tell the story of their experience of this product. This has significant relevance to the civilisation project, since the learning project involves people adopting a particular life stance beginning with the dreams and ideals of their imagination and moving into the more critical and grounded modes of applied thinking. Back stories can begin with enchantment but need to integrate a whole array of learning since, while the original story can get earth-bound listeners to take flight in enchantment, the back story carries a narrative of grounding when the excitement of enchanted possibility is brought down to earth. In a world saturated by imaginal agendas in advertising and public relations' spin, the back story becomes a key role in validating the imaginal curriculum in scenario sketching and providing a useful link in the pedagogy for a life giving civilisation.

Conclusion

In seeking to promote life giving civilisation, there can be many educational approaches. This paper has been an attempt to reflect on the pedagogic power of *scenario sketching* aimed specifically at the second, or mythopoetic part, of Heron's fourfold matrix of human knowing and learning. The strategy, which is hardly new, is to use such evocative scenario narratives to create a mood of interest and aspiration. This evoked enthusiasm is envisaged as a foundation for developing other necessary dimensions of learning for life giving civilisation. Its almost feral power (after all, imaginal reflection deals directly with images, desires and passions rather than commonsense) needs to be directed by rational critique and measured deliberate action, hopefully retaining some of the power of its enchantment. As a learning reflection, 'back stories' are a useful way to complete the pedagogic cycle when the learners in the life giving civilisation project write their own learning and action story which hopefully finds its way into the working annals of the life giving civilisation project.

The universal appeal in many countries of narrative approaches to reflection and pedagogic action may well give the approach some validity in cross-cultural and cross-national settings. With so many narrative inputs shaping Australian culture from America, Europe and England, it will be good if the thoughts and imaginal processes in this paper might see some uptake in other countries. I suspect this will already have occurred, perhaps under different processes and names. Story telling in its *compunction precipitation* and *scenario building* versions seems as old as human culture, and it is good to re-visit its power and majesty and of course its limits in the work of holistic pedagogy for a life giving civilisation.

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Learning to manage: Transformative outcomes of competency-based training

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Transformative learning theory is a dominant approach to understanding adult learning. The theory addresses the way our perspectives on the world, others and ourselves can be challenged and transformed in our ongoing efforts to make sense of the world. It is a conception of learning that does not focus on the measurable acquisition of knowledge and skills, but looks rather to the dynamics of self-questioning and upheaval as the key to adult learning. In this article, transformative learning theory is used as a lens for studying learning in a competency-based, entry-level management course. Instead of asking which knowledge and skills were developed and how effectively, the research enquired into deeper changes wrought by the learning experiences. The research found that for some learners the course contributed to significant discontent as they discovered that management practices they took to represent the norm fell dramatically short of the model promoted in the training.

Introduction

This article presents research into a vocational education and training (VET) program which used the concepts of transformative learning theory to analyse the process and outcomes of learning. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1991) proposes that a change in an adult's 'perspective' on some part of their life and world can be regarded as a form of learning. This conception of learning contrasts with the more common understanding of learning as the acquisition of new knowledge or skills. Rather than focusing on the process by which knowledge and skills are added to a learner's stock of abilities and memories, or measuring how extensive or effective this process of addition has actually been, transformative learning theory looks at the nature of the learner's way of viewing, interrelating, valuing and anticipating experience and the dynamics of the process by which these 'meaning perspectives' can come under challenge, destabilise and transform. This research involved the study of an entry-level management course to see whether transformative learning occurred in it, and one of the questions pursued was, if transformative learning took place, how did the program contribute to the change? Thus the research was not asking about what knowledge or skills were successfully transmitted through the program, or to what standard or how efficiently, but how learners' outlooks, assumptions and expectations changed as a result of their experiences in the program. The research was concerned to identify challenges which threatened learners' worldviews and any processes of critical self-questioning that ensued, and to explore psychological upheavals that may have followed. While the research did not set out to evaluate the program or the model of competency-based training underpinning it, the experiences of the learners raises some questions about the VET context.

Theoretical framework

The concepts of transformative learning that have been introduced so far—the ideas of meaning perspectives and learning as a potentially tumultuous transformation of perspectives—come from the work of Jack Mezirow, an adult education researcher and theorist who introduced his theory in the mid-1970s. Mezirow and a team of researchers investigated the learning of women who returned to education and study after a break from formal education. Using a grounded theory approach, they compared the accounts of students in a large number of re-entry programs and found that many reported experiences which followed these phases:

- a disorienting dilemma;
- self examination;
- a critical assessment of sex-role assumptions and a sense of alienation from taken-for-granted social roles and expectations;
- relating one's discontent to a current public issue;
- exploring options for new ways of living;
- building competence and self-confidence in new roles;
- planning a course of action and acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
- provisional efforts to try new roles; and
- a re-integration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective. (Mezirow 1978:12)

For Mezirow (1978), this uncomfortable and sometimes painful process was symptomatic of 'meaning perspective transformation.' He (1978: 11) explained that a meaning perspective is:

> ... the structure of psychocultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated to past experience. It is a way of seeing yourself and your relationships. More than that, it establishes the criteria that determine what you will experience—criteria

> for identifying what you will find interesting, for deciding which problems are of concern to you, for determining what you are prepared to learn and from whom, for determining values, for setting priorities for action, and for defining the meaning and direction of self-fulfillment and personal success.

Mezirow (1978) claims that learning in childhood involves the formation of these meaning perspectives, a process through which we are socialised into the values and roles of our society. By adulthood, our perspectives are well-established. However, according to Mezirow (1991), the perspectives we develop, which allow us to structure, comprehend and simplify the complexities of experience, can also serve to limit or distort the world. Although it is possible for us to live in ignorance of the flaws in our perspectives or defend our worldview in various ways, sometimes new experiences force attention on a problem with our basic assumptions and thereby expose our perspectives as limited or distorted in some way. Experiences like this may bring a 'disorienting dilemma' in their wake, triggering self-examination and critical assessment of our taken-for-granted foundation in the world. Mezirow (1978) emphasised the disturbance and upheaval that attended this process in many of the participants. Because one's assumptions, social roles and expectations are closely bound up with our identity, any challenge to these 'meaning structures' could well be disconcerting, and forming the realisation that our own assumptions are in some way limited or flawed might entail confusion and self doubt.

Mezirow's theory of adult learning has been enormously influential in the field of adult education. According to Taylor (2007), transformative learning theory has displaced Knowles' notion of andragogy as the dominant paradigm in the field. By 2009 (when the data presented in this paper were collected), a wide range of philosophical positions were represented in debates about transformative learning, including feminism (e.g. Belenky & Stanton 2000), critical theory (e.g. Wilson & Kiely 2002) and poststructuralism (e.g. Tennant 2005). Empirical research had been undertaken in a wide range of adult learning contexts, including social movements (e.g. McDonald, Cervero & Courtenay 1999), community learning (e.g. Bennetts 2003), health (e.g. Fair 2006) and professional development (e.g. Cranton & King 2003). Management development has been another setting for this kind of research. A survey of this work reveals that transformative learning proves a useful way to comprehend the dynamics of learning and change in an environment where assumptions and perspectives can be as important for success as the possession of particular skills and knowledge (Gray 2006; Elkins 2003; Carter 2002). However, most of this research addressed senior management and themes such as coaching, leadership development and business strategy. Basic management training has not been the object of transformative learning research.

Another field that has not been the scene of extensive transformative learning research is VET, especially Australian VET. In my research, which attempted to address this gap, I sought and examined experiences of meaning perspective transformation in VET. I was interested in the kinds of challenges thrown up by a management program—in terms of both curriculum content and organisation and pedagogic practice—and how learners came to terms with these challenges. I was also interested in whether transformative experiences contributed to vocational outcomes. I found that the management program produced challenges for a number of the participants that initiated phases of the transformative process such as disorientation and self-questioning with direct consequences for their understanding of management and, for some at least, their career trajectories.

The management program case

The management program was run on a part-time basis over several weeks in the training rooms of the provider. The course participants came from a wide range of business types and nine of the ten course participants were sponsored by their employers. Eight of them agreed to participate in interviews for this research after completing a survey on the last day of their course which solicited information from participants including whether they had experienced challenges, discomfort and self-examination and if they had experimented with new roles as a result. The questionnaire was adapted from an instrument developed by King (1997) who used it over a number of studies to explore perspective transformation in the context of formal learning. The survey indicated that of the 10 respondents, six had the kinds of experiences that indicate transformative learning and of these six, five were among the eight who consented to a follow-up interview. These interviews, conducted two to three months after completing the course, followed a semi-structured format that included asking participants to reflect on some of their responses to the survey, expanding on any indications of challenge, discomfort or self-questioning, and exploring their experiences since the survey. I also interviewed trainers who facilitated the program about their approaches to training, and whether they had witnessed any signs of discomfort or self-questioning in program participants.

Seven of the eight learners who participated in the interviews disclosed that the program precipitated profound reflections about the nature of management practice and the particular practices they witnessed in their workplace. One of these learners, a newly appointed manager in a community services organisation, offered the following reflection on the challenges posed by the course:

> I suppose the course really made me realise that I can only be a good manager if I have the staff on my side, so the way I see it is: the better I can motivate staff and get them to sort of pull in the direction, the easier my job as a manager will be—and that is something that wasn't really clear to me. For instance, how important it is to delegate and to develop staff, and give them

> training opportunities, and all these things were not clear to me and they are clearer now.
>
> *So what sort of approach to management did you take before the course?*
>
> Probably much more assertive and forceful rather than cooperative and consultative—because it is not normally my style, because I prefer to 'work along'. I absolutely dislike any kind of team work. I only do it if I absolutely have to and unfortunately in this role, managing staff is part of it and the part I really enjoy least of all. So the course really gave me some simple tools of going through the motions and managing staff in a more professional way than I would otherwise have ... I probably thought managing people is getting them to do what you want, full-stop, no matter what, whereas now I am more inclined to give individual people an opportunity to have input and steer them rather than direct them which doesn't come naturally but it seems to work better.

This learner's account reveals that the program confronted her with a model of management that 'made sense' and at the same time presented a clear contrast with her existing perceptions of sound management practice. By the time I interviewed her, she said she was becoming more adept at collaborative decision-making and fostering worker autonomy. Her account also faithfully reflects the message the trainers each insisted the course promoted. One of them articulated the kind of changes the course was designed to promote:

> The mindset of a good, effective manager. They have got empathy with human beings. They understand that the only way to get results is working with people rather than pushing them. There can be lots of 'effective' managers who get things done, but they push people and they ruin people in the process. So a good, effective manager would be one who gets things done, but they do it through using good human relations intervention ... Another value they might have is that they can't achieve things on their own. They are in fact dependent on workers.

Another trainer explained that a good manager is:

> … someone who wants to develop their people and create a motivating environment so their people can really work effectively and want to be at work and enjoy achieving their own particular roles so that to me—mind you, it is hard to find a lot of those people—but that, to me, is what a good manager is: [someone] who is concerned as much about leading their people, setting them in a direction and helping them develop and realise their own potential, as ensuring that all the systems are in place, that the budgets have been achieved, all those what I call 'things'.

It might be expected that the experience articulated above by one of the program participants would be typical of the challenges to participant assumptions. In other words, the message that management should be about—collaboration and worker empowerment to achieve team and organisation objectives—might be expected to pose a challenge to assumptions about management held by the learners, and that any subsequent perspective transformation would revolve around the learner coming to terms with the task of adopting a new approach to management practice. However, most of the interviewees revealed a different kind of struggle prompted by their learning. What most of the interviewees related was that, when they became aware of the implications of the model of management promoted in the program, they realised that the practice of their own managers and/or the management culture of their organisations was actually in conflict with it. The 'disorienting dilemma' was between the management practice in their workplaces and the model of practice they were studying in the course. 'Self examination' and 'critical assessment of assumptions' addressed not only their own ideas about management, but also their relationship to management in their organisations and their feelings of loyalty and gratitude to management for sponsoring their participation in the course (with the implication that they were thereby destined to join that particular community of practice).

One statement that captures the tenor of most of the learner interviews came from a team leader in a large construction company. He said, ‘I wish my manager was at the course… He should have done this course a long time ago’. Later, when I spoke to the course trainers, they disclosed that this kind of statement is one of the most common responses written on their course evaluation forms. I should mention that most of the interviewees were quite cautious about how they expressed their discontent. Although I had assured them that their responses would remain confidential, I nevertheless detected resistance to opening up about why they felt the course was challenging. One participant from a major financial institution was more forthcoming than most. She explained that:

> The company I worked for was very, very large—3,500 employees—so there was lots of different areas in the company and I have worked in several areas of the company. The area I was working in last made me realise that there are a lot of managers out there who don’t care about the people. They just care about getting things done and that is one of the things that [were] highlighted to me by the course. Because I had worked in other areas of the company where the managers were really good, they treated their staff really well, things like that, we didn’t really think about those kinds of things, so coming up to being a manager or a supervisor or getting into team leader roles and going off and doing this course, really made me realise that I have had a lot of good managers in the past, but there is also a lot of horrible people out there who just don’t care about the people and I ended up being one of those people that suffered because of that.

This management trainee, who entered the course as a team leader, had left the organisation by the time of our interview. She told me that the course triggered her final decision, and she also drew strength from conversations with other students in the course who drew her attention to the fact that managers, particularly in some kinds of business, frequently move between organisations. This learner was in the process of settling into a team leader role in a new company and remarked on the contrast between management practices at her old workplace and the new.

Another course participant I spoke to had left his position and was also thriving in a new organisation in a management role. This learner had come to Australia in recent years, and explained that management practices in his country of birth were ‘authoritarian’. He believed that this background led him to accept management practices in the workplace of his former employer, the state headquarters of a retailer. He described the experience in the course he felt had triggered his reflections on management in his workplace:

> In a session on customer service, seeing a video about how people treat each other (internal customers) in the workplace made me understand how these poor service situations arise and why it is important to change [and] combat this in the workplace.

He realised that the customer service model was something that should apply within the workplace as well as to external customers. It seems from that point on, he became more and more aware that the dominant approach to management in his workplace was at odds with the model studied in the course. He specifically concluded that management in his former workplace was limiting the potential of not only him, but the business as a whole, and he felt justified leaving the organisation as a result.

Another two students, including the one who asserted that his manager should be part of the course, were currently looking for other positions. In their cases as well, the message about management promoted in the course (as well as the networking opportunities created through contact with other students) contributed to their current course of action.

During my interviews with the trainers, I asked about their own role in ‘challenging’ the learners to think critically about management practices. All were clear that management trainers should *not* be challenging their students in this way, one declaring that to do so would be ‘immoral’. However, one of the trainers raised the issue of values, and explained to me that participation in the course may serve to clarify learners’ values, which in turn could lead them to question the values of their organisations, particularly the values of management. As I probed him about his own role in clarifying the values of his students, he revealed that:

> I still have some reservations as to how far I would go to encourage them to reflect on their own values viz-a-viz their organisation and to then assess their organisation, because again I feel that that is not my role as the facilitator …

He added that if the opportunity arose,

> … what I would certainly be doing more is working with them in almost a practical exercise of really working out—are the values formalised in their organisation? If not, let’s have a go at it. Let’s go back in the organisation and do *a, b, c,* - work with your Chief Executive and ask can you do this and then put into practice getting those values identified and then starting to get them to do things that demonstrate the values and practice, because there is lots of things they can do and it would evolve in the course what they are doing … They love that approach and [to] be given that opportunity to do that. I believe that, as result of doing that, they will be challenging their organisation’s values and measuring them against their own values. I just believe that is a natural thing that will come out of it and the fact that I have given a demonstration of how positive that can be—where they are aligned with the individual and where people who were prepared to share that with the organisation, so that is a real maturity practising of the values. By giving them the positive, then I am sure they can see whether that can ever be happening in an organisation or not, therefore they would be evaluating, assessing where do they go from here. But for me to be saying ‘you have to really work out whether you are a round peg in a round hole’—I am just wondering if that is overstepping the mark.

