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EDITOR'S DESK

In the last issue, we journeyed back to December 1965 in the editorial to take a peek at the journal as it was then. Here, let's skip a decade to the April 1976 issue …

The journal was 16 years into its history. By now, it was being edited by Joan W. Allsop from the Department of Adult Education at the University of Sydney. However, while the editor may now have been a woman, almost all of the 12 contributors listed at the back of the issue, as in 1965 issue, continued to be men and there was still no editorial. It was being published three times a year (as now – in April, July and November), with a subscription rate of $6 (within Australia) or $7-50 (for overseas). Three articles graced its main contents:

- Edward Blakely, 'Adult, non-formal education and development' (Blakely was associate professor, Community Studies and Development, at University of California at Davis, USA)
- G.W. Ford, 'Change and the need for new learning for TAFE teachers' (Ford was associate professor, Behavioural Science, at University of NSW)

- Griff Foley, 'Diffusion or mobilisation? An important theoretical issue' (Foley was assistant lecturer, Education, at Sydney Teachers' College).

In addition, there was a review article by A.J.A. Nelson (professorial fellow, Adult Education, at the University of New England) on "Lifelong education: Putting the ideas into practice', a "From the Journals" section embracing four international journals and a "Reviews" section on seven books/documents.

It is quite striking that many of the topics could easily be appearing in the journal today – 30 years on. Moreover, the title of the 5th International Training and Development Conference in Canberra in August 1976, advertised in the journal (p.11), was *Strategies for coping with rapid technical, social and educational change* – doesn't that sound familiar! I cite below just a few quotes plucked at random from these 1976 articles to illustrate this point:

> There is emerging an important new educational activity for adults, international in focus, that is not yet receiving enough attention from professional practitioners of adult education. This is the creative new area of non-institutionalised adult education … (Blakely, p.3)

> … adult education which identified earlier with social change via folk schools, people's colleges, emigrant education and literacy training has now become more involved in continuing education for the skilled that in social development for the disadvantaged. (Blakely, p.3)

> It appears that non-formal education is an idea whose time for implementation has come … (Blakely, p.11)

> How adequate is the present system of technical and further education to meet the complex and inter-dependent economic, social, technical, political, ideological, cultural and geographic changes which are occurring in Australia? … The simple appealing slogan of 'further education' masks many difficult and complex individual and organisational problems for

> educators. If teachers procrastinate in coming to grips with these problems, then they place the quality of working life and possible health of all in industry at considerable risk. (Ford, pp. 12 & 17)

> Tanzania is one of the few countries in Africa that have made a genuine attempt to create a style of development which benefits the mass of the people … The present article focuses on a single issue of crucial importance to an understanding of the current role of education in the under-development of Tanzania, namely, how and why attempts to mobilise the masses for development are distorted and deflected. (Foley, p.18)

> Adult educators, of course, have a vested interest in understanding and promoting the concept [of lifelong education]. But other educators, with their attachment to existing school systems, structures and practices, may well feel threatened by it … Faculties of education in our universities and colleges remain reluctant to allocate an adequate proportion of their resources to the study of the theory and practice of continuing education … (Nelson, p.25)

> … 'community education dares to attempt to achieve a reasonable balance and effective use of all the institutional forces in the education of all the people.' This is truly a concept whose time has arrived. (Bedggood, p.35)

> Ethel Venables, a British educational researcher, has carried out an important series of studies into apprentice placement and training problems – an area that has unfortunately received relatively little attention … One major conclusion … is that the technical training system has been found wanting. It is suggested that it's time for a serious evaluation to be made of the viability of the whole apprenticeship system and its effectiveness in providing adequately trained employees … Although the book is entitled *Apprentices out of their time*, perhaps its underlying theme is really a suggestion that the apprenticeship system itself is 'out of time'. Perhaps the degree of relevance and integration of training can be better achieved by other programmes … It is now time to re-assess this area of education. (Schilling, p.42)

Ford's quote on the ability of TAFE to meet current challenges is particularly apt as we hear of the establishment of a TAFE Futures Inquiry by the Australian Education Union! Notions of community education, lifelong learning and non-formal education are still being hotly debated. The extent to which adult education is currently being shanghaied into the service of skills formation is a moot point in the current climate. Doesn't the questioning of the apprentice system sound so familiar! And many articles in this journal illustrate the difficulties of many overseas nations in coming to grips with educational development. There is indeed a resonance about these matters that rings stridently in our ears.

Back to the present. This current issue of our journal continues many of these themes ...

Kathleen Fennessy, **Stephen Billett** and **Carolyn Ovens** grapple with what it means to learn in and through partnerships. Their paper is based upon extensive interview data from ten social partnerships in Queensland and Victoria. They argue that social partnerships, as sites for learning, have the potential to enhance capacity for action and responsibility, which underpins citizenship as a learning process.

Nicholas Biddle examines disparities in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and argues that, until education disparities are reduced, disparities in other outcomes are also likely to remain. From his analyses of national data, he provides a detailed picture of the age at which Indigenous Australians are currently undertaking education, and the age at which Indigenous Australians obtained their qualifications in the past, making comparisons where appropriate with the non-Indigenous population. The paper also examines how certain characteristics of students vary across different age groups.

Silke Hellwig provides insights into the vocational training systems of Australia and Germany, their underpinnings, practices and challenges. From her experience with and research on the German dual system, coupled with 33 interviews with informants in Australia, the author undertakes an analysis at three levels – the macro level of political and organising frameworks, the middle level of curriculum and didactics, and the micro level of learning processes. Pinpointing the strengths and limitations in each system, she concludes that the flexibility inherent in the Australian system holds potential for reform of the German system in both initial and further education and training.

Carmel Kostos draws attention to the major shift towards learner-centred strategies that she contends organisations will need to focus on if they are to meet the demands of the knowledge age. She labels it a 'quiet revolution taking place in our communities', where there is no quick fix but a requirement for broad, strategic solutions regarding the capabilities and qualifications of those involved in developing people and in the formulation of new policies and practices.

Two other articles continue the dialogue on education in other countries – in both cases focusing on female literacy. **B.S Vasudeva Rao** and **P. Viswanadha Gupta** lament the fact that, despite the considerable efforts made by central and state governments in India, illiterates remain. Their paper identifies factors responsible, and suggests 23 strategies that could be considered by planners and implementing agencies for enhancing the literacy rate of women in the Mahabubnager district (of Andhra Pradesh), the district with the lowest literacy rate in the state and country. **A. Okediran**, **M.G. Olujide** and **H.A. Danesy** explore the status of women in pre- and post-independent Nigeria and in contemporary society, and the discriminations and apathy that they face, brought about by patriarchal knowledge and man's domination and control of all spheres of knowledge, work, religion, laws and processes.

The paper advocates for adult and non-formal education and counselling programs. The authors conclude that it is long overdue for government to invest seriously in functional literacy and adult education counselling programs as tools for women empowerment.

This issue also furnishes three research reports from higher degree candidates, two of the doctorates recently completed. Collectively, they portray the journey of higher degree study, and provide a picture of adult learning in very different contexts. There are also four book reviews, tackling various topics from leadership and sustainability to phenomenological psychology, and from re-enchantment and getting of wisdom to communication theory.

Enjoy this issue! And a reminder to keep in mind the 46th National Annual Conference in Melbourne on 23–25 November – with the theme of *Social capital: learning for living (Learning in communities)*.

Roger Harris
Editor

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Learning in and through social partnerships

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This paper explores participation in social partnerships as a space for learning. It analyses interview data about participation in social partnership from partnerships involved in vocational education and training (VET) to argue that social partnerships constitute a form of learning space. Partnership participants engage in new learning through the interactions and activities inherent in partnership work, and relational learning is the kind of learning most supported in these learning spaces. By fostering learning about the self and its relationship to others, social partnerships have potential to enhance capacity for action and responsibility, which underpins citizenship as a learning process. In this way, social partnerships are learning spaces that potentially build collective, even democratic, understanding by enhancing the individual's cognitive and affective competencies. This cultural learning is embodied in the social partnership through engagement in effective partnership work.

Introduction

Within the context of a globalising world, a time of rapid technological advance, economic restructuring, and social and cultural change, multi-agency social partnerships have proliferated (Green 2002; Green, Wolf & Leney 1999). As an institutionalised relationship within and between the state, market and civil society, partnerships are now integral to most local governance systems, and the pervasive vehicle through which these three sectors work towards an inclusive society (Geddes 2005: 18). By linking local community groups with external organisations, social partnerships form decentralised and potentially powerful networks for tackling social issues. Recent Australian studies indicate they can be effective means of 'joining-up' government, and social and civic agencies, with communities to address local and regional concerns, and to build social capital at the local level. The complex and sometimes challenging task of learning to work together is the process that draws partners into realising shared goals (Billett, Clemans & Seddon 2005; Seddon, Billett & Clemans 2004; Seddon & Billett 2004; Smyth, Reddel & Jones 2005).

This paper analyses interview data from a research project on social partnerships involved in vocational education and training (VET) to argue that social partnerships constitute new learning spaces. The project investigated ten partnerships in Queensland and Victoria to identify principles and practices that guide and sustain social partnerships over time and through changing circumstances. The Queensland partnerships investigated included: Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council (QCS&H ITC), Wide Bay Coalition of the Disability Services Training Fund (WBC), Mount Isa Regional Skill Capability Project (MI), Deception Bay Community Youth Program (DBCYP) and St. James College School to Work Project (SJC). In Victoria, the partnerships investigated included: the Upper Yarra Adult and Community Education (UYACE) partnership, and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in Banyule Nillumbik (BNLLEN), Wodonga (WLLEN), Frankston (FLLEN) and Maribrynong and Moonee Valley (M&MVLLEN). In each partnership, interviews with three key informants provided data about partnership development and how participants experienced learning within the partnership. In the first instance, analysis of this grounded data identified the processes involved in effective partnership work (Billett *et al.* 2005; Seddon, Clemans, Billett & Fennessy 2005).

The paper uses these interview data on learning to discuss social partnerships as sites for learning. It proposes that participants engage in new learning through the interactions and activities inherent in partnership work, and that relational learning is the kind of learning most supported in these learning spaces.

Social partnerships as relational learning spaces

Unlike traditional learning spaces such as education institutions, which emphasise the individual's self-advancement by acquiring specific knowledge and skills, the processes within social partnerships focus on learning through relationships directed towards, and defined by, a limited group purpose. Within these learning spaces, participants report:

- developing self knowledge, self awareness and self management
- nurturing democratic values: trust, respect for others, civic and personal ethics, intimacy, care, empathy and tolerance
- improving interpersonal and social skills: observing, listening, interacting, planning, experimenting, problem-solving, negotiating and appraising
- understanding personal/local needs in the context of broader social/political/economic processes and systems
- adapting and using social and political procedures/processes for local benefit, and

- developing resilience: the capacity to remain committed and to adapt to changing circumstances.

These kinds of learning are directed towards securing important procedural goals for social partnerships, but they are distinct in a number of other ways. Firstly, they represent learning outcomes that educational institutions have not privileged, not explicitly focused upon, or had difficulty securing within institutional constraints. Secondly, unlike traditional educational settings, social partnerships emphasise localised and applied outcomes that, while general in description, are likely to be highly situated. Thirdly, by fostering learning about the self and the self in relationship to others, social partnerships have potential to enlarge capacity for action and responsibility, which underpins citizenship as a learning process.

These spaces permit a focus on contextual and embedded learning, which not only enhances individual competence and agency but also brings about collective learning. The relationship between individual and collective learning is complex, for collective learning is not simply the aggregate of individual learning processes. Learning, Delanty (2003: 601) suggests, occurs firstly at the level of the individual's biography, which includes self-knowledge and interpersonal learning; secondly, at the cultural level of collective learning – individual cognitive learning is translated into cultural forms; and thirdly, at the social level – cultural learning is embodied in an institutional form – and at this level, social change occurs. Others (for example, Vygotsky 1978) claim that knowledge emanates from the cultural level first, inter-psychologically between the social source and individuals, and is engaged with, and appropriated by, individuals as inter-psychological outcomes and as social legacies. Here, we propose that there is a relational interdependence between the social and individual sources of this knowledge (Billett 2006).

The unrelenting processes of globalisation and individuation, Beck (2000: 170) and Glastra, Hake and Schedler (2004: 293) observe, compel individuals to conduct their 'own life' within a 'context of conflicting demands and a space of global uncertainty'. Learning is a permanent feature of social life. Knowing how to position oneself at the centre of ever expanding and intersecting networks, requires individuals to learn 'how to be' rather than to know 'how to do', to cultivate *savoire-être* rather than *savoire-faire* (Bauman 2002: 40). In this context of individual learning through participation in the social world, social partnerships can also encourage collective, cultural learning. By facilitating active participation, they have the potential to encourage citizenry and thereby strengthen civil society.

Within and through a partnership's intersecting contexts, participants struggle to construct meaning through their relationships with others. This process of learning through partnership work engages participants in developing attitudes, values and skills that can build social capital and democratic citizenry. The pursuit of shared goals, Putnam (2000) explains, may develop reciprocity between strangers, which in turn can create a web of networks founded on shared values that can build social trust (Field 2003). Through partnership work, participants can learn 'how to be' with strangers, by learning how to exchange views and tolerate diversity, and to respect the sameness and difference in others. This process of learning has the potential to enrich the individual as well as the collective capacity for civic commitment and action. Like more deliberate forms of adult civic education (Gastil 2004; Martin 2003; Delanty 2003), social partnerships may encourage future civic engagement by reinforcing respectful egalitarianism, and by shaping skills in cooperation, negotiation and dissent. Conversely, democratic behaviours and values may be discouraged, rather than fostered, if participants fail to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Or, the learning outcomes may be some mixture of these two positions, because of the context of individuals' relational engagement with, and learning from, the social world (Billett 2006).

By offering individuals the opportunity to learn about themselves through purposeful engagement with others, social partnerships can become transformative learning spaces. This relational learning entails personal and cognitive dimensions that extend beyond the individual or personal to wider cultural and social levels. It is a 'cultural citizenship' (Delanty 2003: 602) learning process, whereby individuals learn capacity for action and responsibility through active participation in partnership work, and develop a perception of self as a social actor shaped through, and by, their relations with others.

To examine these ideas further, the following sections discuss findings drawn from interviews with the ten social partnerships concerning participants' expectations for learning, the role of prior knowledge, and the process of learning through partnership work.

Learning through social partnership work

Expectations

The partnerships investigated were commonly formed to address local concerns and capacity building, but were diverse in their processes of formation and in the goals that sustained them. Some, for example the Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in Victoria, were initiated and sponsored by agencies from outside the community. In these partnerships, the goals of the external agencies were of relevance to, or were shared by, the community. Others, such as the Deception Bay and Wide Bay partnerships, were local initiatives that involved community groups joining up with external agencies to tackle local concerns. Some, like the Mount Isa project, were the outcome of negotiation between local and external interests with reciprocal goals. While partnerships such as the LLENs, Upper Yarra ACE, St. James College and Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council had explicit vocational education and training objectives, others, for example the Wide Bay and Deception Bay partnerships, were concerned with redressing social disadvantage or, like the Mount Isa project, with providing industry specific skills (Billett *et al.* 2005).

Even though partnerships differed in their formation and goals, participants shared the expectation that partnership would engage them in learning. By taking on new roles in developing the partnership, participants anticipated they would gain skills and the ability to deal with issues of concern in the community. Through partnership work, they would learn to build capacity, both for the individual and for society.

One informant idealistically anticipated that, by providing 'access to education and knowledge', the Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council partnership would support a 'more equitable and open society'. A Deception Bay informant was committed to 'allowing all voices to be heard' and wanted to assist those 'who do not speak up so readily'. Participants in some partnerships were more concerned with improving the lives of local people by providing access to specific knowledge and skills. For example, a Mount Isa informant hoped the partnership would assist older workers to continue working and enable young people to remain in the town while acquiring skills related to the mining industry. In this way, younger and older workers could contribute to the regional economy while undertaking training that would also permit them to 'work nationally and internationally in skilled jobs'. Participants in the LLENs and other VET-related partnerships were interested in providing 'pathways' and 'entry points' for youth at risk, who, they claimed, were excluded by the conventional school curriculum. Aiming to improve disability services, one Wide Bay participant was eager to 'learn and needed to for the students and the quality of their training'.

It would be naive to assume that participants' expectations for learning were necessarily associated with achieving the partnerships' strategic goals. For some participants, the primary objective was

furthering the interests of their host organisation or workplace, rather than the collaborative or common goal of partnership continuity. To some extent, this expectation was present for all participants. Participants' expectations were partly derived from the environment in which the partnership was located, which in turn influenced the way individuals engaged in partnership work. For instance, in one LLEN, school representatives acknowledged that their initial motive for participating was to marginalise the local technical and further education (TAFE) institute. Once achieved, they focused on realising the schools' institutional goals.

Prior learning

Participants recognised that prior learning shaped their engagement in, and learning about, partnership work. Existing procedural and declarative knowledge, such as formal education in teaching or welfare and experience in the school and VET systems, was useful for those involved in leading or managing partnerships like the LLENs. Knowing how to learn and how to acquire information prepared some participants for their partnership role. A Wide Bay informant, for example, 'went to all the road shows about courses', while a LLEN manager 'read everything documented by the LLEN before she began her role'.

Understanding the local context and preparedness for the partnership role gave participants confidence in adapting their prior knowledge and skills to the challenges of partnership work. Participants in the Mount Isa, Deception Bay and LLEN partnerships drew on their experience and knowledge of local networks to involve 'influential people' in delivering or supporting their programs. In these instances, partnership work relied on well-chosen, even exceptional individuals. Such strategies are probably neither unusual nor confined to social partnerships. Acknowledging and attempting to reconcile disparate voices and views is an outcome of socially engaged activities. Such

engagement leads to inter-subjectivity or shared meaning, an implicit goal for social partnerships, regardless of their differences.

Across all the partnerships, informants reflected that they needed well-developed relational knowledge – the attitudes and skills that would enable them to engage and interact positively with others. In particular, they needed the capacity to collaborate and cooperate, and the ability to be tolerant, empathetic and committed. One informant considered negotiation and interpersonal skills the 'essential ingredient' (QCS&H ITC). Learning 'how to do group work in the 60s', a Deception Bay participant commented, gave 'life skills' that 'fostered patience'. 'Political skills' enabled a Wide Bay informant to 'get participation, get consultation, get a common goal, choose champions, and keep the ball rolling'. The capacity to trust others, accept difference and be tolerant, which meant being able to 'let go of your own long-held judgements' (M&MVLLEN), was emphasised by many informants. Needing to communicate trust and acceptance of others enhanced an individual's self-awareness and consolidated their relationship-building skills. Yet participants' prior experience and knowledge indicate that individuals bring varied perspectives and levels of readiness to partnership work. This diversity underpins social partnerships as learning spaces.

Learning partnership work

Some participants learned to undertake partnership work by applying knowledge 'from previous experience' (MI) or by acquiring 'PD from multiple sources' (SJC). However, most informants learned incrementally 'through experience' (QCS&H ITC), by 'talking, listening and reflecting' (BNLLEN) and by seeing 'how it works out' (DBCYP). These learning processes, which emerged through engagement in goal related activities and through interactions with others, are essentially constructivist learning processes entailing personal as well as cognitive learning.

Participants claimed they learned through 'real relationships' (QCS&H ITC), 'through meetings, talking things through' (UYACE), and realised that 'you could do it if you worked together' (WBC). In some partnerships, this interaction involved a small group, for example 'a group of women would meet regularly and talk strategy' (BNLLEN). No doubt, these proximal encounters nurtured intersubjectivity and shaped shared meanings amongst partners (e.g. Rogoff 1990). Partnerships such as the Mount Isa project, where there was 'interaction with mines, operators, suppliers, schools, DEST [Department of Education, Science and Training], youth pathways, TAFE', involved a wide network of people. Although this web of interactions exposed a broad range of perspectives, relations between partnership participants were more distal; and it is likely that meanings were not always shared or understood.

