AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

A tribute to our referees

Referees are very special people. They are inveigled by the editor into devoting some of their 'spare' time – a very precious commodity in this day and age – to reading critically someone else's work. They do not know who the author is. That is the condition of blind peer reviewing. They may not necessarily have a natural affinity for the topic or the line of argument in the paper they have received to review. Preferably they do – but the paper wasn't their choice, it was the editor's presumption that that particular reviewer would be interested in it and have sufficient expertise in the topic to be helpful both as a constructive reviewer for the author and as a gatekeeper for the journal. They certainly are not paid nor do they enjoy any other benefit for reviewing. Yet in the vast majority of instances, from my experience with this particular journal, they agree to assist in this way. They are indeed very special people!

Why do they do it? They may feel an obligation to their own discipline or profession to help out in this way – rather like many employers seeing the employing of apprentices as a philanthropic gesture

towards the future of their trades. Or they may have such a rounded understanding of the context of the discipline or profession that they see that refereeing articles (like examining theses – though considerably less time consuming!) can serve as a professional development opportunity where they themselves can learn something new. Or some may be in a life-position where they perceive that refereeing papers for reputable journals, though unpaid work, nevertheless can help in their career planning and/or development. There could be any number of reasons. But whatever the motivation, referees do fantastic work, and the (also honorary) job of the editor for a refereed journal would not be possible without them. So it is in sincere gratitude that I, as editor of this journal, publicly acknowledge here the precious endeavours of our band of referees, who labour, undoubtedly at very inopportune times, over reading papers, making judgements, reaching recommendations for the editor and writing constructive critiques for the benefit of authors. Their work is recognised and gratefully received by both editor and authors. Thank you to you all!

NOTE: If any readers believe that they have the expertise in a particular area and would like to try their hand at being a referee, please feel free to email the editorial team (through my email) a one-page curriculum vitae for consideration. Examples of areas might be: literacy, Indigenous education, the ACE sector, the VET sector, adult learning, and so on.

In this issue

This issue begins 2007 with a couple of papers exploring the concept of social capital, a slippery one at the best of times, but nevertheless one with which it is well worth grappling. **Barry Golding** claims he came to the idea 'fortuitously and reluctantly'! He provides an interesting paper of his personal encounter with the struggles of understanding (or as he expresses it, 'teasing out the nature' of) the

concept through the various research projects in which he has been engaged over the years. His extensive use of network diagrams is novel and has helped him in fathoming in some depth the meaning of social capital, especially in regional communities of Australia. The nature of the links – and the non-links – in these diagrams, he says, 'is indicative of trust and social capital from one perspective point, place, time and context'. **Karen Plane**, in contrast to Barry's explorations over many studies, concentrates in considerable depth on the building of social partnerships in one particular region. She discusses the discourses of social capital and explores the challenges for small businesses and educational organisations in setting up private/public social partnerships. Her argument is that the 'the doctrine of neoclassical liberalism is ideologically antithetical and capacity reducing for promulgating cross-sectoral social partnerships in practice', and concludes that more research is required to critique economic rationalist policy and explore alternative policies for capacity building.

Two papers then focus on the adult and community education (ACE) sector from very different perspectives – though both certainly acknowledge the value of the sector in delivering social *and* economic benefits. **Sarojni Choy and Sandra Haukka** analyse how this sector could be making a greater contribution to the human capital stream of the National Reform Agenda in Australia. They show how the ACE sector, in its diversity and responsiveness, makes valuable contributions not only in its arguably more well known non-vocational outcomes but also in its vocational ones, though there is considerable potential for doing more in 'training for employment outcomes' and 'training for improved pathways'. There needs to be care, however, that any such reform in the sector does not destroy provision for the very types of people whom it has served so admirably in the past. **Graeme Wells** addresses ACE from a different angle, through the disciplines of economics and finance, suggesting that, caught between the jaws of the 'cost-tax vice', it

might be wise to direct more attention to new ways of financing adult and community education. After discussing cost-benefit analyses, privatisation and user pays, he concludes that there will be pressures for the sector to move away from 'the old "public provision" modes of education'. It therefore may be time to think about new ways of providing public subsidies to the ACE sector.

The final two refereed papers as well as the practice paper focus more on methodologies within different educational institutions in three different countries. **Julaine Allan** discusses the process of project-based learning in New South Wales, Australia, particularly reporting on how it was employed in a research project called 'Snapshot of a generation' and its challenges for educators and students. She shows how theory and constructed knowledge inform each other in this process of 'taking the workplace into the classroom', with a number of benefits to education in the human services field. She claims that participation is enhanced by project-based learning because 'the process is fluid, unpredictable and relies on mutual respect and trust', concluding that, while dualisms such as theory/practice, formal knowledge/constructed knowledge and teacher/learner can prevent educators and students taking up the possibilities of participating in constructing knowledge, project-based learning can serve to open such possibilities. **Sabrin Farooqui** writes about teaching the speaking of English at university level in Bangladesh. She finds that the private universities emphasise the development of such skills far more than the public universities. Through ethnographic research involving observation, document analysis and interviews, the author shows how these institutions are helping their students to develop English language skills and explores the problems that students encounter and the factors that assist these learners in developing their speaking skills. **Modupe Osokoya** and **Adewale Adekunle** examine learners and trainers in the Leventis Foundation Agricultural Schools in Nigeria. Researching 247 enrollees in three such schools using questionnaires, interviews and observational techniques, they examine a number of characteristics in attempting to gauge their 'trainability'. As a formative evaluation, the authors are determining to what extent these enrollees match the stated requirements of the Leventis Foundation – whether 'the right candidates are engaged in the programme'.

This issue contains also five book reviews, one research report and a scan of five, very recently published articles in five journals of relevance to adult educators. These contributions cover a range of topics that will be of general interest to readers.

Adult Learners' Week

We all look forward to Adult Learners' Week, 1–8 September. The following snippets on background are taken from the ALA website (details may be viewed at http://www.adultlearnersweek.org/).

Adult Learners' Week in Australia

The first Australian Adult Learners' Week (AWL) was organised in 1995 to promote and encourage lifelong learning. The week in Australia was coordinated from the beginning by the Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE), which changed its name in November 1998 to Adult Learning Australia. The breadth of supporting organisations has grown over this time and Adult Learners' Week now includes events and activities from the community adult education, health, aged care, museums and environmental sectors.

The international background

When governments met in Jomtien for the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, among the goals set were universal access to and completion of primary education, and reduction of the adult illiteracy rate to one half its 1990 level by 2000. Ten years later, governments met in Dakar and still 113 million children had no

access to primary education and 880 million adults, the majority of them women, were illiterate. It is against this background that International Adult Learners' Week takes place.

The move to create a wider celebration of adult learning began with the American Association for the Advancement of Education (AAAE) in the late 1980s. The US week focused on a Congressional Breakfast for outstanding adult learners backed by an activities pack for AAAE members.

Adult Learners' Week commenced in the United Kingdom in 1992. Australia, along with South Africa and Jamaica, then picked up on its success. When UNESCO's General Conference in November 1999 approved the International Adult Learners' Week, a larger dimension came into being. The aim is to bridge the activities during the national adult learners' weeks, to learn from the experiences of other countries, to share the celebration with people in other contexts and to amplify the cooperation between agencies active in the promotion of adult learning at international level.

Since then, organisers in more than 40 countries have organised or are preparing learning festivals. These not only raise awareness of the need to create more opportunities for adults to learn, but celebrate the efforts and achievements of the thousands who find the courage to 'take that first step back'.

International Literacy Day and Adult Learners' Week are used as mobilisation initiatives in many countries. They become a key element of national adult learning policies, promoting wider access to adult learning by celebrating individual and collective achievements, and using their experiences to stimulate a demand for learning elsewhere. Many of the most successful events take place in venues that adults find accessible, friendly, and familiar, such as cafes, bars, community centres, on public transport, sports grounds or village halls. The experiences of some other countries illustrate the different 'festivals of learning' now occurring.

NOTE: If readers would like to participate, information for learners and for providers on getting started may be found at: http://www.adultlearnersweek.org/getting_started.html

The editor and the editorial team hope that you have a fruitful year ahead.

**Roger Harris
Editor**

Getting connected: insights into social capital from recent adult learning research

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This paper begins by teasing out the nature of social capital and its particular and current relevance to adult learning policy and practice in Australia. The paper identifies a number of benefits and significant problems with social capital as an organising construct for adult learning research and policy in Australia. Some connections are made between social capital and lifelong learning, and important distinctions are drawn between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. I draw on my experiences and insights over the past seven years using network diagrams as a research tool.

Network diagrams are identified as a useful tool for charting relationships between learning organisations and individuals. The paper suggests ways of using the network relationships in these diagrams as a proxy for social capital in a range of formal and informal settings in which adult learning occurs in Australia.

Network diagrams are seen to have particular utility in situations where communities and organisations become too small for surveys, where relationships become complex and ambiguous as well as in rural and remote communities where distance and spatial relationships affect access to learning.

I came to the idea of social capital fortuitously and reluctantly. I first discovered its utility through our use of network diagrams in a national research project (CRLRA 2000a, 2000b) designed to explore the role of vocational education and training in rural and regional Australia. The diagrams were instigated in that project by Ian Falk and used by our research team to summarise quickly the way vocational education and training organisations were related to the communities they served. It was our subsequent research into social capital in adult and community education (Falk, Golding & Balatti 2000) that alerted me to the wider utility of social capital as a construct for theorising the relationships, that I now recognise to be an important part, and a product, of all learning.

Before defining social capital, it is important to admit that I retain some of my early scepticism and concerns about use of the term: because it is not widely understood beyond researchers, because it is not always or consistently defined when used and mainly because, being situated, it is difficult to measure out of context. Part of my caution about using the term has shades of the parable about 'The Emperor and his new clothes'. Because I think I can see social capital does not mean it exists, or that other people can see it; or if they can, that they see the same thing as I see. While I tend to avoid liberal use of the term in research reports designed for wider distribution, on balance I believe it is a term worth theorising about and persisting with. Like other situated social constructs such as love and friendship, social capital while 'difficult to bottle' does exist and is important to

recognise and value. Perhaps it is wiser to talk about some of its more widely and intuitively understood component parts (trust, give and take, shared values, networks, collaboration) than to use the term itself, or to use less understood sociological terms such as reciprocity, shared norms and a civil society.

So what *is* social capital and what are its parts? As I understand it, the term social capital accepts that what lies between people in society, communities, organisations and families (trust, give and take, shared norms, networks, collaboration) is qualitatively different from and more valuable than what individuals and organisations 'own'. Unlike economic capital (money) and human capital (skills and qualifications: see Choy, Haukka & Keyes 2006), social capital '... asks us to view a whole range of connections and networks as a resource, which help people advance their interests by co-operating with others' (Field 2005:1). The Australian Productivity Commission (2003) review of social capital identified social networks and/or social norms as a key element. Trust was regarded in that study as an additional element or proxy for levels of social capital in a community. It was seen as a resource that people could use to achieve certain objectives but that cannot be owned by individuals: it is always situated and shared. According to Cohen and Prusak (2001:4), social capital is 'the stock of active connections among people ... that bind members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible'.

Bjornskov and Svendsen (2005) observe that the literature on social capital sees it as operating in three broad spheres at three corresponding levels. It is mainly concerned about functioning of countries and the economy at the *macro* level, institutions and organisations at the *meso* level, and individuals, households and communities at the *micro* level. Social capital is seen by most theorists as critical for efficient functioning, equity and sustainability of learning (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) in all contexts at all three levels.

Lifelong learning and social capital, while separate conceptually, tend to be positively associated and mutually reinforcing. Lifelong learning tends in modern, capitalist societies to be positively associated with both human capital, produced by formal education, as well as by economic capital. Without government intervention, prevailing inequities in economic and human capital therefore tend to lead to inter-generational inequity in education. While social capital and lifelong learning at all three levels and spheres identified by Bjornskov and Svendsen (2005) are subject to the influence of public policy, both are complex challenges for governments (Field 2005).

This is for a number of reasons. First, because most enterprises, workers and civil society lie outside the direct control of governments. Second, because governments avoid funding lifelong learning that is not vocational. They rely heavily on informal learning through volunteers and increasingly try to shift the cost to learners and industry. Third, because social capital and its component parts are relational and situated – they cannot be traded. It is therefore difficult to assess or measure social capital quantitatively or to attribute it as a direct outcome of learning.

Given these conceptual difficulties, why then is a focus on social and network relations timely and worth persisting with in Australia in 2007? First, there has been a move away from formal, directive and government-funded education and training organisations. Second, networks have increasingly been used by governments to describe learning transactions that occur beyond government or public expense. While networks are widely seen as positive and part of 'community capacity building', they tend not to be funded. Third, while there is encouragement in education policies for lifelong and lifewide learning, most governments expect such learning to be self-funding or acquired informally and individually through paid or voluntary work. Finally, there are perceptions that 'building social capital' might be part of the answer to considerable education market

failure and loss of community capacity associated with widespread marketisation of education.

My thinking about social capital has been informed by a suite of research I have been involved in with other researchers into participation and equity in lifelong learning over the past decade (summarised in Golding 2006). That research has included, in approximate order, research into vocational education and training, adult and community education, rural and remote communities, Indigenous businesses, football and senior citizens clubs, land care, fire and emergency service organisations, community-based men's sheds and refugee support organisations. The drift in my research has been towards less formal, volunteer and community-based organisations. Many of these 'surrogate' learning organisations are not conventionally regarded as having a formal learning function with courses, qualifications, curriculum and enrolment.

The research evidence nevertheless points in each case to the crucial importance of ongoing informal learning *through* such organisations. My research identifies the particular role of volunteers in community-based organisations at the micro level, connecting otherwise disengaged or disconnected individuals and households in local communities and neighbourhoods. Community-based organisations also play a significant role creating the prerequisite trust and networks to connect individuals at the meso level with institutions and organisations that provide essential services including further, formal and accredited learning. Reverting to the academic discourse, voluntary organisations are widely seen as creating community capacity by building social capital and facilitating lifelong learning.

Falk, Golding and Balatti's (2000) study of *ACE lifelong learning & social capital* provided new Australian evidence in a range of settings of the particular importance of social capital in adult and community education (ACE). Social capital was found to underpin ACE practice and pedagogy. ACE was identified as an important site for networking

and community engagement, including volunteerism. ACE was also found to connect communities, bridge cultural groups and promote lifelong learning. As with all research, it is one thing to 'discover' something. It is another thing to convince governments that it is rational (including economically rational) to properly fund adult and lifelong learning and the creation of social capital, particularly if the research shows that it can be created by communities for next to nothing.

The double-edged sword in recent research findings is that small, community-based and poorly funded, voluntary organisations including ACE are often in a better position to reach, engage with and support people who are most in need than are large, formal, commercial and fully funded organisations. In effect, while government support and intervention can enhance social capital, it can also be created within and by communities and families as a positive response to loss, adversity, disconnection and disengagement.

The other difficulty for adult and community education, despite its value, is that social capital, like clean air and water, is taken as being 'free' and is therefore unvalued, devalued or run down. Social capital is not as easy to measure, count or report as a function of effort and expense as are enrolment, contact hours or completion. If recognised at all, social capital tends to be seen as something 'ACE can do free' to address market failures in other education and training sectors. As the 'Cinderella sector' in Australia, adult learning tends to be perceived by governments to be at the far end of the vocational and educational food chains. Governments generally won't fund it unless it is vocational in content and intent, and ACE tends to be absent, unrecognised or unfunded in parts of Australia where it is most needed. Other education sectors devalue it by defining, funding and privileging 'higher' education, 'formal' learning and industry competencies over informal learning. To further compound

the problems, it is diverse and difficult to define ACE as a 'sector' (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001) and therefore to measure ACE participation or outcomes. While it is very limiting to narrowly define it as what government funds, it is also too broad and unhelpful to define ACE as everything that adults learn.