> *You see it as desirable that at some point a learner questions their own values in relation to the organisation, but you don't think that is your role to directly challenge?*
>
> I would say personally that is where I am coming from. But again, I don't tell them the challenge—but they do challenge, and they share with me their challenge and I will discuss it with them… but I know where the end point usually ends up. They leave the organisation and it happens. I am very wary of that outcome because their personal challenge gets to the point where they become frustrated with their organisation and then they are in turmoil and they think the only thing they can do is leave and they do, so I am a bit worried… I seem to be a precursor to people changing their jobs because they hear about how it can work, how positive it can be with real examples that I can give them, and they can't see it happening in their own organisation and they leave. Therefore, coming back as a representative of [the training provider], I would hate to be accused by the organisations who are paying for their participants to come to setting them up to get into this turmoil and this challenge, but I know they will over time but then I can't be accused of encouraging them to do it.

Discussion

This case study of a management program approached learning processes and outcomes from the point of view of transformative learning theory. The research focused on challenges, discomfort, self-reflection and role experimentation in accordance with the phases of meaning perspective transformation articulated by Mezirow (1978, 1991). What this research found was that a majority of course participants experienced one or more of the phases of transformative learning. In itself, this result may be expected in a course focused on human relationships and the dynamics of cooperation to achieve collective goals. In terms of transformative learning theory and the body of research and knowledge that has grown up around it in the past three decades, the impact of the management program on participants makes a good deal of sense. However, from the point of view of the purposes of VET, the findings from the case study are disturbing and raise at least two important issues: the relationship between 'industry standards' and industry practice in the context of VET, and the practice of training individuals when the process can lead to a mismatch between the student's skills and knowledge and those of staff back in the workplace.

With respect to the first issue, the very interesting matter arises of the potential for a split between how an industry might wish to portray its essential competencies and associated standards, and how things actually are or can be done in the industry. Of course, critics of the competency-based approach have, from the earliest days of the training reform era in Australia, cast doubt on the extent to which a competency-based curriculum can faithfully represent competent practice in actual work roles (e.g. Stevenson 1992; Chappell, Gonczi & Hagar 2000; Buchanan et al. 2009), while advocates of the approach concede that the model is in need of further refinement (Guthrie 2010). Any split between competency standards and industry practice might simply indicate a wide diversity of practice in an occupational area. Obviously, the development and expression of competency standards is a process committed to minimising ambiguity and promoting a unified image of a practice. It follows that, if a practice area like management actually comprises a greater variety of specific practices than can be encompassed in the statement of a competency standard, then some disconnection between the standards and practice in at least some parts of the field would be expected. On the other hand, if in addition to management practice there is a distinct rhetoric about management, it may be that the process of competency standard formulation has succeeded in translating the rhetorical representation of the practice rather than the practice itself. Another possibility is that the 'split' reveals rather a limitation of the competency-based approach to curriculum itself. It may be that a competency-based approach is inherently more appropriate to rendering technical skills and knowledge than in practice areas which involve psychologically and ethically complex work with humans. It would follow that such areas will be more difficult to codify in unambiguous terms, a difficulty that could account for either of the first two possibilities.

A cursory glance at the history of the management curriculum in Australian VET points to yet another way of interpreting the tension between competency standards and actual practice experienced by the learners. This history, which begins in the turbulent dawn of the Australian training reform era, shows that one of the very first curriculum areas to be reformed was management training. Early documents, such as the government paper, *Industry training in Australia: The need for change* (DEET 1988), were critical of industry support for learning, and suggested that management attitudes toward training contributed to the situation. A large-scale research project that followed these initial assessments issued in the 'Karpin Report', which announced that a 'new paradigm' of management was emerging in the international business environment (Karpin 1995a). As Ellerington (1998: 177) explained, the project found that:

> … increasing globalisation, widespread technological innovation and pressure on business to customise products and services have created an international business environment that requires managers to have skills and characteristics radically different from those of only a decade ago. In a change from the autocrat of the past, today's manager must be a communicator, but tomorrow's manager should be a leader or 'enabler'.

The new paradigm is articulated in the Boston Consulting Group's contribution to the Karpin project (1995b). Drawing heavily on the management philosophy espoused by a wave of American business theorists (e.g. Peter Drucker), the Boston Consulting Group offered a critique of traditional management practice and profiled the 'Australian manager of the 21st Century'. A key feature of this practice is the 'vertical relationships' that obtain in the organisation where a few well-informed individuals direct the work of others with a minimum of feedback. In contrast, Drucker (in Karpin 1995b: 25) argued that the contemporary business environment demanded 'knowledge-based' organisations, 'composed largely of specialists who direct and discipline their own performance through organised feedback from colleagues and customers'. In consequence, the new manager would require (among other things) teamwork and communication skills underpinned by 'a superior understanding of people', and would need to 'treat colleagues on merit', believe in the feedback process and value diversity (1995b: 51).

The Frontline Management Initiative (e.g. ANTA 1996) was a response to the Karpin Report and sought to introduce the new management paradigm into Australian working life through a set of specially developed learning resources and procedures. From the perspective of the research reported in this article, the significance of these developments is that the legacy of this attempt to change management practices persists in the current VET management curriculum, indicating that, to the extent that there are still pockets of traditional management practice in industry, learners coming from these settings will encounter an aspirational curriculum geared to promote change. Such learners may well find themselves thrust onto the horns of a dilemma as they discover that management practices back in the workplace belong to an apparently by-gone era.

The second issue—concerning the tension potentially created when training leads an individual to acquire skills and knowledge that are not consistent with those of the workplace—is related to the previous issue and can be comprehended in terms of some of the explanations canvassed in relation to it. In other words, this tension may be something one would expect if the training is attuned to standards that are not representative of the whole field of practice. Again, if the standards that guide the training express a desired practice rather than necessarily the practice itself—a conclusion consistent with the historical legacy in current management curriculum in VET—an individual who has been initiated into those standards may experience and possibly create tensions back in the workplace. A less fraught perspective on the tension would be that, when training is concerned with an area of practice that has distinct human and social dimensions, such as management, skill and knowledge development ought to be conceived in collective terms. It may be that the holistic nature of management systems demands training at the level of groups rather than individuals. This interpretation is consistent with some recent learning theory which understands learning as a social process and the outcomes of learning as primarily relevant to practice contexts (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). However, since the costs and risks involved in group training can be prohibitive for businesses, especially smaller ones, it may not be practicable to send more than one staff member along to a management course. Also, there is anecdotal evidence—my discussions with the management trainers supplied some—that staff members may be sent to training programs as a reward for good work and/or as a signal that they are bound for greater things within the organisation. But as we have seen, such a strategy may eventually set the individual at odds with the management culture of their organisation.

Conclusion

The lens of transformative learning allows us to examine the processes and outcomes of learning in a way that contrasts with approaches that focus on performances and other evidence of the acquisition and synthesis of skills and knowledge. Using this lens to research learning in a competency-based management program helped to reveal learning experiences which are not generally associated with competency-based training. The case study found that a relatively large number of students experienced a transformation of perspective about management and their workplace. Talking to both the learners and their trainers about these effects of the program, it emerged that the triggering ‘dilemma’ for many of the participants was the realisation that management practices with which they were familiar—such as the practices in their current workplace—were at odds with the model of management promoted in the program. In the space of time after the course, these participants came to the decision that they could no longer work with their employers, and either planned to or did move to different employers. These ‘outcomes’ of the program raise questions about the relationship of competency standards to work practices. In the case of the management competency standards, it could be that history holds the key to understanding the effects of the program studied in this research. The study also raises questions about the practice of sending a single employee off to a training program, especially in the context of a role that is deeply embedded in the social life of a workplace. Further research into the implications of transformative learning in the context of competency-based management training, focused perhaps on curriculum content and the specifics of management practices in the learners’ workplace, would be necessary to resolve these questions. However, there can be no doubt that Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning provides an illuminating framework for exploring at least some areas of competency-based VET.

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Learning about health

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This paper examines the extent of patients' health-related learning from a range of sources and aims to identify psycho-cognitive variables that predict learning. Using a survey design, we found that people higher in perceived health competence were lower in anxiety and took a more logical approach to decision making. Low perceived health competence was associated with avoidant decision making. Levels of learning were predicted by perceived health competence, decision-making orientations and anxiety. Perceived health competence was a significant positive predictor of both learning from health professionals and of learning from other sources, such as the internet. Rational decision-making orientation and anxiety, however, were not associated with learning from medical professionals but were predictive of levels of learning from other sources. Highly dependent decision makers reported learning more from their medical professionals. The implications for theory and practice are explored.

Keywords: learning, health competence, anxiety, decision making

Introduction

Patients need to understand their health conditions in order to make good choices. We examine the extent to which patients of general practitioners learn about their health from different sources and we identify important psycho-cognitive variables that predict learning. Our study contributes to a greater understanding of adult patient behaviour and underlines yet again the importance of developing positive orientations to learning in our adult population.

In this paper, we establish the importance of patients' understanding of their health conditions. We review the literature on predictors of information seeking and learning, considering in turn perceived health competence, decision-making orientations and anxiety.

Over the past decades, the model of medical decision making has shifted from one where doctors took decisions on behalf of their patients to a more egalitarian model where patients are expected to participate actively in decisions regarding their health care (Kaba & Sooriakumaran 2007). This shift is now enshrined in regulatory guidelines, patient rights declarations, health policy and law (Patak et al. 2009; Waterworth & Luker 1990). The move towards patient-centred care and shared decision making is recognised not only as appropriate in societal terms but also as having a positive impact on health (Mead & Bower 2000). Patients who know more about their health and participate in decision making stay safe (Davis, Jacklin, Sevdalis & Vincent 2007) and maintain better health (Kickbusch 2001).

Recently health literacy or health competence has emerged as a concept both within health care and within adult education. It has been defined as 'The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions' by the US Department of Health and Human Services (2010: 1). Efforts have been made to measure health literacy in the form of a series of competencies (Steckelberg, Hülfenhaus, Kasper, Rost & Mühlhauser 2007). The results of these studies suggest that a high proportion of the general population does not have the competencies to understand adequately and manage their own health (Barber et al. 2009). At present we do not know why some patients are well-informed and actively involved in their own health-related learning and others are not. Educational level and socio-economic status have been identified as predictors of health literacy (Barber et al. 2009; Paasche-Orlow 2005), demand for information (Ayers 2007; Dutta-Bergman 2003) and participation in decisions (Kaplan, Gandek, Greenfield, Rogers & Ware 1995; Murray, Pollackb, Whitec & Lo 2007). To date research has not clearly identified the underlying psycho-cognitive differences by which these simple demographics affect health-related behaviours. In the section below we identify three psycho-cognitive orientations which are potential predictors of individual differences in levels of health-related learning. They are perceived health competence, decision-making orientation and anxiety. We examine these three variables to ask:

> Research question: What is the relationship between perceived health competence, decision making and anxiety?

Perceived health competence, also known as health self-efficacy, is reported to predict whether patients will try to change their health behaviour, how much energy they will invest, and how persistent they will be (Schwarzer 2008). Health-based self-efficacy has been related to satisfaction with information (Stewart, Abbey, Shnek, Irvine & Grace 2004) and with the selection of information sources (Pálsdóttir 2008). Similarly, it has also been proposed that self-efficacy leads to greater health-related information seeking and, in turn, learning (Johnson & Meischke 1993; Wilson 1997).These findings are consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986) and other models of behaviour, for example the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991). Therefore, we expect that perceived health competence will be positively associated with reported levels of learning.

> Hypothesis 1: Patients high in perceived health competence will report more learning than patients low on perceived health competence.

Several workers take an information-processing approach in an effort to explain active information and learning behaviours (Ellis 1989; Kuhlthau 1991) and propose stages and meta-cognitive monitoring processes (Johnson & Meischke 1993; Wilson 1997). Implicit in these models is a view of the learner as cognitive, rational (albeit flawed) and engaged. Information seeking is seen as a means to an end, with the end being problem resolution or sense making and an associated uncertainty reduction (Wilson 1997). Much of this work derives from library and information scientists who study information seekers in situations that may be less time pressured and emotionally charged than some patients' experience (Johnson 2009).

Not everyone makes decisions in the same way and, while the rational decision maker is both implicitly and explicitly thought of as the ideal, a number of other orientations to decision making have been described (Gambetti 2008; McRoberts, Hall, Madden & Hughes 2011). Rational decision makers are logical, in that they systematically seek information and apply reason to their decisions. On the other hand, a decision maker may tend to be dependent, that is, they may rely on others to take their decisions or they may be avoidant, that is, they tend to defer decision making (Thunholm 2008).

To the extent that health-related information seeking and learning reflects an effort to inform and engage in problem solving, then rational problem-solving strategies should positively predict information seeking and learning. Conversely an avoidant approach should be associated with reduced information seeking and learning.

> Hypothesis 2: Patients high on rational decision-making orientation will report more learning than patients low on rational decision-making orientation.
>
> Hypothesis 3: Patients high on avoidant decision-making orientation will report less learning than patients low on avoidant decision making.

Dervin developed her sense making theory to explain real world behaviour (Dervin 1983). It is based on the notion that in a situation that is uncertain, sense making takes place in an effort to achieve a desired outcome. She proposes that individuals are constantly theorising within their small world contexts. Their resultant mental models are robust, believed and familiar (Westbrook 2006). The pre-conditions that determine information seeking and acquisition are based on the division of people into 'insiders' and 'outsiders', with insiders' information carrying more weight than outsiders' information. These models can go some way to explaining why patients sometimes reject valid information and make seemingly irrational decisions (Case, Johnson & Allard 2005).

Both sense making approaches (Dervin 1993) and goal-oriented, problem-solving approaches (Wilson 1997) draw attention to the importance of affect and feelings of uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction theory proposes we have a drive to reduce uncertainty and its associated anxiety or discomfort and there is ample evidence that levels of uncertainty positively predict information-seeking efforts (Guo 2011).As a general rule, the more information we access, the more we reduce uncertainty (Case et al. 2005). A model emphasising uncertainty as a learning motivator does not need to posit any problem-solving ambitions: people seek information, but may make no use of any knowledge gained; it simply serves to reduce uncertainty and the anxiety or discomfort associated with not knowing.

However, information does not always lead to uncertainty reduction (Eastin & Guinsler 2006) and health anxious people may indulge in extensive information seeking, reassurance and service use (Salkovskis & Warwick 1986). Paradoxically, it seems that highly anxious people may search for information more but feel they learn less. Bensi and Giusbertia (2007) suggest that anxiety may provoke less rather than more information seeking, and demonstrate that individuals high on trait anxiety use fewer points of evidence prior to making a decision. They interpret the findings as reflecting that their heightened sense of uncertainty leads anxious people to jump to decisions, even at the expense of decisional accuracy. Additionally, uncertainty management theory (Ford, Barrow & Stohl 1996) suggests that uncertainty does not always drive information seeking, and that sometimes uncertainty will be deliberately maintained.