The process of working closely together helped to build relational knowledge and fostered democratic values. Where partnership work permitted, participants learned collaboratively and from each other. As they observed, listened and explored ideas with others, they learned 'to be open to suggestions' (FLLEN) and to change their opinions and perspectives. For some participants, the partnership constituted a learning space in which people were respected, and where individuals 'persevered until they could understand where each other was coming from' (QCS&H ITC). These circumstances built active listening skills, respect for the opinions of others, the 'confidence to challenge' (DBYCP) others' perspectives and to articulate an alternative view. For one participant, learning through partnership work was a process of understanding that people brought 'a whole lot of knowledge' (M&MVLLEN) to meetings and that there was more than one perspective on the same issue. For this participant, and no doubt for others, this knowledge generated good will and facilitated the 'relationships of trust' (FLLEN) that sustain effective partnerships (Billett *et al.* 2005).

Through doing partnership work, participants had the opportunity to develop commitment to their partners and the local project. A Wide Bay informant represented this as a process of learning not to 'whinge' or 'separate out', but of maintaining personal contact with individuals and the group as a whole. This provided a buttress against disappointment and frustration with the pace of progress. It meant learning to focus on the partnership's goals, so 'you don't get put off' (MI) and could show 'the people that they mattered' (DBCYP). Such commitment generated further learning as participants at the local level 'grew confident' (WBC) and gained understanding of the network of systems and processes through which the partnership worked. This knowledge was empowering, for it allowed participants to consider local issues within wider contexts and to evaluate the role of external agencies in addressing local concerns. In the Deception Bay partnership, for example, understanding the role of government, community, agencies and services required 'huge learning' but also gave local people the 'opportunity for influence, broader sharing, innovation and advocacy'.

Understanding a partnership's broader context encouraged participants to adapt processes and procedures to local circumstances, and gave them means to evaluate the partnership. Thus, recognising that VET partnerships were 'dynamic', one St. James College informant learned to 'balance costs and benefits'. The intricate personal interactions that form the basis of partnership work challenged many participants. Some learned how to nurture relationships by adapting 'procedures' to avoid conflict (BNLLEN), whereas others concluded that 'the system', in particular the provision of VET, was actually 'set up to prevent collaboration' (FLLEN). In evaluating the partnership and its context, participants in varying degrees learned to criticise the external forces that shaped its work. Judging that the costs of partnership outweighed the benefits, a Wide Bay informant learned 'never do it again' but to 'walk in and get what I want from TAFE'. If St. James College participants regretted

‘burnout from workload and buck shoving’, and were ‘tired of the VET changes’, a LLEN informant was certain that ‘we have a long way to go’ for schools were not yet able to ‘incorporate VET’ (BNLLEN).

No doubt, partnership work is challenging and frequently frustrating (Billett & Seddon 2004; Billett *et al.* 2005; Seddon *et al.* 2005). One informant (QCS&H ITC) commented that ‘success’ could not be measured quantitatively. Since people learned partnership work experientially, ‘by having to do it’ (UYACE), learning was incremental and most evident in the ‘intimate changes for those people’ (QCS&H ITC) in their understanding and relationships. A Deception Bay informant observed that for the individual, learning occurred through interaction with others, by ‘modifying their reactions to what they heard’ and ‘becoming aware of other people’s needs’. For LLEN participants, informal talk, group discussions and collective work, such as writing submissions, taught them that ‘if we do it together there is safety’ (FLLEN).

Social partnerships as learning spaces

The social partnerships investigated constituted cohesive and inclusive learning spaces in which collective, rather than individual, performance was valued. Providing for some a ‘supportive, respectful setting’ and a ‘non-judgemental learning area’ (QCS&H ITC), partnership seemed to one informant like ‘a learning circle table in a central place, not a void’ (M&MVLLEN). Espousing the ‘“we”…as opposed to “I”’ (QCS&H ITC), partnership work for many participants created a ‘welcoming’ (DBYCP) learning environment, in which ‘equity and democracy’ (M&MVLLEN) were often espoused, and through which it was possible for people to ‘find a sense of belonging’ (QCS&H ITC).

Although ‘safe in most instances’, these learning spaces have the potential to be exclusionary and insular; by valuing ‘we’ so highly, they can establish a strong sense of ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’ outside

the partnership’s boundaries or networks. Consequently, a social partnership does not necessarily form a ‘pleasant’ or welcoming environment for ‘new members’ (QCS&H ITC). Participants need to develop self-awareness and empathy to ‘guard against elitism’ (QCS&H ITC) and to nurture the partnership as an inclusive learning space. A Deception Bay informant expressed this as the need to ‘walk the talk’, to create an environment in which participants ‘displayed’ ‘profound grace’ towards one another as they participated in meetings and learned partnership work. As one participant reflected, it took time, patience and a ‘non-threatening environment’ to foster the ‘mutual respect’ implicit in the ‘willingness to listen’ and ‘tolerate opposing views’ (BNLLEN). Relational learning underpins the ‘shared vision’ and ‘pact’ of ‘trust’ (FLLEN) required for effective social partnership work. It is the basis upon which individual and collective identities are negotiated.

This ‘shared process’ of learning about relationship shapes social partnerships as collaborative and cooperative learning spaces. For one Wide Bay participant, it was an energetic, empowering process of working with ‘cooperative key people’ to ‘workshop the issues, list our concerns, decide what you want to be’. A Mount Isa informant saw it as the ‘practical processes’ and ‘activities’ of a ‘bunch of people working together…building trust by doing things’. Having a shared purpose allowed participants to understand ‘the capabilities and limitations of each partner’ (WLLEN). In these collaborative learning spaces, learning was not ‘didactic’ (M&MVLLEN), not ‘incidental’ (WLLEN), but instead it was embedded in the process of ‘coming to a common view’ or intersubjectivity. Paradoxically, the process of learning to come to a ‘common view’, which, Delanty (2003: 604) and others such as Field (2003: 143) and Martin (2003: 568) point out, is a citizenship learning process, builds the individual’s self-esteem, self-respect and autonomy.

In these learning spaces, the collaborative process of working together serves to encourage flexibility, helping participants to become more pragmatic and capable of adapting external policies to local needs. Informants commented that it allowed partners to develop a 'model that works' (WBC) and to realise that there was 'no set way to solve problems' (SJC). For an Upper Yarra ACE informant, the partnership was an 'opportunistic' learning space in which partners learned 'how to "use" the system to make things work better'. Although this learning is situated and in its specific application may not be readily transferable to other situations, the relational learning embedded in partnership work is transferable. As in other areas of civic engagement, social partnerships as learning domains endow individuals with 'affective capacities', which Field observes (2003: 145) can 'increase the prospect of seeking transformation through education'. By building self-awareness, a sense of belonging and identity, partnership work can empower the individual and strengthen personal agency. By building a sense of community, it can generate collective learning, which may then transfer into a process of social or cultural change.

For many participants, social partnerships were unpredictable, even 'chaotic' learning spaces, where learning occurred 'by the seat of our pants', in the 'cut and thrust, informal, undisciplined way' (QCS&H ITC; WBC). In one inner city LLEN, participants experienced in local government were able to apply their knowledge and skill in consensual decision-making to partnership activities. By contrast, in most other social partnerships, these capacities developed haphazardly as part of the learning process. In this way, individual learning and localised capacity building proceeded in tandem. Amongst participants, there appeared to be general agreement that social partnerships were experiential learning spaces, in which people learned incrementally by doing and by reflecting upon what they had done or achieved. The challenging process of learning together, in a space where 'nobody knew it all' (WBC), stimulated participants to

'think about how far we can take things' (UYACE) and sustained their commitment when they became 'bogged down' (BNLLEN).

If social partnerships are learning spaces that encouraged autonomy, self-management and resilience, participants also learned that clear goals and 'good boundaries' (DBYCP) were necessary. While exposing participants to new ideas and perspectives, partnerships also have the potential to be conservative and inefficient learning spaces. For example, one informant commented that 'each LLEN reinvented the same wheel' and became entwined in the 'paperwork and corporatism of the government' (BLLEN). Yet, the processes of learning to negotiate individual and collective expectations and to wend a purposeful way through procedural intricacies seem to be necessary steps in partnership learning work. While tedious for some, reinvention leads to incremental change and may result in innovative and new practices. If tedium alienated some participants, it empowered others. Strategic goals and ground rules helped participants find a balance between individual expectations and the corporate expectations of their partners. They shaped effective partnerships as democratic and purposeful learning spaces in which people learned respect for others and, through working with others, developed the capacity to adapt and change.

Conclusion

The relational learning that partnership work accentuates enhances the prospect of an individual becoming deeply committed to a group and its cause while the partnership functions. By its very nature, learning in and through partnership work is likely to be incremental and challenging for the individual. At its best, the affective, relational learning that individuals experience develops understanding of self and other, and fosters a sense of belonging and community. At its worst, this sense of belonging may endorse exclusionary attitudes and behaviours, if partnership work is not guided by democratic

procedures, if participants lack respect for difference, and if trust is absent or remains undeveloped. This tension between inclusion and exclusion is problematic for participants, but learning how 'to be' in a network of relationships and within shifting boundaries is an inherent part of partnership learning. As an educative process, partnership work has the potential to enlarge the individual's capacity for civic engagement and active citizenship (Delanty 2003: 601). By enhancing the individual's cognitive and affective competencies, social partnerships are learning spaces that can build collective learning, particularly democratic understandings. This cultural learning is embodied in the social partnership through effective partnership work. At this social level, partnerships as institutions have capacity to strengthen civil society, and it is this potential that shapes them as new learning spaces.

Relational learning developed through partnership work is transferable to other group-learning contexts. It is a fundamental asset for the transitory volunteer workforce that many social partnerships rely upon. It is this kind of learning, rather than the procedural or declarative learning associated with the designated outcome of a partnership arrangement, such as vocational education and training, that further distinguishes social partnerships as new learning spaces. In effect, these spaces reformulate and challenge the specific, situated learning goals of traditional learning spaces. Social partnerships stand as pragmatic, experiential learning spaces. Through the experience of 'being part of the group', by 'talking, reflecting, coaching, responding', participants are engaged in the process of building shared meaning. Partnership work stimulates and encourages individuals to 'take a chance learning' (WBC; BNLLEN) and, by engaging them in novel tasks, it enables new learning to occur. As one LLEN participant explained, 'I see partnership as essential for learning'. At its best, the experience of learning through working together was 'fantastic'; as a learning space, the partnership was 'the best place to learn' (FLLEN). It is the potential for relational learning, which partnership work facilitates and endorses, that defines social partnerships as new learning spaces.

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The age at which Indigenous Australians undertake qualifications: A descriptive analysis

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Reducing disparities in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is one of the main ways in which the relative disadvantage Indigenous Australians face will be overcome. Relative and absolute participation rates in all forms of education have improved, however they are still unacceptably low. Those Indigenous Australians who do undertake post-school education do so for the most part at a later age than the non-Indigenous population.

This paper gives a descriptive analysis of the age at which Indigenous Australians are currently undertaking education, and the age at which Indigenous Australians obtained their qualifications in the past, making comparisons where appropriate with the non-Indigenous population. It also examines how certain characteristics of students vary across different age groups.

Introduction

Finishing high-school and/or obtaining qualifications improves a person's income and employment prospects. Card (2001) gives a summary of the evidence for this from the overseas literature, Borland (2002) has information on Australia and Junankar and Liu (2003) give estimates for the Indigenous population. Furthermore, education may lead to more than just better economic outcomes. Wolfe and Haveman (2001) list a number of possible non-market and social effects of education. These include a positive association between an individual's education and:

- schooling of their children
- efficiency of their choices, including consumer choices
- outcomes of individuals in their neighbourhood
- ability to plan fertility decisions, and
- their health outcomes and their children's health outcomes.

The flipside of these potential benefits of education is that a sub-group of the population who has substantially lower average levels of education is likely to be disadvantaged across many outcomes. Furthermore, until education disparities are reduced, disparities in other outcomes are also likely to remain. This is perhaps no better demonstrated than by the Indigenous population of Australia.

Indigenous Australians are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the Australian mainland, the island of Tasmania and the Torres Strait Islands to the north of Cape York. Although there is a good deal of conjecture, it is estimated that, at the time of European colonisation in 1788, around 300,000 to 1 million people inhabited the varying climates of what was eventually to become Australia (ATSIC 1998). With the introduction of European diseases and an ever expanding and encroaching non-Indigenous set of colonies and then nation, the size of the Indigenous population fell quite dramatically. Indeed, over 200 years later, with the current population of Australia over 20 million people, the Indigenous

population is only just returning to be close to the estimated pre-colonisation numbers – 460,140 at the last census in 2001 – or 2.4% of the total population (ABS 2003).

Like Indigenous populations the world over, Indigenous Australians have not fared as well across a number of outcomes as the colonising population or later waves of migrants that have come to Australia. Furthermore, despite a general recognition of the disadvantages faced by Indigenous Australians, this relative situation has not improved substantially in the last 20–30 years. This can be demonstrated by the following table taken from Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2004). Here, the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous outcomes is presented at 10-yearly intervals (where available) from 1971 to 2001.

Table 1: Ratio of selected Indigenous to non-Indigenous outcomes – 1971 to 2001

Variable	1971	1981	1991	2001
Unemployment rate (% labour force)	5.44	4.22	2.70	2.79
Employment to population ratio (% adults)	0.73	0.61	0.66	0.71
Labour force participation rate (% adults)	0.78	0.77	0.84	0.82
Full-time employment (% adults)	0.68	0.44	0.56	0.57
Private-sector employment (% adults)	0.65	0.42	0.50	0.48
Median income in $2001 – Individual	n.a.	0.55	0.62	0.56
Median income in $2001 – Household	n.a.	0.72	0.77	0.78
Home owner or purchasing (% population)	0.37	0.27	0.27	0.37
Household size	1.33	1.32	1.38	1.31
Population aged over 55 years (%)	0.43	0.34	0.31	0.31
Never attended school (% adults)	39.32	14.42	5.21	3.14
15–24 year olds attending educational institution (% of non-secondary students)	n.a.	0.38	0.35	0.43
Post-school qualification (% adults)	0.13	0.18	0.30	0.44

Source: Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2004) using the Census of Population and Housing from applicable year.

Looking at the figures for 2001, the unemployment rate for Indigenous Australians is more than two and a half times higher than that of the non-Indigenous population, average individual income only a little over a half and the percent of people who own or are buying their own home under two-fifths. Some of the relative outcomes have improved, whereas others have stagnated or even worsened (for example, the percent of adults in full-time employment).

Although the above table shows that educational participation has improved through time, there are still substantial gaps in the relative education levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As quantified in the following two tables, all types of education are less common for Indigenous Australians, but it is especially the case for the education types that are most likely to have a substantial effect on education outcomes, that is bachelor or post-graduate degrees from a university.

In these tables (presented for those 15 years and older who are not currently at school and separately for males and females), the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are broken down, firstly, by whether or not they finished high school, and secondly, by the type of non-school qualifications they have (if any). The last two cells of the bottom line give the proportion of the population who have finished Year 12.

Table 2a: Post-school qualifications by Year 12 completion – Males 15 plus not at school

	Not Finished Year 12		Finished Year 12	
Qualification	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
No qualification	83.5	61.4	62.3	39.4
Certificate	14.2	34.1	19.2	17.2
Diploma	1.4	3.1	6.3	10.7
Bachelor degree	< 1	< 1	9.5	24.1
Graduate diploma	< 1	< 1	1.2	2.6
Master degree	< 1	< 1	1.2	4.2
Doctorate	< 1	< 1	< 1	1.8
Total proportion			17.4	42.8

Source: Customised data from the 2001 census

Table 2b: Post-school qualifications by Year 12 completion – Females 15 plus not at school

	Not Finished Year 12		Finished Year 12	
Qualification	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
No qualification	88.7	82.9	64.2	42.8
Certificate	7.0	10.9	13.1	10.1
Diploma	2.7	3.7	8.1	13.4
Bachelor degree	1.3	2.1	11.8	25.7
Graduate diploma	< 1	< 1	1.8	4.3
Master degree	< 1	< 1	1.0	3.0
Doctorate	< 1	< 1	< 1	< 1
Total proportion			19.8	43.3

Source: Customised data from the 2001 census

Indigenous Australians are less likely to have completed Year 12 (the two cells in the last line of the tables), with the difference slightly higher for males than females. Furthermore, for both females and males, Indigenous Australians are much less likely to have all types of post-school qualifications than non-Indigenous Australians. This disparity is especially true for those who did not finish Year 12. In addition, of those with at least some non-school qualification, Indigenous Australians are much more likely to have a certificate or diploma, as distinct from a degree or higher.

As is recognised by all levels of government within Australia, until the education disparities experienced by Indigenous Australians outlined in Tables 2a and 2b are overcome, the disparities in other socio-economic outcomes presented in Table 1 are going to remain the same, or catch up only slowly at best.

The way in which governments can best impact on education levels into the future is through the number of students at each point in time, as well as their rate of completion. That is, the stock of education (education levels) is mainly increased by the flow of education (the number of students). As this paper will later show, the most traditional source for this flow of education, or the time when most individuals gain their qualifications, is quite soon after leaving high school. However, there is still considerable variation across the population, with a not insubstantial minority of students being in their 30s and 40s.

The focus of the remainder of this paper is the age at which Indigenous Australians undertake post-school education. The next section looks at the current patterns of attendance and how certain characteristics vary by a student's age. The section that follows examines the ages at which the Indigenous population who are alive today completed their qualifications in the past. The final section concludes the paper with a brief summary and a discussion of the implications of the results.

To analyse the learning paths of Indigenous Australians, this paper uses the 2001 Census of Population and Housing (the Census). Carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (the ABS), the Census has educational information on most Australians who were in the country at the time, with information corresponding to the week before the Census was carried out on 7 August. ABS (2003) has more information on the Census, especially with regard to enumeration of the Indigenous population.

There are a number of positives and negatives when it comes to using the Census to undertake such an analysis. Importantly, there is almost complete coverage of the Australian population with a large enough size to get detailed information by age, Indigenous status and year of qualification. There is no other data set which allows such breakdowns, especially all three at once.

Current students

It is important to have a detailed understanding of the ages of the current student population and how this might vary by population sub-group. The first reason for this is the provision of educational services and support. If a student population is made up of a relatively old population, then the curriculum and teaching style might need to be changed accordingly and income support may need to be differentially targeted (that is, less reliance on parental income as a means test). Furthermore, things like childcare and part-time options become more relevant than, say, sporting facilities.

A second reason for studying learning paths is that doing so may shed light on reasons for overall low participation rates. That is, if it is the case that attendance rates for youth and young adults are relatively low compared with older adults, then certain factors may be more important in pulling/pushing Indigenous Australians away from education.

Finally, when a person studies may have a strong influence on the likely benefits and costs, as well as the overall success of a person's education. On the one hand, the older a person is, the higher the likely costs of education in terms of income foregone and especially when combined with a lower life expectancy, the less time a person may have to enjoy the benefits of education. On the other hand, by undertaking post-secondary studies as a more mature student, individuals may have better study habits and be more discerning in their choice of subjects and courses. Information on learning paths is therefore essential for undertaking accurate research on the returns to education.

There has been some work examining the age of Indigenous students. Encel (2000) reported that, using administrative data from the (then) Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), Indigenous university students tend to be around five years older than their non-Indigenous counterparts. This was true for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Similarly Gray, Hunter and Schwab (2000) found, using a cohort analysis of the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses, that non-Indigenous youth had a higher participation rate than Indigenous youth, whereas there was higher participation rates for Indigenous Australians later in their life.

Table 3 presents results for the latest available Census. It gives the median age of both university and TAFE students. The table also gives the median age of non-students aged 15 years or more to compare the results against. The table is broken down first by sex, then by a number of other factors.[1]

[1] The median refers to the middle value when the group of numbers are ordered from lowest to highest (or youngest to oldest in this case). Also note that high-school students are not represented anywhere in the table. The median age for this type of student is similar for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population with figures available from the author upon request.

Table 3: Median age by educational institution and Indigenous status for non-high school students

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	University	TAFE	Non-Student	University	TAFE	Non-Student
Male	29	25	32	23	23	43
Female	29	28	33	23	29	44
Employed	30	27	33	25	26	40
Unemployed	25	25	28	21	25	33
Not in the labour force	27	28	33	22	27	60
Full-time student	25	26	n.a.	21	21	n.a.
Part-time student	33	28	n.a.	32	30	n.a.
Married	37	38	40	36	39	48
Never married	24	22	25	21	20	25
Divorced/separated/widow	41	43	48	41	42	56
Whole population	29	27	32	23	26	44

Source: Customised data from the 2001 Census

Note: Those who didn't respond to individual questions (not including Indigenous status and educational attainment) are only excluded for that particular breakdown.