Despite all of these problems, social capital is a valuable conceptual alternative to narrow education models that presuppose utility for subsequent employment. Balatti, Black and Falk (2006) recently studied outcomes of students from adult literacy and numeracy courses through a social capital 'lens'. They concluded:

> The social capital model of adult literacy and numeracy provides an alternative conceptual framework to one based primarily on employment outcomes. By focussing on connections between people within networks [the model] includes all social contexts including employment [but] avoids the binary distinction between employment and non-employment-related outcomes and is more reflective of the complexities and the importance of people's 'whole' lives. [The model] demonstrates how literacy and numeracy courses contribute to the capacity of individuals to engage in communities and thus add to community capacity and social cohesion (Balatti, Black & Falk 2006:6).

Looking at lifelong learning from a broader perspective than education, it is important to recognise that knowledge and literacy, like social capital, exist more in networks of individuals and organizations than in individuals themselves (Cohen & Prusak 2001). Knowledge, like literacy, also tends to be local, 'sticky' and contextual (Davenport & Prusak 1998), and difficult to codify since much of it is tacit. All of this makes standardised, formal, common curriculum based on a common body of knowledge problematic. While literacy and social capital are important to acquire, they are impossible to own free of context and are difficult to 'teach'.

It is also important to recognise the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2000), which in turn has important implications for learning. Cohen and Prusak (2001:14–15) note that in the case of bonding social capital between homogeneous groups, the 'ties that bind can also blind', illustrating the 'dark side of social capital'. Bonding social capital is useful but can be insular. Cohen and Prusak (2001) suggest that closed networks can involve 'clannishness, mutual delusion and normalisation of deviance'. Burt (2000) makes a case for encouraging 'bridging' alongside 'bonding'. Bridging social capital connects dissimilar groups, is harder to create but is more valuable in enhancing learning. Burt (2000) suggests that since information circulates more within than between groups, networks with closure may not be a good source of social capital or for diffusion of ideas. Individuals able to build bridges that span 'holes' in networks may therefore be more important in learning organisations than people who forge strong bureaucratic links. There is therefore an association between network holes and learning. People with more diverse bridges, rather than people with more similar links, do better in learning organisations.

This emphasis on networks becomes increasingly important for learning and other organisations in an age of interdependence, change and virtuality (Cohen & Prusak 2001:15–21). In the post-modern, interdependent world no one knows it all. Networks can enhance the knowledge of organisations. Social capital becomes critical to a new and less mechanistic world of learning and work. However, volatility and rapid change can erode social capital that depends on stable connections and agreements about what is necessary learning. In a virtual, ICT world, social capital also defines the natural limits of virtual learning and work. It is important therefore to distinguish between electronic and face-to-face networks. Cohen and Prusak (2001:172–181) observe that electronic networks alone do not create either community or collaboration and that absence of norms and trust are the greatest barrier to organisations

using the internet to build social capital. Many important 'vibrations' are missing in an on-line environment. The social capital costs of virtuality: balancing the traditional (human) with the virtual are important.

Networks, in summary, 'are at once the source and shape of social capital in organisations [and] between people' (Cohen & Prusak 2001:55). Analysing them reveals information about existing social capital. Supporting them encourages social capital growth. Networks are a prime source of membership and commitment in organisations. They connect people to the places where people feel most at home and responsible for one another. They identify sites for organisational learning and the main places where knowledge develops.

Since there is no commonly agreed or simple measure of aggregate social capital, it is important to try to find a proxy amongst its component parts. If we accept that mutuality within organisations and communities (*bonding* social capital) on its own is a poor measure of a community's ability to adjust to change or of the ability to learn, it is important that any measure we adopt should be able to distinguish and chart *bridging* social capital as well as identify *missing* links. I have experimented in the past six years across a wide range of contexts with the use of network diagrams. I have found through research that network diagrams provide a useful proxy measure of both network relationships and social capital.

The network diagrams I use are drawn by individual informants, usually by learners, community members or organisation representatives. They can be drawn in a range of ways: from one organisation looking outwards, within and between parts of an organisation or from an individual perspective, such as from a learner, volunteer, family member or worker perspective. Network diagrams are useful because they delineate sites for learning in geographic localities and regions, organisations and communities as well as in ethnic and cultural groups. They allow for a teasing

out of complex inter-relationships: within and between places, organisations and groups. Importantly, they are able to distinguish between bonding (to homogenous groups) and bridging (to other, different groups). Importantly, they illustrate the nature, strength, blockages and competition as well as a *lack* of linkages. Rather than being objective or universal measures, network diagrams anticipate that different individuals may (and do) have different perceptions of the same links. Network diagrams are particularly powerful precisely because they are illustrative and respectful of individual perceptions, vantage points, places, time and context. Cumulatively, the links on a network diagram act as a proxy to document the presence and nature of social capital.

For illustration, I will briefly identify some examples where network diagrams have been useful in the research with which I have been involved. In the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia research (CRLRA 2000a), the diagrams were able to chart the strong, non-Indigenous networks operating in a range of the communities in the Katherine (Northern Territory) region parallel to a similarly strong set of Aboriginal networks based around shared languages and culture. While both sets of networks were strong, they were analogous to being on separate acetate sheets that rarely touched, leading to an overall lack of trust in a community, at that time, divided essentially on racial lines.

In Golding and Rogers (2001), network diagrams were able to document and map the lack of contact (at that time) between Victorian neighbourhood houses and community learning centres in small rural towns. In one instance, a neighbourhood house and a learning centre sharing a common dividing wall in a former public courthouse were ignorant of each other's role and not on each other's network diagrams. In the same study, Victorian adult and community learning centres with poor 'bonds' but good 'bridges' (or vice versa) were found to be relatively ineffective compared with centres with

strong bridging outside of the community combined with strong bonds inside the community. Centre coordinators, who commuted into communities to work or who were recently appointed, struggled to establish or ripen effective local networks.

Network diagrams created within Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE's four prison education centres in 2000 as part of quality assurance exercises confirmed the inherent isolation of prison learning centres by virtue of their very limited bonding networks. The diagrams were also able to identify the debilitating lack of bridging social capital amongst learners and centre staff as well as between education centre staff and prison warders. In the Hayes, Golding and Harvey (2004) study of fire and emergency service organisations in small and remote towns, the network diagrams illustrated a necessarily hierarchical and directive communication network structure, strong collaborative links into the communities but weak links to adult education providers. In the study of community-based men's sheds in Australia (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007, in press), network diagrams were able to demonstrate how bonding and bridging with a wide range of partners within and beyond men's geographic communities had enabled these new and poorly funded organisations to set themselves and survive, essentially on the social capital generated by volunteers and participants and sustained by their host communities. In the study of the role of Australian multicultural organisations for refugees (Miralles-Lombardo, Miralles & Golding 2007, forthcoming), network diagrams were used to demonstrate the critical importance of creating links to services for groups whose social capital had run down a number of times before coming to Australia.

Based on an extensive use of network diagrams in each of these research projects, it is possible to make some general findings about what they map and what they mean. While different diagrams result from different organisational types, individuals and starting points,

they are excellent for mapping and conceptualising structural, sectoral and geographic discontinuity between learners and learning organisations. They identify both bridging and bonding and allow for the possibility that links can have more than one component which are sometimes different and ambiguous. The nature of the links (or lack of them) in the diagrams is indicative of trust and social capital from one perspective point, place, time and context. They are therefore also a function of age, position, experience and gender of the person drawing them. Network diagrams also powerfully illustrate that experience and time create extensive networks, and that high staff turnover in modern organisations can limit the 'ripening' of networks and trust. They show that artificially constructed and funded networks are very difficult to establish and sustain.

The potential usefulness of network diagrams goes well beyond research. They have a large practical potential in adult learning contexts. While they are difficult to compare qualitatively or qualitatively without full knowledge of the informant roles and of network contexts, their power lies in their capacity to reveal the absence or weakness of bonding and bridging links. They have the capacity to inform and empower stakeholders that draw them and create dialogue about desirable network changes. They are quick, efficient, replicable and ethically defensible if used sensitively. They are excellent at quickly and accurately establishing organisational and learner context. They are effective at suburb and neighbourhood level in the smallest and remotest towns and organisations. They are invaluable in situations where organisational and functional informality, complexity and ambiguity increases. They work better in the smallest, most loosely coupled and least directive volunteer and community-based organisations where surveys are less meaningful or not feasible.

In conclusion, based on the evidence, network diagrams and the network relationships they embody provide the best and simplest

proxy we have for social capital in adult and community education as well as a device for empowering organisations to improve their networks. Their most important theoretical contribution is that they demonstrate that learning and trust are developed collaboratively over sufficient time. They suggest that while funding face-to-face meetings and network activity is desirable, money can distort networks and destroy trust. The broadest message is that we all need encouragement to strengthen and legitimise our informal and formal networks with family and community outside of paid work.

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About this author

Associate Professor Barry Golding has undertaken a large number of collaborative national research projects in the past decade, several of which have been published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. His 'research journey' has largely been in equity-related fields, spanning a very wide range

of adult learners. Barry has concentrated particularly on mixed method research (involving both surveys and interviews) across multiple sites, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. He has deliberately 'grazed' from researching formal vocational education to informal, community-based learn `ing. His current focus is on informal men's learning, typified by his recent ground breaking research into learning through participation in community-based men's sheds in Australia.

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A very peculiar practice?
Promulgating social partnerships with small business – but what have we learnt from research and practice?

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The ideologies underpinning public / private partnerships (PPPs) have been much contested in theory, but what does promulgating a social partnership mean in practice? This qualitative research study has been 'critiquing' a construct of 'ecologies of learning' or 'capacities of capital' for social partnerships between industry, vocational education and training (VET) and a regional community.

This paper critiques one of these ecologies by exploring the discourses of social capital which present challenges for small business/ community partnerships in practice. It argues that there is a need to question the impact of neoliberalism on social partnerships with VET and how the entities of industry: 'fortress enterprise', the

community: 'fortress Australia', and governance: 'terra publica' are positioned within this predominant economic rationalist discourse. It concludes that policies for 'globalising neoliberalism' can be capacity reducing for promulgating social partnerships with VET at the local level.

Introduction: global policies for promulgating public / private partnerships in vet

There is pressure in a growing, resource-intensive sector of VET for research and practice to come to grips with policy convergence for enabling and encouraging social partnerships with industry to support strategies for the future. Supranational policy statements such as the United Nations/ UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), the World Business Council on Sustainable Development Global Compact (Birch 2004) and the World Bank Development Report (2006) call for public / private partnerships to resource the needs of an international, expanding TVET (technical and vocational education and training) system (UNESCO 2006, 2005 a, b; UNESCO and UNEP 2005; Kronner 2005). The key goals are to enculture private sector social responsibility for VET and TVET through greater contribution to workforce and community development, and local governance at the regional level. Social partnerships may offer a resourceful, devolved approach to governance and are a positive, proactive way in which communities can build capacity and annex the resources for growth, infrastructure and regional sustainability (Caldwell & Keating 2004; Dixon & Barnett 2002; Kenyon & Black 2001: Kretzmann & Mcknight 1993; Centre for Corporate Public Affairs and the Business Council of Australia 2000: Cheers *et al.* 2002: Allison, Gorringe & Lacey 2006; Seddon & Billett 2004). Proponents of public / private alliances contend that the resulting 'social capital' from these positive synergies

is a vital resource for industry, reducing the cost of transactions and of doing business. In seeking social partners, local communities too are better skilled and prepared to weather the shrill winds of globalisation, increased competition from other regions, and the impact of unpredictable market change (Fukuyama 2001, 1995; Spence, Schmidpeter & Habisch 2003; Spence 1999; Kilpatrick & Bell 2000; Kearns 2004; Cavaye 2000).

Background

Tackling the 'undiscussables' in social capital discourses

There have been many studies of social capital and of the benefits of measuring this 'capital' as a social resource for group or collective capability (Productivity Commission 2003; Woolcock & Narayen 2000; Onyx & Bullen 2000; Onyx 1996; Lyons 1998; Putnam 2000). In defining social capital, Woolcock (cited in Field 2004:42) prefers to distinguish between:

- bonding social capital, which denotes ties between like people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours;
- bridging social capital, which encompasses more distant ties of like persons such as loose friendships and workmates; and
- linking social capital, which reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those entirely outside the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community.

There are unanswered questions for social researchers, though, about enculturing partnerships across sectors of the economy and society with unequal resources of 'capitals', power and political hegemony. Gettler (2005:51) states that real change in policy and practice will not be realised unless society is prepared to come to grips with what Argyris has called the 'socially undiscussables' within the discourses.

There are those who dispute whether social capital can be accurately measured as evidence for effective policy purposes. Mowbray and Bryson (2005:92) find that, rather than research supporting evidence-based policy, the lack of rigour and contestation in much of the social capital literature is resulting in an unquestioned 'policy-based evidence' approach to governance. Mowbray (2004b: 43) argues too that the notion of 'community' is usually partnered with a positive impression of wholesomeness and caring; much of the social capital discourse is presented in the same golden radiance. These populist versions of community capacity building negate the darker side of human nature and what can be the destructive impact of strong bonds of social capital and alignment within groups (Considine 2005; Field 2004; Edgar 2001). This debate also downplays the impact of competition in communities, exclusion and the unequal socio-economic status or empowerment of its citizens. McKenzie (2004) has stated that what should be equally debated is the meaning of social sustainability.

Shrinking governance and 'terra publica'?

> Terra publica is breaking apart (Gleeson 2006:102)

The second concern is that governance and the state have a crucial role in promulgating democracy, equity and equality through policy reform. Putnam (2000) and Kearns (2004) have contended that we are witnessing a decline in social capital, trust and engagement in civic society in the most economically developed countries. The Productivity Commission (2003:viii) argues that governments can either build or diminish stocks of social capital by intervening with effective, or conversely, ineffective policies. There are those who postulate a stronger role for governments for ensuring fair play, the democratic process, and integrity of partnerships and devolved governance at the local level (Buchholz & Rosenthal 2004; Miraftab 2004; Das Gupta, Grandvoinnet & Romani 2003; Spoehr *et al.* 2002; Diamond 2004). Others contend, however, that regionalisation

and decentralisation policies do not result in a greater stakehold for communities in locally devolved governance, but only increased accountability through positioning government more visibly in the regions, albeit cloaked within a discourse of collaboration and social partnership (Cardini 2006; Diamond 2004; Brown *et al.* 2003; Coulsen 2005).

Unsettled communities and 'fortress Australia'?