Thus there is research that suggests that when anxiety and uncertainty are high, information seeking may be either increased or decreased. This seems intuitively reasonable, that in an effort to avoid anxiety we might both seek and avoid information (Maslow 1963). Wilson's (1997) model of information seeking has anxiety as an initial activating mechanism determining whether information will be sought. The model can therefore accommodate both increased and decreased information seeking as consequences of anxiety. Johnson and Meischke's (1993) and Johnson, Donohue, Atkin and Johnson's (1995) model of information seeking proposes that demographics, experience and relevance are antecedents to information seeking. Experience includes both prior knowledge of health conditions and understanding of where and how to gain more information. Personal relevance includes salience and beliefs relating to efficacy. Personal relevance, rather than uncertainty reduction, is the key motivator within this model. Further, within the model, anxiety would be expected to increase the salience of information and so stimulate information seeking.

Much of the work on information avoidance is derived from work with patients who are facing very serious diagnoses and radical treatments (Cassileth, Volckmar & Goodman 1980). It is possible that the relationship between anxiety and information seeking is curvilinear, with low levels of anxiety stimulating information seeking but extreme anxiety being associated with avoidance. In our sample of predominantly healthy, general practice patients, it is unlikely that anxiety levels would be excessive and so anxiety is likely to elevate uncertainty, make it more salient and so drive increased information seeking and learning. Our hypothesis therefore is that:

> Hypothesis 4: Patients higher on health anxiety will report more learning than patients lower on health anxiety.

To summarise, models of health information seeking and acquisition enabled us to propose that perceived health competence, the need to make decisions and solve problems, and the need to reduce uncertainty and associated anxiety are likely motivators or enablers that stimulate learning. In the section below, we consider how these factors might differentially apply when information is derived from health care professionals and when information is informally accessed by patients from other sources such as family and friends or the internet.

Kickbuech (2008) notes that in general people have a high interest in learning about their health and seek information from a host of sources including: the internet, TV, radio, newspapers, friends, family, government institutions, health care providers and insurers. Accessing such information can be active or passive; that is, it might require effort and intent or it might be ‘incidental’ (Williamson 1998), ‘serendipitous’ (Foster & Ford 2003) or ‘encountered’ (Erdelez 1997). In this study, we examine the extent of self-reported learning from the media, health professionals, the internet and family and friends, all of which are likely to both provide information unasked and to provide additional information if they are engaged with actively (although, perhaps, to varying degrees and of widely ranging quality).

The most obvious source of health-related information is members of the medical profession. Health care providers have responsibilities for providing information, have access to quality information and are trained in communicating with patients. Members of the medical profession represent important authority figures with high credibility and it would be expected that patients who depend on others in making decisions would favour doctors as a source of information over alternative sources.

> Hypothesis 5: Patients high on dependent decision-making orientation will report learning more from their doctors than will patients low on dependent decision-making orientation.

In an ideal consultation, the doctor might listen to the patient, provide information and discuss treatment options – highlighting the strengths and drawbacks of each, answer questions, check understanding and then support the patient in making choices. The doctor might also provide leaflets and written guidance to supplement the information given in the consulting room. However, communication within the consulting room is not always as effective as it could be and both health care providers and patients may encounter difficulties. Philips and Zorn (1994) found that more than two thirds of patients viewed access to information in their community hospital as a problem (but less than half the physicians agreed). Time constraints may not always allow for a full exchange of information or allow time for and tailoring of communications to match patients' levels of health literacy (Adams et al. 2009). Kelly and Haidet (2007) report that doctors overestimate patients' ability to understand both written and verbal communications, and Miller et al. (2007) suggest that this is particularly true for older patients.

There are therefore many reasons why patients may seek additional information from channels other than health professionals. Johnson's

(1995) model of information seeking claims that alternative sources of information are accessed according to their perceived utility, which includes usefulness, ease of access and credibility. Other workers identify completeness (Eysenbach & Kohler 2002), reliability and authority (Wathen & Burkell 2002) and relevance (Marton 2003) as important features of information content, particularly in relation to electronic formats.

There are a number of barriers to accessing information from sources other than health care providers: social and technological barriers may need to be overcome, validity of the information cannot be assumed, and information may not be neatly packaged nor necessarily of relevance. On the other hand, a number of barriers to accessing information that exist in the doctor's consulting room are removed or reduced: there are fewer constraints on time and topic, and learners are relatively free to learn as little or as much as they wish. It is likely that patients who are more health competent will learn more from these informal sources than will those who are less competent because they will be more persistent. This effect may not be so apparent when encounters with health professionals are concerned, since this is usually a time-limited situation where persistence may have no benefit. Additionally, it seems reasonable to predict that the motivating effects of anxiety and health competence described above are of more importance in the unstructured contexts of accessing information sources other than medical professionals than they are in the more structured and constrained context of learning from medical professionals. Put simply, anxiety and health competence may drive people to overcome barriers to access and to learn more and for longer.

> Hypothesis 6: The effect of perceived health competence on learning will be a stronger predictor of learning from sources other than medical professionals than learning from medical professionals.

> Hypothesis 7: The effect of anxiety on learning will be a stronger predictor of learning from sources other than medical professionals than learning from medical professionals.

Method

Procedure

An on-line questionnaire was constructed and linked to the newsletter of [blank for anonymity]. The questionnaire was anonymous, and potential participants had a choice to complete the questionnaire and enter a prize draw to win an ipod Nano. To be eligible to answer the questionnaire, participants had to be aged 16 years and over and they had to have visited a general practitioner in the past 12 months. Responses were collected and exported to SPSS for analysis.

The sample

The sample consisted of 196 adults (85% female and 15% male) who responded to an invitation in an electronic newsletter sent to a list of 6,000. Fourteen percent were under 40 years of age, 22% were 41 to 50, 28% were 51 to 60, 24% were 61 to 70 and 12% were 71 or more. Seventy-two percent of the sample was educated to degree level and the remainder mostly had qualified for university entrance or had trade or professional qualifications; only three in the sample of 196 reported having no academic qualifications.

Eighty percent of the sample reported that they were quite or very healthy. A further 14% said they were okay and only 6% reported being quite or very poorly. Respondents were asked how many times they had been to the doctor in the last 12 months, either for themselves or with a relative or friend. Forty-eight percent had been three times or less, 31% had been four to five times and 21% had been five times or more.

Measures

Levels of learning were assessed as follows: participants were asked how much they learnt from five sources and asked to rate their learning on a five-point scale ranging from *Not at all* to *A great deal*. The sources were: media (TV, newspapers, books), health professionals, internet, friends and family, and other. The named sources selected were the ones identified in the literature as being the most used by patients in information seeking and acquisition (Pálsdóttir 2008).

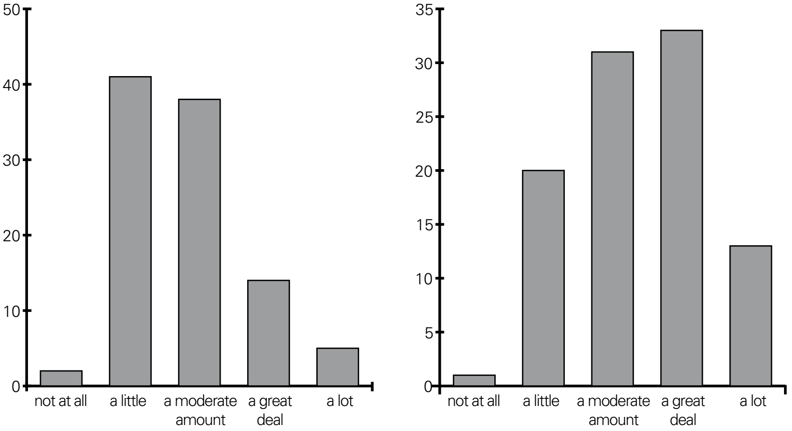
Decision-making orientation was measured using nine items from the General Decision Making Style Inventory (Scott & Bruce 1995) to assess rational, dependent and avoidant approaches to decision making. The selected items included, for example: '*I double check my information sources to be sure I have the right facts before making a decision'* (rational), '*I like to have someone steer me in the right direction when I am faced with important decisions'* (dependent) and *'I put off making decisions because thinking about them makes me uneasy'* (avoidant). Respondents rated each item on a seven-point scale ranging from *Completely disagree* to *Completely agree*.

Health efficacy was assessed using eight items from the Perceived Health Competence Scale (Smith, Wallston & Smith 1995) and included items such as: '*I am able to do things for my health as well as most other people*'. Half the items were negatively framed and half were positively framed. Responses were recorded on a five-item scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*. It is important to note that none of the items ask for ratings on either learning or decision-making capacity.

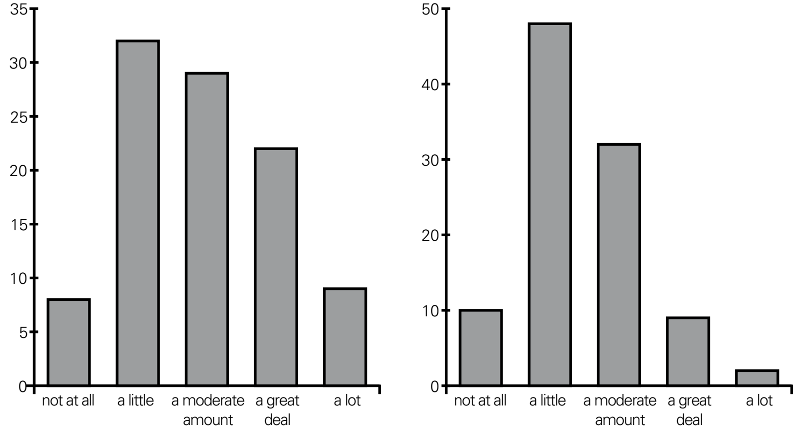
Heath anxiety was assessed using four items adopted from (Wells 1997). The item assesses how distressing or disabling health anxiety was over a fixed period and included: *'How often have you been distressed by health worries'*. Thinking of the last 12 months, participants rated items on a five-point scale ranging from *Not at all* to *All the time*.

Results

The frequency distributions depicting levels of learning from alternative information sources are shown in Figure 1. Very few patients reported accessing information sources other than those listed and therefore these are not included in the analyses below.



Learning from media **Learning from health professionals**



Learning from the internet **Learning from family and friends**

Figure 1: Levels of learning from alternative sources

Participants report learning most from health professionals (mean = 3.40). This is followed by the internet (mean = 2.90) and the media (mean = 2.79). Finally, family and friends were rated as the source of least learning (mean = 2.44).

A mean learning score was compiled by summing the learning scores for the four different sources: media, medical professionals, internet, and friends and family.

The correlation matrix shown in Table 1 reveals moderate, significant and positive correlations between the dependent variables and the independent variables. These relationships are examined in more depth below. Perceived health competence correlates negatively with anxiety (r=-.31, $\alpha < .01$), positively with rational decision making (r=.15, $\alpha < .05$) and negatively with avoidant decision making ($r = -.34$, $\alpha < .01$). Anxiety correlates positively with dependent decision making (r=.22, $\alpha < .01$).

Table 1: Correlations between learning levels and predictor variables—rational decision making, dependent decision making, health efficacy and anxiety

	Mean values	Learning from health professionals	Learning from other sources	Learning from all sources	Perceived health competence	Anxiety	Decision making—rational	Decision making—dependent	Decision making—avoidant
Learning from health professionals	3.40	n/a							
Learning from other sources	2.71	.177*	(.46)						
Learning from all sources	2.88	.566**	.912**	(.45)					
Health competence	3.75	.248**	.118	.203**	(.87)				
Anxiety	2.62	.116	.250**	.258**	-.313**	(.65)			
Decision making - rational	3.29	.168*	.255**	.284**	.148*	.131	(.64)		
Decision making -dependent	3.29	.173*	.100	.156*	-.050	.219**	.101	(.71)	
Decision making - avoidant	2.36	-.102	-.052	-.086	-.342**	-.012	-.206**	.267**	(.82)

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

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

Table 2: Regression analyses with levels of learning from medical professionals and from other sources as dependent variables and perceived health competence, decision making orientations and anxiety as dependent variables

	Medical professionals	**Sources other than medical professionals**	**All sources**
Step 1:			
Gender	-.05	.10	.06
Age	.11	-.17*	-.10
Education	.14	.06	.11
GP gender	.00	-.08	-.07
GP visits	.08	.10	.12
R^2	*.04*	*.05*	*.04*
Step 2:			
Health competence	.31***	.22**	.31***
Rational decision making	.07	.21**	.21**
Dependent decision making	.16*	-.02	.05
Avoidant decision making	-.01	.06	.05
Health anxiety	.15	.29***	.30***
Change R^2	*.13****	*.14****	*.20****

* Significant at the 0.05 level
** Significant at the 0.01 level
*** Significant at the 0.001 level

Regression analyses were conducted to assess the extent to which respondents' learning scores could be predicted from perceived health competence, decision-making orientation and anxiety. The results are shown in Table 2. In Step 1 of the analyses, the control variables of gender, age, education, GP gender and GP visits were entered. Perceived health competence, rational, dependent and avoidant decision-making styles and anxiety were entered in Step 2. The analysis was repeated for each dependent variable, learning from medical professionals, learning from other sources and a combined score, learning from all sources.

The control variables as a whole do not explain a significant amount of variance (medical professionals R2 = .04; other sources R2 = .05; all sources = .04). Age negatively predicted learning from sources other than medical professionals (β=-.17, α<.05).

Perceived health competence significantly predicted increased levels of learning for all analyses (medical professionals β=.31, α<.001; other sources β=.22, α<.01; all sources β=.31, α<.001). Rational decision-making orientation significantly predicted increased learning from other and all sources (β=.21, α<.01 and β=.21, α<.01 respectively). Rational decision-making orientation was not related to levels of learning from medical professionals (β=.07, α>.05). Dependent decision-making orientation positively predicted learning from medical professionals (β=.16, α<.05) but not from other or all sources (β=.06, α>.05 and β=.05, α>.05 respectively). Health anxiety positively predicted learning from other (β=.29, α<.001) and all sources (β=.30, α<.001) but was not a significant predictor of learning from medical professionals (β=.15, α>.05). These results are explained and related to the hypotheses in the section below.

Discussion

In this section we discuss the descriptive analyses and review findings relating to the research question and each hypothesis. Finally, we describe the limitations of the design and explore implications of the study.

The sample was not representative of the population of New Zealand and was well educated, middle-aged to elderly, largely female and healthy. This was a deliberate choice by the researchers. The health literature abounds with accounts of how, for example, age or gender determines information seeking and decision making about health. We wanted to explore a little further and see what might lie behind the simple analysis by demographics. If we could isolate dispositional predictors of behaviour within this sample, then perhaps we could take a step towards understanding what it is about simple demographic descriptors such as education or gender that is the fundamental influence on behaviour.

In our study, few of the demographic variables predicted learning. This undoubtedly reflects the restricted sample. Age was a significant predictor of learning from sources other than medical professionals, with older people saying they learnt less than younger people. Examination of the raw scores suggests that it largely derives from lower levels of learning from the internet and from friends and family. This is hardly surprising as older people are less likely to have good internet access and more likely to be socially isolated. It is an important finding, however, given as noted above that previous research has found that older people struggle to understand information provided by medical professionals. Our research suggests that older people are further deprived by reduced learning from other sources.

As Figure 1 shows, few people report learning either nothing at all or a great deal from the media. About 10% report learning nothing from both family and friends. The modal response to all sources except medical professionals was ‘a little’. The modal response to medical professionals was ‘a lot’, with almost half of the respondents saying they learnt a lot or a great deal from their medical professionals. However, it should also be noted that about 30% of respondents learnt ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ from the internet. For most patients, it seems that the medical profession remains their primary source of health-related information and that this is supplemented in a variety of ways by the media, the internet and personal contacts.