Looking at the last row of the table which gives data for the whole applicable population, we can see that the median Indigenous university student is about six years older than their non-Indigenous counterpart. This is despite the fact that non-Indigenous Australians are a much older population. Interestingly though, TAFE students are

of roughly the same age for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (and therefore younger than university students in the Indigenous population, but older for the non-Indigenous population).

Looking at the breakdown of males and females, for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, the median male university student is roughly the same age as his female counterpart. Male TAFE students, however, are younger than female TAFE students – by three years for the Indigenous population and six years for the non-Indigenous population.

Within the labour force status breakdown, the pattern for non-students is reasonably well known. Unemployment is more prevalent amongst the younger population, whereas those not in the labour force are slightly older than those who are employed. Amongst university students, however, there is a slight variation. Broadly speaking, those who are more likely to be supporting themselves (those employed) are older than those who are more likely to be supported (those unemployed or not in the labour force).

Moving on to the full-time/part-time student breakdown, it is not surprising that part-time students are older than full-time students. This is probably because the relative costs of studying (especially the income foregone) is higher for older persons, as are the familial and other responsibilities. That is, older students are likely to have less time available (after work and other responsibilities) to devote to their studies. Interestingly, the gap between part-time and full-time students is much higher for the non-Indigenous rather than Indigenous populations (11 years as opposed to eight years for the respective university student populations, and nine and two years for the TAFE students). Indeed, for university students, those studying part-time are of roughly the same age across Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. This is an important result as it shows the difference in average age between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

university students are driven mainly by the much younger full-time student population amongst non-Indigenous Australians.

Finally, the marital status breakdown shows that, not surprisingly, those students who are married are older than those who were never married, but younger than those who have been divorced/separated/ widowed. Here we can see that married Indigenous students are roughly the same age as non-Indigenous students, however for those who are not married, the difference is quite large (especially for university students).

Table 3 showed how the average age of students varied. To design policy to take into account the different needs of young and old students, it is equally important to know how a number of social, economic and health characteristics varied across different types of students. In Table 4, four types of individuals are analysed. Excluding high-school students, those who are studying at post-school institutions are broken down into those aged 15 to 29 and those 30 and older. A similar breakdown is done for those not studying. Within each of these age/student status combinations, the proportion who have a given characteristic is given. These characteristics are roughly categorised into three groups: characteristics expected to impact on human capital and readiness to learn, characteristics related to access to education, and characteristics expected to impact on time constraints.

Table 4: Characteristics of students by age

	Student at post-school institution		Not a student	
	Aged 15 to 29	Aged 30 plus	Aged 15 to 29	Aged 30 plus
Finished Year 12	**43.7**	**23.2**	**23.0**	**11.7**
English main language spoken at home	93.8	92.1	83.2	85.4
Used a computer in last 12 months	82.7	85.4	58.9	42.6
Used the internet in last 12 months	70.7	66.7	42.2	28.7
Lives in a Remote area	13.7	16.7	31.6	28.2
Has a disability or long-term health condition	**22.0**	**39.6**	**24.0**	**23.9**
Equivalised household income in bottom quintile	36.2	31.8	44.2	42.9
Has perceived transport difficulty	28.9	26.4	33.4	27.7
Is main carer for someone aged 12 or less	**19.9**	**39.2**	**33.8**	**31.3**
Used child care in last 4 weeks				
(for those who are main carer)	78.3	73.1	0.73	60.0
Participated in sport in last 12 months	**68.8**	**54.5**	**56.2**	**37.6**
Has high risk alcohol consumption	2.1	2.9	15.1	7.4
Employed	56.3	61.0	46.5	47.0
Arrested in last 5 years	**18.5**	**6.9**	**25.7**	**13.3**

Source: Customised table from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

Note: The variables marked in **bold** are those for which the difference between column 1 and column 2 is significant at the 5% level of significance

Table 4 shows that there are a number of variables for which those students aged 15 to 29 are significantly different from those aged 30 years or older. Older students are much less likely to have finished Year 12 than their younger counterparts and therefore likely to begin their studies with lower literacy and numeracy skills. Older students are much more likely to have a disability or a long-term condition and therefore face physical difficulties in attendance at school.

Younger students are much less likely to be the main carer for someone aged 12 years or less and more likely to have participated in sport in the last 12 months. These differences are likely to lead to different demands for student services at their post-school institution. Finally, young students are much more likely to have been arrested in the last five years. Provision of legal services at their university or TAFE college is therefore much more likely to be of benefit to these students than those aged 30 years or older.

Just as interesting as the variables where there are significant differences are some of the variables where the proportions for the older and younger student populations are not significantly different. Encouragingly, there is no significant difference in the use of either computers or the internet between older and younger students.

Past attendance

The remainder of the empirical results in this paper explore the age at which those who currently have qualifications completed their education. It is important to take a longer term view of past learning experiences to get an idea of the way in which current levels of education have evolved and to put into historical context the current patterns of attendance already presented in this paper. Furthermore, when a person studied may have had a strong influence on the likely benefits and costs of a person's education. Information on how long ago it was that people obtained their highest qualification is also important when looking at skills more generally in the current

population. Depending on the extent to which skills learnt whilst studying are maintained, a person who obtained their qualification some time ago may not be as up-to-date in their skills as someone who obtained their qualifications more recently.

The age of completion of a person's **highest qualification** is given in the following set of figures (however, no information is available on intermediate qualifications).These figures are presented separately for males and females, with a separate figure for people whose highest qualification is a certificate, diploma and degree. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, a very small proportion of the Indigenous population have a post-graduate degree so they are excluded from the analysis. The Indigenous population is represented by a dotted line, the non-Indigenous population an unbroken line.

Figure 2.1

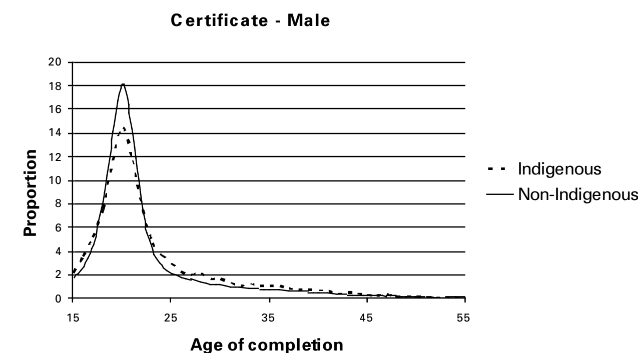


Figure 2.2

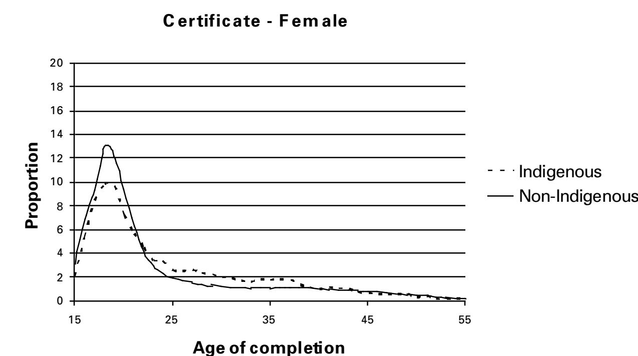


Figure 2.3

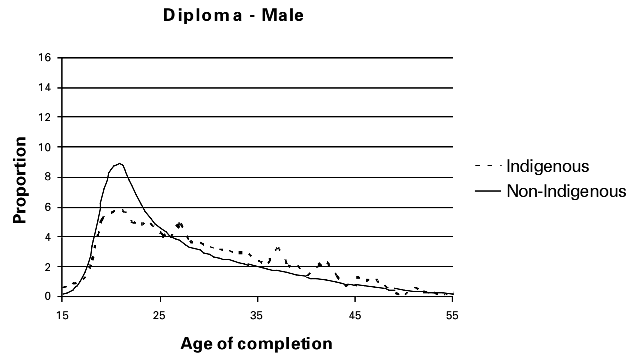


Figure 2.4

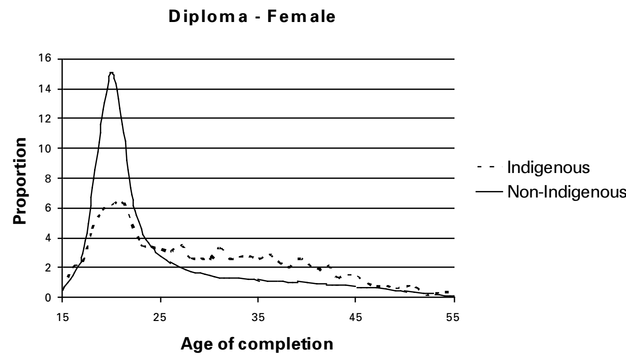
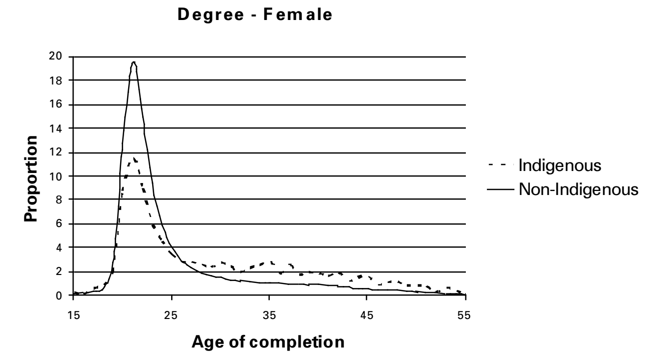


Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6



Looking at Figure 2.1, we can see that, of those for whom a certificate is their highest non-school qualification, a higher number of Indigenous males completed their qualification at age 15–17 than non-Indigenous males. This possibly reflects the lower high-school completion for this group resulting in non-Indigenous Australians being less likely to have had the chance to obtain non-school qualifications by then. However, between the ages of 18 and 22 for males, and up until age 21 for females, the non-Indigenous proportion is higher.

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous females, the peak age of completion is aged 18, which is the age at which 9.8% and 13.0% respectively completed their qualification. For males, this peak is slightly older at age 20 with 14.4% of Indigenous and 18.2% of non-Indigenous Australians completing their certificate at this age.

From age 23 and older for males and 22 and older for females, the proportion that obtained their qualification at each age was higher for the Indigenous than the non-Indigenous population. This older age profile of completion is much more pronounced for females; however, for both sexes, Indigenous Australians seem to have had completed their qualifications later than the non-Indigenous population.

This pattern of older attendance is replicated for diplomas, as shown by Figures 2.3 and 2.4. The older age of completion is especially true

for females where, for example, an almost two and a half times higher proportion of non-Indigenous females completed this type of highest qualification at age 20 than their Indigenous counterparts. On the other hand the situation is reversed for 31 year olds, where two and a half times more Indigenous females completed their education at this age.

To put this disparity into perspective, less Indigenous females completed their diploma between the ages of 15 and 24 (40.3%) than between 25 and 40 (44.3%). For non-Indigenous females on the other hand, the corresponding figures are 66.5% and 24.3%.

Looking finally at those for whom a bachelor degree is their highest qualification (which is a much smaller proportion of the Indigenous population), the age of completion is once again older for the Indigenous population and slightly older for males than females.

Nearly one-fifth (19.6%) of non-Indigenous females and 15.6% of non-Indigenous males completed their degrees at age 21. Such an age of completion is akin to leaving school at around age 17 or 18 and then undertaking a three or four year degree. On the other hand, nearly one-fifth of Indigenous Australians completed their degrees at age 36 or older for males and 39 years or older for females. By age 36, however, a little less than eight percent of non-Indigenous males who would eventually complete a bachelor degree were yet to do so, and by aged 39, a little over eight percent of females had not done so.

Another way to consider the past learning experiences of Indigenous Australians is via the number of years between finishing high school and commencing post-school qualifications. To measure this precisely, one would require either longitudinal data (which is not available for Indigenous Australians) or more detailed questions on past education experience (which is also not available and is nonetheless prone to error in recall). Given this lack of information, such measures must therefore be estimated. To do so, this paper

assumes a certain number of years taken to complete each of the three qualifications and high school education. These estimates are then combined with the age at finishing the highest qualification, as presented earlier.

For these estimates, a certificate is assumed to take one year, a diploma two and a bachelor degree four years. Furthermore, if the highest year of school completed was year 9 or below, then the person was assumed to leave school at 15, year 10 at 16, year 11 at 17 and year 12 at 18. So, for example, if an individual reported that they both finished Year 12 and finished their diploma at age 21, then they were assumed to have spent one year not studying. On the other hand, if the individual with the same level of education reported that they finished their diploma at age 20, then they are assumed to have spent no years not studying.

If these assumptions are valid, there are a number of reasons why such a person may have spent time not studying. For example:

- they may have taken a year off to work between high school and post-school study
- they may have taken time off for non-work reasons, which could include raising children (especially for females), travelling or sickness
- they may have undertaken intermediate qualifications (for example, a certificate, **then** a diploma)
- they may have obtained their qualification by studying part-time; in this scenario, the time spent not studying is spread over several years and occurs concurrently with their study years, or
- they may have had to repeat a number of years, either at school or for the post-school qualification; if so, then the year they had to repeat is classed as a year not studying (that is, they were not studying ‘effectively’).

The information on years spent not studying is summarised in the following table. It gives the estimated median number of years spent not studying for Indigenous and non-Indigenous males and females, broken down by high school completion (rounded to the nearest year).

Table 5: Median estimated years spent not studying

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Did not finish Year 12	4	10	3	4
Finished Year 12	3	3	2	2

Generally speaking, females were estimated to spend more time not studying than males, and the Indigenous population was estimated to have spent more time than the non- Indigenous population. Furthermore, according to Table 5, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous males and females, those who did not finish school were estimated to spend more time not studying than those who did finish Year 12. However, the figure that stands out most in Table 5 is the estimated time spent not studying for Indigenous females who did not finish Year 12.

Although it is not possible to test this using the Census, this quite likely reflects the higher fertility rates for young Indigenous females in this group. Evidence for this can be found in Table 6. Here, the average number of children who were ever born to each Indigenous woman is presented by age group and education combination.

Table 6: Average number of children born by current age and education of mother

	No qualification		Qualification		All women
	No Year 12	Year 12	No Year 12	Year 12	
Aged 15 to 24	0.64	0.42	0.82	0.61	0.62
Aged 25 to 34	2.71	1.72	2.30	1.29	2.34
Aged 35 to 44	3.07	2.95	2.97	2.61	2.99
Aged 45 to 54	3.69	2.85	3.50	4.18	3.64
Aged 55 plus	4.39	2.63	3.18	1.37	4.10
All ages	2.53	1.49	2.54	1.79	2.38

Source: Customised tables from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (ABS 2004)

The most relevant columns for the purposes of this paper are the second last and third last columns (that is, with qualifications). These data show that, for each age group, those who did not finish Year 12 have a higher number of children ever born. This is particularly the case for those women around the average age of female TAFE and university students (aged 25 to 34). Caring duties (for one's extended family and community) as well as other family and community obligations may also be explanations for a greater gap between high school education and post-school qualifications.

Summary and conclusions

This paper began by examining the age of the current student population. It was shown that the Indigenous population is older on average than the non-Indigenous population with the difference larger for male university and female TAFE students. This has important implications for providers of education for Indigenous Australians in that Indigenous Australians are going to bring greater life experiences to their post-school qualifications. This ideally should

be taken into account in curriculum design and the structure of support services.

The paper also looked at how a number of characteristics varied by the age of Indigenous students. Older students are less likely to have finished Year 12. Their literacy and numeracy skills may not therefore always be comparable to their younger counterparts. Older students are also more likely to have a disability or long term condition as well being the main carer of someone 12 years and under. They are hence more likely to benefit from the provision of child care and health facilities at their institution. Older students are, however, less likely to have participated in sport in the last 12 months and less likely to have been arrested in the last five years. Encouragingly, there is no significant difference in the use of either computers or the internet between young and old students.

Looking at past patterns of attendance, Indigenous Australians who currently have qualifications were more likely to have obtained them at an older age than the non-Indigenous population. This is especially true for females whose highest qualification is a diploma, and males with a degree. Indigenous Australians spent more years between high school and obtaining qualifications, with the median female who did not complete Year 12 taking ten years to commence a qualification. Figures presented in this paper suggest that higher fertility rates explained some but not all of this difference, reinforcing the need for adequate child care facilities to encourage Indigenous females to return to education and, once there, support them in their completion.

The data in this study can only go so far in answering questions about Indigenous Australians and the age at which they undertake qualifications. They provide considerable information about who, some information about how, but not much about why. Case studies are an important tool in answering such questions as are larger scale surveys that ask current or previous students about their education or training experiences. The 2004 Survey of Indigenous Vocational Education and Training Students, conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2005) is one potential source of information that could be exploited in this respect.

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Competency-based training: different perceptions in Australia and Germany

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The German dual apprenticeship system has traditionally been viewed as an effective system for generating a highly skilled workforce in the trades, crafts and service sectors. In addition, countries and systems looking to improve their own approaches to vocational education and training (VET) have considered as exemplary the main features of the 'dual system' (that is, two learning sites and shared responsibility between private employers and public vocational schools). Nevertheless, competency-based training (CBT) as it has been implemented in the Anglophone countries has increasingly attracted the attention of public officials, vocational educators and VET researchers in Germany. This attention has been especially focused on the modularisation of curriculum and the importance of vocationalism in education and training systems. Comparative studies of these dual concepts (for example Deissinger 2002, Ertl 2000) have been used to inform

policy and practice. This paper focuses on the competency-based approach to VET in Australia and examines how reforms aimed at developing a national system, and implementing CBT in curriculum, training delivery and assessment are evaluated by stakeholders (for example, representatives of government, educators and academics). It also compares reforms to VET in Australia with those used in Germany for reforming and restructuring the dual system. This analysis is used to generate conclusions about the extent to which aspects of the Australian CBT model might be successfully applied to dual system reforms in Germany.

Introduction

In times of internationalisation and globalisation, social and economic systems are no longer operating independently of each other, but are increasingly influenced by different international and national policies. With regard to vocational education and training (VET), it can be observed that similarities in VET systems are more and more prevalent despite their different historical backgrounds. This is particularly evident in current reform approaches addressing new economic, technological and demographic structures. International and comparative VET research plays an important role in this respect and the question of what can be learnt from different approaches in VET has been raised in numerous studies. A comparative perspective is the basis for this paper about the Australian and German VET systems. Striking aspects of both systems are highlighted and juxtaposed to elaborate similarities and differences at various levels. For both systems it is interesting to reveal how structures of the competency-based system and the German dual system have developed and been accepted, and whether significant changes can be located. Furthermore, it is important to look at how policy and organisational issues have changed and what impact these have had on learning processes. The question here is how political objectives and reforms are realised in learning processes and whether there is a discrepancy between theoretical demands and the reality practitioners are facing, especially in the Australian context. In the German context, examples of current reform approaches that impact mainly on curriculum development, delivery and assessment of training are presented and similarities to competency-based training (CBT) as it has been implemented in Australia are illustrated.

The study

This paper is part of a comparative, multi-level study on the German and Australian VET systems. At the macro level, the political and organising frameworks of the German and Australian VET systems are compared. At the level of curriculum development, didactic and curricular guidelines are depicted. At the micro level, the comparison focuses on the realisation of these guidelines in learning processes. The research objective is to discover the differences and similarities in the VET systems, namely, a competency-based system and a system based on vocationalism, that are often considered as opposites due to their different underlying philosophies and different historical, political and economic contexts. Data about the systems were collected using a qualitative empirical method, validated by a broad literature review. Data on the Australian system were derived from 33 expert interviews with an average length of 45 minutes that were conducted in March and April 2005. Experts were categorised in three target groups: practitioners, academics and representatives of State and Commonwealth institutions. Practitioners provided their views and experiences within the competency-based system in order to obtain a picture of how CBT is actually realised. Academics who had undertaken influential research on CBT were interviewed to underline the theoretical view on CBT concerning didactic and pedagogical issues. Representatives of State and Commonwealth

institutions provided information on policy and organisational issues of CBT. Selected findings from these interviews are presented in this paper to illustrate different perceptions of CBT in Australia. The findings are structured according to selected criteria used as a basis for comparison with the German VET system. (Due to space constraints, a complex comparison between the German and Australian VET systems involving all relevant aspects cannot be provided here.)