> It will now be argued that no new settlement has been forged and that Australia is very much uncertain of its future – 'unsettled' (Woodward 2005:15)

The next 'undiscussable' is overcoming the dislocation and disenfranchisement in civic society brought about by three waves of reductionist policy reform (Gleeson 2006; Stretton 2005; Pusey 2003). There has been much critique about the benefits, and conversely, the failure of public / private partnerships to fill the vacant space in governance in the areas of education, health, housing and social welfare that researchers have argued has been left by three waves of economic rationalist reform in Australia (Pusey 2003; Stretton 2005; Gleeson 2006; Argy 2004; Spoehr 2005; Spoehr *et al.* 2002; Mowbray 2005, 2004 a,b). Overlooked in the social capital discourse is the capacity reducing impact of functionalist policies on governance, social stability and the increased fragmentation of urban, peri-urban and rural Australia in the face of discontinuous policy changes. Disregarded are the sobering questions about equity and income disparity and the resilience of personal support networks, personal capacity and 'identity capital'. Mowbray and Bryson (2005) and Mowbray (2004 a,b) have argued that the notion of 'community' has become depoliticised, evading unease about inequality and individual difference in access to networks and personal alliances. A quantitative study of social capital ties and civic engagement in the United Kingdom (Li, Pickles & Savage 2005) found that socio-economic status correlated with stronger personal alliances and

networking, with less advantaged groups using more insular, weaker personal networks. Woolcock and Narayan (2000:233) have stated that: "Crudely put, the networks of the poor play defense whilst those of the non-poor play offense".

Industry protectively guarding 'fortress enterprise'?

On the taboo subject of threat, eroded trust and vulnerability in business, Culkin and Smith (2000:149–155) provide an interesting typology of small firm management style stating that small business often exhibits 'The Alamo Syndrome' and is 'labouring under the illusion they are running ICI'. Yet in an aggressive marketplace, guarding the fort from competition from corporate bodies, bureaucracies and institutions is necessary practice for small firms' continued existence. Spence (1999) writes that, within this 'fortress enterprise' culture, small firms distance themselves from responsibility for their surroundings. Curran and Blackburn (in Spence 1999:164) suggest that small businesses see themselves as largely independent of their environment. Goldsmith and Samson (2005:12) state there is pressure for all small businesses to become active stakeholders in corporate citizenship and capacity building. It may be, however, that the same individualistic policies that drive 'do it yourself and self-help' have a sting in their tail, and consumers are being encouraged to become a more affluent, litigious happy society. Enculturing an ethos of deepened corporate philanthropy may not partner well with a culture of increasing risk of litigation. The social partnerships research around the world is rich with debate about the ethics for industry and a corporate socially responsible organisation; there is a dearth of research that raises the somewhat contentious question of what qualities does society also expect of a socially responsible, civic community?

Accurately measuring social investment in regions and vet by industry?

The last impolite 'undiscussable', much downplayed in social capital debate, is that sustainable public / private partnerships need hard cash to drive them. A difficulty for evidence-based policy is accurately determining industry contribution to VET, the community, and social sustainability from partnerships with industry. Lyons (1998:5) argued that measuring corporate philanthropy in communities is problematic, but cited 1991 data which estimated $1.8 billion in combined contribution from large and small business. More recently, the ABS Generosity of Australian Business study (2002) found that in the 2000–2001 calendar year businesses gave $1,447 million dollars to the Australian community for sponsorship for sports, associations and events. Another study has estimated that the contribution by small business to be one billion, five hundred million dollars (Madden, Scaife & Crissman 2006:50). There is also complexity in measuring industry contribution to the economy through VET (Richardson 2004). Dumbrell (2004:5) has cited 1998 figures estimating enterprise support at 45% of a total $8.5 billion expenditure on formal VET training, or approximately $4 billion. Richardson (2004) contends employee time in structured training is not counted in these 1996 statistics and this would present a different picture, estimated at $16 billion input to the economy. Whether or not this is enough to resource an expanding VET sector is questionable. Dumbrell (2004:28) writes, however, that there is still a need for better integration between public and private expenditure on VET. There are few studies though which attempt to aggregate this data to show a clearer picture of industry contribution to VET, communities and the Gross Domestic Product in Australia.

Research methodology

The practical aspect of the study has involved four years of qualitative fieldwork and 'lived in' observation, gathering data from practitioners in the 'institution' of adult learning and VET *and* practitioners in the 'institution' of enterprise management in small business. The research has adopted qualitative techniques of semi-structured interviews, with both groups of people (Piantinida & Garman 1999;

Guba & Lincoln 1989, Rubin & Rubin 1995). 'Small business' is defined as the owner-managed small firm (6–19 employees) and the micro-firm workplace (1–5 employees) respectively, across a range of industry sectors. 'Practitioners' include those people working with small firms in VET, adult and community education, community and regional development, business incubation and support, library and information services, and local government. One hundred and twenty interviews have been undertaken with people from both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. All interviews have been transcribed and returned to the interviewee for correction and comment. A regional case study analysis has limitations and is restricted in its transferability by its scope, but may offer new interpretations and grounded theory about the meaning of social partnerships with VET.

Findings

The research has found active, high profile partnerships/alliances in the region driven by Federal, State or Local Government, which are formalised, often with and between, levels of government and larger industry organisations and small business clusters. Many of these alliances have been instigated by direct intervention through funding initiatives promulgating collaboration with industry. They vary in levels of formality from the regulated industry partnership, business cluster or network to the casual informal relationship. Formal partnerships and clusters tend to be in 'like sectors' where there is already evidence of existing networks and bonding social capital and perhaps where it is easier to forge relationships, as opposed to across sectors of industry and the community where bridging and linking social capital might be more difficult to enculture. Participants for the study occupied 'space' in a complex array of roles, relationships and responsibilities across the public / private dichotomy and for-profit and not-for-profit sectors. This offered interesting responses on the tensions and paradoxes of occupying cross-sectoral roles and the difference between not easily articulated 'lived practice' and

formalised, 'known theory'. Participants in both industry and the community were often positioned across two key contradictory but mutually enforcing roles. The first was a workplace practitioning role with its capacity-building focus on promoting relationships and learning. The second was a custodian role and maintaining the survival of the organisation in a competitive economy. These are not mutually exclusive groups and, in this context, both oscillated between the anode and cathode pull of community development and social sustainability and/or towards industry and the marketplace.

Practitioners as capacity builders

These participants are working in the context of community development and regional infrastructure support with a mandate for developing local partnerships, and they spoke of their experiences with industry and the community and the qualities needed by the partners for them to be successful. Healthy alliances were often indigenous, formed from within their sector, and useful for information-sharing and combating isolation in their work. There are vibrant business clusters in the region, built on the willingness of small businesses to share information and work collectively towards a common goal. There are also flourishing, high profile, showcase industry developments, active export clusters in food and primary industry, and alliances in ecotourism, tourism, natural resource management and land management practices. However, these networks cannot be 'forced on an industry', they said, and a financial contribution from the small businesses may create a stronger commitment to an industry cluster. Also, sustainable alliances have been built with small holdings in horse industry education, through VET and community education, safe chemical use and water catchment protection. There are those practitioners who may be actively operating a small business/hobby business themselves outside of their core work. They were very enterprising, and worked as boundary crossers between two worlds – small business and VET – but they were often more suspicious of bureaucracies and

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their effectiveness for working with small firms. They were very politically aware of the constraints of the policy climate they were working within and the need to be vigilant. But of small business, one practitioner said: "They need to be more responsive".

Practitioners as custodians of the organisation

For other community-focused organisations, few were looking outside the organisation or their sector in reality. In cases, there was little awareness about whom they might partner in industry, but talk about needed corporate sponsorship from industry for events and community initiatives. For others, there was skepticism of partnerships and concerns about ethics and values, and integrity and the 'genuineness' of social conscience in industry. Some spoke of their 'lifeworld' and reality: little communication between large and small providers of VET; all were competing for the same pool of funds; and a climate not conducive to networking or information sharing. Another demonstrated conscious attempts to collaborate over contracts, but had been burnt by the unscrupulous behaviour of the partners. Some spoke of protectionism of turf and information and of a policy culture which expected a community sector organisation to operate as if it were a small business. And interestingly of small businesses they thought: "… most are just focussed on survival".

There are those who described a sense of frustration and disempowerment in their work which evolved from political hegemonies above them. This is evidenced by the comments from one practitioner, capacity reduced by the information blockages in the system:

> Once we can access that information about training needs and regional growth, we have then got to get … [regional stakeholders] to a realisation that schools can meet their training needs, along with the local TAFE college and registered training organisations – if they let us know what they are on a fairly short-term and long-term basis.

And of governance, some said:

> It's feudal – the peasants are revolting!
> Changes in local government have meant we have had to start building the networks all over again.
> We don't have the resources to reach them all; only about ten percent of them.

> It's not a case of not being able to get us all together. There is vacuum at the policy level.

Small business as capacity builders

These were the established small businesses with a key focus on entrepreneurship, growth, success and the firm. These owner-operators were strongly embedded within their organisation and, over time, had developed resilient social networks within their industries. 'Partnerships' to these small businesses often meant writing the cheques, work in kind, associational membership and community contribution: 'We support everything in the region that's going', they said. 'But it's not something we talk about'. In this context, the notion of small business as social partner in supporting the community is a very successful one. They provided ongoing monetary support for the local townships through community sponsorship of sports and events, and corporate sponsorship either directly through the firm or indirectly through clubs like Rotary and Lions or community associations. Capacity building and corporate responsibility was seen as something to be quietly done, and they were reluctant to discuss it at first with people they believed had no experience of small business. Within this culture, it is not considered polite to inquire about or discuss such things outside their business, personal and social group, and they provided evidence of strong protective ties and closure within their own business clusters and networks. Some had strong bonding and bridging social capital built through years of industry networking and information sharing. This was a valuable resource for collaborative marketing, and learning about change within the industry workplace:

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> We have very good industry clusters and social networks.
> We get everything we need through the industry.

And they valued the capacity builders who worked with them to advocate for change: 'We have our own industry spokespeople'.

Another group, however, is much less high profile, the traditional small and micro-firms embedded at the 'Main Street', or home-based level. There is a hive of indiscernible activity within the informal and non-formal relationships between these small businesses and their specific locality as community members, participating in school associations, tourism associations, land care groups, volunteer associations, 'friends of' groups and Chambers of Commerce. These very small associations worked as lobby groups in their communities, fundraising for events, and as stakeholders for issues of concern at the local level. The extent to which they are truly empowered and politically engaged is debatable, but they were very active within their immediate localities. However:

> It's difficult to balance my social concerns with running the firm.
> You need to understand that anything you do outside the firm takes away from it.

Small business as custodians of the organisation

Other small firms however were just as politically disengaged and marginalised by the marketplace. For these the isolation, lack of profile and/or visibility and lack of networking was acute, suggesting that even in the 'egalitarian' small business sector that there are hidden cultural, status and 'very undiscussable' class-based structures in some sectors for small business to overcome:

> You are the first person we have seen about this!
> No one has ever asked us to share our experiences with them.

For these small businesses, their key focus was the day-to-day survival of the firm and maintaining and protecting its place in a competitive marketplace. This role was totally encompassing, leaving little time for anything outside these parameters. As in the wider community and populous, there are questions about socio-economic status and inclusion, representation and participation; there are similar questions for the small business sector. The social partnership role may not be one played out across all industries or be suitable for all small businesses. Many firms in this region are very small and micro businesses; some are very isolated and need external support in running the firm. Not all firms are established enough in their life stage to be philanthropic, or employ people and formally train them, or have the flexibility to participate in an industry network, or to learn outside the firm. There are also significant differences in levels of inclusion in networks between industries, with some industries clustering more than others. In defining a corporate sponsorship role for the small firm, they said:

> There is the general perception that there are more resources to be' had' than there actually are.

Barriers for promulgating social partnerships

Below, then, are some of the challenges for promulgating cross-sectoral social partnerships with the smaller organisation:

- not perceiving any benefit in a partnership arrangement, a reluctance to partner formally with anyone
- partnerships not seen as conducive to the organisational/firm policies, goals or culture; values differences are perceived as too great
- restricted human resources in small organisations to grow the alliances
- partnerships seen as predominantly corporate sponsorship by both sectors and not about building relationships or learning through other 'capitals'

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- both sectors grappling with a preoccupied focus on the defensive and protecting the organisation/firm and its intellectual capital from threat
- increased disempowering accountability, measuring, auditing workload for the organisation/firm
- partnerships mean loss of managerial decision-making and independence
- partnerships not seen as 'core business' in their industry/sector
- skepticism around the notion of 'learning partnerships' and what they might entail
- perceived 'safeness' in autonomy: less risk and threat, more control
- lack of resourced capacity builders on the ground to form the alliances across sectors, to break down the silo divisiveness and defensiveness.

Enablers for social partnerships

In a time of devolution and decentralisation, at least in theory, social partnerships may have an integral role in filling a resources and leadership void in shrinking public sector governance. There is reconciliatory work to do, however, to build collaboration across sectors with often little meaningful contact on a day-to-day basis, and competing organisational goals and values. If the policy goals are to be met through social partnerships and fully realised in VET/TVET, there needs to be:

- better cross-sectoral collaboration, convergence and integration at the international, national and state policy level
- strategic, not ad hoc, funding arrangements for VET, local government, NGOs, regional development and community organisations for developing sustainable partnerships/alliances for the longer term at the regional level
- support for the capacity builders to work across the sectors to create the space within the discourses for alternative debate about realistic change management practices at the community level

- recognising and legitimising the integral role for VET and adult and community educators, local community leaders, volunteers and small business and their value in driving grassroots process.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the notion of social capital as one construct from a model for social partnerships in vocational education and training. It has found evidence of successful partnerships and alliances in the region, but contends the doctrine of neoclassical liberalism is ideologically antithetical and capacity reducing for promulgating cross-sectoral social partnerships in practice. There is a need for further research which critiques the impact of economic rationalist policies on social partnerships at the international, regional and sub-regional policy levels and explores alternative policies for capacity building and generating greater real collaboration across the sectors, and between communities and regions.

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Human capital development: reforms for adult and community education

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The adult and community education (ACE) sector is consistently responsive to changing community needs and government priorities. It is this particular function that has drawn ACE into the lifelong learning debate as one model for sustaining communities. The responsiveness of ACE means that the sector and its programs continue to make valuable contributions to the quality of social and economic life, particularly in local communities. Although a major focus of ACE is on non-vocational outcomes, there is potential for the sector to make a greater contribution to the human capital stream of the Council of Australian Governments' National Reform Agenda.

This paper briefly describes the ACE sector and its current provisions, and proposes ways in which it could make a greater contribution to the human capital stream of the National Reform Agenda. Reforms to ACE are critical at a time when the Australian Government is planning activities for the Reform Agenda, when there is an urgent need of skilled workers, when the ageing population is seeking pathways and opportunities for economic outcomes, and when traditional vocational education and training providers are unable to meet the skill shortages experienced by industry across Australia. This paper attempts to initiate debate around an enhanced role for ACE, in terms of not only the Reform Agenda, but also a rather more defined position in meeting the learning and skilling needs of the broader community.

The adult and community education sector

For over 100 years, adult and community education (ACE) has operated largely as an informal education sector in Australia. During this period, the sector has evolved gradually in response to the needs of its client groups. Through policy reforms it has influenced changes to, for example, flexible and lifelong learning, the open training market, community capacity building, and human and social capital. Its most outstanding feature lies in the ability to address community needs at the local level, through diversified roles and activities which lead to its complex, inconclusive identity. Researchers (for example, Clemans, Hartley & Macrae 2003; Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001) have found it challenging to create a profile that depicts the whole sector, particularly in the absence of much reliable, valid and comparable data on ACE activities and outcomes. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research maintains a set of data on ACE activities through public funds. However, Borthwick, Knight, Bender & Loveder (2001) caution that this national data collection does not reflect all activities in Australia's ACE sector. In the absence of a national database of all ACE activities, it is difficult to quantify adequately the total contribution and potential of the ACE sector to human capital development.