The research set out to examine the relationship between perceived health competence and anxiety and decision-making orientation (the research question). The correlation analysis in Table 1 shows interesting relationships between the dispositional variables assessed. High levels of perceived health competence are associated with lower levels of health-related anxiety. Put conversely, higher levels of anxiety are associated with feeling that one is not capable of looking after one’s own health. Given that this was a ‘snapshot’ survey, no inferences can be made about causality. That is, we do not know whether a lack of health competence causes anxiety or whether building perceived health competence would alleviate anxiety.

Perceived health competence is also associated with decision-making orientations. Specifically, perceived health competence is positively associated with rational decision making—the approach that is often regarded as optimal. It could be expected that perceived health competence would be negatively associated with dependent decision making since, if a patient does not feel capable of making good decisions, they may turn to others whom they consider are more able. This was not found to be the case, since perceived health competence was not found to have a relationship with dependent decision making. However, there was a negative association between perceived health competence and avoidant decision making. It seems that, when people do not feel capable of managing their health, they avoid decisions rather than turning to others to make decisions for them.

Anxiety was not only negatively correlated with perceived competence, but was positively correlated with dependent decision making. That is, patients who are high on anxiety tend to feel less efficacious than other patients and are more inclined to be highly dependent in their decision-making orientation. Equally interestingly, anxiety is not associated with avoidant decision-making orientation. In this sample, at least, anxiety is not associated with a reluctance to engage in decision making as reported elsewhere in the literature (Brashers, Goldsmith & Hsieh 2002). This finding, that a lack of perceived health competence but not high anxiety levels is associated with avoidant decision making, is new and interesting. If it is replicated using other samples then it provides a possible mechanism for understanding 'blunting', the term used for patients who avoid health-related information (Case et al. 2005). It seems such patients may be in a trapped in a cycle of avoiding learning because they feel they do not understand, and not understanding because they avoid learning.

Seven hypotheses were proposed predicting relationships between learning and perceived health competency, decision-making orientation and anxiety. Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived health competence would be associated with high levels of learning and this was confirmed. Hypothesis 2 predicted that rational decision makers would report more learning. This was confirmed, and supports the notion that people who have a logical and reasoned approach to decision making seek information and learn more than do others. This effect held only for learning from sources other than medical professionals. Perhaps a rational orientation does not lead to greater learning during consultations with professionals because information is neatly packaged and presented; moreover, perhaps there is little opportunity to reason and question in a brief consultation.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that those high on avoidant decision making would learn less than those low on avoidant decision making. This was not demonstrated, even patients who tended to avoid decision making appeared to be learning about their health. Hypothesis 4 predicted that anxiety would drive learning and this was confirmed. However the detail underlying this is interesting and we discuss this further below.

Our fifth hypothesis was that decision makers high on dependency would learn more from the medical profession than would those low on dependency. This was confirmed and implies that high dependency decision makers are learning from the decision maker rather than learning so that they can make a decision.

Hypothesis 6 anticipated that the effect of perceived health competence would be greater for sources of information other than medical professionals, but this was not supported. It seems that perceived health competence is associated with greater levels of learning, both in consultations with medical professionals and in learning from other sources. It is surprising to find in a sample of highly educated that people who are lower on perceived health competence learn less from their doctors than do those who are high on health competence. The effect of efficacy was expected to be greater when behavioural and situational control was greatest and when more skills were needed to overcome barriers and identify, select, interpret and translate information. It seems that, even in a sample of people educated to degree level, high feelings of health competence contribute to learning from health care workers. This is an area that requires more attention, as it suggests that very many patients, not just those who are seriously disadvantaged by lack of education or communications skills, may feel they struggle to learn what it is that our health carers seek to teach.

The effect of anxiety on learning was confirmed for learning from sources other than medical professionals, and only approached significance for learning from medical professionals. This supports Hypothesis 7 that a difference would be found, and supports theories that propose that patients' efforts to reduce anxiety or uncertainty may motivate information seeking and learning.

We have found that informal health-related learning is predicted by perceived health competence, a rational orientation to problem solving and by anxiety. Thus, we have support for the notion of the patient as striving to reduce uncertainty or anxiety through seeking out knowledge, and for the notion of the patient as an active and rational problem solver who seeks learning to inform decision making. We have evidence that patients who are confident in their ability to self-manage and to take decisions report more learning about their health than do those who perceive themselves as less efficacious. Our study is the first to validate the implicit assumption that information seeking is motivated by decision making or problem solving. It is the first to simultaneously examine health competency and anxiety and to establish that both are associated with increased levels of learning.

From a practice view, the finding that not all of our patients considered that they learnt equally well from health professionals is worrying. One might expect in many educational settings that novices who know least might learn most, but the opposite was found. This implies that the quantity or level of information presented by doctors' challenges even highly educated patients.

The findings that few respondents learnt solely from medical professionals means that not only should quality information be available but, as patients, we need the skills to source information, understand it, evaluate its quality and make informed decisions. There is a clear role for adult educators here.

Limitations

It is not possible to generalise from this study to patients in general. Our sample was, above all else, healthy and highly educated. Patients newly diagnosed with serious health conditions may not behave in the way our sample reports. The Cronbach alphas reported for our measures of learning were low, suggesting that high levels of learning from one source do not necessarily predict high levels of learning from another. We feel it was justified to use what is in effect a total learning score in this instance as that is the limit of our interest.

Further work

Relationships were identified between our independent variables and these relationships are likely to be complex and at least partly reciprocal. For example, increases in health competence are likely to reduce anxiety and reduced anxiety may well, in turn, contribute to elevated feelings of health competence. Similarly, while health competence may increase the likelihood of rational decision making, rational decision making may also lead to elevated health competence. A longitudinal study would enable us to assess these important causal relationships.

Qualitative studies would also add insight into the way information from different sources was accessed and used. Such an approach would enable researchers to investigate the extent to which identified predictors of information seeking and learning were stable or context and state dependent. The importance of state has been long overlooked and yet plays a large part in determining proactive behaviours (Sonnentag, Binnewies & Mojza 2008). State is likely to be highly relevant in the anxiety-provoking and emotional situations that are part and parcel of many patients' experience of serious illness.

Work within the field of patient information seeking and informal learning about health reflects multiple orientations to both philosophical assumptions and methodology, with the most frequently adopted approaches reflecting constructivist or positivist orientations as adopted in this paper. The theoretical origins of research in this area can be traced to psychology, education, mental health and information sciences, so not surprisingly a good deal of similar work is emerging but is neither fully cross-referenced nor described using common terminology (Barnett-Page & Thomas 2009). To add to the complexity, investigators have examined information need, defined by Case et al. (2005: 5) as 'recognition that your knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal you have', information seeking which is accessing information (Wilson 2007) and information-use behaviour which might include learning and decision making (Spink & Cole 2006). There is very little mention of learning in the information science or medical literature and it seems to be an assumed outcome of information seeking. In our study we asked specifically about the extent of learning as this is the outcome of both practical and theoretical significance if information seeking is to inform health-related decision making and self-care. This is a beginning but the area would benefit from increased attention from educational researchers who understand lifelong learning and are accustomed to engaging with cross-disciplinary work.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that patient psycho-cognitive orientations determine their information-seeking and learning behaviours, not just in terms of quantity but also in terms of source. The study underlines the importance of the efforts of adult educators who seek to develop independent learners able and confident in their ability to seek information and make decisions. From a practical perspective, the importance of having a variety of sources of information available is underlined by this work, as very few participants relied solely on their professional carers for information.

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Time and meaning in later-life learning

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With an increase in life expectancy in modern complex communities, there will be a prolonged period, post-retirement, in which older adults will seek meaningful projects. Juxtaposed with the longer period after retirement is the realisation that life is nearing the end. This paper draws on research undertaken from 2003–2010. The purpose of the research was to investigate the lived experiences of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) learners. The participants identified as being in the post-work phase of their lives and their ages ranged from the mid-70s to the early 90s as at 2010. The study used a qualitative methodology and interpretations were elicited from a phenomenological perspective. A significant finding from the study was that the existential concept of time was at the core of the learning experiences and their need to develop and grow.

Introduction

As modern complex societies enter an era of a 'top-heavy' population the older adults in these communities will be faced with the existential questions of the purpose of their life, coupled with the tensions of the need to grow and develop. With an increase in life expectancy, there will be a prolonged period, post-retirement, in which older adults will seek meaningful projects. Juxtaposed with the longer period after retirement is the realisation that life is nearing the end. These two aspects of time (having time on their hands and time is running out) are considered important in understanding and interpreting the lived experience of learning in later life.

This paper is based on a qualitative study of 16 older, adult, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) learners. Participants' ages ranged from mid-70s to early-90s (as at 2010). Participants were interviewed twice over a period of seven years, from 2003 to 2010. The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of older adults in learning to use and using a range of ICT. Case study analysis provided data that drew on phenomenological interpretation to elicit themes. A significant existential theme to emerge was time. The unique time period in the lives of older adults, not constrained by the demands of work commitments and career decisions, provides an opportunity for significant growth and development with an increasing focus on time and meaning.

Grounding studies of later-life learning in the socio-cultural world

Many authors highlight the need to ground human research design and interpretation in a socio-cultural context because of the generally held belief that humans are inseparable from their social, cultural and historical context (van Manen 1997; Williamson 1998; Illeris 2002; Findsen 2005; Jarvis 2007). In studies of older adulthood, an understanding of the social context of ageing is considered essential because of the belief that the self and ageing are socially constructed in unique and complex ways (Tennant 1997; Thorson 2000; Findsen 2005; Jarvis, 2001a, 2007). Findsen (2005) highlights the need for greater understanding of later-life learning experiences in the broader cultural, political, economic and social circumstances of older adults, in other words, their lived experiences. For older adults in modern complex societies, the socio-cultural context has changed over time and those now in later life 'need the skills to manage more complex lives' (Clifton 2009: 19).

The rise in older adult organisations and retirement villages, and the increasing number of older people travelling, suggests a re-defining of old age that may be explained by the notion of development as an 'ongoing dialectical process' (Tennant 1997: 54). This developmental process is believed to occur in response to the modern changing world in which individuals likewise change, thereby gaining a better understanding of their lives and greater participation in society. Tennant advises that, in understanding the lived experiences of older adults, it is important to focus on 'how the various factors in development interact, such as biological, cultural, historical, psychological and physical' (1997: 54).

The view that learning and life are inextricably linked has been explored as an existential phenomenon (Jarvis 2001b; Jarvis 2007) that goes to the very core of the Being and is 'as crucial as breathing' (Jarvis 2001b: 201). Jarvis explains the integrative and life-affirming nature of the dimensions of learning in saying that 'learning is about becoming a person in society, about transforming the experiences of living into knowledge, skills and attitude so that human individuality might develop' (1992: 237). Van Manen's (1997) notion that experience implicates the totality of life accords with Jarvis and supports the view that the socio-cultural context is vital to an understanding of the lived experience of learning in later life—

the humanness of the experience, in particular the aspect of human endeavour (of learning).

The integration of learning with lived experience provides a way of understanding and interpreting approaches and meaning from the standpoint of older adults. While Findsen (2005: 3) asserts that there is merit in the investigation of learning processes as they apply to later-life learning, he notes that such studies have limitations because they do not take into account the ‘contradictions, tensions and paradoxes of ageing’. Learning is believed to be a fusion of the intellectual and emotional, of meaning and value, an emotive process as well as a cognitive process (Dewey 1933; Brookfield 2000). For older adults, learning is ‘qualitatively different from learning undertaken in the past’ (Withnall 2010: 104).

Making meaning through learning is thought to be ‘an interaction of both social practices and ontogenesis’ (Keating & MacLean 1988: 298). These interactions place both the self and the social within the construction of knowledge and, in fact, when a connection between life, age and learning is investigated, societal conditions are seen to be of crucial importance (Illeris 2003).

Although learners are the chief actors in the drama of learning, the Being is also a member of a human family (Kidd 1973), so any individual experience is never truly just one person’s experience, and it is inexplicably linked to the social. Humans are in constant interaction with their surroundings and ‘these interactions constitute the framework of all experience’ (Dewey 1933: 36). Environmental interactions are fundamentally social and, as learning rarely takes place in social isolation, most learning can be thought of as social (Jarvis 2007).

Methodology

Five male and 11 female ICT learners, with ages ranging from mid-70s to early-90s (as at 2010), were interviewed at least twice over a period of seven years, from 2003–2010. An approach was made to non-profit organisations that offered ICT lessons for older adults and learners volunteered to take part in the study. The main aim of the study was to understand and interpret the lived experience of later-life, ICT learners. Participants were learning to use technology either in small class settings with peer tutors or in their own home with an individual peer tutor. Peer tutors were voluntary and not qualified teachers. On average, each learner attended regular weekly lessons for a period of 12 months.The initial face-to-face interviews took place during the period of learning and then participants were again interviewed when they had ceased lessons. All participants had retired from paid work and self-identified as older adults.

A hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology was chosen because it enabled rich existential and ontological insights into the learning experience by privileging the voices of the participants. Ontological insights were interpreted from the lived experience of the participants, whereby questions of the Being's relationship with the world were explored. Understandings of phenomenology and hermeneutics were influenced by the work of Heidegger (1962) and his ontological 'account of the human-world relations which determine and outline the dimensions of human existence (*Dasein*)' (Ihde 1990: 23). Heidegger's link with ontology influenced an orientation to phenomenology and enabled a focus on the Being's relation with the world and the nature of lived experience.

Three phenomenological analytical and interpretive tools were used at various times throughout the analysis and interpretative phase. The three tools were: within-case, cross-case and thematic analysis. Within-case analysis focused on the individual and enabled insights into the ontological experience, that is, those elements that seek to answer Being questions. Narratives as told by the participants in the interviews were constantly examined, comparing them with other stories told by the respondent and also comparing them with stories told by other participants in cross-case analysis. Data from within-case and cross-case analysis were placed within a thematic framework so that the data could be examined and referenced as emerging themes. Various understandings such as *a priori* understanding (based on the literature review), emerging understanding (based on field data) and analytical understanding (based on recurring data in within-case and cross-case analysis) were used.

Unique time factors influencing later-life learning approaches

The time factors that contribute to an understanding of the complex context of learning in later life are unique to older adulthood and may influence approaches to learning. It is thought that an 'individual temporal perspective has a significant impact on learning' (Allan & Lewis 2009: 40). Two time factors will be discussed:

- Limited number of years left
- Longer period after retirement

Limited number of years left

The most fundamental, existential dichotomy is that between life and death and this awareness (that death is inevitable) 'profoundly influences man's life' (Fromm 1947: 42). The heightened awareness of death is relevant to older people because they are closer (than they were when they were younger) in clock time to death. The cognisance of time running out, of coming towards the end of their life, is recognised by researchers and older people alike. Various authors have reported on this in the past (Erikson 1950; Lebel 1978; Maslow 1970; Moody 1985).

The personal insight that the self has a limited number of years left is referred to as the 'life turn' by Illeris (2003) and a 'certain threshold' by de Beauvoir (1978: 555). The 'life turn' is a significant psychological and sociological turning point that changes the way the Being thinks about their life and life in general.