Findings and discussion

VET in Australia: Organising frameworks and institutional structures

The macro level of the Australian VET system is characterised by two levels of organisation, namely, the Commonwealth and the States/Territories. Organisational and institutional structures of the Australian VET system are determined by the Commonwealth Department for Education, Science and Training (DEST) as well as the State and Territory authorities. With the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) in 1993 a national institution was called into being that was solely in charge of VET operating outside the Commonwealth government (Pickersgill 2004, p. 21). ANTA's role was supposed to be a broker between the States/Territories and the Commonwealth. Different interests were to be integrated within a national coherent VET system enabling mutual recognition of vocational qualifications and promoting the mobility of learners across State and Territory borders. There is a consensus among VET researchers and public officials about the purpose of such a national institution and what it should contribute to VET in Australia. However, different views exist on whether ANTA achieved these objectives or not. In some views ANTA is more or less regarded as a failure, because it is perceived as a highly bureaucratic organisation pre-occupied with administration and funding arrangements rather than policy. Furthermore, ANTA is not considered successful in getting greater involvement of small and

medium enterprises in decision-making processes, for example in the development of competency standards. Another important issue that is regarded as not having been sufficiently addressed by ANTA is elevation of the status and prestige of VET in Australia. ANTA is seen as having had the opportunity to raise the acceptance of VET and vocational qualifications as distinct from school and academic qualifications, but according to experts` statements it missed that opportunity. Despite these criticisms, there is also acknowledgement of the successes ANTA had especially with regard to its efforts in establishing and maintaining national frameworks for a coherent VET system. Most experts state that there is more of a national system now and ANTA contributed to this development. Answers to the question on what would happen after ANTA was abolished[1] reveal considerable insecurity about the future of VET in Australia. Many experts appreciate the fact that the responsibilities of ANTA are now vested in the Commonwealth department (DEST). They express hope for the potential for more transition between schools, higher education and VET, with all these sectors now under one umbrella. But they also fear that VET could be marginalised without an external organisation addressing the needs of VET and that the dominance of higher education would be increased. The question on whether more centralisation with DEST being responsible for VET would be positive was also answered ambiguously. On the one hand, experts appreciate the attempts towards achieving a national VET system, but on the other, there seems to be a danger of politicising the VET system by driving a central national agenda that is primarily focused on funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. Furthermore, there seems to be the risk that the States and Territories are moving away from the national agenda and the efforts undertaken so far will be rendered ineffective.

[1] Following the Prime Minister's announcement in October 2004, ANTA was abolished on 1 July 2005 and its responsibilities and functions transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

Another important structural issue in the Australian VET system that impacts on the realisation of CBT at the macro level is the policy of an open training market. Much research has been done in this context (e.g. Anderson 1997) and the focus in the expert interviews is set on the efficiency of and the quality resulting from an open training market. The open training market is regarded as efficient with respect to the establishment of private providers in niche markets where public providers cannot supply sufficient training. According to experts, cooperation between private and public providers has increased and enterprises that had delivered non-accredited in-house training became registered training organisations. However, problems are expressed concerning the quality of training. The open training market caused a considerable increase of private providers who often did not have adequate equipment and facilities to provide high quality training. A competitive market demands great efforts in advertising, marketing and managing training to attract clients. There is the view that this is often done at the expense of delivering high quality training.

VET in Germany: Organising frameworks and institutional structures

The macro level of the German VET system is characterised by two levels of regimentation, namely the States or *Länder* and the Federal Government. Similar to the Australian system, *Länder* are responsible for school and higher education, whereas VET is regulated at the federal level. The most important institutes are the Federal Ministry for Education and Research and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education. Training regulations for all nationally recognised qualifications achieved in the dual system are developed and endorsed at the federal level. Curricula for part-time vocational schools in the dual system are developed and endorsed by public officials from the *Länder*. Chambers play an important role in the German VET system, functioning as monitoring, consulting and controlling institutions.

The training market in Germany is regulated by the Vocational Training Act of 1969, which includes training regulations for all nationally recognised skilled occupations and requirements for trainers and training companies. In order to assure the quality of training in the dual system, the chambers monitor training and the qualification of trainers. According to the Vocational Training Act, chambers are responsible for the standardised final examination all apprentices have to take (Deissinger 2004). There has always been a great commitment from companies and employers to offer apprenticeships, which are funded mostly by employers. Companies provide 27.68 billion euros every year for training in the dual system. Public funding by the Federal Government and the State governments for the part-time vocational schools was 2.814 billion euros in 2004 and 3.157 billion euros in 2003 (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2005, p. 139). Nevertheless, the supply of dual apprenticeships decreased from 654,454 (1999) to 572,452 (2003) (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2004, p. 9). The situation on the training market reached a critical state in 2003 with more than 20,000 lacking training places. As a consequence the Federal Government offered a so-called training pact to employers, which obliged them to increase the supply of training places. The pact has been successful and the number of training places increased in 2004 by 2.4%, that is, a total of 586,374 training places. This increase saved employers from the threatening training levy, which would have been introduced if the training pact had failed. However, the situation on the training market continues to be critical, since the supply remains below the demand for training places and in 2004 almost 30,000 applicants could not find a training place (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2005, p. 313).

Although the structural surfaces of the Australian and German VET systems appear similar, differences are evident in terms of regulation, funding and responsibilities. The dual apprenticeship system is the major pathway for VET in Germany. Its underlying principles,

such as the dualism of learning sites, the vocational principle and the principle of consensus among social partners and stakeholders, shape the macro level of the German VET system (Deissinger & Hellwig 2005, p. 314). In contrast, the Australian VET system is more heterogeneous in terms of pathways and consequently in terms of funding arrangements and responsibilities.

CBT in Australia: Developing and implementing training packages

Training packages have continued to be the format of CBT in Australia since 1996. In the following section, development and implementation issues with training packages are analysed. According to Australian VET researchers, there are different understandings of what competency and CBT actually mean. However, aspects such as a focus on outcomes rather than on inputs as well as an, at least initially, underlying behaviouristic tenor are articulated. Critics of CBT argue that a theoretical dimension was absent, because CBT was more about management and organisation than education and learning theories. Following this argument, there has not been a major change to CBT and it is still focused on managerial issues of being able to measure and account for performance. Although measurable and observable outcomes still seem to be at the centre of CBT, a more holistic understanding and approach is prevailing now. Cognitive skills (that is, underpinning knowledge and generic skills) are increasingly being acknowledged in current concepts of competency. It is interesting to note that, despite behaviouristic perceptions, the initial concepts of CBT did in fact address these issues. In one of the early guides on developing competency standards, Heywood, Gonczi and Hager (1992, p. 25) claimed competency to be holistic and to include knowledge, skills and attributes. And according to the Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages (Schofield & McDonald 2004, p. 17), competency is also considered a broad concept that includes performance, application of skills and knowledge, transfer of skills and knowledge

and combination of higher order skills. Thus, theoretical concepts have always incorporated a broad and holistic understanding of competency and CBT, although perceptions and implementation have often been rather narrow.

Experts agree upon the fact that through the implementation of training packages, CBT has become a new format and its basic ideas have been reinforced. Training packages corroborated the political target of a national VET system by determining competency standards, qualifications and assessment guidelines that are in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Framework. According to Schofield and McDonald (2004, p. 14), training packages have both an “enabling and regulatory function” to provide flexibility for learners, providers and employers and to allow for national recognition of vocational qualifications. The objectives of training packages are perceived as important and necessary, however different problems with regard to the development and review processes are articulated. The major concern is that the processes are too slow and too focused on the *status quo* of workplace requirements (see also Schofield & McDonald 2004, p. 20). Another difficulty seems to be that industry is solely in charge of determining competency standards and that practitioners have been left out of decision-making processes. Only in a few cases can it be claimed that practitioners have been consulted. Most experts agree upon the fact that industry can define best what is required in the workplace currently and ideally in the future. However, they also state that educators should contribute their expertise in teaching and learning as well. Since these experiences are not broadly taken into account, training packages are primarily designed for workplace training.

Another important issue in a so-called industry-led system seems to be the question of who is industry and who is actually in charge of developing training packages. According to the interviewed experts, it is mainly “big industry” that is responsible and small

and medium enterprises are often not included in decision-making processes. Therefore, training packages seem to be most suitable for big enterprises that have the appropriate facilities and equipment. For small and medium enterprises the implementation of training packages is claimed to be more difficult. Following this argument, there are small, medium and large enterprises as well as public and private providers delivering training. All of them rely on the outcomes of the same training packages, although the environment is diverse. This tends to result in a perception of training packages being a "one size fits all" approach. It is quite evident that this causes difficulties for implementation. Thus, the adjustment, or tailoring, of training packages to the specific needs and facilities of the learning sites is increasingly stressed as important.

Competency-based approaches in the German dual system: Increasing flexibility in curriculum and training regulations

The dual apprenticeship system is traditionally rather rigid and highly regulated. Various attempts to increase flexibility in curriculum and training regulations have been undertaken. One example is the so-called satellite model (*Satellitenmodell*) of the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHT 1998). The model suggests three flexibilities for the dual apprenticeship system, namely, flexibility in duration, flexibility in core and elective modules and flexibility in assessment. First, the duration of an apprenticeship should be variable and range between 24 and 42 months depending on the performance of the apprentice and the needs of the employer. Second, with a flexible duration the apprentice and the employer should be able to select core and elective modules in addition to the foundation training. This should lead to nationally recognised qualifications comprising standardised basic modules and additional specific modules selected by the individual. However, there are rules for the combination of elective modules to avoid heterogeneous qualifications and to assure the delivery of relevant knowledge and skills. Furthermore, employers should have the flexibility to define

enterprise-specific modules that can be delivered on-the-job, but only in addition to, and not instead of, the required core and elective modules. Third, assessment procedures should be made more flexible. Individual assessment in the electives should be allowed and the complex final examination should be broken up. In the traditional model of a dual apprenticeship, there is one final assessment at the end that covers all skills and knowledge the apprentice has to acquire. The German chambers of industry and commerce suggest that the final assessment should be stretched over a longer period of time to have a number of smaller assessments both on- and off-the-job that cover the contents of each module in more depth. However, the assessments should still be under the authority of the chambers to secure the objectivity, reliability and validity of assessment. Thus, within the objectives of the new model by the chambers, apprentices and employers should be able to decide individually how long the apprenticeship will take, which modules will be acquired and when assessment will take place. The similarity between the satellite model and CBT lies in this flexibility, which is inherent in CBT and suggested by the German model. However, the degree of flexibility demanded by the German model is lower than in CBT, as it reinforces that existing structures cannot be easily overcome and that reform approaches as illustrated in this example remain within certain boundaries.

Although the satellite model has never been implemented in practice, it had an impact on the restructuring of existing and the development of new training regulations for skilled occupations, for example in the area of chemistry, varnishing and in the IT sector (Clement 2002). The background of the restructuring in the IT sector was the rise of new information and communication technologies and the lack of skilled employees. Enterprises demanded more flexibility in vocational curricula to adjust to economic and technological changes. Training courses should be designed more individually and focus on the needs of employers and learners (Müller, Häussler & Sonnek 2000, p. 8). These demands were realised in the new IT occupations,

which consist of two components – a core component with compulsory training modules and a flexible component with optional modules that allow for individual specialisation within certain areas (Baethge 2001, p. 63). The modules are derived from work processes and therefore represent workplace requirements including technical skills, underpinning knowledge as well as social and personal attributes. As part of the optional modules, the learner has to work on a project given by the employer that deals with a current problem in the overall context of the enterprise. This underlines the practical relevance of the IT training and reflects the increased influence employers have over the design of tasks for their learners. This example reveals similarities to the competency-based approach in two respects. First, as in the above-mentioned examples, the structure of the training course is made more flexible with compulsory and optional training modules. Second, the intervention of employers is strengthened by defining enterprise-specific projects as part of the final assessment. From these examples, one can conclude that CBT can function as a model for the German dual apprenticeship system. However, all attempts to modify current curricular structures must consider organising frameworks as well as the historical, economic and social context of German VET. Otherwise, reform approaches are likely to fail.

Applying CBT to the delivery and assessment of training in Australian VET

In this section, questions concerning the application of CBT to the delivery and assessment of training in Australian VET are analysed. Here, the study focuses on the perceptions of teachers and trainers. According to the majority of practitioners, teaching has changed with CBT and now with training packages, mainly in three aspects. First, the delivery has become more industry-focused, since the competency standards comprise workplace requirements and therefore are more practical. Teachers state that the amount of theory has been reduced to a greater and lesser extent depending on the industry, but generally the focus is now set on practice.

Second, training packages allow for more flexible delivery and self-paced learning. Most teachers appreciate the flexibility they have in the design of learning processes and in applying different methods according to their learners. According to the practitioners, self-paced learning is now being frequently used in most learning processes. However, the amount of self-paced learning varies depending on the institution, the equipment, facilities and the availability of learning material that allows for self-pacing (for example, online resources).

Third, with CBT and especially with training packages, the focus on outcomes rather than inputs has been reinforced and assessment has become a major issue for practitioners. Competency-based assessment requires not only continuous, on-demand assessment, but also the assessment of practical skills in the workplace. Difficulties with competency-based assessment are expressed mainly concerning the required amount of time and effort. Owing to time constraints, competency-based assessment can sometimes be reduced to a checklist approach, where competencies are ticked off without valid, reliable and objective evidence. But if the learner fails in a real workplace situation, although he/she has been formally declared as competent, the credibility of both the institution and the teachers is being put at risk. Thus, the other extreme can easily occur, namely, that competencies are over-assessed to make sure the learner is competent. Practitioners state that they experience tension between being under pressure of time to assess large numbers of learners individually and generating a highly skilled workforce. Employers rely on employees who are not only declared competent, but are able to do all required tasks successfully. According to experts in the area of professional development, this dilemma can only be solved by preparing practitioners explicitly for competency-based assessment. Furthermore, practitioners should be assisted in making decisions about whether a person is competent. Another difficulty the majority of practitioners sees in competency-based assessment is that a learner is deemed either ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’,

and that there is no distinction between the performances of the learners. Competency-based assessment provides information only on whether a person is able to do certain tasks, but it does not make transparent how well the performance is undertaken. Teachers' experience is that, without such distinction, learners are often not motivated to do more than what is necessary, since they do not get credit for it. Furthermore, employers and universities require graded systems to distinguish between applicants, which is not usual with competency-based assessment. As a consequence many providers establish their own grading system to give a distinctive judgement on the performance of their learners. Although graded assessment is not inherent in CBT (Schofield & McDonald 2004, p. 19), the demand for it seems to be growing. Especially when transition between schools, universities and the VET sector is high on the agenda, instruments to grade performances to facilitate movement and to enable credit transfer seem to be necessary.

General difficulties in the implementation of competency-based learning processes are expressed in various respects. The main challenge from the perspective of most teachers is the understanding and translation of training packages into deliverable teaching and learning resources. This requires both technical expertise in the occupational field and also didactic knowledge, since training packages are often perceived as "wordy documents". The successful implementation of training packages seems to rely heavily on the quality of these resources. Practitioners who do not develop their own material, but depend on external resources, particularly criticise their low quality and the inappropriateness for the learning process. They argue that a mechanism to assure the quality of these resources should be developed and applied. Another difficulty in the realisation of training packages is the decision about which elements of competency could be combined in order to deliver and assess more holistically. A more holistic approach is generally perceived to be necessary because it gives the learner a broader understanding

of processes and interrelations of tasks. Additionally, generic or employability skills as demanded by employers should be included as well. However, a common instrument for their delivery, assessment and recording is not provided. As a consequence the realisation of generic skills varies to a great extent (see also Schofield & McDonald 2004, p. 19). Summarising the views of practitioners, generic skills are either explicitly delivered, assessed and recorded or they are implicitly assessed with respective technical elements of competency. In some cases generic skills are even entirely ignored and ticked off without any form of assessment. This approach cannot be regarded as valuable, since the importance of generic skills is increasingly stressed by all stakeholders and especially by employers.

Practitioners perceive that CBT and training packages changed the structures of VET, and therefore it is not surprising that most practitioners see their roles as teachers changed and broadened. This result is in accordance with several studies by Australian researchers who have analysed the changes that CBT has generated for teachers and trainers (see for example, Harris, Guthrie, Hobart & Lundberg 1995, pp. 270, Smith, Lowrie, Hill, Bush & Lobegeier 1997, p. 92; Billett, McKavanagh & Hayes 1999, p. 121). Practitioners see themselves more as facilitators, as mentors, as workplace assessors, as negotiators with learners and employers and in some cases as developers of learning resources. The tasks and responsibilities have become wider and the picture of a traditional teacher giving input seems to be rare. Only a few teachers state that they teach as they always taught and the structural and didactic changes have not had any impact on them. The reason for this is that the subjects they teach are theoretical and the delivery takes place in the classroom, which allows them to apply more traditional teaching methods. The role of learners seems to have changed less significantly, however practitioners state that learners are now more responsible for their own learning, which requires that they understand what and why they learn. Especially if self-paced learning is the prevailing approach,

learners have to organise their learning process themselves and learn more independently. This is a major change for many young learners coming from a school environment and they often struggle with it. However, according to the experiences of practitioners, learners become used to the new self-directed environment and many of them progress enormously.

Applying CBT to the delivery and assessment of training in German VET

Delivery and assessment of training in the German dual system is distinguished in two forms according to the two learning sites: workplaces and compulsory part-time vocational schools. Outcomes and assessment for the practical on-the-job learning processes are determined by training regulations. Learning targets, assessment guidelines and suggestions for teaching methods for the school-based learning processes are determined in school curricula. An attempt to make existing school curricula more "competency-based" in terms of professional action competence (*berufliche Handlungskompetenz*) was the re-structuring of vocational curricula into so-called learning fields (*Lernfeldkonzept*). Professional action competence is a concept resulting from the discourse on generic or employability skills and defines four components that are required in order to be considered competent within an occupational field: technical competencies, methodical competencies, social and personal competencies (Schuler & Barthelme 1995, Erpenbeck & Heyse 1996, Belz & Siegrist 2000). This concept is set as a target for the new curricular design of learning fields. School curricula for the dual system used to be based on and structured according to general and technical subjects. Each subject was taught and assessed separately by teachers in a traditional classroom environment.

The new curricula are now based on interdisciplinary learning fields which are curricular units based on work situations and processes (Huisinga, Lisop & Speier 1999, Kremer & Sloane 2001). They require skills and knowledge as well as general abilities across traditional

school subjects. The introduction of these new curricula triggered changes for organising frameworks, curriculum development and the design of learning processes in the German dual apprenticeship system (Kremer & Sloane 2001). At the macro level, the national committee of ministers for education (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) defines learning fields and the numbers of hours that ought to be spent on each field. Learning fields are divided into units specifying the required skills and knowledge. This curricular structure should enable more flexibility and adaptability to economic, technological and social changes. Vocational schools are given more responsibility and flexibility in the organisation of learning processes. The implementation of learning fields ought to be prepared and evaluated by working teams and aligned to the specific profile of each vocational school. Furthermore, a closer cooperation between vocational schools and training companies should be fostered. Thus, the separation of the two learning sites – school and workplace – ought to be reduced and the separation of theory and practice should be approached in a more holistic and integrative way. On the level of learning processes in vocational schools, learning fields are to be implemented in so-called learning situations (*Lernsituationen*). These learning situations are complex learning environments in which interactive, learner-centred teaching methods should be applied. Learning environments should be developed by teachers in cooperation with each other to realise interdisciplinary learning processes. Although the concept of learning fields is implemented in all vocational school curricula in the dual system, there is still resistance and criticism among teachers. This is partially due to the fact that the concept has been implemented as a top-down approach, that is, the decisions were made at the policy level and teachers were not well enough prepared. Another problem with the concept is the required cooperation and interdisciplinary teaching methods. Teachers who are used to teaching their subjects independently now need to cooperate with other teachers and design a conjoint learning processes according to the required skills of the

learning field. This requires organisational and managerial skills as well as adequate school facilities, which cannot be taken for granted.

In conclusion, there are three main similarities in the concepts of learning fields and training packages. First, the objective behind both concepts is to provide more flexibility. The design and organisation of delivery and assessment of training should be made more flexible. Furthermore, the adaptability of learning content to changes in technology and work should be increased. Second, both concepts are structured according to requirements of activities in workplace situations. The modular structure – although more strongly developed in the concept of training packages – should enable the desired flexibility and adaptability. Third, difficulties in the implementation of both concepts reveal similarities, for example, regarding the top-down implementation, the increased responsibility of teachers and learners as well as the required cooperation among teachers and between teachers and employers.