The diverse nature of ACE is both a strength – the ability to address local needs in ways that other larger providers or organisations may not be able to do – and a weakness of the sector – appearing to be fragmented so that the marketplace may not understand what the sector does (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). Golding *et al.* (2001:47) argue that ACE could not be regarded as a national sector because States and Territories have different ACE histories and because of the diversity of ACE across Australia. Besides, funding arrangements and contributions by ACE differ greatly by jurisdiction. There is confusion between data on ACE providers and those on ACE programs where these two categories are sometimes used interchangeably. ACE programs could also be delivered by providers not necessarily categorised as an ACE provider, such as public institutions like those in technical and further education. To the general public and key user groups, adult and community education is seen as separate from mainstream vocational education and training (VET). To many, it is a separate 'sector', at times referred to as the 'third sector'.

However, ACE's significant contribution to 'just in time', 'just what I need' and 'just for me' education and/or training, as well as personal development programs, is not without recognition (Clemans et al. 2003; Saunders 2001). There is evidence indicative of ACE's assistance in re-engaging participants with learning and training, and initiating pathways to more training or employment. The sector continues to respond (at varying levels) to Australian Government priorities around the ageing population, changes to the labour market, skills deficits and shortages, working with a culturally diverse labour force, and increasing use of information communication technologies in the workplace and in communities.

ACE serves participants who are members of the general community: aged from teens to 90 years; men and women; people who are poor and those who are relatively affluent; people seeking work skills and work qualifications and those following an interest; employed people, unemployed people and retired people; people from all linguistic and cultural background groups in the Australian population; people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities; people who have primary education only and those who have tertiary qualifications; people living in urban, regional and rural areas; and people who pay for their courses and those who do not (Clemans *et al.* 2003:17–27). Without doubt, the sector serves learners from all works of life.

ACE programs and services can be categorised into foundation education, including language, literacy and numeracy; English as a second language; personal development; specific vocational education programs (including traineeships, industry training and employment services); general citizenship; and volunteer training.

ACE providers typically offer either a mix of accredited and non-accredited programs; non-accredited programs only; and accredited programs only. What informs their provisions include factors such as:

- 'having a feel' for community needs
- reading the community demographics
- monitoring data (what is demanded and what is not)
- consultations with staff, committee members and students
- responses to State and Territory policy and funding initiatives.

Jones (1998:5–6) attributes the success of ACE to the following factors:

- a powerful relationship between government and the community
- promotion of cultural diversity
- education that is affordable, cost effective, of high quality, and broad and deep
- use of technology to reach rural areas
- addition of value to the community by promoting purpose and belonging.

Participants in ACE programs are increasingly applying what they learn for vocational purposes. According to Volkoff, Golding and Jenkin (1999:5), such 'vocational intentions reside within the individuals rather than within particular programs'. Some ACE participants value personal development as being equivalent to a vocational outcome because it enables them to make social contributions and participate in community development. It is this group of participants interested in personal development who would be disadvantaged by any reforms in ACE if there is a greater emphasis on vocational outcomes. Clearly, learning and education for some ACE participants translate into human and social capital with economic returns. This harmonises well with the human capital outcome under the National Reform Agenda.

While the proportion of participants who are developed as workforce-ready skilled workers is less compared with that in the VET sector, ACE continues to expand provision of accredited and non-accredited vocational education and training to meet the demands of its clients. Furthermore, ACE continues to provide pre-training to those who have limited VET learning experiences, have not engaged in formal learning for some time, and/or may have had unpleasant learning experiences in other institutions. In this way, it plays a 'value-adding' role to meet the intrinsic learning needs of people by assisting them to gain confidence to undertake further learning and skills development and to manage their transition from training to employment. ACE has provided learning pathways to many participants who could not enrol in VET programs, thereby facilitating a second chance for them. ACE learning is highly focused, often short in length, and aimed at providing learners with desired knowledge and skills in a friendly, supportive environment (Saunders 2001). ACE pedagogies are known for the development of five skill clusters described by Sanguinetti, Waterhouse & Maunders (2004: 66) as:

- autonomy, self-mastery and self direction – the central and underpinning skill
- work readiness and work habits
- enterprise, innovation and creativity skills
- learning, thinking and adaptability skills
- interpersonal skills.

Sanguinetti *et al.* (2004:70) assert that the development of 'autonomy', 'self-mastery' and 'self-direction' are important because they underpin the development of all other skills. ACE pedagogies facilitate the development of 'interpersonal skills' that support 'work readiness and work habits'; 'enterprise'; 'entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation'; and 'learning, thinking and adaptability skills'. ACE is widely recognised for its role in developing personal and social skills and 'generic' skills which relate to 'life and employability skills and attributes'.

Beyond specific programs and services, ACE is playing an active role in engaging and building communities by developing and strengthening networks, building community resources, and participating in community development projects. Irrespective of the framework used for analysing the role of ACE, its provisions lead to improving the quality of adult and community learning experiences and outcomes – the third goal set by the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education. It continues to build the human and social capital at the community level. Against its existing performance and service delivery, a potential for the sector to make a greater contribution to human and social capital is beyond doubt.

A structured analysis by the authors of this paper explored ACE's role and further potential to assist with the immediate skills shortages and the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG's) objectives around the development of human capital under the National Reform Agenda (COAG 2006). Choy and Haukka's (2006) analysis implies that ACE

is well positioned to achieve the following outcomes of the National Reform Agenda:

- Increase the proportion of adults who have the skills and qualifications needed to enjoy active and productive working lives.
- Improve overall workforce participation, with a particular focus on income support recipients, the mature aged and women, in a manner consistent with the long term interests of the individual and the economy, giving due regard to productivity.
- Increased provision of flexible working arrangements within the workforce, in a manner consistent with the long-term interests of the individual and the economy (COAG 2006).

High levels of achievement against these outcomes to meet COAG's aspirations could be facilitated through certain reforms to the ACE sector. A set of reforms is suggested later in this paper. To place the suggested reforms in context, it is important to appreciate current levels of performance by the ACE sector. The next section summarises the trends in ACE performance based on data from 2001 to 2005 provided by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2006).

Ace performance at a glance

Analysis of recent data on student outcomes shows that, between 2001 and 2005, about 12.8% of all VET in Australia was delivered through ACE provision (right axis of Figure 1). Just over half the ACE student population engaged in non-vocational programs. The data indicate that subject enrolments in vocational programs delivered by ACE as a proportion of all ACE activities have been higher than subject enrolments for non-vocational programs. As a proportion of all VET programs, subject enrolments in vocational ACE programs, on average, was about four and a half percent. Similarly, annual hours recorded in vocational ACE were higher (almost two-thirds) than

in non-vocational programs. Annual hours in vocational ACE, as a proportion of all VET programs, remained at about four percent.

Figure 1: Proportion of ACE students participating in vocational and non-vocational ACE programs and all VET programs (2001–2005)
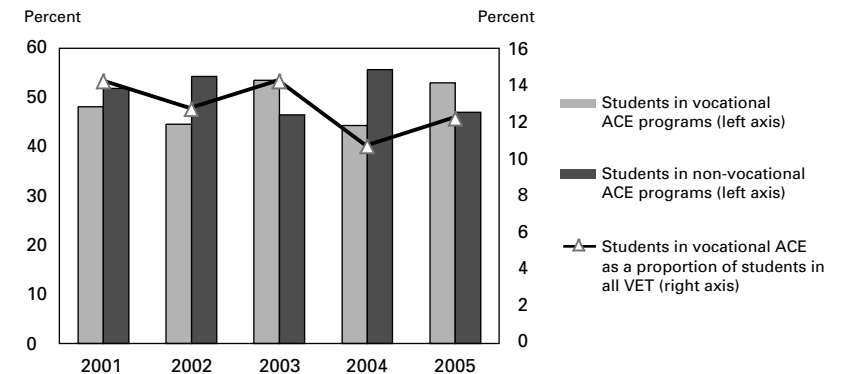
The data show that non-vocational ACE programs were more popular with women who made up about two-thirds of the ACE student population. Comparatively, more men enrolled in mainstream VET.

Students from capital cities made up the largest proportion of ACE participants. Students from other geographic areas (rural, other metropolitan, remote) took up more vocational ACE than non vocational ACE. This may be because ACE providers were the main source of vocational programs in those areas. Campus-based delivery by ACE, particularly in vocational programs, was most popular with students in all program types. This implies that most ACE students prefer campus-based or face-to-face interactions to other modes of delivery.

During the period from 2002 to 2005, those with a Year 12 qualification comprised the highest proportion of students in ACE programs (32.2% to 36.3%), and all VET programs (36.9% to 38.1%).

An increase in the number of students with a bachelor degree or higher degree was noted, particularly in non-vocational ACE programs.

Mixed Field Programmes, Society and Culture, and Management and Commerce remained the top three fields of education in the ACE sector. Engineering and Related Technologies, Management and Commerce, and Society and Culture were the top three fields of education in VET.

Qualifications resulting from vocational ACE programs were mainly *Subject only – no qualification, Certification II and Certificate III*. For non-vocational programs delivered by ACE, *Subject only – no qualification, non-award courses* and *Statement of attainment* were common until 2005.

Pass rate and satisfactory completion in both vocational and non-vocational ACE were high, particularly in non-vocational ACE and well above the rates for all VET.

At a glance, ACE is already performing well against the following four goals of the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education which was formulated in recognition that economic success is largely driven by workforce skills, capabilities and creativity:

• Expand and sustain innovative community based learning models.
• Raise awareness and understanding of the role and importance of adult community education.
• Improve the quality of adult community education learning experiences and outcomes.
• Extend participation in community based learning.

This Declaration remains the main framework for the ACE sector.

Indications are that ACE has exceeded its performance beyond these goals through some of its activities. ACE is already playing

an active role in engaging and building communities by developing and strengthening networks, building community resources and participating in community development projects. Current programs of this sector are already leading to employment outcomes and improved pathways for further learning. Nevertheless, there are barriers to optimising outcomes for human capital development. Researchers such as Borthwick *et al*. (2001), Bottomley (1998), Clemans *et al*. (2003), Jones (1998) and Saunders (2001) have identified key barriers and have suggested strategies that would improve ACE's performance and/or recognition of this performance.

Recent discourses and responses from government and industry endorse that building the nation's skills base is the most important strategy for remaining competitive internationally in the coming years. Governments across Australia recognise the potential for ACE to make a bigger contribution to skilling Australia (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee 1997). Yet policy changes to facilitate an increased role of ACE in the skilling process, and resourcing of the ACE sector, continue to receive less attention. To further enhance ACE's contribution, there is a need for reforms to the ACE sector to re-position its roles and functions for improved human capital development.

Reforms to enhance human capital development

Any reforms to ACE need to appreciate the role of the ACE sector in meeting the needs of the traditional user groups. Hence, reforms to funding policies for predominantly vocational outcomes to enhance human capital development would exclude and disenfranchise a growing number of the traditional beneficiaries of ACE.

A greater role for ACE in implementing the National Reform Agenda or addressing skills shortages will not be without a multiplicity of changes to, for example, funding levels, quality, differing State and

Territory approaches to training and accreditation, over regulation and the issue of industry leadership, Australia's ability to be globally competitive, impacts arising from changing technology and workplace relations, employers' failure to invest in training, and the poor public perception of training. Within this complex context, there is potential for ACE to make a greater contribution to human capital development and the national agenda. Without concerted and well considered attention, ACE's established systems and resources will remain under-utilised at a time when Australia needs to exploit all its existing avenues to meet the skill demands.

Responding to the current skills deficit requires greater efficiencies in training for employment. There is no doubt that substantial additional funds would boost provisions by the ACE sector. Funding remains an issue for any training sector. The question is: how could ACE providers be more active in developing the country's human capital and skilling Australians with limited funds? With supplementary funds, they could expand two areas of their current provision: *training for employment outcomes*, and *training for improved pathways*. First, strategies suggested by Borthwick *et al.* (2001), Bottomley (1998), Clemans *et al.* (2003), Jones (1998) and Saunders (2001) to overcome or minimise current barriers will improve outcomes (for details, see articles by these researchers). Secondly, to facilitate the strategies, re-positioning of ACE providers which are categorised into four tiers, as suggested below, could be considered:

- Tier 1: large RTO with annual government funding of $100,000 and above
- Tier 2: small to medium RTO with annual government funding of less than $100,000
- Tier 3: RTO that could not be categorised as Tier 1 or Tier 2
- Tier 4: non-RTO.

A preliminary analysis of the number of ACE providers in Australia, as part of a project that is developing a national database of ACE providers (Choy & Haukka, 2006), recorded 1,027 across Australia within the above four categories. Of these:

- 13.7% are Tier 1: large providers (data available from Victoria and New South Wales only)
- 28.6% are Tier 2: small to medium providers (Victoria and New South Wales only)
- 11.6% are Tier 3: RTOs not categorised
- 45% are Tier 4: Non-RTOs.

Providers in Tier 1 and 2 could be grouped as large providers. They would already have existing resources and structures and an established client base. Additional funds for professional development of staff would facilitate quality delivery that meets the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standard 7. In this way, they could increase delivery of accredited VET, thereby adding to the number of skilled workers.

Providers in this group (of large providers) could choose to operate on a competitive basis or through collaboration and partnerships with other ACE and local VET providers. They could optimise local resources for provisions to meet the local community needs. This first group of providers could also continue with the provision of non-vocational adult and community education to accommodate their traditional client base.

More information is needed to understand better the nature of providers in Tiers 3 and 4. ACE providers in these tiers could be grouped as medium/small size providers. Some would already have existing resources and others would need funding and assistance to meet the full requirements for RTO status in order to comply with AQTF standards. This re-organisation could be initiated and facilitated following the Australian Quality Framework Advisory

Board review to reduce regulatory requirements. More funds and support for professional development of staff could facilitate quality delivery that meets the AQTF audit standards.

Assuming that this second group of ACE providers (medium/small) does not have the full complement of infrastructure to provide VET, they could concentrate more on the provision of non-vocational programs to create pathways into further training by large ACE providers and by other VET providers, and into employment. They could approach their business through collaboration and partnership with large ACE providers and local VET providers. They could collaborate and form partnerships with other providers to optimise local resources for provisions to meet local community needs. Those that have sufficient resources and infrastructure and those in regions where they are the sole providers of VET, such as in rural and remote areas, could continue providing VET.

In a highly competitive environment, partnerships are critical for both groups (large and medium/small providers). Four levels of partnership suggested by Himmelman (2001) could be considered: networking, coordinating, cooperating and collaborating. Within a complex and competing environment, strategies for *training for employment outcomes* and *training for improved pathways* within the four levels of partnership are now discussed.

Training for employment outcomes

ACE could play a more active role in training for employment by offering VET programs targeted for specific employment outcomes to meet skill needs in the local community or particular industry areas where there is high demand. Providers could use their existing structures and resources or achieve these outcomes through improved partnership arrangements with other local providers, industry and other networks. Two distinct roles could be considered – as a training

provider or as a broker. Greater access to user choice funding would enable an increased number of registered providers to contribute.

A cursory look at vocational and non-vocational ACE programs shows that the sector contributes to the upskilling and reskilling of Australia's workforce in a number of industries – building and construction; business, community and health services; primary and rural; and tourism and hospitality. To a lesser extent, some training is offered in automotive, aviation, energy, food processing, marine and mining. In some instances, such as in mining, training appears to be of a specialised nature. There were no data on training that related to the biotechnology industry.