In a number of autobiographies and biographies, references were made to 'the end' by people in older adulthood (de Beauvoir 1974, 1978; White cited in Marr 1991; Lessing cited in Ingersoll 1996; Hepburn cited in Berg 2003). Faced with the inevitable end of life, older adults become more sensitive to notions of time. In Erikson's (1950) psycho-sociological 'ego integrity' terms, older adults search for a sense of wholeness in their lives, for the continuity, the meaning and purpose of their lives. Older adults know that life will continue without them but would like to believe that their contribution to the world was significant and that they will be remembered. In Being and Time (1962), Heidegger suggests that being is time, hence, time is pervasive and significant. The sense of self in the past, the present and the future constitute the 'horizons of the Being's temporal landscape' (van Manen 1997: 104). The intensity of the awareness of time in later life means that time as an influence cannot be overlooked. Time contextualises the life-world of all beings, in particular those in later life, and in a form not present at other stages in life.

As life approaches the end, the Being 'must give account to the self, of the self, and of the meaning of its existence' (Fromm 1947: 41). In the quest to make sense of a life in relation to the whole of life and to the lifeworld, not only are questions asked of the self about what the past means but also what the present means. The search for the meaning of one's life becomes an imperative as the inevitable end of life approaches. Learners are faced with choices that are ontologically and existentially grounded in the ageing process (Jarvis 2001b). Time is seen as running out and hence the search for meaning becomes an intrinsic, developmental task of ageing with an intensified focus on value and meaning. ‘The endless quest for meaning to make sense of existence … might well become more important to some of us as we age’ (Jarvis 2001a: 98).

The tensions of ‘what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish is inherent in the human being and is therefore indispensable to mental well-being’ (Frankl 1984: 127). The ‘polar field of tension’ sets up an ‘existential dynamic where one pole is represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfill it’ (Frankl 1982: 127). The sense of sustaining the life-force is significant for older adults who are faced with the tensions of withdrawing from their lifeworld or continuing to develop and grow and remain active (Erikson 1950; McClusky 1971; Moody 1985; Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick 1986). When the Being truly examines the self and balances the consequences of no-learning versus the outcomes of learning, they will choose the sometimes painful but ultimately rewarding path of growth (Rogers 1969). This seems to suggest that human endeavours are intrinsic to growth and development and to the Being. From extensive research, Jarvis clearly makes the link, that there is an inherent imperative to learn and that learning is as essential as food and water to human growth and development (2001a, 2001b, 2006, 2007).

The time imperative is at the core of the final two stages of Erikson’s (1950) psycho-sociological model, and Moody’s (1985) tensions of life-expectancy versus the need to grow and develop. Sartre in his 70s alluded to the inevitability of his own death (Sartre & Contat 1975). He claimed that the thought of death did not cause him to be melancholy, nor did he grieve for the past, rather he wanted to make the best of the years he had left to him. Maslow’s (1970) notion that self-actualisation can only be realised in older adulthood means that learners may decide it is ‘now or never’. With a heightened awareness of longevity, older people engage in an existential search for the answers to ontological questions and do so through learning experiences (Russell 2005).

In relation to later-life learning, time as a dimension of influence is recognised by a number of researchers (Wolf 1991; Jarvis 2001a, 2007; Findsen 2005). The temporal structure of the final stage of life differs qualitatively from the structure of time in mid-life, causing older adults to seriously contemplate the expected life-span, number of years left and how they want to spend the rest of their lives (Lebel 1978). The omega of their life provides older adults with the unique opportunity for the wisdom of age to combine with the search for meaning in an active form (Moody 1985). Not wanting to waste time in meaningless pursuits, older learners are highly selective, more so than younger adults who are known to engage in learning only when they are interested and the learning is relevant to them (Knowles 1984). Older adults' choice of learning is no longer determined by career goals and in this sense is voluntary and self-initiated (Illeris 2002).

Considering the vastness of learning opportunities in the lifelong learning culture of developed countries and the rapid changes in knowledge, there are many sources of learning potential. Elderhostels are popular in America in arranging study tours and holidays for thousands of older people each year. Programs such as Elderhostel and the University of the Third Age (U3A) offer retired people opportunities to pursue learning interests. Older adults are increasingly participating in large numbers in emerging and expanding activities, and may be drawn especially to those that involve new experiences (Peterson & Masunga 1998). Many older adults state that they do not know how they found time to go to work pre-retirement (Jarvis 2001a). It seems that people in later life have all the time in the world (longer period after retirement) but no time to spare (limited number of years left). From the Russell (2005: 247) study, Gill described what it was like to be a computer learner—it is the most magnificent thing: ‘What would I do without it? What did I do with all my time before? It’s just so rewarding, fulfilling’. Life-on-earth time was running out, yet later-life learners claimed they have all the time in the world and there is no hurry as the following comments demonstrate. ‘You’ve got all the time in the world. There’s no deadlines.’ (Russell 2005: 248); and ‘I’m not desperate for time. I just think eventually I’ll get there’ (Russell 2005: 248).

Despite their claims that they have all the time in the world, participants in the study also accepted that they were not going to live forever and that they needed to plan for the future and look beyond their lifeworld and themselves. Participants in the study made explicit remarks about the finitude of their lives and identified the self as a being in the omega stage of life. The later-life learners appear to resolve the tension between the two principles of finitude and self-development, because this particular time of life provides a unique opportunity for the wisdom of age to combine with the search for meaning in an active form.

Longer period after retirement

Greater life-expectancy as a result of good health and medical advances results in a longer period of time after leaving paid employment in which people are still healthy. If life expectancy is 80 years and people retire from paid work at 60 years, there is still one quarter of a life yet to be lived. In fact, at least one third of life can be spent outside the workforce. This increased, ‘uncommitted’ time available to people means they are inevitably faced with how to occupy themselves in meaningful ways over a prolonged period. When people first retire, they think it is going to be an opportunity to spend more time on leisure activities, but it soon becomes obvious to them that it is not feasible to spend the rest of life in ‘trivial pursuits’ and there is a need to find worthwhile things to do (Thorson 2000; Russell 2005).

The long period after retirement presents the time dilemma of having a lot of time to spare, yet needing to do more than just fill in time. People in retirement may seriously consider the choices of doing more of the same, such as a hobby they now want to spend more time on, or taking up something entirely new, such as a long-held interest they have previously been unable to pursue. The extended period of relative freedom, coupled with the desire to be actively involved, fosters the notion of active retirement in which ‘older adults are encouraged to achieve learning goals and participate fully in life’ (Findsen 2005: 60).

In fact, retirees have an ‘increase in unobligated time’ (Blit-Cohen & Litwin 2004: 386) and, in a way not possible at other stages in life, have the ability to control their time. This flexibility with time appears to empower people in later life and provides them with choices. From the study of later-life learners, Quentin described the time immediately after retirement and his imperative to learn something of value:

> After I retired, I had a few years out just appreciating my freedom. Then I thought, well, everything around me seemed to be computer. It seemed to hinge on computers, banking, everything. I just thought I was being left further and further behind and I had to do something about it. (Russell 2005: 257)

The participants identified as being in the post-retirement stage in life when there was time to pursue personal interests. Retirement presents its own challenges and one of them is to find meaningful activity. As previously described, Quentin referred to the few years after retirement as being a period when he pursued things he had always wanted to do, but then he started thinking seriously about how he wanted to spend his time and the rest of his life. Reflection such as that described by Quentin may enable those in retirement to set challenging and meaningful projects, rather than just keeping busy.

Freed from the time constraints of full-time work commitments, older adults are able to selectively undertake meaningful learning projects. Learning in later life is characterised by personal instincts, the innate desire to learn and the absence of external incentives (Illeris 2003). Illeris affirms that older adults learn out of interest for a particular subject or thing, and the desire to understand or gain experience in specific contexts. One study found that older adults learn for spiritual or personal growth, for pure enjoyment in learning something new, and to keep up with what is happening in the world (AARP 2000). A majority (70%) of participants in the AARP study also said they engage in learning in order to enrich their lives. Maslow's (1962) self-actualisation, at the pinnacle of human needs, provides a way of understanding learning in later life, as an opportunity to reach individual potential in interests and natural abilities. The true value of learning for older people is in the ability of learning to expand and challenge learners to search and explore their growth and development (Moody 1976).

Goals and time

Older adults do not measure time by the number of tasks they have completed, as they may have done when younger (for example, 'I had a very busy day, I did this and this and this and this') (Erikson et al. 1986). Older adults are not bound by clock time or quantitative measures of tasks. They think in terms of 'I got one task done really well. It doesn't matter that it took all morning'. Erikson et al. (1986) suggest that the time factor, as described earlier in 'The limited number of years left' and 'The longer period after retirement', may catch older adults unaware and this is why those in later life need to reconfigure time in order to be able to become competent and realise a sense of achievement. Later-life computer learners in Russell's (2005) study changed goals when they found they had to reconfigure time. They initially thought they would devote a certain amount of time to learning, but discovered that learning required more time and they shifted their goals to reflect the amount of time they were prepared to spend on learning. Another possible explanation is that they allocated more time to learning by shifting around their time priorities.

Participants in the study were satisfied when they have made achievements. They were not concerned about how long it took them to reach a level of competence and they did not dwell on the time factor of learning. From the study of laterlife ICT learners, Coby's initial goal was to email her children by Christmas. Coby's description captures the wholeness of her approach, her goals, purpose, and satisfaction with achievements and progress:

> I made up my mind that I would be able to send an email by Christmas. Well, in fact, I couldn't. I couldn't send it out by that time but I had progressed a bit. Fairly soon after Christmas I did achieve my goal. My first goal was only to be able to send an email to our daughter in Denmark and our son in London. So, having achieved that, I felt I'd reached my aim at that stage. Now I want to progress a bit but I don't want to do anything complicated. I just want to read the emails and read some information that comes up. (Russell 2005: 173)

Coby set out with a specific goal but accepted that, while she did not achieve the goal in the set time, she learnt other skills. Coby reconciled the initial goal not being achieved with unanticipated skills learnt. It seemed more important for her to be able to do the things she wanted to do on the computer that were relevant to her lifeworld than to learn skills that were not important to her. Her main purpose in learning to use the computer was to have closer communication with family living overseas. She also wanted to be able to 'pick up information' in relation to travelling overseas to spend time with her family (Russell 2005: 174). Coby's overall purpose of being able to enhance the relationship with children and grandchildren living overseas drove her learning. Each skill achieved brought her closer to achieving her overall purpose. Coby's description appears to align with Dewey's (1964) notion that 'ends-in-view' give activity greater meaning and direct the future course of learning. Coby's end-in-view, of enlarging family relationships, was more significant than the focus on achieving specific goals within a given timeframe.

Erikson et al. (1986) believe that later-life learners replace goals with the achievement of single tasks that provide older adults with the same satisfaction as achieving goals. The authors link this behaviour to the heightened perspective of time. Goals are re-assessed in light of the time older adults have left to live and the time they are prepared to spend on learning. In the process, it is believed that older adult learners move the goal posts. Erikson et al. suggest the learner drives the shifting target based on allocating time and being able to achieve one thing. The empowerment is once again an essential dimension of the learning experience that relates to time.

In conclusion, Erikson et al. (1986) advise that it may not be possible to refer to goals in the same way as for younger people and that the notion of goals needs to be re-defined for older adult learners. Some of the later-life ICT learners in this study (Russell 2005) started out with goals as they would when younger. However, with the overwhelming nature of ICT and the seemingly infinite learning potential, they re-thought their original goals. It was not a question of lowering the standard or of shifting the goal posts, but more about getting one thing done and done properly. This seemed more important to the learners in the study than achieving specific or general goals. The notion of defining intents and purposes was further complicated by the ability of the technology to present unanticipated challenges and the potential for learners to achieve these.

Summary

The period of older adulthood is unique in the lifecourse as an opportunity to learn something of interest. There are no time constraints, so devoting time to learning and exploring new pursuits is possible. Learning at this stage of life is not compulsory (school) or work-related (career); it may be self-initiated and voluntary. People in retirement have a choice of learning, to learn or not to learn, and also a choice in the topics they learn. They are able to be more flexible with time in a way not previously experienced. Learning that occurs after leaving full-time, paid employment is unique as a time when learning is not related directly to paid work and there is no requirement to gain the accreditations and qualifications that at an earlier age would be valued for their economic potential. Devoid of work commitments, older people are in a position where they are able to voluntarily engage in learning. They are not bound to learning for financial gain and they have no career aspirations.

Maintaining a sense of self is important to later-life learners as they negotiate their place in a changing environment. They seek continuity, inclusion and integrity in their relations with others and preferred autonomy to dependence. Later-life learners acknowledge their closeness to the end of their lives, but do so with a sense that they intend to live fully until they die. They are in a unique position of being able to weigh up their lives in a way not possible when younger. Older adults are acutely aware of time and in a sense they ‘play’ with it, that is, they are able to look back while looking forward from the position of the present.

Later-life learners use reflection to reconfigure and reconstitute time, to maintain integrity, and to have a sense of who they are. With an awareness of time as in the finitude of corporeality, older adults make the best of the time left to them and continue to be themselves using new measures of time. They reposition the self in relation to goals to enable growth and development within the time left to them and they look to the future beyond their own lifetime. The paradox of time felt by the participants—that they have all the time in the world and yet very little time left—lies at the heart of the uniqueness of time in later life.

Time is a value for those in later life. They are in a state of time luxury because they have no work commitments but they do not want to merely fill in time in meaningless pursuits. They have a notion that they have plenty of time (or at least more than they had previously to spend on themselves), but they also believe that time is not to be wasted. In tandem with this is the realisation that they are facing the inevitable end of life and coming to terms with the finitude of life. It is a paradox for the Being that, in order to be able to consider pursuits to be worthwhile and to spend time on them, the Being has to realise that life could end tomorrow. The older adults appear to follow the adage ‘plan as if you are going to live forever and live as if you are going to die tomorrow’. However, they also have the attitude that there is no urgency, that they have all the time in the world and that it does not matter if something does not get finished today, as there is always tomorrow.

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Principles and practices of mature-age education at U3As

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A movement known as the Universities of the Third Age (U3As) provides educational, cultural and social services for mature-age people in Australia and internationally. This paper focuses on the educational courses run by U3As and discusses two basic questions: What are the expectations of learners who enrol in these classes? and How can tutors best meet these expectations? In 2011, there were 97 U3As in Victoria, with an aggregate of 24,800 members. All tutors are voluntary, and members of U3As pay a modest annual fee of only $40–$60 which entitles them to attend any of the courses on offer.

This paper is based on three major sources: highly respected sources on adult education (cited in the references); the findings of the ‘Tutors’ Round Table Conference’ held at the U3A Hawthorn on

2 October 2010; and comments from tutors about their experience in delivering various subjects.

It also recognises the culture of U3As in general, in that tutors are given the widest possible discretion in the way they run their courses. This means that classes might vary from a very structured, language course to a very informal, current affairs class where the tutor is more a facilitator than a lecturer or where the tutor might regard himself or herself as simply another member of the class.

Founded in 1984, the University of the Third Age (U3A) Hawthorn is open to anyone over 55 years of age. Today, it offers 103 courses to about 1,200 learners (members), and it has 80 tutors. Despite the wide variety in the nature of classes, every tutor strives to give students the best possible experience during the class, whether this be some new learning, a good social or cultural experience, or simply a source of stimulation and enjoyment.

The Strategic Plan of the U3A Hawthorn for the period 2010 to 2013 includes these guidelines:

- We will provide a broad range of quality activities in a friendly community environment for members of the Third Age.
- To this end we strive for continual improvement in the quality of our courses and our administrative processes.
- Our role and purpose: maintaining an active mind is a key factor in maintaining the health and happiness of senior members of our society.