CBT and future challenges for VET in Australia and Germany

All experts were asked what they regarded as the main challenges for the future of VET in Australia. Since the range of answers is quite broad, only the most common responses can be summarised here. The most frequently stated challenges are skills shortages and an ageing population. According to these experts, skills shortages do not result from the fact that there are not enough people in VET seeking employment. The problem seems to be that they do not want to work in certain fields such as the trades and crafts sectors, where skills shortages are most prevalent. The problem is that schools and universities have a higher profile than VET, which often seems therefore to be a second-best option for young people who generally tend to seek a university degree and not a vocational qualification. The transition between the three sectors of the educational system should be fostered and the prestige and social

status of VET, especially the traditional trades, should be elevated to attract more learners into these areas. The challenge for the VET sector is to solve the skills shortage problem, but in fact it is facing a skills shortage of its own staff. Experts in professional development argue that it is difficult to recruit qualified teachers and trainers to provide the training demanded by industry. It seems necessary to attract more teachers and trainers by focusing more on the professional development of the teaching workforce. Furthermore, it is important to have a closer link between industry and providers to generate a highly skilled workforce. The challenge is to ensure that competency standards are up-to-date and in line with current and future workplace requirements and that all industries cooperate both with public and private providers. Thus, the VET system should on the one hand attract young people into VET and raise the status and acceptance of vocational qualifications, and on the other, be responsive to the ageing population by retraining and up-skilling people who stay longer in the workforce.

An ongoing challenge is the establishment and consolidation of a national VET system with regard to accreditation of qualifications as well as consistent realisation of quality standards and training packages. Despite national frameworks there remains inconsistency in the mutual recognition of certificates and credits, which is partially due to the heterogeneous quality of training that is delivered. Thus, the challenge is to establish better cooperation between providers and to apply quality assurance mechanisms efficiently. In this respect it is regarded as important to get the balance right between national policy-making and local decision-making. Although there has been a national push towards more centralisation and policy-making at the Commonwealth level, the States and Territories like to pursue their own interests and follow their own strategies, especially with regard to VET. Concluding from these statements, difficulties that need to be addressed in the future are mostly concerned with the organising framework of the Australian VET system. Organisational issues such

as better cooperation between industry and providers as well as finding the most appropriate balance between the Commonwealth and States/Territories seem to be the prevailing challenges.

Although the dual system as the main pathway in the German VET sector has always been regarded as a successful way of training people in skilled occupations that range from traditional trades and crafts to the service sector, several challenges can be identified (see Deissinger & Hellwig 2004). The biggest challenge is the sufficient provision of training places especially in traditional trade and craft sectors. Although the "training pact" showed promising effects, there is still a considerable lack of training places (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2005). In terms of quality, it is an ongoing challenge to keep vocational curricula up-to-date and attuned to new technologies and changes in work processes. Although attempts have been undertaken in this respect (for example, the concept of learning fields and the restructuring of IT occupations), the German system is still being criticised because of its rigid and inflexible structures. These structures result in consistency of qualifications and learning processes, however, adjustments to new technologies, new demands and structures are inhibited (Clement 2002, p. 395). Thus, the key aspect about CBT that is perceived as holding promise for the German system is the flexibility both in terms of delivery but also in terms of the modular structure of learning targets that can be adjusted to current and future conditions.

Conclusion

From this analysis of the different perceptions of CBT within these VET systems, a quite heterogeneous picture evolves. Regarding the policy and organisational level, there is considerable criticism of the competency-based approach with respect to learning and educational theories and also structural and managerial issues. However, concerning application, the competency-based approach has been implemented broadly and the views on it are quite positive. The majority of practitioners claim CBT to be working for them and they appreciate the flexibility they have. However, the degree of successful implementation of CBT depends, on the one hand on the facilities and equipment at the institution, and on the other on the learning materials that are provided.

Especially for the German context, the flexibility CBT provides is highly attractive, as illustrated in the examples in this paper. Rigid structures, determined curricula and guidelines restrict innovative and individual processes and make the German system less responsive to the demands of learners and employers as compared with the Australian VET system (Rauner 1997, p. 125). Thus, further attempts to enhance the flexibility of existing structures should be undertaken with regard not only to the dual apprenticeship system but also to adult education. The German VET system is focused on initial qualifications gained for example through an apprenticeship, however the provision of continuing education and training under the premise of lifelong learning should be addressed to a greater extent (Federal Ministry of Education and Research 2001). Most commonly employees work in the occupation where they gained their first qualification and a change to other fields of entirely different occupations is rare. Thus, the structures of the German VET system might provide nationally recognised and prestigious qualifications, but the provision of lifelong learning is underdeveloped. As a conclusion it can be stated that, despite the critiques articulated in Australia, CBT has potential for the German VET system especially with regard to more flexibility in initial and further education and training.

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Silke Hellwig *is an assistant lecturer in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Konstanz in Germany, and currently undertaking her doctorate on comparative VET research. In her work, she focuses on different approaches to skilling people in VET, in particular on competency-based training as realised in Australia and training based on vocationalism as realised in the German dual apprenticeship system. As part of her research, Silke spent time in Australia visiting different TAFE institutions and universities as well as NCVER, ANTA and DEST to collect data from experts on CBT.*

Silke has a masters degree in business and economics education from the University of Konstanz and is a member of the management team of the EU Leonardo da Vinci project, "Support of persons in the accreditation process of non-formal learning".

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Learning in the knowledge age, where the individual is at the centre of learning strategy and organisational success

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Adult learning practitioners are being challenged to prepare for a revolution in the way workplace learning outcomes will be delivered. Recent thinking on the future of work by a number of leading business authorities from around the world reports that changes in the way students are being educated for work and the demands on workers in the knowledge age will force a major shift towards learner-centred organisational development strategies. These changes will require broad, strategic solutions, including a re-think on the capabilities and qualifications of those involved in developing people and the formulation of new policies and practices that enable and support learners as they re-focus their careers into the new world of work.

There is a quiet revolution taking place in our communities. A transformation that is long over due. Children in our schools are leading this change through being granted the right to learn in their own way. This approach to facilitating school-based learning, which is being embraced by innovative school leaders and teachers all over the world, is based on the notion of recognising individual difference in learning, acknowledging each child has a unique personality, thinking style and preference for taking in and relating new information. Innovative schools are integrating learner-centred models into the curriculum, while at a local level, it may be one maverick teacher who is making small changes to their teaching style, anticipating that others will follow their lead.

Traditional models of academic achievement are being challenged

This revolution in education is being driven by research findings in psychology which are challenging traditional models of teaching based on conventional methods for measuring intelligence and neglecting other ways of learning and academic achievement. Teaching models, influenced by differences in learning, emphasise the role of the individual learner as pivotal to the success of relating new information and the achievement of deep understanding. The teacher helps the children to develop awareness of their talents and the ways in which they learn more effectively, thereby assisting the children with making decisions about the types of learning activities they find engaging and enjoyable. Decisions about program design are made with the learner's individual differences in mind, as well as the objectives, content and learning environment.

This description of learning is likely to be a long way from the command and control type classrooms where our own frameworks for lifelong learning were formed. These mental models have set up how we approach learning in our adult life: as learners, as leaders of learning and even how we involve ourselves in our children's learning.

According to learning expert and paediatrician from the USA, Mel Levine, society has a legacy of adults who continue to struggle under the influence of their school-based learning experience. Levine (2002: 14) writes in his book, *A mind at a time*, that '[t]heir intellectual identity has been shrunken down to a list of examination scores that will determine their destinies, while shedding little light on their true strengths, weaknesses and educational needs'. This legacy can be seen in our prisons, and in issues in relationships or in those being challenged by addictive behaviours. It often appears in the workplace in rebellious attitudes and behaviours, in under-achievement and, surprisingly, with high achievers.

In my own school experience, I was educated under the strict and frequently violent regime of a religious order. An extremely right brained, conceptual thinker, I was continually punished in primary school for not grasping mathematical concepts and remembering facts, while at home, my playtime included drawing house designs to scale and later as a teenager, organising dances and charity activities. These mainly right-brained talents were not recognised in the industrial age, linear education model of the time, which typically measured intelligence on language and logic capabilities (Gardner 1993: 80).

Learning under a learner-centred model, I would have been guided to use my individual personality, thinking preferences and learning style. My prior experience and values would have been considered by the teacher when planning for my learning. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as with many other teenagers who simply resisted the dumbing-down of their talents and the requirement to conform to a left-brained world. I was asked to leave two secondary schools, which left me thinking that I had no academic ability and no prospects for employment. These experiences explain my discomfort with academic learning and one-size-fits-all training in my adult life.

Training and learning in the knowledge age must be learner-focused

Highly respected futurist, Alvin Toffler is reputed to have stated: '[t]he illiterate of the twenty first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn' (Mercer 2003). While Toffler's statement clearly solidifies the need for continuous learning within organisations, it also challenges training and learning to be positioned to prepare a workforce that is self-aware, self-directed and geared for change by placing greater emphasis on the individual's role rather than the trainer's in the learning experience.

Learner-centred models are strongly aligned with Toffler's thinking, as they engage individuals in the learning experience in their own way, by understanding and applying how they best learn through their natural dispositions, talents and frames of reference. They position the educator as facilitator and enabler, rather than controller of what learners need to know and how they will learn.

The proposition for incorporating human diversity theories into adult training and learning methods is nothing new, as leaders in adult education have been advocating for the rights of the individual in learning since Malcolm Knowles' groundbreaking work in the 1950s on andragogy. Australian Institute of Training and Development industry achievement award recipient, Stephanie Burns, based much of her work on 'learning to learn' in the 1990s on enabling more efficient learning outcomes through recognising and working with individual difference. Burns advocated for the rights of learners to participate in the learning experience using their own filtering perceptions, rather than those imposed on the learner by the trainer (Burns 1996: 77).

In recent years, scientific research into the human mind and human development is forging new understanding of how we learn, and this has opened up significant implications for traditional models of education and work-based learning. Howard Gardner (1993) has reframed the notion of intelligence in education with his influential model of multiple intelligences and concept of individual-centred schools, while Daniel Goleman's (1996) work on emotional intelligence has made its way to the most senior levels of business management by creating greater understanding in the workplace about the nature of emotion and individual performance.

There is increasing disillusionment with the ladder of achievement

The knowledge age is driving the need for continuous improvement within organisations and no business or individual can risk standing still. Professor of Entrepreneurship at Australia's RMIT University, Peter Sheldrake (2003: 1), is blatant about the consequences for organisations that are not tuned-in to the demands of the new economy: 'In the current environment, change and innovation are critical. Companies that stay still die'.

The labour market is also being redefined by the knowledge age and organisations struggle to retain their top talent, who are increasingly becoming disillusioned with the ladder of achievement and their lifetime of conforming to others' expectations. Knowledge workers in particular are no longer driven by the fear of job insecurity, with many opting for the work-life of the freelancer in search of opportunities that are more meaningful, and have greater challenge, autonomy or satisfaction.

Helen Trinca and Catherine Fox, journalists for Australian Leadership and Management Magazine, AFR BOSS, have discovered a whole generation looking for more meaningful engagement in worklife, in their research towards their book *Better than sex*, which examines the new world of work. Trinca and Fox (2004: 186) write: 'There is a new wave of "meaning seeking", where many people are asking, "If it's only about making money, why is it dominating my whole life?"'. Increasingly, these shifts in the knowledge age are seeing workers

coming to accept that they are responsible for managing their own careers and keeping their skills current, even recognising that they can no longer depend on their employers for work identity (Florida 2003: 109).

These developments in the relationship between employers and their workforce and the transformation occurring in education highlight critical implications for workplace learning:

Challenge #1: How does training and learning remain a viable and valuable asset, positioned to meet the demands of the fast-paced, information era of business?

Challenge #2: How does training and learning keep up with the needs of the modern era of the worker who is self-aware, self-directed in their learning and geared for change, while still facilitating organisational learning outcomes?

Richard Florida (2003: 115), author of *The rise of the creative class* and Professor of Regional Economic Development at Carnegie Mellon University in the USA, states that companies are concerned with 'investing significantly in developing their people's skills and capabilities, when people frequently leave for better opportunities and greater challenge'. While companies are cautious about investing in their human capital, workers are also expressing concern about formal learning keeping pace with the demands of their jobs. Florida (2003: 114) quotes one study which reports that individuals are now taking ongoing responsibility for their own learning 'because the interactive nature of computer tools allows new media workers to learn new skills at their own pace and within their own learning styles and because formal learning programs have not kept pace with skill needs in this fast-changing industry'. In another example of workers' concern about learning and development keeping pace, Florida draws on an employee satisfaction study of network professionals at Lucent Technologies, which reported that only 30% of those surveyed felt their company's formal training programs met their needs (Florida 2003: 115).

Training and learning must be seen as a sustainable business asset

The message from business leaders is clear. Individuals and organisations must be continually innovating and learning to remain relevant and viable in this highly competitive global marketplace (Sheldrake 2003). However, genuine achievement of sustainable business growth will only occur where management strategies engage individuals through relating organisational goals into their workers' frames of view.

Professor of Management at Sloan University in the USA, Thomas Malone (2004: 165), states in his book *The future of work*: 'We're living in a world in which lots of people throughout an organisation need to be continually inventing new ways of doing things. Your ability to continually invent can be critical to your cultivation of people'. Malone takes his message further by suggesting that valuing and enabling individual difference is the key to business success, 'taking advantage of people's true intelligence and creativity will become one of the most critical capabilities of successful businesses'.

Martyn Sloman is a leading researcher on training and learning with the UK-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and former Head of Learning at Ernst and Young in Europe. He writes in his recent report, *From training to learning*: "Extensive CIPD research has demonstrated that, in our rapidly changing and increasingly knowledge-based economy, competitive advantage is built where individuals actively seek to acquire the knowledge and skills that promote the organisation's objectives. It is built where employees "learn to learn" and possess the capabilities that enable them to do so' (Sloman 2004: 1).

Revolutionise or risk becoming redundant

There is no quick fix. These challenges require broad, strategic solutions including a re-think on the capabilities and qualifications of those involved in developing people and the formulation of new policies and practices that enable and support the learner. Training and learning must take the leadership role in re-framing learning into the knowledge age and advocate for the individual learner in the organisational development equation. The research findings that are inspiring new ways of delivering professional practice, workplace and individual learning, such as those used in learner-centred models, will bring greater meaningful learning experiences for workers and facilitate more individualised, need-it-now knowledge acquisition that will assist their organisation's success into the future.

Like the revolution taking place in education, it is crucial for training and learning to re-position its business framework to demonstrate real value as enablers of learning, rather than deliverers of knowledge, equipped to develop a workforce that will thrive in the agile and innovative business cultures of the future. The knowledge economy demands a workforce where an individual's true intelligence, creativity and intrinsic motivation are valued as the key to business innovation and success.

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Low female literacy: factors and strategies

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Literacy is a process which dispels and promotes rational thinking and moulds human beings into becoming responsible citizens. The absence of literacy directly and indirectly retards the development of individuals, society, community and the country. For the success of any program, people should be motivated by providing necessary congenial environments, socio-economic conditions and committed efforts on the part of implementing bodies. In spite of the number of efforts made by central and state governments in India, still illiterates remain. This paper identifies factors responsible for people remaining illiterate and suggests strategies to adopt for achieving better results in the district which has the lowest literacy rate in the state and country.

Literacy is one of the key aspects of human resource development. In order to quantify the human resources of the country, the State and central governments have launched a number of educational (both formal and non-formal) programs for the promotion of literacy. As a result, large pools of illiterates were made literates. However, a vast majority of the illiterates are here, particularly among females.

Literacy is a process, which dispels ignorance and promotes rational thinking. Literacy thus moulds a person to become a responsible citizen. In a democratic society, people cannot remain as silent spectators to the vast changes that are taking place in the society. But they have to participate effectively not only in decision-making processes, but also in formulation and implementation of developmental programs. To achieve this objective, all the citizens need to be educated. In other words, literacy is the tool for development.

Women, who contribute half of our population, have the dubious distinction of maintaining a lower profile in many social, educational and economic aspects across the world. In the context of India, the phenomenon has been further worsened with women occupying lower positions in terms of educational, health, political and economic aspects and relegated to lower positions in society. Women have been treated as lesser contributors to society in terms of social and economic development issues. Though women have favourable attitudes and appropriate capacities to contribute to society, the social milieu in developing countries like India has always positioned women with a lesser role to play in social and economic issues.

Women constitute an important segment among the less-advantaged sections of society by virtue of their backwardness in terms of social, educational and economic development irrespective of their religion, caste and creed. In the last few decades, this aspect has been much debated at the international level and a global movement has been initiated in terms of gender sensitisation.

Professor Kanta Ahuja (1995:1), the Vice-Chancellor of Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati University in Ajmer, Rajasthan State, stated that 'girls were being kept out of school because their parents did not appreciate the importance and value of education. The condition of the school and the quality of education, especially in the government schools in the rural areas, were other bottlenecks in attracting children towards school'. She feared that, unless the widening gender gap was reduced, illiterates in the age group 15–35 years would only be women.

The World Declaration of Education for All was proclaimed at the World Conference on Education for All held in March 1990 at Jomtie. Article-1 of the Declaration read: 'Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and culture, and inevitably, changes with passage of time". About two and half decades ago, similar thinking was reflected in *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*.

Significance of the study

According to the 2001 census, Andhra Pradesh literacy is 61.1 percent. Within this figure, 51.2 percent are females and 70.9 percent are males. The Mahabubnager district ranks 23rd in literacy out of 23 districts of Andhra Pradesh with 45.5 percent of literates. Among them, 57.9 percent are men and 32.8 percent are women. This indicates that the Mahabubnager district has the lowest literacy percentage in both genders in the State. This is the reason why this study has been undertaken.

Locale and sample of the study

In order to study the factors influencing the low female literacy in Mahabubnager district, Andhra Pradesh was chosen as the focus of this study. Two mandals and ten villages from each mandal, involving ten women respondents in each village, were randomly selected for the study. The study was conducted on a sample of 200 women only.

Administration and data collection

The data were collected from the women by administering a schedule that was developed for this study. Each female was asked to cite a minimum of three main factors for not attending formal schooling in early childhood, for not enrolling their children in schools, as well as not attending an adult education program. They were also requested to offer suggestions for improving literacy. The schedule was personally canvassed to women respondents. The Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) technique was adopted for the interviews.

Objectives of the study

The primary aim of the study was to analyse the factors contributing to low female literacy in the Mahabubnager district of Andhra Pradesh. In addressing this aim, the study focused on the following objectives:

- to identify the root causes for the low female literacy in Mahabubnager District, Andhra Pradesh
- to elicit opinions from various categories such as age, social class, literates and illiterates, and
- to establish strategies to be adopted from the responses and suggestions obtained from women respondents for enhancing

female literacy, particularly in a rural and backward district like Mahabubnager.

Profile of the respondents (N=200)

The table below shows the background of the women respondents.

Sl. no.	Personal characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
1	Age:	20 or below	66	33
		21 – 30	56	28
		31 – 40	50	25
		41 and above	28	14
2	Education:	Literate	64	32
		Illiterate	136	68
3	Caste:	Backward Castes	62	31
		Scheduled Caste	80	40
		Scheduled Tribe	12	6
		Minorities	46	23

One-third (n=66) were 20 years or below, while 28 percent (n=56) were between 21 and 30 years and the remaining 39 percent were older than 30 years. One hundred and thirty six (68%) illiterate respondents were involved in the interviews for the study. Regarding their social class, 40 percent (n=80) were Scheduled Caste, 31 percent (n=62) were Backward Caste and 23 per cent (n=46) of the respondents belonged to Minority communities.

Factors as perceived by the respondents

The following factors were given by respondents as causes for low female literacy in Mahabubnager District of Andhra Pradesh

Social factors

- migration for work in seasonal periods
- early marriages as per their social custom
- girl children are not allowed to go outside the house and village because it is a social taboo
- parents go to their workplaces and household activities are undertaken by the young female children
- caring of younger ones at home
- gender disparity at home, in society and earlier marriages in this region, and
- sharing of family responsibilities after the death of elders in the family.