The industries where most ACE activities occur are the areas that historically have been the focus for this sector. Information and communication technology, however, represents a growth area.

Approaches to training for employment rely heavily on relationships between personnel from ACE and VET institutions, and the level and effectiveness of communication. The nature of such relationships is critical to the development of human and social capital at the local level. Historical and cultural dimensions may impact on such relationships. An independent facilitator or the State Training Authority could broker improved relationships. According to Saunders (2001:5–8) it is possible to improve interactions between ACE and VET providers through:

- increased information sharing between ACE and mainstream VET
- development of strategic alliances between ACE and mainstream VET
- establishment of learning pathways by continued negotiation
- better sharing and allocation of responsibilities for provision of related courses
- joint provision of courses
- shared use of resources such as premises, teachers and equipment

- development of a clearly identifiable national ACE/VET structure (to complement that of mainstream VET), including better identification and coordination of current ACE/VET provision at local, regional and state levels
- cross representation on ACE and mainstream VET management bodies.

Each of the strategies directed at *training for employment outcomes* needs to be considered in the context of the individual communities and capacities of ACE providers. The relevant strategies must be explored in depth to develop action plans, and identify key agents and their roles to achieve the outcomes against the National Reform Agenda or for reducing the skills deficit.

Training for improved pathways

ACE is widely recognised for its role in developing personal and social skills as well as 'generic' skills (Sanguinetti *et al.* 2004). Kearns (2001) describes generic skills as 'life and employability skills and attributes'. He regards life and employability skills as inseparable and argues that their development is underpinned by personal attributes.

The provision of employability or soft skills, which are receiving much current attention, has traditionally been popular with participants in the ACE sector. Sanguinetti *et al.* (2004:70) contend that 'the development of "autonomy", "self-mastery" and "self-direction" underpins the development of all other skills. Likewise, the development of "interpersonal skills" will feed into "work readiness and work habits", "enterprise", "entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation", and "learning, thinking and adaptability skills" and so forth'. They also contend argue that it is possible to facilitate the development of all five skills clusters, identified by Kearns (2001), using ACE pedagogies. These arguments support the multidimensional pedagogies of ACE. The non-threatening and supportive environment is well suited for the development of generic

skills when compared with the single dimensional instructional methods common in the competency-based framework.

An analysis of current ACE provisions confirms that the sector is well placed to provide generic skills and pre-training, and to improve pathways into VET programs or further training or learning.

Summary

ACE is renowned for both vocational and non-vocational provisions with capacities for VET (competency-based) as well as multidimensional pedagogies. Most providers in the sector already have the basic prerequisites to enhance their contributions to the development of human capital and skilling of Australian workers through the two possible approaches suggested in this paper: *training for employment outcomes* and *training for improved pathways*.

Greater input from ACE in training for employment outcomes and training for improved pathways to achieve the National Reform Agenda and reduce the skills deficit in Australia requires reforms in current policies. The strategies such as those suggested by Borthwick *et al.* (2001), Bottomley (1998), Clemans *et al.* (2003), Jones (1998) and Saunders (2001) need to be explored by government authorities and ACE providers to implement changes that will enhance the sector's contribution to the National Reform Agenda and the development of human and social capital. Any reforms in policy directions involving ACE should maintain its strengths and services to current client groups who are not yet ready to engage in learning through other sectors and who prefer ACE to other providers. Provision of non-accredited and certificated courses as well as self-development type courses should remain with ACE. At any cost, reforms in ACE should not turn away the very people the sector was first set up to serve.

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Prices and values: a perspective on adult and community education

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Government-provided services are caught in the jaws of a 'cost-tax vice'. On the cost side, the long-term trend of rising relative prices of services, including education, seems set to continue. The other jaw of the vice is the high efficiency cost of raising additional taxes. Recent research making the case for public provision of post-compulsory education has concentrated on the difficult task of quantifying its economic and social benefits. However, given the effects of the cost-tax vice, this paper argues that it may be wise to change the focus of research and to direct more attention to new ways of financing adult and community education.

Introduction

> In the latter half of 1920, the suggestion was made to the Council of the University of Tasmania by the Premier of Tasmania that as the Tutorial Class experiment had been on trial for six years at considerable expense of public money, it was now time to make an attempt at an impartial summing up and judgement of progress and results (University of Tasmania 1921:3).

So begins an early assessment of the value of adult education in Tasmania. Economists were heavily involved in this enterprise and in the evaluation of it. The committee of three included L.F. Giblin, the Government Statistician, while the small number of people giving evidence included Professor D B Copland (an economist at the University and the Director of Tutorial Classes), Mr T Hytten (General Secretary of the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.) and later to become a professor of economics at the University), and J. B. Brigden (West Coast lecturer of tutorial classes and also later to become a professor of economics at the University).

That economists were heavily involved was no accident because in Tasmania, as in the rest of Australia and in England, three out of five classes were in economics. The remainder covered a range of subjects such as history, literature, philosophy, music and biology. The Tutorial Class program, run in conjunction with the W.E.A., superseded government-subsidised vocational training offered through Mechanics Institutes, and its objective was to offer courses running over three years which enabled students to reach the same standard as would have been reached by university students.

Given the representation of 'exasperating calculators' on the committee, the report is in some respects surprising. There was a brief nod in the direction of the complaint of 'considerable expense of public money' in terms of a comparison of costs with those incurred in the mainland states. But there was no hint of modern cost-benefit

analysis – almost all the evaluation was cast in terms of whether the teaching methods led to outcomes comparable with those achieved by university students (it did). In concluding, the Committee gave strong support to the Tutorial Class system, giving another nod to economic evaluation by remarking that 'education has in view, not merely the turning out of efficient producers of wealth, but the training of people to be their true selves…' (University of Tasmania 1921:23).

Four decades later, modern cost-benefit analysis was still only present in faint outline in the views articulated by the economist Peter Karmel who, in 1962, made the general argument for state provision of education. In addition to a public-sector role in setting educational standards, he argued that

> [p]ublic expenditure on education goes some way toward correcting the private individual's under-estimation of the benefits of education; towards overcoming the discrepancy between private and social benefits; and towards mitigating the consequences of unequal income distribution; but the volume of such expenditure is, after all, responsive to the demands of members of society, not as individuals in the marketplace but as voters in the polling booths. However the wares of the private sector have at their disposal the whole paraphernalia of modern advertising to titillate the taste, while the products of the public sector (and indeed education in the private sector) go unsung (Karmel 1962:7–8).

It will be argued that, although there have been significant changes in government policy, the underlying problems identified by Karmel are still with us. Private and social returns to education are still uncertain and, for many consumers, participation takes place well before benefits become apparent or, alternatively, before monetary returns from education are realised. Income distribution and family circumstances still have a significant impact on access to education.

However, it is interesting to observe that Karmel did not propose explicit cost-benefit evaluation of expenditure on education. It seems to have been taken for granted that increases in public spending of the kind he envisaged would pass a cost-benefit test. It is also interesting to note that his proposed solution to the problem of under-provision – public expenditure on (and, implicitly, provision of) education – has fallen out of favour in recent times.

The two jaws of the 'tax-cost vice'

It is interesting to ask why this change has taken place, and why the change in emphasis has attracted so much controversy. Many commentators ascribe recent developments to a change in political preferences summarised by the rise of 'economic rationalism' – a term which, as originally used by economists, referred to 'an economic policy approach which recognises both market failure and government failure, and eschews false tradeoffs between equity and efficiency … [which also] embraces the collectivist ethic' (Gruen 1989: xi). As originally conceived, economic rationalism was an approach to policy formulation which, insofar as it applied to the provision of government services, recognised the pressures arising from the jaws of a 'tax-cost vice'. In response, policy-makers sought efficiencies in the provision of government services. In some cases the preferred policy was subsidised private provision, in other cases user-pays policy was adopted, and yet other approaches involved changes to entitlements.

Two long-run trends are fundamental to understanding the 'vice'. The first is the increasing cost, and hence expenditure share, of services (including health and education). The share of the service sector in gross domestic product (GDP) has doubled since 1950 to be almost half of the economy today (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). The second long-run trend is the rising tax share of GDP and, given the structure of the Australian tax system, rising effective marginal tax rates.

Taking the rising expenditure share of services first, there are two reasons for this trend. One is a secular increase in demand for services, with demand rising faster than income. The second is the so-called Balassa-Samuelson effect, which explains why the cost of services rises over time. The explanation is based on the observation that productivity growth is higher in primary and secondary industry than in services. High rates of productivity growth mean that selling prices in these industries can grow relatively slowly while still offering high wages. In the long run, labour is attracted to these high productivity, capital-intensive, sectors of the economy.

The situation is different in the rest of the economy, which comprises labour-intensive industries with low productivity growth. To maintain wage parity, these industries increase real wages at roughly the same rate as elsewhere. Hence real costs in these industries rise steadily over time. At the same time, household demand for services in household budgets rises with rising real income. The result is a higher expenditure share of services in GDP.

Some examples of Balassa-Samuelson effects are the following. The 'productivity' of symphony orchestras in providing live performances is limited by the size of the auditorium and the number of days in the year, and orchestras require increasing levels of public subsidy to survive; schoolteachers operate more effectively if the class size is kept below some maximum size, and expenditure on education as a share of GDP increases over time; and medical practitioners must spend a certain minimum time in face-to-face contact with patients, so the relative cost of general practice services rises over time.

Now turn to taxes. At the time of Federation, customs duties were the main source of tax revenue in all states and income tax rates were low – the income tax rate in New South Wales, for instance, was sixpence in the pound, or five percent. For Australia as a whole, total tax revenue was around five percent of GDP. At present, tax collections in Australia have risen to around 32% of GDP (Reinhart & Steel 2006:2).

Although this share is not particularly high by the standards of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Australia's tax system is inefficient in an economic sense. Let me explain. 'Inefficiency' refers to the fact that marginal increases in tax revenue impose a welfare cost. This is because taxes affect people's decisions and, to the extent that taxes lead us to make less desirable decisions than those we would have made in the absence of taxes, 'efficiency' or 'welfare' costs arise. Economists generally reckon that welfare costs of taxation – and roughly speaking, these costs depend on the degree to which taxes lead to changes in private-sector decisions – increase with the *square* of the effective marginal tax rate. Hence, welfare costs increase very rapidly as effective marginal tax rates rise.

Australia's tax system is inefficient because, at the Commonwealth level, tax revenue is heavily reliant on personal income taxes, and Australia has a targeted welfare system, with payments depending on family income. While income-testing helps control welfare spending, it means that many taxpayers face high effective marginal tax rates. Even after the recent round of tax cuts many middle income families – who are the contested ground in Australian politics – face effective marginal tax rates over 50% (NATSEM 2006).

At the margin, the States also rely on inefficient taxes. The bulk of their revenues is derived from Commonwealth grants, including Goods and Services Tax revenues. But if a State government wishes to unilaterally increase revenues, it does so by taxes which impose relatively high efficiency costs – stamp duties, gambling taxes and payroll taxes.

State and Commonwealth governments find themselves caught in the jaws of a vice, and they face increasingly difficult choices. An ageing population implies a growing demand for government services and, implicitly, a greater degree of income redistribution between the employed and the elderly. Satisfying the increasing demand for services and redistribution both require higher tax revenues.

At the same time, rising costs imply that public provision of the same quantum of services will require further increases in taxes and in the government expenditure share of GDP. These trends make themselves felt at the ballot box – because of the rising relative price of services, taxpayers correctly perceive they are getting less for their money. At the same time, high effective marginal tax rates make it difficult to raise additional taxes.

A solution, adopted by both sides of politics, has been to extend the application of cost-benefit analysis to public sector provision of services, to privatise some public services, and to make greater use of 'user pays' policies.

Cost-benefit analysis

At first sight, the application of cost-benefit analysis to services such as adult and community education seems straightforward, and there is a substantial literature in this field. If the benefits exceed the costs, there is an argument for public provision. But the situation is not that simple.

The first issue to be faced involves characterising the benefits and the people to whom they accrue. In this regard economists make a distinction between public and private goods – the latter are those for which, given an available quantity, greater consumption by one person necessarily implies less consumption by others. There is rivalry in consumption of these goods. A ticket to the Australian Football League grand final is a private good, as is attendance at an adult education class. In both cases, there is a limited number of places available so there is rivalry in consumption. Consumption of public goods, on the other hand, is non-rival. For example, listening to a broadcast of ABC radio is a public good, as is watching television on Channel 9.

It is generally easier for private goods to be supplied by private markets because property rights (and hence prices) can be established. So the holder of a valid ticket gains entry to the Melbourne Cricket Ground on grand final day, and only those who have enrolled are permitted to attend the adult education class. But even for public goods, private provision can sometimes work effectively. In free-access internet sites, for example, private markets can work because the content is bundled with advertising which provides the source of revenue.

The classic but, in practice, rare case of cost-benefit analysis concerns the provision of a public good which would not be provided by the private sector because, in the absence of property rights, the market fails to provide price signals. The analysis then involves a comparison of the social benefits and social costs of provision. In the simplest case, the former is the sum of private benefits, while the latter includes the costs of the resources used in producing the service as well as the efficiency costs of the requisite additional tax revenues. As argued earlier, these efficiency costs have been rising over time.

More usually, cost-benefit arguments for public sector provision involve goods and services which have both private and public-good attributes, and this is the case to which Karmel alludes. Although education is rivalrous, not all the benefits are captured by students as private benefits. Some economic benefits are also captured by their employers. There may also be significant unpriced public benefits or spillovers, variously identified as 'social benefits', 'social capital' or 'network externalities' which mean that there is a divergence between private and social benefits. If these spillovers are significant, it is likely that private-sector provision will be less than optimal in the absence of public intervention.

Unfortunately, while there is general agreement that these social benefits are significant, they are notoriously difficult to measure. In a recent evaluation of the NSW technical and further education

(TAFE) system, for instance, the Allen Consulting Group recognised the difficulty and simply assumed that unpriced social benefits of the TAFE system were 15% of the private benefits accruing to students and employers from higher productivity (Allen Consulting Group 2006:44). To take a more extreme example, the analysis of the social and economic impacts of adult and community education by Birch, Kenyon, Koshy & Wills-Johnson (2003) only measured economic benefits.

Problems also arise in the measurement of costs. For simplicity, costs are usually measured in the context of a given institutional framework, and the efficiency costs of raising taxes are ignored. Both these points can be illustrated with reference to the study by the Allen Consulting Group, which is a good example of current best-practice work in this field. This study provided a careful evaluation of the net benefit of the NSW TAFE system, comparing it to an alternative situation in which TAFE is abolished and training is offered by private-sector providers. In this comparison, services offered by the private sector were postulated to be the same in terms of quality and location, but fees would be 50% higher than for TAFE. Tax savings were assumed to be returned to the government and spent on other activities (such as health) in the same ratio as existing expenditure patterns (Allen Consulting Group 2006:51–52).

Given the present state of knowledge, these two assumptions may seem reasonable. But they are crucial to any evaluation of alternative modes of provision of TAFE-style training courses. Whether private sector training courses would be available, and on what terms, is a matter that deserves detailed analysis. With regard to taxes, the Allen Consulting Group's assumption does not consider the benefits of lower taxes consequent on avoiding efficiency costs of tax collections. As argued earlier, this is an ongoing issue in the public provision of public services.