Adult learners have special needs: Malcolm Knowles

The major thesis in the works of Malcolm Knowles (e.g. 1998) on adult learning is that adults have special needs that are different from the needs of younger students. At the obvious level, U3A learners are not attending classes to obtain a degree or to qualify for a job: they attend classes, as many have pointed out, ‘for the love of learning’. Nor do U3A learners attend classes because these are compulsory. On the contrary, they are free to switch classes at any time, so that tutors must be aware that members will ‘vote with their feet’ if they are not satisfied with any aspect of the class.

But there are other, deeper differences between adult learners and, for example, university students. The first, as Knowles has pointed out, is that adults are highly independent in their approach to any subject. They do not need to follow the orientation, systems or belief of any tutor. On the contrary, they want to have a part in running the class. This means they should be consulted on a whole series of matters: the syllabus for the year, the books or other materials to be used, and the style of the class. For example, do they enjoy forming discussion groups of four or five? Do they prefer to participate in the same group each time or should the groups be re-arranged from time to time?

Learners like to set their own goals, and these might differ even in the same class. One person might be interested in the major turning points in history, while another might be more interested in the meaning of history. Because learners are goal-oriented, they will appreciate a program that is well organised and has been clearly defined. Tutors should show their learners the course objectives early in the course and they should encourage and assist them in setting personal goals. Knowles suggests that tutors might encourage learners to complete a personal goal sheet at the beginning of the course. Other tutors might prefer to state an outcome for their course, such as: ‘At the end of the course, you will be able to…’.

A second emphasis in Knowles’ work is that mature-age learners bring a rich life experience to class. This might be from their career as a doctor, a nurse, a teacher, an engineer and so on, from family experiences, from a recent crisis in their lives or from previous studies. Tutors need to be ready to recognise when learners are drawing on their previous experience and should consider how they can help them to connect new learning to their own experience.

Learners are constantly asking themselves whether and why the course of study is relevant. They like to see a reason why they should study a certain subject, how it is relevant to their interests and plans, and what value it has for them. This is easier with a language course where the person may be planning a trip to Italy or France, but more difficult in a course in ancient history, philosophy or poetry. Tutors should show why the course is relevant during every session, and whenever they introduce a new topic. It will help if tutors can present concepts or theories in a setting that is familiar to their learners. One technique is to ask whether they can think of a situation in which the new concept would be useful; another is to provide an everyday example to illustrate the concept or theory.

In Shakespeare classes, for example, learners might find passages that stimulate their thinking or comic passages that heighten their sense of humour.

Adults have learnt from their lives that it pays to favour things that are practical. This might present a challenge to tutors in academic or theoretical subjects, but learners will always appreciate any attempt to bring the topic ‘down to earth’.

Apart from the educational merits of a subject, there are many other important factors that motivate mature-age learners. Joining a like-minded community, being amongst colleagues and making new friends rank very highly on this scale. The social and cultural benefits of being a U3A member are real and they are recognised by tutors. Some tutors start a new course by encouraging all present to introduce themselves to someone they have not met before and discuss why they have enrolled for the class.

Surveys have shown that, when learners who were particularly satisfied with a class were asked why they enjoyed it, statements like ‘I found it stimulating’ and ‘It appealed to me personally because …’ occur frequently. Learners want some serious learning from a class. They want to feel the tutor has presented something of real substance; and they want to be challenged and stimulated.

Some learners are motivated by cognitive interest. They enjoy the act of learning for its own sake and they seek every opportunity to satisfy an inquiring mind. Above all, however, Knowles claimed that learners want respect and recognition. They want to know that the tutor is aware of, and respects, the wealth of experience in the classroom. They value a tutor who is keen to hear their opinions, who treats them as equals and who gives them opportunities to voice their opinions.

How should U3As regard the question of rewards? It is only human for a learner who has spent a full year studying a subject to appreciate somehow being affirmed for what they have done. Knowles states that one of the motivations of the adult learner is to feel they have been able to ‘fulfil the expectations or recommendations of someone with formal authority’. In business life, people attending even a two-day course receive a certificate. As certificates or any form of written acknowledgement are not a part of the U3A culture, the question of how the tutor can affirm the progress of a learner remains a challenging one.

However, there are many informal ways in which tutors can recognise the efforts and achievements of learners. One is to praise those who make a contribution during a class. Another is to tell the class how successfully it has progressed in a certain topic or subject. And a third technique is to speak to learners individually. Some classes hold a party at the end of a course or at the end of the year—this provides a feeling of recognition and achievement.

Tips for effective tutors

Through his work, Knowles has these various tips:

- Establish a receptive attitude in the class. Start by showing the class why the new subject will be useful and relevant, and make sure that all learners feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Set a good feeling or tone for the class with an open, friendly atmosphere (humour will always help). Some tutors have been known to start every class with a humorous story. Others ask learners for their 'news of the week' before they start, and encourage them to say what they have done or heard during the past week.
- Set an appropriate level of expectation, even of tension, if you are introducing a particularly important subject. However, bear in mind that people learn best under low or moderate stress, and if the stress level is *too* high, it could be a barrier to learning.
- Have an appropriate level of difficulty. The level of difficulty should be sufficient to challenge the learners, but not so high that they become discouraged or frustrated.
- Encourage learners who might question what you are presenting, or who say the material is not relevant. Try to see any challenge as positive, as it gives you, as the tutor, the best opportunity to justify the subject of topic or theory you have selected.

Experience-based learning

Another of the leading theories on adult education emphasises that learning should be based on the experience of the learner. A chapter by Andresen, Boud and Cohen, entitled 'Experience-based learning' in the book, *Understanding adult education and training* (Foley 2000: 225), opens with this statement:

> The distinguishing feature of experience-based learning (or experiential learning) is that the experience of the learner occupies

> a central place in all considerations of teaching and learning. This experience may comprise earlier events in the life of the learner, current life events, or those arising from the learner's participation in activities implemented by teachers and facilitators.

The chapter authors set out a series of guidelines for experience-based learning (EBL). These are summarised below.

The essence of this approach is that, during any class, the learner is not simply taking in what the tutor or other members of the class are saying; that is, the learner is not listening *passively*. Instead, he/she is listening *actively*, and even while the tutor is speaking the learner is asking (inwardly): Does this agree with my experience in [whatever their discipline was]?

The EBL approach has been a reaction against teaching modes that were too didactic, too controlled by the teacher, and based on an overly-disciplined transmission of knowledge. Supporters of EBL consider that the learning effort should come from the learners and that all learning should be participative. It should not be the role of the teacher to express the meaning of a given element of learning; rather, it should be up to the student to ascribe meaning to it.

EBL can be used for both formal and informal learning. An example of the second could be an excursion to a museum, and—of special interest to U3A students—lifelong learning.

Characteristics of experience-based learning

EBL should involve the whole person—intellect, feelings and senses. Role-playing or even discussion can assist in this. Passive learning, where the learner simply sits and listens to a lecture, is the furthest removed from the EBL ideal. A step forward would be for the learner to have a fact sheet to follow, thus involving both listening and reading. A further step would be to use discussion groups, in which learners have opportunities to discuss their views on a given subject with their colleagues. As Confucius said, ‘I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand’.

If learners can relate new learning to their own experiences, the learning is more likely to be included in their memory and understanding. Reflective thought is important to the learning process. Learners take in the new learning and then reflect on it in terms of their own experience, thus transforming an earlier experience into a deeper understanding. The authors (Andresen et al. 2000: 226) state that: ‘the quality of reflective thought that the learner brings to any experience is of greater significance to the eventual learning outcomes than the nature of the experience itself’. Kolb (1984: 38) has also written: ‘Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’.

EBL makes use of self-assessment as a way of building confidence in the learners and of enabling them to crystallise their knowledge.

EBL can operate in three modes. First, it might use structured learning activities. These can include simulations, games, role plays, visualisations, group discussions, dramas or play-acting, or hypotheticals. Second, the tutor might favour facilitation. The success of the facilitation depends on the skill of the facilitator. EBL assumes that there will be a relatively equal relationship between the learner and the facilitator, and that learners will have a high level of control and autonomy. This is certainly the style of facilitation used at U3As. Third, the tutor might rely on assessment. Assessment is specifically excluded in U3A classes because of the voluntary learning principle and the fact that people enrol for courses purely ‘for the love of learning’. However, in the list of assessment methods used in EBL, it is interesting to note the inclusion of self-assessment and peer assessment. U3As might wish to give further thought to the use of such assessment techniques.

EBL emphasises that learners study a subject that is significant to them personally. This accords with the spirit of educational courses at U3As, where students do not train to receive degrees or to qualify for jobs, but rather to become familiar with, or even to master, something of special interest.

Essential criteria for EBL learning

Certain criteria are considered essential for learning based on the EBL model. There must be a primary focus on the reason why the learner has enrolled for the course and what they expect from it. The course must include debriefing and reflective thought. Learning must involve the whole person. The education must recognise that the learner is not simply a 'learning machine' (in a way that children might be viewed in a primary school), but is a *person* with senses and feelings, perceptions, awareness, sensibilities and values—in other words, with the full range of the characteristics of a vital human being. The process must recognise the attitudes, previous learnings and world views that learners bring to the class. The leader must have an ethical stance that accords respect for the learners, values their wellbeing, recognises and validates each individual, and recognises they want to be self-directed.

The many forms of EBL used in vocational and professional education are also very suitable for use in U3A classes. These include case studies, role plays, hypotheticals, video-based activities, group discussions, syndicate methods, autobiographical writing, problem-based learning, group work and self-directed projects.

In summary, experience-based learning draws on learners' previous life experiences. It engages the whole person. It stimulates reflection on experience. It encourages openness towards new experiences. And, overall, it encourages continuous learning.

Comments by U3A tutors

The following is a selection from comments made by U3A tutors regarding their classes at a Tutors' Conference held on 2 October 2010.

Delegates felt that tutors should begin their classes by providing an outline of the course and request feedback at regular intervals, but they should also note that course descriptions are only a guide and that tutors can change the content if required. A language tutor stated that all her classes use role-play, as it provides a challenge to the learners and also introduces them to each other. She regards role-play as a vital component of her classes.

The problem of dominant class members who seek to monopolise discussion was raised on a number of occasions. It was felt that when a learner persistently wishes to dominate the class, the tutor should ask for alternative views and also make time at the end of the class for a private discussion with the class member. Great tact should be used in handling such problems so as to avoid alienation. Despite the foregoing, however, the tutor remains, at all times, responsible for the direction of the class.

Tutors should encourage the shyer, more reticent members of the class to select an item of interest and then give their views on that item. This increases their confidence.

Tutors should find ways to affirm members of the class to show that every member of the class is seen as an important contributor. Tutors should also find ways in which they can recognise the experience and value of every class member.

Language classes should provide intellectual stimulation and an opportunity for social interaction. There should be a strong sense of fellowship between all class members. The issue of dealing with learners who are not keeping up to class standards is problematic.

Some learners tend to 'self-evaluate', that is, ask to repeat a year if they have fallen behind, and this can be easily organised.

In Current Affairs classes, all tutors are individualistic and therefore their styles and presentations will differ. Some tutors feel that the U3A should combine entertainment with education. The group dynamics of a class should be excellent and friendship should be a big component of a class. By the end of the year, the learners should have the ability to discuss a range of ideas and they should have learned a number of new insights. Tutors should encourage presentations from individuals. These build self-confidence and self-esteem because the presenters are recognised and acknowledged by the group. It also fosters a sense of community and mutual trust. The work of presenters should always be acknowledged.

It is also very valuable to obtain feedback from the class. A language tutor who consulted the class found they suggested the following guidelines for tutors: class attendance should be regular; content should be well organized; tutors should have a strong knowledge of their subject and provide clear explanations; there should be an overall direction, showing where the class is headed; tutors must be sensitive to the needs and personal feelings of their groups; and there should be a sense of humour and of social engagement. A cup of coffee at the conclusion of the class is always welcome.

As there are no tests or examinations in U3A classes, tutors need to develop ways to measure comprehension. Is the tutor going too fast for the majority of the class? Is the tutor introducing too much new material and failing to give the class the background or the preparation to assist them in absorbing the new material? Such issues suggest that tutors should ask questions regularly: Am I going too fast? Does everyone get the general idea? Please comment if you are having difficulties. What do we think of these ideas?

One helpful technique is the use of a questionnaire. When the tutor has completed a new topic, he/she should ask learners to complete a questionnaire during class. It is useful to start with general questions, asking whether they find the subject useful and interesting. The questionnaire can then ask for some more specific information.

Some tutors have developed specific settings and techniques for their classes. One example is a Shakespeare tutor at the U3A Hawthorn who has developed what he calls an Encounter Group. The Encounter Group is a small educational group that comes together to study a particular subject, often with a member who has some specialist knowledge of the subject. In the case of the U3A, this member is the tutor. The tutor acts as the facilitator of the group in that he or she organises the venue and introduces the subject, and encourages discussion but does not dominate the discussion. The concept is to form a group in which the individuals share experiences and, in so doing, not only learn something about the subject but also learn something about the other members of the group. And, of equal importance, they might learn something about themselves. Members form strong and lasting relationships and develop a bond with other members and a caring attitude towards members who are sick or have social troubles. Thus, while the Encounter Group is primarily a learning group, it is also a social group.

Results from a research project

A representative panel of five tutors was asked a series of three questions. The replies to these questions are discussed below. The tutors provided classes in Languages, Literature, Philosophy, and Current Affairs (two).

The first question was: In your class, what is your major aim? The answers were as follows:

Language tutor. My major aim is, of course, to help my learners learn French as that is *their* aim. To achieve this, however, classes must be designed to be both informative and interesting, and also to be a time they enjoy. A sense of achievement is important, so that I try to reinforce the positives whilst continuing to progress.

Literature tutor. My major aim is to create an enjoyable learning environment.

Philosophy tutor. I concentrate on giving students an enjoyable experience. This includes mental stimulation, discussing philosophies that they see as relevant to them, some active class participation, some lively banter and some humour. A class should have a strong learning base, but should also be a fun experience.

Current affairs tutor A. My principal goal for each class member is not only to achieve greater knowledge but also to increase confidence. By class discussion and by learners preparing and occasionally presenting a paper, my aim is this: that they will begin to enjoy contributing to normal social discourse among their non-U3A friends by widening their friends' understanding of topical issues of the day. My secondary goal (based on my strong conviction that adult learning must have a strong social role) is to encourage after-class socialising and discussion, and to encourage learners to talk to absent members who may be ill, or on holidays, and to ask for vacation highlights to be shared on return.

Current affairs tutor B. To share our understanding of particular events or policies in domestic and international affairs, so that each member of the class is better able to understand the issues and make his or her own judgment.

The second question was: What are your major problems?

Language tutor. I really don't have any major problems. Better teaching equipment would be much appreciated.

Literature tutor. Establishing a venue. My house might be the best choice.

Philosophy tutor. The learning model for our class is to cover and discuss the major thoughts of leading philosophers from Socrates to the present day. As many of the learners have been in the class for three years, and some for more, the problem is to cater for new people while introducing fresh material for the ongoing learners.

Current affairs tutor A. To achieve my principal goal, I need to find ways to encourage the more tentative class members to make their first presentation and overcome their performance anxiety. The method I am using, with encouraging results, is to ask first-time presenters to review or précis a press piece, a film, or a book. This 'training wheels' approach postpones the more challenging step of exploring the self-interest of the major players in the current affairs' topics we discuss, then injecting their own opinions and advancing alternative strategies for addressing the problem.