Unfavourable environment

- drought is common in the district: as a result, children are also engaged in earning income along with their parents for their livelihood
- respondents admitted that they were more interested in television, cinemas, songs, games (in the case of the children) and passing time in chatting rather than learning
- the infighting of parents in the home environment
- looking after children and/or old people and discouragement from neighbours
- disinterest of parents towards the education of children
- lack of high school(s) in nearby places
- no proper guidance after school hours, and at home, and not able to afford to undertake tuition on payment
- lack of proper seating arrangements in school
- teachers not regularly coming to the school, teachers absent some days and, sometimes due to housework, the children also absent, and
- low performance in class and not keeping up with other students.

Apathy of government officials

- lack of familiarity with the functioning of adult education centres
- ineffective linkage between economic developmental programs and literacy, and
- inadequate training on the part of functionaries concerning retention of students/learners in the learning environment (drop-outs).

Lack of educational facilities

- schools are located at long distances from home
- inadequate teaching staff, classrooms, teaching-learning materials, games and recreational provisions
- lack of textbooks / notebooks / pencils and not being able to afford to purchase, and
- non-availability of hostel facilities.

Economic factors

- most families cannot afford to educate girls
- because of poverty, girls will be sent to work with landlords or to nearby cities
- assisting parents in cattle-rearing / duck-rearing and fetching firewood
- helping parents in their daily professional (caste) occupational work, like weaving, plumbing and so on, and
- lack of proper dress to go to school.

Perceptions

- people believe that education is not of much use for their daily life
- general feeling among people living on or below the poverty line that it is difficult, and not useful, to spend money for children's education
- fear of ridicule from friends, neighbours and others
- afraid to send a girl alone to school / college
- lack of awareness about education, and
- education not being seen as essential in advanced age.

Health factors

- frequent ill-health of the students, due to lack of nutritious food and unhygienic conditions in living areas.

Strategies

The following strategies, suggested after recording respondents' views and personal field observations of the investigators, are measures that can be considered by planners and implementing agencies to enhance the literacy rate of women in general and particularly in the backward districts.

1. Steps should be taken to understand and create awareness to solve the problems among themselves.
2. Migration is one of the causes as per the observation of the investigators. The government and voluntary agencies can plan to create alternative residences for girl students while their parents migrate during work seasons.
3. The literacy centre had to be run in convenient times for the women with their consultation because they may be tired physically after work in their occupational field. From the responses, it was noted that many have no knowledge about the existence of adult education centers. The need for effective environment building and motivational strategies are to be created.
4. As the problem of illiterates is greater in this district, the causes of lack of attending early child schooling, and disinterest in learning at advanced age, are due to poverty.
5. Self-realisation and self-acceptance greatly help to overcome various problems and contribute to better adjustment in society. Voluntary efforts will have higher impact in this respect. Factors relating to change of attitude are to be studied and identified and measures taken up accordingly.

6. Occupational and skill development training programs for women aimed at improving income status to be organised.
7. Provision of a separate adult education building so that the learners will have the feeling that they are not attending formal education. The villagers can monitor the learning activity.
8. Free girls' residential hostel facility at Panchayat level or for a cluster of villages.
9. Parents below the poverty line who are sending their children to schools be encouraged by giving preference in sanctioning of welfare schemes by the government machinery.
10. Women learners who regularly attend and successfully complete the three primers be given preference while sanctioning housing allotment. This will help permanent stay and reduce migration.
11. Compulsory enrolment of children in school at primary level and provision of a midday meal and reading-learning material may have a positive impact on the joining and retention of children in schooling. In principle, the government is providing some of these provisions, though in the processes of implementation, there are lacuna because of lack of monitoring and apathy on the part of the authorities.
12. Awareness process should be a continuous process, not time-bound, short-term or one-off.
13. Teachers and trainers need to be trained in the conditions of the particular areas or regions in which they are working in order to bring effective and lasting results in enrolling and attaining sufficient literacy levels among women.
14. Information and communication for rural development programs must be highlighted through village level functionaries. This will result in mass participation in learning activity.
15. The investigator noted that efforts are being made to create environments through the Jathas, Street Plays etc., but the suggestion is that any one-off effort is not sufficient to sustain the interest of learners and students. Therefore, with the assistance of local voluntary organisations, environment building should be a continuous process, so that the motivation of women and girls is sustained through to the completion of an education activity. It further emphasises that local talent should be utilised to create a need-based environment.
16. There is an urgent need to prepare more and more success stories through the print and audio-visual media so that both the educated and the uneducated can be inspired to participate in the national endeavour.
17. The print and electronic media, particularly television, can be utilised in the most effective manner. This media should create a congenial learning environment so that the society and the women folk join in and recognise the importance of education. This suggestion is very important because, from the responses, it was noted that the women are more interested in watching television serials.
18. At present, the mahila Mandals are playing a very limited role in promoting women's literacy. These units are not showing interest as they do in thrift activity. From the evaluation reports of Akshara Sankranthi, government efforts to link literacy and micro-finance did not have much effect.
19. The basic education advocated by Mahatma Gandhi be introduced for female education schools, at least in districts where very low female literacy prevails. This system is linked with income-generating activity so that parents can motivate and retain their children in formal schooling.
20. Education should not be introduced in isolation. It should go hand in hand with health, economic and social development, small savings, micro-finance and above all communal harmony. It should give people an immediate benefit, however small.
21. Officials while visiting the schools and non-formal education centres may adopt monitoring which should be a regular process carried out in a non-threatening and joyful manner.

22. Strengthening of Anganawadi, Balawadies and frequent visit of health personnel is necessary to motivate them.
23. Some of the issues in the prevailing low literacy levels, particularly for women and girls, include: traditional customs, lack of a healthy environment, lack of confidence, gender discrimination, feelings of insecurity, poverty, migration, the presence of vested-interest persons, non-commitment of officials, politicians' apathy, and the educated from the surroundings not encouraging drop-outs and illiterates to study further.

Historically, women in general have not enjoyed privileges, even in the Vedic period. Later on, the situation further degenerated during the post-Mahabharata and then in the Mugul periods. After Independence, government tried to build some provision in the Constitution to give women equal rights and status with men, but in practice little has been achieved. After hectic effort, thirty-three percent of women reservation was passed. The act to provide one-third seats in Parliament and the Assemblies has not come into effect even today.

The role of women in development is most intimately related to the goal of comprehensive social, educational and economic development, and is a strategic question for the development of all societies. In this regard, it is worthwhile quoting the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India: "To awaken the people, it is the woman who must be awakened and if she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the village moves and the nation moves". Thus, a long way back, Pandit Nehru visualised the importance of women in social, educational and economic development.

In contemporary society, we can understand the attitude of men and elders are not favorable towards women's participation in all important aspects of family and society. Right to education, right to poverty, the dowry system, child and early marriages, discrimination

in wages, not enjoying their part of earnings are some of the reasons which hold back the progress of women and the less advantaged sections in the society. Providing education is the only way to change women's position in the society.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "If I learn carpentry from an illiterate carpenter, I know how to do carpentry work. If I learn carpentry work from a literate person, my thoughts will also stimulate". This is the great vision of Mahatma. Thus, keeping the above in mind, planners, government, political parties and voluntary agencies can formulate their future strategies to improve women's literacy.

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Empowerment of women through literacy education: some issues for Nigeria's consideration

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This paper examines the status of women in the pre- and post-independent era in Nigeria and in contemporary society. It explores the introduction of western general forms of dichotomies, discriminations and apathy that general education has caused in their life, and brought about patriarchal knowledge and man's domination and control of all spheres of knowledge, work, religion, laws, processes and which have engendered societal dis-empowerment of women.

The paper thus advances adult and non-formal education and counselling programs as tools for empowering women. It also

reviews the problems faced by women in society and proffers adult and non-formal education and counselling education strategies as solutions capable of propelling them to contribute their quota to the socio-economic and political development of the nation.

Concept of adult education

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1976) recognises adult and non-formal education as an integral part of lifelong education, which can contribute decisively to economic, social, cultural and educational development of nations and world peace. The Conference defines adult education as:

> The entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in the two-fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

Coles (1971) considers that adult education embraces all forms of educative experiences needed by men and women according to the motive of their varying interests and requirements and their differing levels of comprehension and ability and their changing roles and responsibilities throughout life. Exeter (1968), quoted in Akinpelu (1988), sums up adult education as a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular basis and full-time basis (or persons who have no opportunity to attend school) undertake sequential and organised activities with the conscious intention of bringing

about changes in information, understanding of skills, appreciation and attitudes for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

From the above, adult education is conceptualised as an educational enterprise for people regarded as adults and not a mere congregation for recreation. Therefore, it is a purposeful activity, deliberately coordinated towards achieving identified specific needs of recipients. The recipient must be adult, in terms of consciousness, mental balance, social responsibility and moral uprightness. It is a voluntary process, requiring voluntary participation and withdrawal.

Adult education is need-defined and tailored towards individual needs and interest. It is learner and animateur centred. The facilitator in an adult education program is not a teacher, but one who anchors the program for everybody in the centre and directs learning processes. It is an out-of-school program, but very organised and consciously directed with inbuilt institutional schemes of work. Adult education process can be seen as a purposive and intentional process set to solve major societal problems and promote understanding of basic realities of life.

From the foregoing, education thus must build on what Freire (1970, 1973) calls concretization and problematization – that is, a continuous revelation of the world around students (who are no longer objects but active subjects) and teachers, and a constant critical dialogue examining the meaning of action. Freire (1973) submits that education without direct action becomes mere verbalism, action without education mere activism.

Anyanwu (1987) comments that, through adult education and functional literacy training programs, individual adults fulfil themselves within the framework of their society, thereby developing their personality as individuals and at the same time bringing a measure of reputation to their society as a whole. Also, adult and

literacy education improve their daily life and increase their income patterns through additional abilities and new knowledge acquired. Adewale (1996) asserts that "societies must be prepared to consider lessening disparities as a major political, social, and educational goal". It is in recognition of this that impetus has been added to adult and literacy education since there is so much that has to be comprehended and understood. It requires an adult mind with an adult experience to transmit new basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, methods of work and values, thus shedding conservatism, poverty syndrome, illiteracy, ignorance and disease that have for long characterised women's lives in developing countries.

Preamble to women societal-created problems and forms of discrimination

Illiteracy and poverty range very high among women in Nigerian society. These have introduced women to other problems like prostitution, sex-networking attitudes and women enslavement amongst young adults. Today, many women who could have been useful for national development have been transported to other countries from Nigeria for various reasons. Some of these range from poverty, religious restrictions disallowing women from mixing freely with their men folk, ignorance, wantonness, social barriers, cultural taboos and restrictions. Hence, women's roles have remained glued to child-rearing and kitchen management. Many women who could have been trained professionally in different fields are permanent housewives in rural sectors, helping their husbands on their farms or selling in the markets as petty traders. At times, they roam around major cities seeking alms as a means of survival or selling their children for gifts.

The educational needs of women have recently been addressed in the last decade with great vigour, in the areas of engineering, accountancy, management, sciences, social sciences, environmental

studies, humanities and marketing. These aimed to help women solve their numerous problems to a greater extent. However, adult education since 1947 has been streamlined along the lines of mass literacy programs, vocational training, community development, social welfare and industrial work, as a decisive factor and a discipline in encouraging women to become significant in society as entrepreneurs. The aim has been to make them more secured, self-reliant and also to engender in them self-confidence to face societal challenges and their work, home management and personal development. In addition to this, Titi Abubakar, the wife of Nigeria's Vice-President, in the year 2000 waged a relentless war against women trafficking to sensitise government and international communities to the plight of women in Nigeria especially.

Legal framework of women discrimination

In Nigeria, a woman can work anywhere or become an entrepreneur only with the permission of her husband. In Islamic societies, women are put in purdah; they are not permitted to work or mingle with the male folks in such a society.

Married women also require the permission of their husbands to work with an organisation and/or be posted to other locations outside their matrimonial homes other than the workplace of their husbands; where this is contrary, they risk their marriage for their work.

In some societies in Nigeria, women cannot inherit their husband's property in the face of family pressures on them consequent upon the death of their husbands. Thus, family members of their husbands can take away valuable parts of the property meant for them at anytime. The widow, in most cases, is faced with family neglect and her legal rights are denied her. The children are left un-catered for, and therefore they remain illiterate or half-educated; but, if she is strong, she could work hard to raise funds to educate them to become useful citizens. This situation in Nigeria is gradually being improved by the

current gender sensitivity programs, spearheaded by the wives of the President, Vice-President, governors and local government chairmen. Programs such as HIV/AIDS awareness counselling, family planning and literacy/vocational rehabilitation for teenagers and adults in both rural and urban areas of the 36 States of the federation are introduced and being pursued.

Socio-cultural discrimination of women

In Nigeria, the man is the boss in marriage and he determines the place of residence and work location of the woman (wife). The man is also expected to take care of the wife and the children by meeting and fulfilling all their needs. By this, many women are made fulltime housewives, depending on their husbands for survival. Within traditional and cultural settings, this role is hardly fulfilled today due to incidence of poverty, sudden joblessness of the husband, retrenchment and compulsory retirement from work. Women are thus seen, suddenly, engaging in odd and menial jobs to make ends meet. Hence, a woman bears the burden of child-rearing and taking care of herself as well as feeding her husband.

Work discrimination

Many employers of labour have often displayed open discrimination for and apathy to the employment of women, based on the special biological nature of their womanhood. They do not want to employ them for fear of losing colossal amounts of money in the course of their pregnancy or while on maternity leave. To worsen the case, most husbands do not want their wives to be transferred too far from their residence or far from the children. Thus, the organisation has to seek a new replacement, which in economic terms may be taken to mean economic wastage in manpower training and utilisation. Therefore, many women because of this have lost their chances of being employed to their male counterparts. For example, in a

personal survey, a few employers sampled on their attitude to women employment gave these responses:

> "They are too sluggish in pregnancy"
>
> "My company will lose so much during their pregnancy and maternity leave; employing women into sensitive positions is sometimes risky if she will not be there always"
>
> "Women are very good at work but may defy being transferred to other stations; this may cost the company more to recruit and retrain a new hand to man her post/position"
>
> "Women have weak minds and cannot do rigorous work".

Aims of adult-oriented education for women empowerment

The aims of education programs for women empowerment are to:

- make women more aware of opportunities available to them through mass literacy education in all sectors of the economy and social system
- stimulate the spirit of entrepreneurship in Nigerian women (that is, spirit of self-employment, rather than begging/slaving for survival)
- instil better integration strategies of women into the socio-economic sectors
- reduce poverty rates among women and make them self-reliant economically through inculcating new training
- instil new vocational skills in Nigerian women, especially in suburban and rural areas; this is to make them more functional and independent in order to cater for themselves and their children, rather than engage in commercial sex-business that can make them contract HIV/AIDS, thereby cutting short their life span
- improve the socio-economic welfare standard of Nigerian women and their children

- pave the way for women's access to acquiring career information and loans through counselling and adult education programs from banks or financial or government-created institutions
- boost the spirit of feminism in them; that is, to shed the inferiority complex syndrome and lack of dignity and respect usually found among them
- recognise women's contribution to development, growth, creativity and knowledge
- help women fight against the feeling of low self-concept and lack of confidence that has kept them behind in societal activities
- evolve in them the spirit of dignity for labour and self-reliance
- support the development of women's groups and associations rather than killing them prematurely
- reduce the pace of violence at home, at work, at school and in all places where women operate; to allow them to live a useful life
- dignify womanhood by banning all forms of pornographic or nude display or music that bring down womanhood
- urge government to give qualified women equal positions and posts in government portfolios, such as ministerial appointments and state commissionership or in local government administrations and so on.

The above aims are also hoped to alleviate hardship and wanton poverty among Nigeria's women. The latter situation has prompted many women to be attracted to being trafficked abroad for commercial sex in western countries such as Italy and France as a fast means of making money. It has been reported in the international media that many women and teenagers have lost their lives in the process of sea transportation or been exposed to wanton sex harassments by sea-pirates. More often this results in their death, after which they are dumped in the open sea as meals for sharks and whales.

Therefore, from the above, the empowerment of women would be better defined via well designed counselling and adult and literacy education programs flavoured with the Mass Literacy Campaign diverted at women.

The aim of adult education counselling and mass literacy programs for women in this dispensation is to sensitise society to the need for equality of both sexes in complementary work processes, knowledge, skill acquisition, professional practice, equity in ethical and law application, and thus giving women equal chances and quotas in job placement like their male counterparts.

Adult and mass literacy mass education processes supported with sustainable counselling will engender the acquisition of necessary skills needed to cope with the modern changing realities of life, compelling women to comply or unwillingly submit idleness to societal tension, temptations and social vices as a way of life.

Adult literacy education strategies have to be applied as a tool for the empowerment for educating literate, semi-literate, illiterate and working class women; that is, to serve as liberation education in the dissemination of new skills, knowledge, experiences, ideas and working methodologies which will provide clear vision that will develop in women an analytical mind and creative thinking. The spirit of equality, sense of honesty and good mothering will also be inculcated in the women so that they may be accorded high respect and dignity in society.

If the above goals of adult education and overall education of women is to be achieved in an emergent Nigerian society, Pai Obanya (1999) maintained that the role of government will be the creation and maintenance of an enabling environment for talents, creativity, imagination and dynamism for Nigerians to flourish, to blossom, to be channelled to productive endeavour, and to produce wealth and happiness for the nation. Hence, from the above, education of

adult groups, especially the women, becomes imperative to enhance an effective growth of the emerging nation in the new millennium. He also observed that the development of higher education for adults could be an element of solving the national problem – if the adult class, especially women, could be properly oriented to adopt a participatory posture in the emerging democracy and in sectional development, then many stumbling sectional issues could be revived, discussed and resolved.

A review of the perception of women in societies

At the beginning of the human race, both men and women were endowed with knowledge and wisdom. Bashin (1992) asserted that feminists and other anthropologists informed the world that women discovered agriculture, women initiated certain crafts and women were the first health workers; they developed medicine. She also lamented that, as recent as 2,000 to 3,000 years ago, when creation of knowledge became a separate and formalized activity, men of the leisured classes took control over learning and education, and creation of knowledge became the exclusive preserve of the upper class. The influence of western science and knowledge over traditional knowledge of other cultures made so-called learned men create formal, organised modern religions, which dethroned the feminine principle of power. Hence, in the new scheme of things, women have little or no role in religion. This is why modern religion is patriarchal. Hence, the male dictates, heads and defines ethics, morality and societal law. Though few women have risen to the bench as judges and justices in law courts, legally, most laws are based on religious laws and are full of double standards and injustice against women. This is by not allowing them to hold headship posts in many religions until recent times. Feminist historians have also reported that the witch-hunts in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were examples of violence displayed and used to kill knowledgeable and strong women. The witches hunted were mid-wives, medicine women,

women with abilities and power. Thus, many scholastic surveys reveal male perception of women gender as deformed men, with smaller brains and low ability to compete with men.

While Aristotle described women in his gross sexism of both men and women, he saw men as active and women as passive. He further referred to the female as a mutilated male, that is, as someone who does not have a soul. He also said that the biological inferiority of a woman makes her inferior, also in her capabilities, her ability to reason, and therefore her ability to make decision. Aristotle further asserted that man is superior and female inferior – that man is born to rule. He also said that the courage of man is shown in commanding and of a woman in obeying.

Another prominent philosopher Freud categorised a normal human being as a male and perceived the female, by his definition, as a deviant human being lacking penis, and whose entire psychological structure is supposedly centered on the struggle to compensate for the deficiency.

From the above analogy, men have severally dominated and controlled the spheres of many professions and work life, involving women, for example, in professions like medicine, pharmacy, media practice, education, psychology, engineering sciences, social sciences, management, humanities, economics, languages and so on. This kind of patriarchal domination has done terrible injustice to women by discounting or reducing women's knowledge and marginalising their chances in education, academia, political posts and appointments, and thus reducing women in society as second class citizens or a subordinate class.

These present writers observe that for centuries, general education and knowledge have been dominated and controlled by men. It has also succeeded in causing women dis-empowerment and making them more domesticated and tools for their husbands.

The super-imposition of westernisation and western knowledge has created a lot of dichotomy, bureaucratic problems and fragmented thinking, making men to be superior and women to be inferior or subordinate in societal events. This fragmented thinking and knowledge has posed the current exploitation tendencies, poverty syndrome, discrimination and apathy in sexism and great dangers to the survival of the women elitists and the illiterate class, most especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

If the process of women empowerment is to be taken seriously to succeed and achieve the desired goals, poverty and all acts prompting impoverishment should be alleviated. Marginalisation, discrimination in employment opportunities, religious sanctioning of women to their homestead, social and cultural barriers confining women's operation in socio-economic activities, corruption, and violent elimination of successful women should be eradicated via adult and mass literacy programs in the mass media. This is to build in the lost values, norms, ethics and morality that have been eroded by western civilization.