Privatisation and user pays

In practice, cost-benefit analysis of the sort described in the previous section is usually used as a tool to justify changed spending on public provision of education, rather than exploring changes to ways of doing things.

But governments have also sought to escape the jaws of the vice by changing modes of operation, for example by privatising services, often with the implication that users pay for services provided. This process has been underway for some time and in view of the long-run forces at work, it is likely to become increasingly important.

For schools and hospitals the process has been an indirect one. Funding for public provision has been squeezed while, at the same time, private provision is encouraged by a combination of subsidies and penalties. In the case of school education, the subsidy takes the form of capitation grants to private schools. In the private hospital system, private provision is encouraged by subsidies to medical insurance together with tax penalties for those who fail to purchase it.

In the context of education, Cardak and Hone (2003) argued that this private-subsidy policy succeeded in lowering direct public expenditure because cost savings in the public sector are greater than the capitation grants to private schools. But while these policies may well reduce claims of education on the public purse, it is not at all clear, as indeed Cardak and Hone argued, that they would pass a full-blown cost-benefit test. To take another example, McAuley (2005:159) made the contrary case with regard to hospitals – he argued, in terms of a low-cost mechanism for promoting private provision of hospital services, that '[a]s a means of sharing expenses private health insurance is inferior, on all plausible policy criteria, to tax-funded single payer systems'.

Recall Karmel's account of the problems that public provision is intended to address – lack of information as to the benefits of education; inequities in access because of family background and income; realising unpriced social benefits; and overcoming the financial market problems inherent in students having to borrow to finance education spending.

How do these problems arise in the adult and community education sector? Twenty five years ago, Hocking and Byers (1983:50) identified the first two problems as being significant, noting that without structural change, '[t]he present programme will continue to attract those people it has always attracted – the middle class with previous satisfying educational experiences'. This writer's suspicion is that this problem persists.

At present there is a mixture of private and public provision, and the user pays approach is applied to varying degrees. In larger urban areas, public adult and community education providers compete, at least potentially, with the private sector. For example, adult and community education providers and private-sector providers both provide training in the use of computer software. Some courses (professional writing and editing, for instance) lead to an accredited qualification, but many (such as classes in oil painting) do not. The existence of unpriced social benefits justifies public subsidy. For some potential participants, financial constraints limit access to courses.

In the secondary and tertiary systems, vouchers have often been proposed as a means of providing in-kind assistance to students who would otherwise be unlikely to participate, and to encourage the supply of education to be more responsive to demand (see Jongbloed and Koelman (2000) for a useful summary of alternative voucher models). In Australia, proposals to introduce vouchers in secondary and tertiary education have generally met with resistance, although the Commonwealth government recently announced a system of Work Skills Vouchers and Business Skills Vouchers for

use in technical and further education. Opposition to vouchers has reflected fears that vouchers would be used as a way to cut overall public funding, that a demand-driven system would lead to erosion of standards, and that it would expose some institutions to an adverse selection problem with more able, or low cost, students migrating out of the public system. Whether or not those fears would be realised, it should be recognised that the present system of capitation grants described earlier, with public funds following the students, is rather like a voucher system.

Could State-based vouchers play a role in the adult and community education sector? The sector is already demand-driven to a greater degree than schools, the TAFE system and universities. Because it is largely under State control, funding decisions can reflect local preferences, rather than national priorities. In the case of adult education, at any rate, much of the present public subsidy supports a facilitation role, with the services provided by teachers on short-term contracts. So in many respects provision has already been privatised, and a voucher system may encourage the emergence of new providers. The justification for subsidy in many of the courses is that not all the benefits are captured by participants. More often than not, other forms of incentives to participate – such as tax deductibility – are infeasible because of the difficulty of associating particular courses with changes in potential or actual earnings.

Looking ahead

There has recently been a spate of studies assessing the economic value of post-compulsory education and although the quantitative estimates vary, there is a consensus that the adult and community education sector provides services delivering economic and social benefits. However, given the likelihood that the jaws of the 'cost-tax vice' will grip ever more tightly, there will be continuing political pressures to move away from the old 'public provision' modes

of education. Perhaps it is a good time to change the focus away from traditional cost-benefit studies and move towards analyses of alternative modes of provision, and to think about new ways of providing public subsidies to the adult and community education sector.

For once, small is beautiful. The adult and community education sector is in the fortunate position that it is largely under the control of State governments. Experimentation is possible.

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Snapshot of a generation: bridging the theory-practice divide with project-based learning

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In this example from the human services field, project-based learning is used to connect theoretical knowledge and practice skills by taking a project from industry and completing it within the peer supported learning environment of the classroom, returning the project product to industry. The theoretical ideal of participation was the project's goal and the way Snapshot of a generation fulfilled this goal on several levels is discussed. The benefits of project-based learning are an injection of new perspectives and energy from students to the workplace, completion of tasks that human services workers view as important but do not have time to do, and critically important workplace experience for students in an environment of peer support and learning. Project-based learning is a subversion of the usual practicum because of the way abstract theory is embedded in the doing rather than separate from it.

Introduction

Contemporary adult/tertiary education in the human services field incorporates a number of approaches to facilitate students' learning of knowledge and skills. Varied classroom teaching methods, simulated workplaces and workplace practicums all offer ways of connecting theoretical knowledge with practice or constructed knowledge (Healy 2005). While the importance of practical learning strategies has long been recognised (Kilpatrick 1918), debates about quantifying or qualifying the way practice builds knowledge have continued (Goldstein 2001, Shardlow & Dole 1996).

This paper discusses one solution to overcoming the theory-practice dichotomy by using problem-based learning with human services students. Following an outline of the theoretical knowledge /practice skills debate, problem-based learning is defined and the participation project *Snapshot of a generation* is described. The project outcomes are discussed and the way in which theory and knowledge were interconnected in the project is highlighted.

Theoretical knowledge versus practical skills

The vocational education and training (VET) sector's focus on training for competence has apparently widened the gap between knowledge and skills. Theoretical knowledge is the province of universities while registered training organisations develop trainees' ability to 'simply perform skills' (Ling 1999:1) presumably without necessarily knowing *why* they do them. In the human services field where practitioners engage with society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged members, knowing both how and why one takes a particular course of action is vital to working ethically and effectively (Bowles, Collingridge, Curry & Valentine 2006).

The VET sector provides a substantial part of the human services workforce, particularly in non-government organisations that bear

the brunt of neo-liberal social policy with decreasing resources and increasing demand the norm (Alston 2002). VET courses – diplomas, certificates – are shorter and cheaper than university courses and are developed and adapted to industry changes via consultation with industry representatives (TAFENSW 2005). Competencies are said to be the industry standard in whichever skill group they define performance.

The challenge for VET trainers/teachers in the human services field is to turn competency standards into locally relevant learning experiences that result in useful employees. This is particularly important in rural areas where employers, trainers, service consumers and students are likely to come into contact socially and professionally for years to come. The well-being of rural communities relies on a well-trained and active civil society (non-government human services) sector (Alston 2002). Developing the connection between theoretical perspectives and related practical strategies in real local examples is the goal of the teacher/trainer's project outlined in this paper.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL) is a comprehensive instructional approach to engage students in sustained, cooperative investigation (Bransford & Stein 1993). It is most commonly found in secondary education in the United States of America. It has been referred to also as problem-based learning and inquiry-based learning (Bransford & Stein 1993).

In the PBL approach, students are required to answer a question or develop a product for example. In doing this it is felt that they are able to take control of the learning environment and process, working in groups to complete a series of tasks to reach the project outcome (Brogan 2006). Because the project involves complex tasks, a range of inter-disciplinary skills is developed as distinct from focusing on one

aspect of knowledge or skill development – mathematics, for example (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx *et al.* 1991). The benefits for students are described as enhanced problem-solving skills, communication skills, team work skills and an understanding of the abstract or theoretical concepts behind the project issue including the way these are translated into action (Harriman 2003, Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial & Palincsar 1991, Brown & Campione 1994).

As competency standards are designed to be integrated into workplace tasks, projects that involve interdisciplinary ideas and actions represent the workplace more effectively than trying to isolate and then teach aspects of communication, group work and research for example. In Australia, PBL is a favoured teaching approach in some universities with a growing body of literature exploring the benefits and problems of this learning strategy. While the benefits include those listed above, problems include difficulty with assessment, team building and in the engineering sector, resource allocation (for example, Seidel & Godfrey 2005). The way these issues can be addressed is discussed at length by Seidel & Godfrey (2005) and is not the subject of this paper.

The PBL example in this paper was developed from the desire of VET teachers/trainers to maintain their industry skills, provide a service to agencies who frequently took students for practicums and because they were tired of the usual face-to-face teaching regardless of how many adult learning styles they addressed. Teaching a competency designed to develop research skills seemed pointless without doing some research that had value for the local community and relevance to the students involved.

The following sections of the paper outline the project *Snapshot of a generation* and discuss project-based learning to highlight the way theory and constructed knowledge inform each other with a number of benefits to education in the human services field.

The participation project

In 2006, a seven member student group aged from 19 years to 46 years were in the final year of the Diploma in Community Services Work through TAFENSW. They all lived in Orange, a regional town in central west New South Wales about three hours west of Sydney. They agreed to undertake a project commissioned by the local council community services division. The local council wanted to include children's views in their community planning process but found teenagers' views easier to access than younger children's. The project brief was to seek and record a group of children's views, present them to council in an appropriate format and evaluate the participation process with the children involved. The theory to be elaborated was (broadly) that participation in society is a basic human right and therefore everybody should be enabled to participate in public processes that concern them (UNICEF 1995).

The students began their project with an investigation of the way children are represented in society by collecting newspaper reports about children. Students also completed a content analysis of children's appearances in television programs. Students noted that pre-teenagers were most frequently depicted as cartoon characters (Bart Simpson and Eliza Thornberry, for example), as babies that did not speak or as recipients of education, health messages or consumer goods, and not as active participants in society.

As Levesque (1999) points out, childhood and adolescence are socially constructed stages that are highly idealised in western nations. Moving from childhood to adolescence in Australia is measured in age (turning thirteen) and in structured ritual (going to high school). Following the project group's discovery of the cartoon depictions of pre-teenagers, the acknowledgement that opinions of teenagers are more often sought than children's (Kang, Scharmann & Noh 2003) and that anecdotally there were social expectations from children and parents of the transition to high school, they determined that eleven and twelve year olds were an appropriate target group for the participation project.

To give children a voice in community planning processes and in the community generally, the students decided to survey all the local children who were in their final year of primary school and report the results in the local newspaper, to the NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People as well as to the local council for inclusion in the community plan.

Snapshot of a generation was a special feature published in an Australian regional daily newspaper in 1998. The feature reported survey findings on the community's attitudes and values about family, religion, politics, recreation, media and education. The original report's author could not be located and the newspaper had no copyright restrictions over the original survey nor any knowledge where it was derived from. The 2006 student group determined that the survey could meet their aim of giving children a voice in the community and the council's need to know about local children's views of the community. The students negotiated with their local newspaper's editor to publish the results.

The survey instrument consisted of several sections. It had 63 questions over five pages. The only demographic information collected was sex of respondent. The sections – school, family, sport and health, religion and society, and media and entertainment – included quantitative and qualitative questions within each section. For example, within the religion and society section, a question asked whether they went to church regularly. Respondents could tick 'yes' or 'no'. The following question asked what religion meant to them. Several lines were provided for the answer. The broad range of qualitative questions sought participants' views in their own words.

Method

The students planned and completed all the tasks required in this project. All principals were contacted by telephone, and then sent a letter with a copy of the new survey instrument and the 1998 *Snapshot of a generation* article. A follow-up phone call was made to find out if the school wished to participate. Participating students were year six children from local schools whose principals agreed to be involved in the project. Seven schools participated out of nine that had year six classes. Four participating schools were government funded and three were privately funded from student fees.

Participating schools were sent enough copies of the questionnaire for each child in year six classes, instructions for class teachers and arrangements were made for collection of completed questionnaires one week later. Instructions to teachers included that the survey was confidential and no names were required, that children should not discuss their answers with each other while completing the survey and that teachers should not make suggestions about what to write. Class teachers handed out and then collected the questionnaires. A total of 311 completed instruments were returned.

Project team members collated and reduced the data from the completed questionnaires. Each question was tallied separately and quantitative data were recorded on spreadsheets. Qualitative data were rewritten on separate sheets of paper and then collated into themes related to the section from which they originated. Care was taken to record participants' views in their own words. Each team member worked on several questions within a section, recording the responses, reducing the data into themes and writing up the findings for that question. Each team member consulted with others to ensure the validity of their analysis. Results were grouped by sex of participant. Where possible, results from the current survey were compared with the 1998 newspaper report. The discussion points of the final report and related recommendations were developed from

a team evaluation of the results, incorporating issues raised in the literature review and issues noted and discussed during the data analysis phase.

Follow-up

The completed report was sent to the newspaper editor. Stories from the report were published every day for six days. The final report was sent to the local council for inclusion in the community plan and also to the NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People for inclusion in her library.

To evaluate the implementation of participation theory, students needed to know if the children participating in the survey perceived they had been involved with and visible to the adult community. To develop other research method experience, the students decided to hold focus groups.

Three months after the newspaper publications, two focus groups of survey respondents were convened to find out the children's views about the project. Two schools were contacted and agreed to select six children from those who volunteered to participate in a group discussion about the survey and the newspaper articles. A focus group was held at each school with six children. The discussion lasted forty minutes and children were asked what they remembered about the survey, if they had seen the newspaper articles and what they thought about the project including the newspaper stories, the local council community plan and the NSW Commission for Children and Young People.

The focus groups were convened in the school halls. Children were shown a blank copy of the survey, informed about the focus group process and asked if they had any questions. They were informed that the discussion had nothing to do with their school results and that they could stop participating at any time. The following

discussions were recorded by two project team members who scribed onto large sheets of paper. At the end of discussion on each of the three questions, the scribes held up their notes and read them back to the group. Group participants were asked if they agreed with the notes and if they would like to change or add anything to what was recorded.

The focus groups found that children remembered doing the survey but did not recall much about the questions. The questions that most interested them and that both groups reported talking about in the playground later were about what they would do when they were adults, both personally in their family life and for a career. Comments made about the survey included:

> *It was a bit dull.*
> *It took too long to do.*
> *We talked about it after, about what we'd do when we grew up and stuff.*

All of the children in the focus groups had seen the newspaper articles. Teachers had brought copies of the paper to school and children reported their parents buying the paper when they usually did not. The children were excited about their views being in the paper and reported talking about the articles with their parents and with friends at school.

> My mum and dad asked about the bullying and if I was scared of getting kidnapped or robbed.
> We brought the paper to school and everyone tried to work out if what they said was in there.

The focus group participants described feeling that they were important and that their opinions were important when they were in the paper. When told that the report would be seen by other people who made decisions in local and state government, the children said it was good if politicians listened to them. Children's statements included:

> I hope we get a new swimming pool.
> They might ask us about other stuff.

The students described the focus groups as a vital stage in the connection of theory and practice because they provided feedback about turning the ideals of the project into action. The students were able to reflect on what had worked towards their goal of participation for children and what was more important for all the adults involved. For the students, finishing the project and their course was frequently the main goal. For the project commissioners, it was important they could incorporate views from a target group specified in the NSW Local Government Act for local government plans.