Current affairs tutor B. There are no major problems, but in a group such as this, it is important to ensure that no one person dominates the discussion, and that every class member has an opportunity to voice an opinion.

The third question was: How can we make our classes more interactive?

Language tutor. Because language teaching – particularly in the early years—is very much teacher-based (chalk and talk), interaction can only be encouraged as skill with the language develops. Despite this, I do try to include interactive activities when possible.

Literature tutor. I think it is not feasible to have group interaction with large groups. All members in my groups participate in each session. I therefore restrict the size of the groups to 12 participants. I find this is the largest group where the members still act as individuals. In larger classes, they tend to form smaller groups—but this leaves the participation to the leaders of the smaller groups. Large classes, which are useful for giving information, can include questions from the floor, but this can hardly be termed interactive as the questions are restricted to a few and they must be strictly controlled. I think that there are reasons for having both large classes and small classes; large classes for imparting information by experts, and small classes for exchanging information between all members of the class.

Philosophy tutor. As this is a large class, with 40 to 50 students each week, the tutor's style must be highly interactive, frequently asking questions and calling for contributions. I encourage learners to present topics; I use group discussions; and I always take a break in the middle of the class to allow further discussion.

Current affairs tutor A. Interactivity and class involvement can be improved by intentionally polarising an issue and inviting members to adopt a partisan position, thus aiming to generate some tension in the discussion and discover arguments and counter-arguments which may have remained undiscovered. The aim is to encourage learners to take a position on the issue and feel involved.

Current affairs tutor B. Because the class is kept to a maximum of 15, there is an appropriate level of interaction.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to examine the purpose and nature of the educational services provided by the Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in Australia. U3As are a lively and growing movement that is providing valuable learning services for Australia's mature-age population.

The major conclusion is that mature-age learning is very different from learning at universities and other tertiary institutions. Older learners demand a high level of control over what is happening in their classes, and they are at all times relating their learning to their own lives and academic experiences. Tutors, for their part, cannot afford to simply impart knowledge and information. Their approach must be holistic, implying that they must recognise, and cater for, the human needs of learners, which can include educational, cultural and social needs.

At present, the educational offerings of U3As are largely fragmented because they must rely on prospective tutors coming forward and offering to cover a certain subject. It is to be hoped that this article will encourage further discussion and analysis of the educational role of U3As and, consequently, help them plan and shape their offerings.

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Barriers to adult learning: Bridging the gap

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A fundamental aspect of adult education is engaging adults in becoming lifelong learners. More often than not, this requires removing barriers to learning, especially those relating to the actual organisational or institutional learning process. This article explores some of the main barriers to adult learning discussed in the literature and examines some practical guidance on how to overcome them.

Introduction

Much has been said and written about barriers to adult learning. However, most of the literature in the field is concerned with barriers to participation, and not many authors or writers focus on how to deal with these barriers. Thus, the purpose of this article is both to place more emphasis on barriers to the actual (organisational or institutional) learning process and to discuss possible techniques and strategies to help overcome them.

In so far as the adult learners themselves are central to the topic of barriers to adult learning, this article starts by considering different definitions of adults as learners. The second section explores some of the main barriers to adult learning discussed in the literature, and the third section examines some practical guidance on how to remove, or at least minimise, these barriers. Finally, the article provides a short overview of why educators of adults need to consider barriers to learning in their practice.

Adults as learners

There are several definitions of the adult learner throughout the literature. However, different authors focus on different perspectives.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 70–71) define the adult learner in terms of who participates and who does not participate in adult education. They identify the profile of the typical adult learner as being 'remarkably consistent: white, middle class, employed, younger, and better educated than the non-participant'.

Other authors have attempted to define adult learning by distinguishing it from pre-adult schooling. Knowles (1980), for example, identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

- adults are autonomous and self-directed; they need to be free to direct themselves
- adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities and previous education
- adults are relevancy-oriented; they must see a reason for learning something

- adults are more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning
- adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones
  (in Merriam & Caffarella 1999)

Vella (2002: 5) also honours the fact that while ‘people may register for the same program, they all come with different experience and expectations’. Moreover, she claims that ‘[n]o two [adults] perceive the world in the same way’, and stresses that adults need to understand that they themselves decide what occurs for them in the learning event. At the same time, she recognises that adult learners need to see the immediate usefulness of new learning: the skills, knowledge or attitudes they are working to acquire.

Galbraith (1990) goes one step further and admits that ‘adults [are] different from children and youth as learners in many respects’ and therefore ‘different methods from those of traditional pedagogy would be likely to be more effective with them’ (p. ix).

In spite of all these contributions, it is still difficult to arrive at a clear and simple definition of adults as learners, especially because of the complex and multi-faceted nature of their motives and orientation. As Galbraith (1990: 25) puts it, ‘it is erroneous to speak of *the* adult learner as if there is a generic adult that can represent all adults’. However, it is perhaps this diversity among adults that makes helping them learn a challenging, rewarding and creative activity.

Main barriers to adult learning

According to most researchers, there are two main barriers to adult learning: external or situational, and internal or dispositional. External barriers are typically defined as ‘influences more or less external to the individual or at least beyond the individual’s control’ (Johnstone & Riviera 1965, in Merriam & Caffarella 1999: 56–57), whereas internal barriers tend to be associated with those which ‘reflect personal attitudes, such as thinking one is too old to learn’ (Merriam & Caffarella 1999: 57).

Among the so-called external barriers to learning, we can mention:

i. The effects of aging, such as loss of vision and hearing, which some authors believe tend to affect the capacity for learning of those adults who participate in formal adult education, especially because ‘most institutions do not take into consideration the physical differences of adult learners’ (Merriam & Caffarella: 97).
ii. Changes in health and certain life events which, according to Merriam and Caffarella (1999: 99), ‘indirectly influence adult’s ability to learn. [For example] Pain and fatigue often accompany both acute and chronic illnesses, leaving adults with little energy or motivation to engage in learning activities’.
iii. Role characteristics and their impact on adult learning, such as changes in nuclear family roles (like marrying and having children), changes in other family roles (such as death of a parent) and changes in work roles.
iv. Motivation factors, for example, being forced to attend career-related workshops or conferences for job security.

Internal barriers to learning normally include all or some of the following:

i. Failing to explore several perspectives or adhering to ‘pervasive myths, or mindsets, that undermine the process of learning’, as for example: ‘Rote memorization is necessary in education’, ‘Forgetting is a problem’ and ‘There are right and wrong answers’ (Langer 1997: 2).

ii. Depending on remembered facts and learned skills, or trying to make sense of new learning by relying on 'old categories' formed in the past.
iii. Staying focused on one thing at a time while failing to 'see a stimulus as novel' (Langer 1997: 39).
iv. Being anxious and concerned about not being able to succeed in a new learning situation or manifesting 'negative perceptions of schooling and skepticism about the value of learning' (LSC 2005).

Overcoming the barriers

Despite these barriers, research has shown that adult learners of any age *can* learn and succeed in their pursuits if they are afforded the opportunity, assistance and support they need. In order for adult educators to be successful in doing so, they should resort to strategies such as 'seeing support for learners as an entitlement, not an optional extra' and '[flexibility] to suit adults' circumstances and schedules', among others (LSC 2005).

Above all, however, it is important to try and create a safe and supportive learning environment. Not only should learning tasks demonstrate the teacher's 'concern for safety, learners as subjects, and an inductive approach', but adult educators should also listen, observe, design and use open questions that will invite participation in a positive learning atmosphere (Vella 2002: 186).

In a formal educational setting, such a positive classroom environment could be created by:

- 'involving learners in mutual planning of methods and curricular directions;
- involving participants in diagnosing their own learning needs;
- encouraging learners to formulate their own learning objectives;

- encouraging learners to identify resources and to devise strategies for using such resources to accomplish their objectives;
- helping learners to carry out their learning plans; and
- involving learners in evaluating their learning'.
  (Galbraith 1999: 5)

Apart from trying to help the adult learner feel safe, educators of adults must bear motivation factors in mind. In order to keep their learners engaged and motivated, Cross (2004) suggests that they should:

- try to establish a friendly, open atmosphere that shows participants they will take part in a positive and meaningful educational experience;
- adjust the level of tension to meet the level of importance of the objective. If the material has a high level of importance, a higher level of tension/stress should be established. Otherwise, a low to moderate level is preferred; and
- set the degree of difficulty high enough to challenge participants, but not so high that they become frustrated by information overload.

In addition, 'Feedback must be specific, not general. [Adults] must also see a *reward* for learning … [They] must be interested in the subject [matter]. Interest is directly related to reward. Adults must see the benefit of learning in order to motivate themselves to learn' (Galbraith 1990: 25).

To sum up, adult educators *will* be able to 'bridge the gap' as long as they provide a climate conducive to learning and view themselves as participating in a dialogue between equals with learners. As Galbraith (1990: 6) himself expresses it, 'Implementing these principles requires the adult educator to be technically proficient in content and program planning areas as well as highly competent in interpersonal and human relation skills'.

Conclusion

Even though some evidence may be lacking, most of the viewpoints and suggestions outlined earlier are important and *can* make a valid contribution to the topic under consideration. However, to understand fully how barriers to adult learning work, educators of adults should move to multiple explanations of what adult learning is all about, rather than rely on just one or two perspectives. The more we know about adult learners, the barriers they face and how these barriers interfere with their learning, the better we can structure classroom experiences that engage all learners and stimulate both personal growth and reflection.

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BOOK REVIEW

Making is connecting: The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0

David Gauntlett
Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011
ISBN: 978-0-7456-5002-9 (pbk.), 286 pages

The world is what we make of it

While in Russia in 2002, the group I was with spent a delightful day in a small, isolated village on the Oka River, a good drive from Nizhny Novgorod. The school catered for children of all ages and was a national leader in basket-weaving using a range of locally grown materials. Thus the curriculum reflected the local environment. We assembled in the largest classroom and the teacher in charge of the wonderful craftwork introduced, one by one, from youngest to eldest, the students and their work. At the side of the room stood a computer, printer and digital camera.

As he made his closing remarks, the teacher turned to the range of equipment and became really enthusiastic. I confess that my heart sank at this point as I made the false assumption that, like so many teachers in craft and technical courses in the education systems with which I was familiar, he would be looking forward to 'moving on', rather uncritically, from the craftwork to embrace the new technologies. What he went on to say was: 'I can't wait till we're connected to the internet because then I'll be able to teach all of Russia about weaving baskets'.

This collegial approach, linked with the desire to advance traditional craft knowledge using the new medium, was not one I'd come across. It is just the kind of community-serving creativity that Gauntlett's *Making is connecting* seeks to foreground. Across the world education—at least at school level—has been torn for some decades with trying to find the right balance between craft (so deeply bound in culture), design (educationally powerful but not at all well understood) and technology (in its fullest sense of the spectrum from hand tool through architecture and engineering to artificial and genetic intelligence). Finding such a balance whilst caught up in orthodoxies of balkanised curriculum organization, the deprofessionalisation of teaching, and the increasing use of testing of a few valorised subjects is nigh impossible.

It is unfortunate that Gauntlett's take on education is peculiarly narrow. He constrains most of his remarks towards schools and their teachers and repeatedly uses his 'sit back and be told' cliché to describe what (he believes) happens in schools—something that most in the profession, firstly, would not even practise and would challenge even exists in good education today but, secondly, would not deny is returning as a direct result of the OECD-driven testing regimes which are displacing exciting learning and dis-spiriting good teachers. The fact is that Gauntlett, who frequently says 'to be fair' and talks of fair-mindedness and 'fair points', fails to distinguish between a profession intended to serve a public good and one increasingly straitjacketed by policies that inhibit creativity in student and teacher alike.

When discussing concerns with Web 2.0 (p. 193), he talks of (some) academics having a 'black-and-white worldview ... (wearing) their single-mindedly "critical" stance as a badge of honour'—his agenda is against the *critical* in, it seems to me, a particular negative, connotive sense. For me, critique is one of the great sources of creativity and, brought into play with the political, the creativity of dialectics is one of the great energisers of human thinking and action. For me, critique is a most positive neuron pathway of design iterations enabling continuous reflections on what is, what could be, and what is brought to be. For the crafts and crafting—key concepts to this book—the conversation that takes place between hand and mind is one of continuous critique.

Thus, if Gauntlett's concern is to communicate with a readership that is predominantly everyperson but is also the Academy (not the easiest of tasks), he might better explore with/for the reader the theoretical underpinnings of his colleagues' positions. One example, core to the book: when Gauntlett draws selectively and partially on the not insignificant work on creativity by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), he targets the latter by citing the phrase "'certified public genius'" (*sic*, Gauntlett: 75) and then offering his own 'rather fuzzier understanding which is, perhaps, closer to the "common sense" notion of creativity that we might use to describe a friend or colleague who seems to like making things or solving problems in everyday life.' (p. 75). Explorations of the idea of 'common sense' can be both fascinating and challenging, but Gauntlett wastes an opportunity to celebrate the articulate explorations of both big 'C' Creativity and little 'c' creativity readily accessible to the lay reader and scholar alike in the works of, *inter alia*, Koestler (1964/1975), Boden (1992), Gardner (1993), Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Florida (2003).

There might be a clue here to Gauntlett's overall approach—one of a perceived common-sensism peppered with selective referencing to advance his case that '... through making things, people engage with the world and create connections with each other. Both online and offline, we see that people want to make their mark on the world, and to make connections.' What we can say is that the spirit of his proposition is sound and is one with which many might align.

The author is rather selective (and uncritical) in his use of illustrative craft(ing) material too. He has had professional experience with Lego (the company) and uses the kit-toy in loose, jumbled format, in his public presentations to let attendees play and be creative. But Lego is an interesting case study in the world of play and modelling with its creativity-inhibiting instruction booklets and in-built (excuse the pun) component interdependency. As sold today, Lego kits can be charged with being rather prescriptive. Meanwhile, Gauntlett fails to make the link when he presents Lanier's (2010) critique of Facebook's current formulaic, template-driven approach to creating one's own profile. Lanier argues that the messy and non-uniform productions of homepages in the 1990s were the very evidence of unique crafting.

Thus we turn to the need to be aware of our collective lack of discourse about crafting and making, and their social benefits (and this book, along with others of late, does contribute to the conversation). I think Gauntlett and I would share a common bewilderment at the conundrum of, on the one hand, a kind of taken-for-grantedness of crafts and technologies in our world, with, on the other, a lack of rich discourse—whether public or in the Academy—around the phenomenon of humans and their tools-for-being. Gauntlett has optimism that his and other recent works similarly concerned with the conviviality (for he does celebrate Illich [1973] in one chapter) are bringing forth the conversation but, again, he underplays not just his chosen worthy sources but also the historical threads to which they have contributed.

These threads have run continuously as craft-design-technology debates from the industrial revolution to the information revolution, and I have no doubt they will continue and will be significant. While Gauntlett introduces, selectively, the likes of Ruskin, Morris, Marx, Illich, Lanier and Sennett, he brings little new in the way of observation of the human condition. There is much known and to be shared about how we engage with crafts (whether material or digital), about how we craft our worlds, and how 'making is [really is] connecting' (my inclusion). The *connecting* part, whether understood as conviviality, networking, hobbying or social event, is no new phenomenon. Blacksmiths' shops were communal meeting-places as well as places of celebration of knowledge-in-the-hand, and the quilting-bee remains similarly so, while the shoemakers were itinerant networkers of craft, news and opinion. Witness, as I have, the cooperative problem-solving of a group of office workers over the challenge of a new software package or the communal house-building of the Amish (or many other community groups). Introduce the ingredients of any of these making-is-connecting experiences to the digital world and I see no remarkable difference. Bits and bytes are, after all, just another material offering, new possibilities for making and thus for connecting. (Besides, I have difficulty with the rather oxymoronic 'virtual reality'.) I make these points because one section of Gauntlett's Introduction is entitled 'Towards a "Making and Doing" culture' when perhaps the issue might have been 'returning to' such a culture.