Functional and mass literacy culture has to be imbibed by governments of the federation as a means of inculcating new social values, habits, work skills, attitudes and vocational training in women, using the material and instrumental vocational approaches in capacity-building of women, and hence making the women to be effective and functional in their chosen vocations. New vocational training skills have to be fashioned, to engage illiterate women in self-employed working areas such as soap-making, tying and dying, candle making, pomade making, electrical and electronic works, tailoring and fashion designing, painting, architectural drawing, music and instrumentation. Other areas include computer operation and program designing, modern farming methods and techniques, marketing strategies and media practice for women and young ladies discovered to possess creative skills, critical thinking and abilities. This will allow them to shift from local crafts that are more

demanding, energy sapping and less productive or profitable, thus putting an end to poverty's vicious cycle.

The relevance of the above becomes significant, if one takes a cue from the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) of the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, that

> macro-level economic policies have adversely impacted on women and families, especially those in poverty. The restructuring of the economy is driving women into insecure employment, unemployment, unprotected home-based production and dangerous working conditions. Diminishing social security systems and services are becoming the reality of women's daily lives. Inequalities in the quality of life increase from region to region within nations. Poverty both in absolute and relative terms and the number of women living in poverty increase in all regions.

The above macro-economic policies of government in developing countries summarise the impact of such policies on women. They reveal a process of disempowerment for uneducated, unskilled, illiterate and semi-literate women who may find themselves out of a job anytime due to emergent new technology or innovation in the working process of their organisation. In summary, the new millennium needs a new approach to women development and empowerment processes to facilitate a better nation. The Holy Qu'ran supports the education and development of women as it states that, if one educates a woman, one has educated a whole nation. This is because a well-educated woman will be a mother with the characteristics of good womanhood and offer good mothering to produce well-nurtured children capable of developing the nation. Women are mirrors of behaviour to their children; as a native proverb claims, "a good mother bears good children, while a bad mother produces bad and rotten children". For the nation to develop rightly, we need good education for all adult women and young female adults.

Therefore, the goal and focus of women empowerment through adult and literacy education and counselling processes are to change all stumbling blocks, bureaucratic bottle-necks and bureaucracy in society, such as elitism, ethnicity, statism, sex-quota syndrome and so on. These have silently been applied over the years to disempower women from effective functioning and reaching high posts or positions in authority or attaining political offices like their men counterparts holding the same qualifications in Nigeria. For example, many still believe that women cannot rule over them. This explains why we have never had a woman president or governor in Nigeria, and only a few women have risen to the post of deputy governors. In addition, only a few portfolios, about three to five percent, are allocated to women as either Federal Ministers or Commissioners or even appointed or voted in as local government chairs and councillors. Women, by their nature, are soft, strict and officious, and, if given the opportunity to perform, they can help to redeem Nigeria's lost glory and image if integrated into the working committees of many standing organs in economic policy, environmental resource distribution, educational programs and implementation. Few women who have been appointed have strived to protect their prestige, image and family name; hence, they would carry out their schedule of duty to the letter, without fear or favour. Women administrators who were well-trained have been found to be creative, innovative and resourceful in bringing about positive changes in organisation work processes. It is this kind of scenario that we advocate for Nigerian women through adult and literacy education programs.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions and findings about women's living conditions and the poverty cycle in which they have found themselves, it is recommended that:

- A Ministry of Women Empowerment has to be established and mandated at the three tiers of government through financial empowerment, to evolve functional programs.
- Functional vocational rehabilitation/social welfare programs should be evolved at all three levels of government to empower the training of semi-literate and illiterate women in modern skills acquisition to help them to become self-reliant.
- Community-based vocational training programs should be instituted in the rural areas, to empower rural women and prevent them from engaging in menial services, commercial sex-business, or subjecting themselves to activities of fraudsters to be trafficked about for sex-business and gross exploitation.
- Government should evolve functional social welfare policies and packages that will enhance women development in the country.
- Gerontological programs should be evolved to assist aged women who do not receive adequate care from their families.
- Counselling health services and social work services should be evolved to assist in the organisation of development programs for women.
- International organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs), donor agencies and so on should be sensitised to aid women empowerment in development programs for women.
- Sponsorship of brilliant and creative women on training programs at home and abroad should be encouraged, that is, those who will, on return, retrain other women at home.
- Legislation should be enacted to prohibit all forms of women trafficking, pornographic music and nudic postures capable of defacing and dehumanising womanhood on the mass media.
- The NGOs (national and multi-national) should be sensitized for the sponsorship of programs, in fact, UNESCO, World Bank, UNIDO, British Council, UNDP and so on should assist the funding of adult and literacy education programs for women empowerment. Workshops, seminars and conferences, as well as research on women development, should be part of the funding.

- Private sector funding of women empowerment programs by multi-national companies and corporations should be encouraged.
- The various electronic mass media should be sensitised to develop programs and messages relating to women development which will positively change the perceptions and attitudes of the public about women.
- Government should legislate to empower the training and employment / recruitment of qualified women to competitive posts and positions in the country's ministries, parastatals, corporations, ambassadorial posts, as well as making them vice-chancellors, provosts and rectors of institutions or directors of corporations and research centres.
- Government should also legislate against all forms of violence usually displayed against women with punitive sanctions and punishments for offenders. This is to enable women to live peacefully in society, to enjoy themselves and adjust favourably on the one hand to take part in community and national development, and on the other to take good care of their children who are the future hopes of Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, the authors conclude that it is long overdue for government to seriously invest in functional literacy and adult education counselling programs as a veritable tool for women empowerment. Mass literacy programs up to the grassroots level where there are more women should be the norm to create awareness for mass adult and literacy education and community-based vocational training programs capable of instilling and inculcating new vocational skills, social work habits, values and work orientation in women in any vocation they may choose to pursue.

The government should also, as a matter of policy legislation rather than lip-service, fund women developmental and empowerment

programs such as workshops, seminars and other training activities. For quick rural development, government should place permanently the office of Women Empowerment under the Presidency for effective monitoring and funding. More counsellors, adult and literacy educators, social workers and rehabilitation officers need to be recruited and retained to meet the modern-day demands and needs of women.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Situated researcher reflections and professional learning journeys

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Some key theoretical aspects of my recently completed Doctor of Education thesis regarding teacher professional development were situativity theory, communities of practice and being a situated reflective practitioner. With the hard work now over, it is interesting to comment on these aspects and their continuing relevance.

During the six years of part-time study, as a situated researcher working professionally in the educational community, I was really living these theoretical propositions, researching professional learning while situated, learning and collaborating within multiple

educational communities. This personal learning was reflected in the thesis itself, with the final research reports accompanied by my own journal reflections about the research journey. Sometimes, reflecting Van Manen (1977), this involved a sort of 'confessional style' of descriptive comment, but also over time I became increasingly skilled at adopting a more critical stance involving broader links to other literature and theoretical positions.

My individual perspective was also frequently challenged within the various situated learning communities of the academic, educational system and school worlds which were my life contexts. In the academic world, there was the apprenticeship process involving work and feedback with my supervisors, as well as academic conference attendance and presentations, online conference chatrooms and peer review processes. In the school community, I disseminated internet surveys within principals' associations, conducted coaching workshops and shared draft papers with school leadership teams and was provided with feedback. My professional work as an educational systems leader also provided opportunity for sharing relevant papers with colleagues in other managerial roles, and I had a sense of becoming an agent of change while also gaining other perspectives.

The situativity theory framework used for data analysis was also the basis of my situated researcher reflections. This involved acknowledging effective learning occurring through a process of collaboration with others, while engaged in a joint enterprise and sharing beliefs and relevant practical activities. And I connected with Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice work, through ongoing formal and informal learning within those communities over an extended timeframe, with a sense of identity with the group developing and community responsibility for the learning of others.

In terms of joint enterprise, as a doctoral student I was really situated in the academic community as a newcomer, engaging in a range of experiences for the purpose of learning the written as well as

unwritten codes and practices of academia. From national conference participation to writing papers for journals and the long-term relationships formed with my supervisors, my identity as an academic slowly emerged although not without tensions arising from the duality of academic and educational practitioner roles. As Wenger (1988) outlines in regard to multiple overlapping communities, various positions are adopted, dependent on the group. As an experienced professional educator and leader accustomed to a relatively central location within that community, there were times when I found the academic apprenticeship process quite challenging and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation and master-apprenticeship relationship certainly became evident.

But there was so much learning and my journal captures a significant moment when I was supported to become focused on the theoretical framework: 'Fresh from some workshopping of my teacher professional development topic with academic colleagues and a mentor, I've now distilled the essence of my work within situativity theory. What it's meant has been a key lens to analyse the research findings and the beginning of an explosion of creative energy and ideas and using the writing craft to re-examine and synthesise my learning' (Journal, April 2003).

Situativity theory also emphasises collaboration. A significant group for collaboration was my professional colleagues in the education system. In this environment, there was certainly the usual government bureaucracy and competing power blocs which Hargreaves (1992) has identified in other contexts as leading to a culture of 'balkanisation'. There were also some particular colleagues with whom I shared ideas and with whom I was learning informally on an almost daily basis. My journal captures some of the excitement I felt after visiting one of the case study schools and writing a paper which I shared with these particular colleagues: 'I was just buzzing, and I started fleshing out ideas about what education could look like

in the future … and a few days later I got everyone together to go out for coffee to give me some feedback!' (Journal, September 2003). In this strong collaborative and open community, I felt safe to share ideas and articles of interest in informal situations, to dream about new models for education, to review draft papers and to really engage in critical discourse and learning about pedagogy and professional development.

As a long-term school leader, the third community which was significant in my doctoral learning came from this group. Draft papers were used by some schools as practical artefacts to stimulate discussion about their own practices and their feedback was invaluable in my research journey.

And it was in this community that I experienced one of my greatest pleasures in conducting interviews of teachers and leaders within the case study schools. While there was a certain amount of tedium associated with eventually transcribing many lengthy interviews, I loved using the semi-structured approach, 'just letting people talk and then following up issues as they arose while presenting new topic questions from time to time to get their response' (Journal, March 2003). The richness of these data captured not only factual information but also the excitement of interviewees' professional development experiences in those moments of enlightenment. What I learned as an interviewer was the skill involved in listening to teacher responses and encouraging an in-depth reply while also deciding when to intervene and ask a follow-up question. And I felt very humbled at times when teachers, essentially unknown to me, opened up their hearts and minds and trusted my integrity in sometimes sharing deeply personal career experiences. While some teachers talked about career disappointment and there were significant recent school crises and associated staff demoralisation evident from some of the cases study schools, 'what came through strongly throughout from most of the teachers interviewed was a real commitment to

education and to kids and this was very uplifting' (Journal, September 2003).

Related to other aspects of situativity theory, throughout the doctoral research process and within the multiple communities of the academic, educational systems and schools, I was really grappling with a dominant professional identity. There was a strong sense of wanting to share my learning with others in these communities. Through engaging in research, preparing conference papers and presentations, writing for journals and practitioner publications and education consulting, I began to collaborate and to work towards making a difference for teacher and student learning.

With the goal of the formal doctoral qualification achieved, that process of collaborative professional learning and making a contribution is ongoing. No matter what the dominant pathway from here, it is certain to involve continued collaboration within multiple educational communities.

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RESEARCH REPORT

An examination of the social systems of engineering projects

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My PhD thesis, titled "An examination of the social systems of engineering projects", was submitted in March 2005 and accepted by the University in August 2005. As can be inferred from the title, the research was transdisciplinary in that it drew from bodies of knowledge in domains of engineering, management, sociology, education and philosophy. My three supervisors were from both engineering (Systems Engineering and Evaluation Centre: SEEC) and education (Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work: CREEW), and the examiners were from sociology and engineering.

The thesis drew together threads of the representation of real-world entities as systems, the life-cycle of groups of people, the nature of problem-solving and related issues associated the learning processes in the development and application of new knowledge in a group. These threads were consolidated in a Social Systems Evaluation Framework (SSEF) that was based on the forms of capital concepts of Bourdieu, namely embodied, social, institutionalised, economic and objectified capital. The Social Systems Evaluation Framework can facilitate the evaluation of the social system of an engineering project at any stage from initiation to disbandment and provides guidance on the encouragement of high performing teams or on the need for early intervention in a dysfunctional team by management.

A significant feature of successful projects is the complementary contributions of the formalised structure and processes and the informal relationship-based networks. These relate to the institutionalised and economic capital, and the embodied and social capital respectively. The former support the organisation and efficient performance of tasks that are predictable, routine and amenable to standardised procedures. The latter support the solution of problems that are novel and complex and require innovation and creativity. Leadership styles appropriate to a given situation, the recognition of experience in the formation of competence and expertise, and the criticality of collective learning, transactive memory and distributed intelligence are features of successful projects that are accessed at lower levels of the system comprising forms of capital.

Since completion of the research for the thesis, I have continued in two areas. The first is the representation of real-world entities, of which the hierarchical 'system' representation is the most familiar as it is found in entities as diverse as the family, religions, the military, bureaucratic and criminal organisations and the reductionist methods of natural science, medicine and engineering. The notion was that the common hierarchical representation, when applied to social and socio-technical entities, does not allow for the interdependence and co-evolution of elements in generating emergent properties. Boundaries are artefacts of the representation, and limitation of analysis and intervention to elements within the chosen boundary, while necessary to simplify a problem to manageable proportions, can result in significant errors in developing measures for prediction and control.

The first results of this further research came in a refereed paper presented at the 2005 Systems Engineering, Test and Evaluation (SETE 2005) conference in Brisbane titled "The representation of systems". The conclusions of this paper are that the fully connected network is a more realistic representation of real-world entities and that the commonly used hierarchical representation can be derived from the network by eliminating, freezing or ignoring many of the available connections between elements or nodes. The network is considered to be the general case and therefore more useful as an area of research in understanding the behaviour of social and socio-technical systems.

The Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) has recently placed a research contract with the Systems Engineering and Evaluation Centre for a preliminary study on the characteristics of social systems that can be derived from the application of the network representation to the military.

The second area of further research is the life-cycle of small groups with particular reference to the formation of a group. The bodies of knowledge accessed previously suggested that an extended period of up to 18 months was necessary before an assembly of strangers could begin to function as a team. This was accepted at the time as indicative that some management care and attention is necessary in the selection and activation of a project team. However, in subsequent discussions with current managers/practitioners, it became evident

that management could not tolerate such a lengthy unproductive phase and their experience was that teams can 'gel' very quickly.

This study is ongoing and has lead to the work of psychologists in researching the ability of people to make seemingly accurate assessments of others in seconds rather than months and decide if they can work together. An aspect of this area of interpersonal relating is the Pygmalion effect – that is, that people respond to others in the way they are expected to.

I had an opportunity in late 2005 to test my approach to characterising projects as social systems when I delivered a one week course to students of the masters degree in project management from the Australian Department of Defence. These 15 students were at middle management level and were experienced project managers. They readily accepted my approach and, through many interactive discussions, I formed the view that they 'knew' much about what I was talking but it was tacit knowledge that only became explicit in discussions. Their difficulty in a highly structured and 'processified' organisation was to justify decisions and opinions made on the basis of that tacit knowledge. My role evolved towards providing them with information on the importance of tacit knowledge and making that knowledge explicit. Their final assignments were so informative that I have undertaken to publish them as an edited book.

A final comment is that my research program crosses several disciplinary boundaries. Transdisciplinary research is not easy for many reasons. Yet I believe that my research has demonstrated how necessary it is particularly at this stage of Western society when so many institutions are showing signs of distress. Remedies do not seem to be forthcoming from the 'stove-piped' domains and disciplines that evolved in the era following the Industrial Revolution.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Organisational learning about depression in the workplace: a community of practice of silence and avoidance

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The economic and social impact of depression on the Australian workforce (Hickie 2002; Hawthorne, Cheok, Goldney and Fisher 2003) is only recently being acknowledged. In 2004 I undertook semi-structured interviews with people with human resource responsibilities in the deregulated sector of information technology in South Australia. The interviews focused on their accessibility to work-based education about depression and asked their opinions regarding the merit of such education. As I also wanted to conceptualise what is understood about depression and to seek insight into what their understandings are of prevailing attitudes in their workplaces

about workers with depression, I drew upon a methodological perspective from the field of organisational behaviour and undertook a qualitative, interpretive method of analysis. I was interested in investigating what tacit and/or overt 'social learning' was occurring on the value of education about depression in the workplace and qualitative research methods provided me with the ability to explore, understand and explain the participants' social work-world. I made observations about their workplaces, noted indicators of workplace cultures and gathered artefacts to gain some comprehension of where and how people had learned their constructs about depression, with the intention of proposing what could be developed and used in the workplace in addition to what was currently available, or perceived to be available, to ameliorate their apparent current lack of literacy about the topic. I undertook a further thematic analysis to enhance my understanding of the discourses that shape and are inherent in the organisational cultures in the environments in which this research was situated.

Emerging themes

As education about recognising depression and stress as real and manageable can enable increased participation in mutually understood and agreed processes for interventions or prevention, it would seem important for people with personnel responsibilities, managers, and employees and employers in general, to be able to recognise various forms of depression in their employees. However, it appears that this is not always the case. The people in this research were under-educated about the impact of depression in the workplace, and unfamiliar with sources of relevant information. Moreover, the relevance of this education was disenfranchised in several of these workplaces, being considered not work-related and not of interest to technical employees. I also asked interviewees what they perceived to be their colleagues' and peers' thoughts about those matters. What emerged was a generalised ignorance, pejorative

labelling and stigma generated by anachronistic stereotypes. These were workplaces in which disenfranchising behaviour and practices are currently tacitly endorsed.

I explored the pedagogical practices and organisational learning which emerged as inherent in their organisational ethos. What transpired was a persistent and underlying disquiet about the impact that depression may have on a person's 'performance' (that is, work productivity) reflecting a prevailing business concern of economic stability which was interwoven with an anxiety about the 'legal' side of 'dealing' with people with depression. The intrinsic goal of these organisations was their continued survival through the labour and productivity potential of employees; managers supported only very specific, technically-oriented education in order to maintain the economic viability of their organisations in what they regarded as the most expedient way. In their pursuit of this, many of the managers in these organisations articulated concerns about supporting the 'weaker' [*sic*] links, the people with 'problems' (those who were ill or depressed) in their organisations and considered them to be fraught with difficulties. Most justified this by explaining that, while their organisation had a duty of care to people, they also had competing business interests; they had to justify any educational activity as being relevant to their 'bottom line' in order for it to occur. Few perceived that assisting staff who were depressed may in fact assist that bottom line in terms of increasing morale or workplace satisfaction through prevention or hastened recovery and return to increased levels of economic productivity.

When asked about what they perceived their colleagues' beliefs about depression to be, many articulated variations of the notion that most of their employees were 'too private' or 'too introverted' either to delve into other people's emotional states or problems or to discuss their own 'problems' in the workplace. That depression was not something that was talked about in these workplaces was consistent

across organisations and some of the managers whom I interviewed described themselves as sharing this trait. It would seem likely that this managerial discomfort with the topic could only exacerbate the lack of support for work-based education about depression. Furthermore, many described their preference for a practice of 'employing for fit' – choosing employees who would continue the prevailing cultural climate in which private, non-intrusive behaviours were described as the prevailing norm – 'the way we do things here'.

The nature of communities of practice

I am currently exploring the notion that this tacit, mutual and widespread avoidance of discussion about depression could reflect a form of learning which is associated with being engaged with a community of practice. In brief, Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger and Snyder (2000: 139) and Wenger (1999: 32) define communities of practice as groups of people formed around shared interests who come together informally for mutual benefit. Of particular interest to me is the proposal that communities of practice also share ideas and insights that are tacit or difficult to describe (McDermott 2000). This concept of tacit learning occurring in communities of practice is possibly reflected in the prevailing and shared lack of discussion about personal matters, the minimising of the value of education about depression in the workplace and the unspoken disquiet about depression – its existence or even validity – described by the interviewees. Furthermore, while the literature refers to communities of practice as being a process by which organisations and groups can increase their effectiveness (Allee 2000, McDermott 2000), James (2002) notes that Lave and Wenger's proposals could also suggest that the learning in some communities of practice can reflect workplace practices which are for the convenience of the organisation, rather than for an increase in comprehension, knowledge or personal (and hence organisational) effectiveness. The pervasive, tacit and mutually supported notions of avoidance of discussion about

depression in the workplace may reflect some components of the learning associated with engagement within a community of practice.