Discussion of project outcomes

The competencies from the Community Services Training Package (CHC02) that were achieved by the students during this project included: *Undertake research activities*, *Develop and implement a community development strategy*, *Develop, implement and promote effective communication techniques* and *Reflect and improve upon professional practice*. The student group devised the methodology, managed the project, conducted and evaluated the research, wrote the report and disseminated the findings. The teacher/trainer's role was to present theoretical concepts at relevant stages (ethical issues of research with children, for example), and facilitate reflection on the process and knowledge developed, managing conflict along the way.

The students were totally engaged and enthralled by the research and learning process during *Snapshot of a generation*. They became very protective of the findings and committed to the goal of publishing children's voices in an accessible manner. The project had multiple tasks related to research, networking, group work, communication with children and adults, professional confidence and conduct, planning, record keeping and participating in local government processes as part of promoting the participation of children.

Team members had to contact community leaders such as school principals and the newspaper editor, explain their project and promote the benefits of involvement in it. They had to produce high quality documents for publication to a diverse audience and they had to communicate appropriately and effectively with children. Working together, planning and problem-solving were daily tasks vital to meeting project deadlines.

The project process had to include ways of consolidating knowledge. It was important to the teacher/trainer that team members reflected on why they undertook certain courses of action, referred back to the participative theory underpinning the project and reflected on what they would do differently next time. Once the project had been decided on and a timeline established for completion, some aspects of teaching follow easily. In research, the development of a proposal including methodology lends itself to outlining the theory, discussing the way it relates to the project, developing a plan and implementing it. Evaluation of the plan and its implementation are vital to reflect on the process and learn from it for the next stage or the next project.

Evaluation and reflection strategies during *Snapshot* included morning meetings where the project tasks were identified for the day and recorded in a minutes book. The book was reviewed weekly before progress meetings with members of the local council community services team who provided feedback to the students about the project and asked them to reflect on their week's work including what they had learnt. This enabled the teacher/facilitator to highlight aspects of the project that related to competency elements or generate activities and tasks around elements that were overlooked.

At times of conflict in the group, a meeting would be held, the issue/s discussed and a decision made by the students about what action would be taken. This was also recorded in the minutes book which became an important record of the project and also a tool for assessment. This record-keeping process embeds evaluation of teaching and learning strategies in the project and continues the teacher/facilitator's learning alongside students.

Discussion of project-based learning as a participatory process

Project-based learning subverts the process of typical human services practicum experiences where students develop skills in the workplace because the project comes into the classroom to be completed by the group with peer support and facilitated by the teacher/trainer. However, the project is not a simulation and the outcome is a product of some sort that is important for the particular aspect of human service delivery. Workplace employees who commission the project and determine its parameters become mentors and advisers to the project team. The stages of the project are linked to theory along the way via formal teaching strategies and group processes such as discussion and reflection.

The challenge for teacher/facilitators of project-based learning is to link the project with the curriculum and more importantly to find ways to link learning with the experience of doing. Linking theory and practice has long been the challenge for educators (for example, Healy 2005). In the VET sector, competency-based learning has clearly, and some would argue narrowly, defined skills related to tasks (for example, Jennings 1991, Ling 1999). For educators in this sector, ways of making particular skills meaningful and demonstrating their usefulness remain linked to the theory underpinning the doing, regardless of the performance emphasis of the competency framework. For example, in *Snapshot* it was vital to begin with conceptual understandings of participation and the social construction of childhood to inform the way the project would develop. Without this grounding the students may not have made such a strong commitment to promoting children's voices. It is the

conceptual grounding that gives meaning to the related skills and tasks.

Citizen participation is frequently promoted as a goal of governance or government processes. Consumers, service users and community members are invited to participate in policy development and service delivery, particularly in the health and welfare sector. Educators in this sector train students in participatory strategies such as needs analysis and asset-based community development so future human service workers can use participatory processes in their work. Participation (also called community engagement) is a goal many universities have to enhance their relevance to their local communities (Egan 2005).

Translating participatory ideals into practice has proven difficult for many reasons (Wyse 2001). However, in a sector where empowerment and social justice are the key principles guiding practice (AASW 2006) and a history of 'grassroots' responses to social issues is upheld as an appropriate way of being effective, the positive premise of participation is assumed. The *Snapshot* project had ideals of participation at several levels – community and student group – with participants engaged in both levels simultaneously. It also had ideals of imparting human services practice skills in the safe and usually simulated theoretical environment of the classroom.

PBL challenges the tension between formal theoretical knowledge and constructed practice knowledge that plays out in attempts to turn ideals into practice. A post-modern view of this tension reveals a contested site that is shaped around the academically constructed dualism of theory/practice. The dualism hides the way people learn, who learns and what knowledge is developed.

Some kind of participation is inherent in the teaching/learning relationship and this is enhanced by project-based learning because the process is fluid, unpredictable and relies on mutual respect

and trust. Teacher/trainers have to trust that the students will engage in the process and that they can work out what has to be done and by when. Students have to trust that teacher/trainers will provide them with the information they need in a timely fashion and guide the process so links can be made between tasks and knowledge.

It can be argued that most education is undertaken to get a new job or a different job. Education is inextricably linked to doing work because it suggests why tasks or projects should be done in certain ways. It is inherently practical regardless of whether it is delivered in universities, TAFE institutions or schools. The theory/practice, formal knowledge/constructed knowledge and teacher/student dualisms can prevent educators and students taking up the possibilities of participating in constructing knowledge. Project-based learning opens up these possibilities.

Postscript

When the conference flyer came out for *United we stand* (see Allan 2006) – a combined conference of social work, welfare and community practitioners and educators – an abstract about *Snapshot* was written and accepted and the project team swung into action. They got a letter of support for their work from the local mayor, wrote letters and made phone calls requesting donations, held barbecues and chocolate drives and raised enough money for their conference registrations and airfares. The students wrote the paper about their project and, although extremely nervous about the forum and their abilities, successfully presented their work. The feedback was positive. They met a lot of people and learnt a great deal from other presentations and from doing their own. The students' goal of promoting children's participation had the unforeseen outcome of promoting their own participation in public processes concerned with education and service delivery in the field in which they were training.

I wanted them to write this paper but they got jobs instead.

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Developing speaking skills of adult learners in private universities in Bangladesh: problems and solutions

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The globalisation of English and a growing demand for good English-speaking skills in the job market in particular have been placing a greater emphasis on the teaching of English speaking skills in Bangladesh. The private universities emphasise developing English skills. It seems that students of public and private universities have the same level of proficiency when they start but, at the end of four years of study, the students of private universities have acquired a higher level of proficiency in English. With observation, document analysis and a series of interviews with teachers who are teaching English language in these private universities, this study investigates how these private universities are helping the students to develop English language skills. It explores teachers' perceptions of the problems students encounter while speaking English and the factors that help these learners to develop their speaking skills.

Introduction

In Bangladesh, English language teaching and learning has followed the traditional grammar translation method in all levels of general education since it emerged as an independent country in 1971. In language classrooms, the focus was on grammatical rules, memorisation of vocabulary, translation of texts and doing written exercises. Classes were taught in the native language 'Bangla' (also known as Bengali), with little active use of English language. Since the English courses did not seem to improve the skill levels of the students, as expected, reform started to take place in education from early 1990s. The globalisation of English and a growing demand for competent English language users in the job markets has placed a greater emphasis on English language teaching in Bangladesh. To raise people's overall level of competency in English language, the Bangladesh government made changes in its education policy. The English Language Teaching Improvement Project introduced communicative textbooks up to the higher secondary level. The project aims to facilitate the teaching and learning of English with a methodology that will encourage students to acquire communicative competence in English through regular practice of these skills in the classroom. The enactment of the Private University Act in 1992 marked another major breakthrough in the higher education system in Bangladesh. The law was approved with the expectation that these universities would open their doors to the education appropriate for the time. These universities emphasise developing English language skills.

This study focused on how these private universities are helping students to develop these skills. It explored teachers' perceptions of the problems students encounter while speaking English and the factors that help these learners to develop their speaking skills. The work presented in this paper constitutes a part of a larger research project that had two objectives. One was to gain teachers' perspectives

on the problems students have while speaking in English, the reasons behind their perspectives and the factors that work for effective learning. The second objective was to obtain students' perspectives on their problems while speaking in English and their understanding of the ways that help them to develop this skill. This paper focuses on the first objective of the project. The achievement of both objectives will help to provide a more thorough picture of teaching of spoken English in these private universities. The purpose of this study is not to generalise the results to all other private universities of Bangladesh but to obtain a deeper understanding of the situation in five private universities there.

This paper begins with an introduction to the English language teaching policy in Bangladesh. Then it reports on a study conducted in five different private universities of Bangladesh where issues of teaching spoken English were raised through a series of interviews with five teachers who are teaching English language in these universities. It ends with some recommendations for change in the educational policy of Bangladesh.

English language teaching in Bangladesh

English is a foreign language in Bangladesh and the country depends on it for various internal trades and conducting business with the outside world. Bangla is the native language of 95% of the total population of this country. People use this language in their everyday activities. However, English is in much demand in job markets. In business, industry and government, workers are increasingly expected to develop proficiency in English. Students take English language courses from year 1 to 12 in schools. These courses are mandatory for all students. After passing the Higher Secondary Certificate exam which is held after completion of twelve years of study, students move to tertiary education. There are two categories of universities in Bangladesh – public and private. Public universities

are established by the government. The private university act passed in 1992. The first private university (North-South University) started its first academic session in the capital city Dhaka in 1993, and since then, 52 private universities have been established in different parts of the country. The growing demand for higher study, and delayed study caused by 'highly politicized student activism on campus' (Chowdhury 1997:8), contributed to the phenomenal growth of these universities. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, the total number of students in the private universities is 44,604. The University Grant Commission monitors these private universities to ensure that the standards of teaching and physical facilities are satisfactory. These universities have offered an opportunity to thousands of students unable to avail themselves of opportunities for a good education in public universities.

Establishment of private universities is one of the most important reforms in the history of education in Bangladesh. These universities have responded to the demand for higher studies by providing education in fields of Business Administration, Business Finance, Computer Science, Environmental Science and Telecommunications since there is a high demand in service sectors for students who have skills and knowledge in these areas. Some private universities provide an honours degree in English literature. Chowdhury (1997) states that these private universities are believed to improve the standards of higher education in Bangladesh to an international level by making collaborative arrangements with universities in the United States and other developed countries. English is the medium of instruction in these universities and general English courses are compulsory for all students. These universities put special emphasis on English, remembering that jobs will go to those who have achieved fluency in spoken and written English (Alam 2005).

Literature review

The literature on teaching spoken English to adult learners in Bangladesh is very scarce. Many studies highlight the principal problems of teaching English in countries like Bangladesh, China, Japan and Korea where English is taught as a foreign language (in an EFL context) and where the grammar translation method is the prevalent teaching approach (see Anderson 1993, Chowdhury 2001, Li 1998, Liu 1998). In these countries, learning English language means learning grammar, reading and translation. Students do not like to become engaged in conversation or play communication games. They refuse to speak English to each other. There is a long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority in these countries. They expect teachers to be authority figures and the teaching method to conform to the traditional teacher-centred approach. Teachers find it difficult to teach these students with a new approach. Li (1998) states that

> [a]fter so many years of schooling in traditional settings, students rely on the teachers to give them information directly, making it very difficult to get the students to participate in class activities (p.691).

In Bangladesh, as Chowdhury (2001) mentions, students are not exposed to skill development courses in pre-university years. So if they are faced with communicative approaches to language teaching in university, they find themselves in a new world. He also mentions that in universities, first year students have a modest grasp of structure and usage due to heavy grammar input from pre-university schooling but have great difficulty in expressing themselves. Teachers find it difficult to get the students to participate in class activities. He also states that the problem lies with the overall cultural orientation to the academic atmosphere rather than with the competence of the students.

Some studies outline strategies that can be used by teachers in EFL contexts to help adult learners develop their speaking skills.

Shumin (2002) suggests that adult learners should develop short, interactional exchanges in which they are required to make short utterances. It will make them able to become more engaged in small talk in the target language. Jones (cited in McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2004) proposes the technique of the 'split story' which involves telling students a story, but stopping at a crucial point and inviting students to provide their own imaginative ending. Pair work and group work also increase the amount of speaking involved in the activity (Brown 2001, Green 1989, Nation 1989). Nation (1989) points out that "[o]ne of the most useful procedures is the movement from individual to pair to group to whole class activity" (p.26). Adult learners should be allowed to collaborate during the learning experience; it enhances the learning situation (Green 1989). According to Hinkel (2006), contextualised uses of specific grammar structures and vocabulary help to connect the subject-matter and language learning activities. Debates and problem-solving tasks can promote increased grammatical and lexical complexity in the language of learners. They prepare learners for real life communication in an EFL environment.

Researchers also place importance on learning environment which affects how much initiative students will take to speak in a foreign language. Green (1989) pointed out that non-English speaking adults are already timid about using the English language. The teacher must help to build the self-confidence of the students by being encouraging. Learning environments can have a facilitating effect on oral production (Payne & Whitney 2002).

Methodology

This study focused on two aspects of private universities – the conditions that affect how the teaching-learning process is conducted and the concepts that English language teachers have of effective teaching. The data collection started in December 2005 and finished in June 2006. Since the researcher has experience of teaching in two private universities, she is quite familiar with the settings.

The interviews were conducted with five teachers, aged between 28 and 32; three were women and two were men. A profile of the participants is provided in Appendix A. Participants were selected through the researcher's personal contacts. 'Typical case sampling' which is a type of purposive sampling has been selected as a sampling strategy (Wiersma & Jurs 2005). The participants were neither beginners nor highly experienced teachers. To be selected for the sample, they had to be an English language teacher in a private university and had to have experience of teaching for some years. All of the informants received their masters degrees from the Department of English of Dhaka University. The teaching experience of the five teachers ranged from two to six years. They have been given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity. These names are used when their views are noted below.

In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. The interviews followed a semi-structured format because the study started with a fairly clear focus. It helped to address more specific issues. Each question was followed by probes designed to obtain more detailed responses. The interviews lasted between 30–40 minutes and were conducted in participants' homes and offices. The purpose of the interview was explained to the participants and the confidentiality of the personal information was assured. While most questions focused on the strategies that teachers use to teach English in their universities, there were a number of questions that asked students' level of expertise, university policies and course structures which were thought to be important for this research to find out the reasons behind using various strategies by the teachers (the interview questions are in Appendix B). The interviews were conducted in 'Bangla' and were transcribed and later translated. Interview transcripts were sent to the informants for verification and feedback to increase the credibility of the research.

A total of six classroom observations offered evidence about strategies that the teachers actually use to develop the speaking skills of

their students. The field notes that were taken while conducting observations in the classrooms were descriptive. The description of the situation and the events were jotted down as they occurred. The notes were written as narratives but were summarised immediately after each observation. Documents such as course outlines and examination questions were also studied.

During data analysis, the interview transcripts were read by the researcher to understand the topic and the themes. Trends, categories and classifications were developed using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba 1985) and they have accurately captured the information in the data. The information has proved to be useful in understanding and illustrating the issues under study.

Findings

Recurrent themes and salient comments regarding the teaching of speaking skills of English language were identified and subsumed under three main categories, namely, policies of the private universities, teachers' perceptions of students' problems in speaking and the reasons for the problems, and the strategies that teachers use to overcome these problems.