Thus the new-found consciousness we find in the works of Gauntlett, Sennett (2008) and Crawford (2009) can be considered as *reaction to* capitalism (the arch technology, I feel) and its particular instruments. For a good half-century, a spectrum of quality-of-life issues has been signalled for us—be they about small (Schumacher 1974), slow (Honoré 2004) or superfluity (Hamilton & Dennis 2005).

So one reaction to our being used as the tools of capitalism is to seek out, and create, our Illichian tools for conviviality, to know self, and to position self as maker. Here, I see the concept 'self' as without meaning unless as part of community/ies, and I see making as both bringing-into-being and contribution to future/s. Rather like the Big C/little c device for creativity, we can think of our (individual) futures and our common (humanity's and other species) Future. Thus, the connecting that can come from making happens amongst all the c's and 'f's as well as, collectively, contributing towards the 'C' and 'F'. Bringing these two together is the work of design whose very definitional resistance to determinist ideas of 'progress' advanced in the capitalist cause offers a playground for personal and collective efficacy.

Gauntlett celebrates Greer's (2008) *craftivism* and resistance but fails to engage in depth the threats to the causes he espouses through his chapters on 'Personal happiness', 'Social capital and communities' and 'Tools for change'. As at once active and passive consumers, we are caught as instruments of the designed capitalist project (to which there are alternatives). A strong ethics of production is warranted where resistance means challenging the embedded practices of designing-in obsolescence while designing-out any potentials for maintenance (motorcycle or otherwise) and repair. 'Luddism' and 'hacking' both receive bad press yet are, in appropriate ways, ethically defensible tools of resistance to dehumanising ways of producing and to oxymoronically homogenising 'lifestyle choices'. It seems to me that, if we engage with the archetypal ethical question of 'How should we live?', we need, at least, not only hope (which Gauntlett acknowledges) but also action.

As paean to the pleasures and purposes of making and connecting, Gauntlett expresses his case through three understandings of making-*is*-connecting, that is, the two practices as 'one and the same process'. First, it's about *connecting things* (Lego blocks, digital material, ideas) together to make something new. Second, making is about *social connecting* which comes with our creativity. Third, 'through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments' (p. 2). The matter at hand is ultimately about Existence and our existences—personal, common and distributed. If the best way to care for ourselves is to care for each other (and all else the planet offers), then any purposeful bringing-together must be worthwhile. If Gauntlett is right that making is connecting and the corollary is true—that connecting is a way of making—then what we might collectively seek, as a call to action, are ways to create *and protect* the spaces (mental, social, temporal and physical) for the two to flourish.

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RESOURCE REVIEW

Nextbook—7″ multimedia android tablet with digital pen

Specifications: 8-2.11 b/g wifi; Android OS2.1, Micro SD Card slot, pen

This tablet has been innovative in increasing the memory potential with 3rd party storage capacity, thus enabling the transfer of files to and from the computer. It provides connection to a TV and offers an *a*pen which digitises notes and drawings. However, as with the marketing of new products, the user finds that one technology will not do everything and therefore we need a variety of 'gadgets' to accomplish all the tasks we wish to undertake. As an educator, it does not meet all the needs of what might be required or desired in a portable technology.

As this version of the Nextbook has already been replaced, I'm sure that some of the issues identified in the criteria below will have already been addressed.

This tablet was reviewed from two perspectives:

- it was considered from a **general use** as someone who might want access to web browsing, accessing email, reading ebooks, viewing photos and videos and listening to music. It does meet these general requirements, but at varying levels of satisfaction.

- as an **educational tool** for academics and students who would also desire some sophistication in file creation and manipulation, annotation and mark-up of text, it is not there yet. It also does not currently support Adobe Flash Player which is required for running many of our education resources/learning objects, though again, this may have never been the intention of this technology.

A number of criteria have been considered, based on expectations and usability. These are identified below.

For general use

Touch screen response: It is not as sensitive and responsive as other touch screens. One needs to be a little more deliberate with finger movements.

Interface: Clear, but not as intuitive as it might be. It is not obvious what applications are available. The applications button is not obvious. An application store would be useful for accessing additional applications—these are not readilyidentified.

Connectivity: Connection to a secure network was not as straightforward as it should be or suggested. Although connectivity was deemed to be easy, this did not prove to be the case. Even on a fast network, it took considerable time for it to identify the network and then it would not readily allow a connection.

Readability: The reader itself is quite good—the clarity of text is excellent, although resizing the text is not as simple as other touch screens where fingers can expand and decrease size. The size of font is adjusted via the menu which has set sizes. Turning the pages requires more of a deliberate movement than a quick swipe of the finger, although pages also do turn with a tap of the finger. As a reader, I would not have a problem with it.

Connectability: This device is an improvement on other readers:

- it connects to the TV, enabling photos and videos to be displayed on the TV;
- it has a USB connection to a computer, enabling the transfer of files, photos and such like between devices; and
- it allows the installation of a SD memory card to increase storage capacity.

Unique features: iNote application allows the creation of drawings and notes using the digital pen which transmits directly to the device through infra-red signals. This is an advantage for detailed drawings and notes which need to be digitised. These drawings and writings can be saved and emailed on to others.Pictures and notes can be annotated, provided that they are in the iNote folder**.** However, the **digital pen is unique** requiring two small batteries. It is non-standard ink refill, which may be a problem.

Browser: It is not set up for standard browser window and needs to be re-sized which is not straightforward. The availability of bookmarks is useful and important for effective searching.

Back button: This is a useful inclusion for all applications as it allows easy revisiting of the previous screen without returning to Home. It is not application dependent.

Media features: The music and video capabilities are excellent and provide some useful options, such as bookmarking on the sound and video tracks.

Portability: Although smaller in size compared with, say, an ipad, it is not necessarily an advantage as it is still reasonably heavy. Nor is it particularly thin—the overall size could be a disadvantage as it doesn't fit in the pocket or handbag and has a relatively small screen.

For academic use

The annotation capability is an advantage, but documents need to be loaded in iNote which may not be a real advantage if assignments cannot be loaded in the application. It does not appear to have digital text recognition which would be a useful addition in adding notes. Selection of text does not appear to be evident, nor is cut and paste obvious. On the other hand, it is excellent for reading etext.

The increased storage capacity is useful, as multimedia files are increasing in size. It is also an advantage for academics to be able to readily transfer files between devices. Its ability to display on a TV could also be considered an advantage, although in educational establishments it would be a greater advantage if it could be directly connected to an interactive whiteboard. It does not appear to have this capability.

Although this device does have a number of additional and advantageous features, its overall touch response and re-sizing of text graphics could be considered a disadvantage. Also, its ease in connecting to the network presents a problem. As alluded to earlier, its capacity to serve the educational market is not quite there yet.

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BOOK REVIEW

Teaching without indoctrination: Implications for values education

Charlene Tan
Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008
ISBN: 978-90-8790-646-7; 116 pages (pbk.)

The author of this soft cover, comprehensive examination of the problems of indoctrination, which are—often unwittingly—inherent in our 'liberal democratic' education system, is Associate Professor in Policy and Leadership Studies Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Tan's interest in this area began during her postgraduate research. Since then, she has pursued an examination of how we can teach without indoctrination in her doctorate, conference papers and teaching.

In the preface of this well referenced book, Tan states that: 'It is interesting to note that the etymological meaning of "indoctrination" simply means "instruction" and indoctrination obtains its opprobrious meaning only from the twentieth century onwards' (p. xiii). However she does not use the word in its original sense, but instead in the modern, pejorative manner and she argues that indoctrination occurs across all fields including the arts, sciences, religion and education, and is not specific to the ‘Other’, those whom we fear or do not want to understand. Tan proposes that indoctrination occurs in any situation where we are intellectually blindfolded (she uses the word ‘paralysis’) to the degree that we become unable to either justify or challenge our dominant, cultural belief set or perceive it from a different perspective.

In a bold step in the first chapter, she explains that inWestern society we tend to associate indoctrination with what can occur in the deliberate perpetration of, for example, Nazi or Communist ideologies. However, she asserts that our own ‘liberal-democratic’ educational system can be as perhaps unwittingly indoctrinating.

Chapter two, *Understanding the liberal democratic context*, jumps directly into what she identifies as part of a central paradox embedded in our educational approaches. In a system which deliberately and knowingly uses indoctrination, there is no paradox to face, but in a system which perceives itself to have designated indoctrination to the abhorrent basket, there is a central problem.

We believe that, if our children are taught to be rational and also open to change when challenged by better grounded beliefs, we are encouraging free thought. This belief in the primacy of rationality is what the paradox is about. She sees this as exemplified by the intertwining or combining of ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’. We use the term in this way as our society wants citizens who are rational thinkers. This fits the liberal mode and the belief that our system encourages free thinking and the two power each other. This is an old argument based on the frailty of the rational basis for thought, but her support of it is clear and succinct. She enriches it by examining the notions of evidence and evidentiary based beliefs.

Tan uses case studies from Western society to demonstrate educational indoctrination. These include those of Thomas Jefferson’s works and attitudes, Mary Sheldon's educational theory about the teaching of history education in nineteenth century America, the re-education of post-war Italy by the Americans and perhaps crucially, the case of Mozert vs. Hawkins County Board of Education. In this situation, a group of Fundamentalist parents attempted to stop their local school from having a prescribed reading program which they claimed 'indoctrinated students in the liberal traditions of rationalism and cultural relativism, and thereby directly interfered with the parents' ability to raise their children as fundamentalists' (Stolzenburg 1993, p. 588, cited in Tan 2008, p. 22). The judges dismissed this argument, because, importantly, they did understand the complex nature of indoctrination and instead perceived there to be a simple juxtaposition between indoctrination which could be identified by its coercive and ideological nature as opposed to the apparent non-indoctrinating objectivity of neutrality and free will.

Moreover, Tan cites Laura and Leahy (1989) who note that:

> The ability of children to function in their societies may be … gravely impaired by an upbringing which inculcates them in the belief that the oppressor's views of how society ought to be run is at least as good as theirs. …by upholding the canons of liberalism, the paradox is that we may be unwittingly violating the canons of justice.

Tan unravels the problem. In an exquisite philosophical rendering of Catch 22 ('and it's the best there is' [Heller 1961, p. 55]) she explains that a liberal belief in rationality cannot be rationally defended, and therefore by its own definition, is indoctrinative.

But all is not lost. Tan recommends an approach by which we can avoid indoctrination through using a reflective framework. Leaning on Dewey's (1933) proposals about open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and intellectual responsibility, she describes the reflective educator who constantly examines their own goals and motivations to hold them up to scrutiny, a process which enables that person to connect to inner insights and make real changes in life (p. 37). She then provides three prescriptive pages of practical strategies about how reflective, non-indoctrinative education can be undertaken in schools. She suggests, for example, that children in Western schools could examine or debate the religious, social and cultural reasons why some women who are Muslim wear headscarves. Other examples include the suggestion that examining English Romantic poems can assist students in their understanding of the concepts of 'love, self-fulfilment and worship' (p. 39). Another includes the proposal that we engage our students in debates about topics such as universal suffrage and slavery.

Chapter 4, *Teaching without indoctrination in civic education*, Chapter 5, *Moral education* and Chapter 6, *Religious education*, follow the same format. She uses case studies, legal argument, philosophical argument and Socratic questioning to lead us to how indoctrination can be overcome in these teaching settings—some of which are far more problematic than others—and again gives concrete examples, some of which are compelling. Her argument may not convince, however, an advocate for more traditional and utilitarian approaches to religious education.

In the final chapter, Chapter 7, Tan revisits the initial question of the dilemma central to the struggle between indoctrination, rationality and belief inculcation (p. 81). She concludes by exhorting us to turn towards being a community of reflective practitioners and for obvious reasons advises a whole-of-school approach rather than having individual teachers who engage in personal reflection.

The language in this text is that which is used by academic educationalists and philosophers and hence could be challenging, if not annoyingly elitist to a novice practitioner. But overall, I was pleased that I had read it—despite finding that the strategies suggested are not all new to me in my field as an educator of future educators in Australia, it did highlight some of the dilemmas. It is worth noting, too, that many of Tan's suggestions are already core practice in our teacher education programs and hence would not be completely enlightening for many of my colleagues. This may not, of course, be the case for all educators or educational institutions. In addition to this, I also felt a tug from that ubiquitous Catch: are not Tan's proposals another kind of indoctrination?

This text would be useful to a person who is teaching in schools, post-secondary education, community education and so on. It may not be so relevant to teaching in strongly applied fields where students are engaged in apprenticeships to become plumbers, electricians and so on, but this is a moot point and perhaps a relevant one on which to end this review.

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NOTES FOR INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

1 Papers are to be sent to the Editor, Professor Roger Harris, Adult and Vocational Education, School of Education, University of South Australia, Mawson Lakes Boulevard, Mawson Lakes, South Australia 5095. Phone: 08 8302 6246. Fax: 08 8302 6239. Email: roger.harris@unisa.edu.au

2 Submission of an electronic copy of a contribution is preferred, with one paper copy posted, against which the electronic print-out may be checked for accurate layout.

3 The paper should not exceed 5,500 words in length. The paper (and its title) is to be clearly typed on one side only of A4 paper.

4 Authors are also to submit, *separately* from the paper:
   (a) the title of the article (repeated), name(s) of the author(s) and your institutional affiliation(s);
   (b) an abstract of between 100 and 150 words;
   (c) a five-line biographical note on present position and any information of special relevance such as research interests;
   (d) complete contact details, including postal and email addresses, and telephone and fax numbers; and
   (e) a clear indication of whether you want your paper to be refereed (that is, blind peer reviewed by at least two specialist reviewers from Australia and/or overseas)—if there is no indication, the paper will be considered as a non-refereed contribution.

5 Any complex tables, figures and diagrams are to be supplied in camera-ready copy, on separate sheets with an indication of the appropriate location in the text.

6 Authors are to follow the style used in this issue of the *Journal*. Footnotes should not be used. References should be indicated in text with the author(s), the year of publication and pagination, where necessary, in parentheses; for example, Jones (1998), or (Collins 1999:101). References are then listed in full, including pages, at the end of the paper in consistent form; for example,

for books:	Athanasou, J. (ed.) (2008). *Adult education and training*, Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.
for articles:	Hamer, J. (2010). 'Recognition of prior learning—Normative assessment or co-construction of preferred identities?', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(1): 98–113.
for chapters:	Newman, M. (2009). 'Educating for a sustainable democracy', in Willis, P, McKenzie, S & Harris, R (eds.) (2009), *Rethinking work and learning: Adult and vocational education for social sustainability*, Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer: 83–91.

7 Papers are accepted on the understanding that they are not being considered for publication elsewhere. Authors of main papers accepted for publication in the *Journal* will receive one copy of the *Journal* and five reprints of their paper. Other authors will receive two reprints of their contribution.

8 Brief research reports and book reviews (of approximately 800 words) relating to adult learning would be welcomed.

9 Some issues of the *Journal* are thematic. While papers published in a particular issue are not restricted to the theme, intending contributors are encouraged to submit papers on themes announced from time to time.

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