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BOOK REVIEW

Towards re-enchantment: Education, imagination and the getting of wisdom

Peta Heywood, Tricia McCann, Bernie Neville & Peter Willis (eds.)
Flaxton, Queensland: Post Pressed Publishers, 2005
214 pages
ISBN 876682 80.9 RRP $39.95
Obtain from CREEWBOOKS@unisa.edu.au

[Editor's note: this is a second review of this book. The first appeared in the November 2005 issue of this Journal.]

This inspirational book emerged from a colloquium sponsored by the School of Educational Studies at La Trobe University on the theme of *Re-enchanting education* which attracted teachers and teacher educators with the shared belief that the current education system was failing many people. Alternative approaches, which actively engaged the students in the learning process, could improve their well-being and make their lives more fulfilling and thus be intrinsically more rewarding for teachers.

The colloquium explored a more creative discourse of education that included the worlds of image and imagination, of feelings, emotion and the heart in which learning and education develop the inner person, build on connections and become enjoyable, exciting journeys, creatively and reflectively stimulating for both students and teachers. Learning then becomes a source of enchantment, a captivating, enthralling activity in which the spellbound person is re-energised, uplifted and entranced so that anything becomes possible. It is these enchanting moments in education and learning that provide the inherent rewards for both the learner and the educators. People flourish, become richer and more fulfilled as knowledge is transformed into wisdom.

Participants at the colloquium have contributed their personal interpretations of the re-enchantment theme in this collection of wide-ranging papers under the headings of Curriculum, classroom and culture; Narratives of enchantment and an Epilogue to the colloquium compiled from post-colloquium email discussions exploring the experience of the colloquium. The theoretical models of Jean Gebser's structures of consciousness, Kegan's (1996) theories of learning and cognitive development, Heron's inter-subjective inquiry and Van Manen's poetising lived experience are used to explain and demonstrate the transformative powers of learning in more creative, reflective environments.

The influence of Bernie Neville, associate professor at the School of Education Studies at La Trobe University, is apparent in several papers. His contribution explores the possibilities of an approach to education based on a humanist, ecocentric worldview that focuses on individual growth and living in harmony with the rhythms of nature and the natural world in which the body and mind are congruent.

Many of the papers in the first section deal with adolescents and the failure of the current secondary school curriculum with its rational/mental focus on economic objectives of competencies and mechanistic learning oriented towards future employment. This fundamentalist emphasis is unbalanced and contributes to the social and emotional disconnection of many adolescents. The result is 'the living dead', who, according to Andrea Gallant, a secondary teacher, are those students who achieve despite the system, and the alienated, disengaged and unmotivated for whom school has no meaning and relevance. The diverse aspects, including the body and mind, of the adolescent's life are disconnected and fragmented at a time when they seek connections and search for identity and meaning. The existing curriculum does not provide room for the different maturation rates of learners and their social, emotional and spiritual needs. Darrel Caulley, a research fellow, in 'Giving meaning to the lives of secondary school students', proposed that this could partly be overcome if the connections between community and school were strengthened to create a safe and caring environment similar to the traditional village.

However, it is not only the education system which is failing society. Contemporary popular culture, new communication technologies and the media all focus on superficial, instant gratification in the continual search for novelty. It is a world of fragmented relationships and vicarious experiences which engages the individual for a brief moment in time and does not encourage them to develop their inner lives and grow emotionally and spiritually.

A more responsive education system, which facilitated and developed thinking, feeling and intuiting in an integrated learning process, would achieve shifts in consciousness and individual transformation. de Souza believes that

> if the learning is to go beyond the surface, it must touch the 'soul' of the student. It must reach that core where the learning becomes transformed by an inner response which may and should lead to outward expressions of changed thinking and behaviour (p. 122)

Facilitating a university course on spirituality provided David Tacey with his own experience of re-enchantment. He and the students explored the wisdom or interiority of their hearts by delving into what was missing or needed to be remembered in their own lives. At first it was a difficult and confronting process, which became transformative and very rewarding as each found their voice to define and write their own spirituality. This deeper consciousness of self from emotional and moral maturity achieves what Peter Willis describes as unitary transformation.

Two papers provide a more international aspect. One, by Bingxin Wang, a Chinese Professor of Education and current PhD candidate at La Trobe, reports an innovative re-employment training scheme in China, which aims to develop initiative and entrepreneurial skills with the ultimate aim of providing for the basic needs of the many laid-off workers while also meeting their higher aspirations for a better quality of life. In the other, Sua-Ha Wong narrates her personal experience as a six year old learning Chinese calligraphy as a holistic, integration of the body and mind in the Confucian concept of self-cultivation.

The four 'Narratives of enchantment' describe personal meanings of enchantment by drawing on the writer's life experiences for personal transformation. By reflecting on childhood intuiting, imaginative play and relationships in their lives, they make connections between their childhood, who they are now and their passionate quest to provide a more balanced, enchanting education for others.

This book would appeal to educators at all levels who aspire to make learning more rewarding and exhilarating for learners and are seeking to revitalise and re-invigorate their professional practice and personal enchantment with education. Many of the ideas and strategies

would enrich the curriculum and could be incorporated into their classrooms. It is a stimulating and thought-provoking read, which challenges personal attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices.

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BOOK REVIEW

Leadership and sustainability: system thinkers in action

Michael Fullan
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This is an interesting book, the latest in a series by Michael Fullan over a fifteen year period all of which address shortcomings in the education systems of Western societies. Fullan is formerly Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and in April 2004 was appointed Special Adviser on Education to the Premier and Minister of Education in Ontario. Fullan appears to have moved from an introspective view of education as indicated by the 1991 title, *What's worth fighting for? Working together for*

your school, to consideration, demonstrated in *Leadership and sustainability*, of the bodies-of-knowledge of other disciplines.

For Western society, the twentieth century was an era of specialisation. Society promoted the formation of a range of specialised disciplines, each charged and authorised with the provision of a particular service to the community. Each discipline developed its own dominant paradigm that is traceable to the reductionist paradigm applied so successfully by the natural sciences, and to the quest of modern society for efficiency and accountability.

Without exception, the specialist disciplines of twenty-first century Western society are showing signs of distress brought on by a growing gap between societies' expectations and the services delivered. All of the disciplines could be said to be experiencing a failure of the dominant paradigm. The life cycle of a paradigm is well captured by Kuhn in *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1996) or by Prigogine and Stengers in *Order out of chaos* (1984). They identify a cyclic process starting at a period of stability during which many problems are solved but with an accumulation of unsolved problems, a phase of contention between the adherents to the old paradigm and the proponents of a new paradigm, and emergence of a new paradigm. Fullan is clearly in the front ranks of the quest for a new paradigm in education. He invokes three key areas in the quest for a new paradigm for education, all of which can be illuminated by the bodies-of-knowledge of other disciplines. They are systems thinking, sustainability and leadership.

The disciplines of engineering and project management agree wholeheartedly with the importance of systems thinking in analysis of complex entities, but I make the point that while Senge, to whom Fullan refers, presented some useful insights, the current systems thinkers are very much aware that the so-called systems that we examine for the purposes of explanation, intervention, accountability and improvement are but truncated models of the real-world entity.

They are no more than representations of the real things. Possibly most important of all is that, whereas in the early days, the systems approach was very much simplified and tended to treat people as constant factors or ignore them altogether, today's systems thinkers regard all real-world entities as social systems in which the emergent properties are in a state of continuous change as people, individuals, groups or communities, interact and co-evolve. Checkland in his *Soft systems methodology: a thirty year retrospective* (2000) suggests that there are no permanent solutions, rather an ongoing task to "find ways of understanding and coping with the perplexing difficulties of taking action, both individually and in groups, to 'improve' the situations which day-to-day life continuously creates and continually changes".

Fullan's second key area is sustainability. Sustainability is one attribute of a community of practice and there is a wealth of information in the work of Wenger (1998) and Lave and Wenger (1999) that could support his proposal for the formation of networks of heads and experienced teachers. To be effective in discovering a new paradigm, these networks must be self-organising and not subject to "uniformed prescription" from the centre as illustrated in Figure 2.1. And just as important as forming and sustaining networks is recognising when a network is following its own agenda. The work of Janis (1972) on the phenomenon of groupthink is helpful in detecting when a network needs remedial therapy or termination.

Fullan's third key area is leadership. Under the old paradigm of 'steady as she goes', it seems that leadership took on the characteristics of administration and management. The current crisis calls for a different style of leadership, one that is open to new ideas, can articulate and communicate a vision of the future and does not feel the need to be the originator of every decision. These are the very qualities that have been discouraged in the name of compliance and conformity. People with these qualities are always present in every

community, marginalised by the existing paradigm and needing now to be found and sponsored. Locating and empowering them are the core challenges facing any reformist agenda that can only be addressed from the very top of an enterprise. This is an area where interdisciplinary discourse could be most valuable and productive.

Leaving behind the key areas theme, there are two other comments arising from the omission of any reference to information and communications technology (ICT). One is that ICT has the capacity to overcome distance and increase the amount of information shared in the proposed networks of heads and experienced teachers. What none of us are too sure about is whether this promised increase in coverage, immediacy and volume will result in increase in effectiveness. This is a fruitful subject for interdisciplinarians to research and share experiences. The second comment relates to the absence of any acknowledgement that the student body of the twenty-first century is thoroughly immersed in ICT. Any new education paradigm surely must be cognisant of this reality.

In summary, this is a book that is worthy of study. It is an easy read and is well structured. It makes the case for reformation of education in Western society and demolishes the current fixation with measurable outcomes in literacy and numeracy as a way to prepare the student body for participation in twenty-first century society. Fullan goes on to propose what is needed for deep reform of education in Western society. He identifies three key areas, systems thinking, sustainability and leadership, but mainly limits his treatment in this book to the body-of-knowledge within the domain of education. As someone from the domains of engineering and management who some years ago identified the same areas as fundamental to reform, I can vouch for the benefits to be derived from exploration of bodies of knowledge in other domains. Interdisciplinary discourse is not easy but it can be very fruitful. It is to be hoped that Fullan maintains this course.

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BOOK REVIEW

Communication theory: media, technology and society

David Holmes
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272 pages

A paradox of our time is that, as the store of knowledge we create expands, increasing demands on our time and diversions reduce the opportunities for us to explore and understand the vast amount of material produced. Add to this the tendency for many contemporary authors to write lengthy tracts when shorter ones would be more than sufficient, we see that introducing new material and new ideas becomes difficult because readers are daunted by the sheer size of the task. Consequently, students and novices frequently look for texts that simplify complex ideas and concepts and reduce entire fields of knowledge to a series of dot points.

In *Communication theory: media, technology and society,* David Holmes resists the temptation to oversimplify his subject-matter in order to meet such demands. Instead, he has produced a concise text that captures the complexity and difficulty of theorising communication in relation to media, technology and society, and which requires a high degree of engagement by the reader. In return, its reward is a stimulating critique of contemporary theories of communication and media technology.

As a lecturer at Monash University, Holmes clearly uses experience gained from teaching to combine both an historic overview of the field of communications theory with stimulating ideas about the future direction of societal trends associated with communications and media technology. There is a great deal of material for readers to absorb, and Holmes moves quickly through the various subjects covered, perhaps indicating its place as a textbook within a supported course of study. Additionally, the use of a complex and at times academic vocabulary, which often seems to assume prior knowledge, may be a deterrent to newcomers to the field.

As an Australian text, Holmes' work is a welcome addition to a field where many similar works do not consider the unique conditions and perspectives of Australia, nor the contributions of Australian scholars. Like many Australian communication scholars, Holmes deftly synthesises major ideas and concepts in communication from North America and Europe with the experience of local scholarship to produce a work which encompasses the significant and influential thinking of this discipline. Consequently, in this text readers are introduced to, or reminded of, the work of classic, foundational theories in communication, including Debord, Foucault, McLuhan and Williams, while relocating them in relation to contemporary developments.

Readers of this book may thus gain a broad general introduction to the subject of communication theory while finding a challenging

critique of its canon. In particular, Holmes provides a much needed consideration of the social realities of communication technology and communication theory, without adopting a disparaging approach to other areas of related theory such as content analysis and semiotics.

Holmes' focus in this work is squarely on the social impact and legacy of the introduction of new technologies on both media and communication practices and processes, but also on the impact on the individual and society as a whole. The location of an understanding of communication theory in a sociological context is indeed a central objective of this work, with Holmes arguing that "emergence of new communication environments has more or less forced traditional media and communication studies to be sociological" (p. xi). For this reason, a particular strength of this text is its interdisciplinary approach, with reference to and integration of ideas and arguments from the fields of communication, media and sociology.

It is fitting that Holmes pays more attention to broadcast media than to printed texts, demonstrating its relevance to the needs and practices of contemporary audiences as well as the reality of what comprises 'media' in the twenty-first century. This also allows Holmes to challenge the accepted wisdom of what he calls "'the second media age' thesis" (p. x), which he claims has been an informing argument in analysis of 'new media', especially the Internet. Rather than drawing a distinction between first and second media ages and beginning analysis of the new communication practices and processes associated with new media from the point where they depart, Holmes insists that they are "mutually constitutive" (p. 83). Arguing this position is a major objective of this work and Holmes not only sets out to debunk much of the hyperactive utopianism that imbues much new media theory, but successfully dissects the 'second media' age theory by providing examples and logical analysis of its flaws.

In its six chapters, *Communication theory* ranges across some of the most important and critical issues in contemporary media theory,

examining theories of broadcast media and cybersociety, interactivity and community. Perhaps its most valuable theoretical contribution is in its clear exposition of the inter-relationship between broadcast and network communication where Holmes strongly repositions broadcasting in relation to traditional and contemporary medium theory. The final chapter on 'Telecommunity' (pp. 167–221) provides an excellent summary of discursive trends in communication and media studies in relation to the notion of community, and of particular importance, the shift in classical conceptions and definitions of community brought about by the integration of new communications technologies and mediums into society, and in the lives of individuals.

While the pace of the rhetoric and the sophisticated vocabulary may be daunting to novice scholars, within a guided program of study this text would be a valuable resource. As a provocation to communication scholars to reassess contemporary concepts and ideas, *Communication theory: media, technology and society* also makes an important contribution to a field in which orthodoxy too often remains unchallenged.

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BOOK REVIEW

The interpreted world: an introduction to phenomenological psychology

Ernesto Spinelli
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In this book, Spinelli addresses philosophers, psychologists and therapists with his arguments to accept phenomenological psychology as a valid approach in its own right. For those with an interest in phenomenology or psychology, the book will have some merit, and more so with the addition of the chapter on doing phenomenology. However, as the primary aim of the book is to convince that phenomenological psychology has a rightful place and contribution to make, those already interested in phenomenology will find the book spends unnecessary energy in trying to convert and would have been better with more applications of Spinelli's own phenomenological approach, accompanied by the compelling narrative descriptions that bring phenomenology to life (see also Spinelli's *Tales of un-knowing*).

Spinelli describes himself as a phenomenological psychologist and existential psychotherapist, thus applying elements of phenomenology to the fields of psychology and therapy. He is one of the leading figures, along with van Deurzen-Smith and Yalom, to argue for the recognition and acceptance of phenomenological psychology, which he also terms 'existential phenomenology'. In this book, he goes to great lengths to cite critics and counter their arguments, although some of these criticisms were raised back in the 1950s or 60s. The target audience is, on the one hand, psychology students or practitioners who are experiencing some disillusionment in the field and who may find that the addition of a phenomenological approach retrieves their interest, and those psychologists, on the other hand, who have not welcomed the infiltration by phenomenology, claiming for example that existential therapy "cruelly limits itself" for abandoning the interventionist approach (p. 181).

The title of the book is apt: The *interpreted* world. Spinelli repeatedly emphasises the phenomenological view of the world as something that each of us interprets and constructs. This is where phenomenological psychotherapy comes into its own – the therapist, in the manner of all phenomenologists, 'brackets' out their assumptions, biases and presuppositions when in the client's presence, and allows the client to 'be' in their presence, so that the therapist becomes part of that 'being' and in turn becomes the 'other'. Rather than have the client *express* their mode of being in the encounter, with the therapist intervening to highlight faulty thinking, perception or behaviour, the client *moves* to their mode of being and is allowed to interpret and construct their world as they are at that moment experiencing it, with the therapist 'being there' in this world. The aim is that "clients will recognise the elastic nature of their experience and, thereby, re-acknowledge their role as active interpreters of, rather than passive reactors to, the 'givens' of life" (p. 153).

The book itself is a revision of the first edition published 15 years earlier. It contains 11 chapters, beginning with an introduction to phenomenological theory, several chapters on perception, a chapter on phenomenological research, a chapter each on existential phenomenology and existential psychotherapy, two chapters on phenomenology and its relations to psychology and a final 'critical overview' of phenomenological psychology. The final chapter is presented as a summary of the entire book, but seems as though it is written to be a stand-alone article. Rather than belabouring what the reader has already endured, it might have been more conducive to fill the book with more examples of doing phenomenology and providing the narrative examples and discussions that can make phenomenology endearing, riveting and compelling for phenomenological practitioners. In the nature of a textbook, the book also has a complete reference section and index. Unfortunately, there are a few distracting typographical errors scattered throughout the book.

A common complaint of readers keen to explore phenomenology is the inaccessibility of the writing style of key phenomenologists, particularly those of the Continental school. Spinelli deplores this situation ("a language so arcane and rarefied that it made the deciphering of the Dead Sea Scrolls seem like the simplest of tasks", p. 1) and attempts to redress it through a more readable writing style. Although easier to digest than, say, Heidegger, the reader may find themselves drifting on occasion and having to reread passages, but this is part of the attempt to highlight the ground that earlier phenomenologists had covered in complex and obscure volumes. The most compelling reading is probably where Spinelli cites cases and supplies narratives, adding a few of his own earthy examples from a modern-day life. Such narratives are, after all, what phenomenology is about.

Throughout the book, Spinelli draws upon two branches in phenomenology: the transcendental approach of Husserl, and

the existential approach of Heidegger. (Sartre gets a mention with the latter movement.) Modern phenomenologists, such as Embree and Van Manen, also acknowledge additional movements, such as hermeneutical, experiential, linguistical etc. Some of the phenomenological themes dealt with in depth in the book are intentionality, consciousness and perception.

For the reader wanting to know how Spinelli 'does' phenomenology, despite a whetting of the appetite in chapter 2, we must wait until page 136 for an account of his "steps" and must be satisfied with a "brief sketch" (p. 137) as an example. As is loudly proclaimed by phenomenologists, there is no one way of doing phenomenology ('Die *Phaenomenologie gibt es nicht'* – Heidegger, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 3); each must determine their own way forward. It is therefore with some anticipation the reader waits for Spinelli's approach and hopes for more, only to be faced with a return to the defensive arguments in the remaining chapters.

There are a few negative overtones and conclusions throughout the book that non-psychologists may find disturbing, such as the discussions on authentic and non-authentic living, meaninglessness, personality disorders, and the existential notion that all humans are driven from a state of angst. Some of these themes were promoted by Heidegger (who was also, to his discredit, a Nazi). These tragic overtones are reminiscent of a certain period in German history and literature and one might hope humankind can evolve to a higher level. Those with experience of Eastern philosophy may object to Spinelli's negative conclusion that, where a "completely open stance to existence" prevails, "no meaning remains" and "all is flux, chaos, absurdity" (p. 118). The very last sentence of the book, even, carries negative overtones and smacks of evangelism: "In this brutal world we have created, where the pursuit of death has been elevated above life..." (p. 218), and then phenomenology appears as the saviour of humankind. To be sure, phenomenology seeks to enable humans to

realise their potential and promote a closer understanding between one another, or as Van Manen (1990, p. 12) expressed it: "So phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are". Surely Spinelli's appeal can be made in an uplifting, inspirational way, rather than resorting to doom, gloom and fear tactics.

Overall, the book presents a readable account of phenomenological psychology, complying with Spinelli's urgings that phenomenologists write in a more accessible style if they wish to enlist supporters. There is ample room to agree or disagree with the author and the content presented, allowing for some lively discussions. Students of psychology, psychotherapists and counsellors could very well find this book triggers change in their practice.

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