Policies of the private universities

English language courses are compulsory for all students of the private universities. These courses are called 'Foundation courses'. Students attend some courses at the beginning and some at the advanced level of their studies. In one university, there is a separate course for teaching speaking. Classes take place twice a week. There are around 15–25 students in a language class and classes usually run for 90 minutes. These courses emphasise the teaching of all four skills – writing, reading, speaking and listening. Teachers do not have to follow any fixed textbook to teach English in these universities. In two of these five universities, the course outline is given at the beginning

but as Farhin, one of the participants, said: "The syllabus is fixed but the teachers have freedom to choose the teaching material". Students have examinations on speaking. In some cases, students are given marks on class-performance which is basically on speaking activity.

English is used as the medium of instruction in these universities. As Farhin stated: "Lectures have to be in English. Teachers have to talk in English to students inside and outside the class". It is compulsory for the students to speak in English in classes, especially in English language classes. Two participants, Shamim and Saif, had experience of teaching in two other private universities. They said that the policies are similar there. One participant noted that the university authority emphasises speaking skills to such an extent that students are supposed to come to the teacher and talk for some time in English if they receive a poor grade in their speaking test. If any student misses four classes, s/he is not allowed to sit for the final examination.

Unlike the public universities of Bangladesh, the private universities provide students with opportunities to use a language laboratory where they can practise listening and speaking activities. Various competitions are arranged there. In some universities, there are even 'self access centres', as Saif mentioned from his previous experience of teaching in another private university. Thus it can be seen that English is the medium of instruction in these private universities and all students have to take mandatory English courses during their candidature. Students also have tests on speaking and they can also practise the language outside the class through language clubs and self-access centres provided by these universities.

Teachers' perceptions of students' problems in speaking and the reasons for the pproblems

Different problems were identified by the participants regarding students' skills in spoken English. Three out of five participants said that the students usually have a small English vocabulary. They do better in reading and writing skills but do very poorly in speaking. They feel shy and do not want to speak in front of the class. One participant mentioned a very important factor that inhibits students from practising speaking in the EFL context. Since people are mono-lingual in Bangladesh, students do not need to use English outside the class. Mayeesha talked about one of her students who had said: "Outside the classroom, whom will we practise with? With our friends? They will laugh. It's not possible to practise speaking English with family members either."

The majority of the students have come to tertiary level after passing the Senior Secondary Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate where their textbooks for English have been written following the communicative language teaching method. The books focus on all four skills of English language, but only reading and writing are tested in their final examination. When the participants were asked if they thought that the students have ever practised speaking in English in their schools, all of them agreed with Mayeesha who responded boldly:

> Never ever. I asked my students about it and they said that they never did speaking or listening activities in their schools. This is completely new for them that they have to speak in English in class.

Most of the participants blamed the educational system for the students' lack of courage to speak in front of others in class. As Farhin stated: "Our educational system should be blamed for it. Students do not have many chances to interact in English in schools. In many schools, teachers take English classes using Bangla." She added: "Another problem with our educational system is that the students are not given the opportunity to think. They cannot write or speak about anything on a new topic where they have to think before writing or speaking". In schools, students focus entirely on rote memorisation up to the higher secondary level of education.

Creativity is not encouraged. The participants considered that it is the education system of Bangladesh which has made the students unable to think for themselves and to deal with an unfamiliar situation. Thus, most of the participants blame this educational system for making the students timid about using the English language.

Strategies used by the English language teachers

Since the students do not have sufficient proficiency in English, teachers find it hard to do any oral communicative activity with them. Teachers provide students with easy topics to help them getting started with speaking. As Namira, Saif and Shamim mentioned, they start working with the students giving them very simple topics like 'Introduce yourself to other students' or 'world cup football' or 'world cup cricket', subjects with which they are familiar. Sometimes students are asked to talk about a movie they have watched recently. Students often play games in groups, for example, the whole class is divided into groups and students are given stories with no ending and are asked to provide the ending. Sometimes they are given some material—a knife, a rope. They are asked how they will escape with the help of these things. These activities create interest among the students. Since students have a problem in initiating speaking, the teachers try to help them speak up in class. They do not teach grammar separately and emphasise fluency rather than accuracy. The teachers try to enable the students to communicate effectively by placing importance on the socio-cultural features of communication and oral production. They teach effective communication strategies, conversational routines (for example, small talk), conversational formulae (for example, forms of address) and speech acts such as requests, compliments, clarification and questions.

To try to help students overcome their shyness, teachers of these universities make it mandatory for all students to speak in English. As is mentioned in the objective of a course outline at one of the courses

of English language, the course aims to improve students' speaking ability. The course also aims to considerably reduce learners' overall shyness, nervousness and inhibition in speaking. Since there are small numbers of students in a class, teachers can manage to speak with everyone in the class. They ask questions of all the students, asking them to speak up in their class. All the participants agreed that students improve later with practice.

> What I see at the beginning is that they cannot talk in English, but after some time, they start talking with few words. I feel that the development takes place after having much interaction in class. (Shamim)

In classes where students of mixed levels sit together, the more fluent students dominate the class. As a solution to this, Farhin mentioned: "I do not talk much to those students who are with advanced level of English. I rather use them as facilitators. They are to talk to weak students and help them".

In four of the five universities, students have speaking tests which encourage them to practise in spoken English. Namira said that the university where she teaches does not have any policy of taking a speaking test but she takes the test personally so the students feel motivated to learn it.

In these private universities, students can also practise language in language clubs. Debates and various games are arranged in these clubs. They therefore have opportunities to practise English outside class. Sometimes, students are shown movies, as Farhin said, using multimedia and are asked to talk about them later.

Thus the data show that to help students overcome their shyness and hesitation in speaking English, teachers allow students to talk about themselves, encourage dialogue and discussion through asking questions and use the technique of 'split story' (Jones, cited in McCarthy & O'Keeffe 2004). They create a congenial atmosphere in class and friendly relations with the students.

Discussion

Though English has been taught as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh, it has not had the desired impact on learners in terms of basic competence in the language. The data reveal that the private universities are using different strategies to develop students' English speaking skills. They make students speak in class by making it compulsory for all of them. All students have to take compulsory English courses and they have tests on all four skills which work as motivation for the students to develop the skills since it is proven that, if something is tested, it is important (Shohamy 1993, Wall & Alderson 1993). Students can also practise the language outside the class through language clubs and self-access centres provide by these universities.

Students come to tertiary level in Bangladesh with the educational background where "classroom activity is characterised by the teacher delivering the syllabus which students ingest, leaving little room for genuine enquiry, questioning or criticism" (Thornton 2006:190). This study illustrates that most of the teacher participants blame the educational system for making the students timid about using the English language. In such a situation, teachers allow the students to talk about themselves to promote conversation. They encourage dialogue and discussion through asking questions, which helps students minimise their shyness and hesitation in speaking English. They develop a congenial atmosphere in class and friendly relations with students. The teachers' comments remind us of Brown (2001) who said:

> One of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that are wrong, stupid or incomprehensible … Our job as teachers is to provide the kind of warm, embracing climate that encourages students to speak, however halting or broken their attempts may be. (p.269)

The triangulation of the data collection method contributed towards cross-validation of this qualitative research, and the detailed account of data analysis and examination helped to enhance external reliability. The in-depth interviews were a useful method for this research since they helped to generate insights (Neuman 2006), while interview transcripts sent to informants for verification and feedback enhanced the credibility of the research (Fade 2003, Mays & Pope 2000). Moreover, the researcher's prolonged engagement with the community assisted in making the information obtained from the participants more accurate and credible.

The research, however, is not without its limitations. The participants do not represent a wide spectrum of varied experiences. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in Bangla. The translated version therefore might have affected the findings of the study.

Conclusion

The initiatives taken by these private universities have so far been successful in helping students to develop their speaking skills. With fluency in English, they stand a better chance of securing a good job. But only 30% of all students in the country can afford to study in private universities. What about the rest who are studying in public universities? Although it is a very small-scale study, this research has helped to raise very important issues related to the development of English speaking skills of adult language learners in Bangladesh. This study shows that the key strategy adopted by these private universities to develop speaking skills is making it compulsory for the students to speak. The Ministry of Education of Bangladesh should recruit trained teachers and take the initiative of testing speaking skills in both the Senior Secondary Certificate and the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations so that the learners are forced to practise speaking in English in their schools. Potentially, it could raise the overall English speaking competency level of students and make it more of a level playing field.

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Appendix A: Profile of the participants

Name	Age	Gender	Academic Qualification	Teaching experience in EFL	Teaching experience in private universities
Mayeesha	Below 30	F	MA, Department of English, University of Dhaka	4 years	2 years
Shamim	30–35	M	MA, Department of English, University of Dhaka	5 years	3 years
Namira	Below 30	F	MA, Department of English, University of Dhaka	4 years	2 years
Saif	Below 30	M	MA, Department of English, University of Dhaka	6 years	3 years
Farhin	30–35	F	MA, Department of English, University of Dhaka	6 years	5 years

Appendix B: Interview questions

- How long have you been teaching English language?
- How long have you been teaching in this private university?
- What is the policy of this university regarding the teaching of English language?
- How many courses on English language are there?
- How often do the classes take place?
- How many students are there in every class?
- How do you teach speaking skill?
- How do the students respond?
- What are their levels of English language?
- What problems do students face when they are asked to speak in English?
- What do you do with passive students in class?
- What do you think inhibits speaking skill?
- Does the university provide students with any facility to learn English language (for example, language club, self-access centre etc.)?
- Do students have any speaking test?
- Have you found any improvement in their speaking skill?

Evaluating the trainability of enrollees of the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools' programs

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The Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools (LFNAS) are schools established to train youths to develop their state and their nation in the area of food production. This study sought to assess the trainability of enrollees in the three operating LFNAS. Five research questions were posed. The CIPP evaluation model was adopted. The population and sample for the study consisted of a total of 247 enrollees. Questionnaires, structured interviews and observational techniques were used to gather information, while using simple descriptive statistics to analyse the data. Many of the enrollees were found to be within the required age range.

A substantive number had minimum basic educational qualification; however, a sizeable number in two of the schools had no basic education, and could not even be engaged in communication. Most of the enrollees had been engaged in different occupations before enrolment and many did not really have the sincere interest in farming as expected, though a majority of them aspired to become modern farmers on completion.

Introduction

The core purpose of education is the development of people. Through education people are able to acquire the relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interest that enable them to become part of the development of their immediate community, state and nation, and even in the world at large. The 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria was introduced as a practical step towards the purposeful realisation of this objective of education in the country.

The publication of the National Policy on Education (NPE) by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 1978, 1998, 2004) ushered in the 6-3-3-4 system of education. According to this document, some part of the philosophy of education in Nigeria rests on the belief that:

(a) Education is an instrument for national development; to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development and the interaction of person and ideas are all aspects of education.
(b) Education fosters the worth and development of the individual for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society.
(c) Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability.

(d) There is the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. (Section 1, paragraph 4, p.8, 6 FRN 2004)

Again, two of the main *national* goals of education in Nigeria, stated in the policy document as a necessary foundation, are:

(i) Building of a free and just democratic society.
(ii) Building of a just and egalitarian society.

The philosophy of education therefore is based on

(a) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
(b) A full integration of the individual into the community.
(c) The provision of equal access to educational opportunities to all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal schools system. (Section 1, paragrah 5, p.8 7, FRN 2004)

One of the national education goals derived from this philosophy is the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society. Accordingly, at any stage of the education process, and more especially after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time, combining work with study or embarking on full-time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on.

Ukoli (1985) lamented that transforming Nigerian society into a scientific society was likely to be an uphill task. According to him, the profile of Nigerian society reveals a modern sector floating in

a vast sea of traditional society where traditionalists represented approximately 75% of the entire population.

The American Vocational Education Association defined vocational and technical education as the type of education designed to develop skills, abilities, understandings, attitudes, work habits and appreciation needed by workers to enter and make progress in employment on a useful and productive basis (Longe & Adedeji 2003). Adedoja (1998) particularly describes vocational and technical education as the total experience of an individual such that the student learns successfully how to engage in gainful occupation. In addition, it offers knowledge of the foundational principles guiding the practices essential for skill development. Such education does not merely rely on imitation, observation or incidental participation but rather a more organised instructional package. The teaching of agricultural science, food and nutrition and technical drawing are examples of this in the secondary schools.

The secondary school leaver, who chooses to combine work with study or takes up full-time employment while hoping to resume studies later on, can also choose to study available technical or vocational education. Such an individual may study with the intention of having interim training, or of being self-employed on completion and thus being able to contribute to the development of society.

Vocational education teaches an individual the basic principles of doing things; it becomes technical where and when aspects leading to acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge are included. The trainee is thus trained to acquire marketable, enterprising skills. The training is such that the trainee is helped to develop the right habit of doing things and thinking, through respective training in varieties of experiences from the occupation. Longe and Adedeji (2003) also make it clear that such training is carried out in a way that it gives the trainee a

productive ability with which he/she can secure employment or be self-employed.

Atchoarena (2004) observes that, globally, many governments are reviewing their efforts in promoting vocational education. Such review is because of a strong belief that skill formation enhances productivity and substantive competencies in the world economy. This and many other factors are motivating state policies in technical and vocational education. This education, according to Atchoarena (2004), is seen as a powerful way of providing a second chance to secondary school drop-outs, more especially in developing counties by offering an alternative to university education in a bid to combat youth unemployment and poverty.

A review of secondary education programs in industrial countries highlights that the structure of this level of education remains very diversified with respect to vocational education (Atchoarena 2004). Many developed countries combine vocational schools with dual forms of training such as apprenticeship. Nigeria, a developing country, has this type of structure indicated in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2004) for students in junior secondary school as part of Introductory Technology. The not so academically endowed students, on completion of junior secondary school, are able to transit into organised vocational training. However, 28 years after publication of the first edition (FRN 1977) of the policy document, this aspect of the policy has not been fully implemented.

The National Policy on Education (FRN 2004: paragraph 40, section 7) describes vocational education as that form of education obtained at technical colleges. These technical colleges are equivalent to secondary schools but designated to prepare individuals to acquire practical skills and the basic scientific knowledge and attitude required as crafts-people and technicians at sub-professional level. Two of the goals of this level of education are to provide the knowledge and technical skills necessary for agricultural, commercial

and economic development and also to give training and impart the necessary skills to develop individuals to be self-reliant economically.

The policy (FRN 2004: paragraph 121 section 13) invites all those who may want to assist the government to achieve its laudable goals by stating:

> Government's ultimate goal is to make education free at all levels. The financing of education is a joint responsibility of the Federal, State and Local governments and the private sector. Government is thus welcoming and encourages the participation of local government individuals and other co-operate bodies or organizations.

One of the organisations heeding the government call for the development of the country is the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria). The founder of the A.G Leventis Group, an international commercial company, instituted a foundation before his death. The Foundation is meant to assist educational, cultural and other charitable causes while specifying West Africa and particularly Nigeria as a major beneficiary. The Nigerian branch of the Foundation was formally called the 'Nigeria Advisory Panel' and was inaugurated in 1978 with a group of distinguished nine personalities, eight of whom were Nigerians. This Panel, renamed the 'Leventis Foundation (Nigeria)', was registered and incorporated as a charitable limited company on 26 April 1988.

In support of the Federal Government's 6-3-3-4 education program, especially as it places so much emphasis on self-sufficiency in food production, the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) embarked on a major policy decision in 1986. The Foundation focused on the main goal of training young farmers in modern agricultural methods. The body became a prime mover of preservation of natural resources; it works in co-operation with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation. Between 1989 and 1997, the Foundation also donated equipment, workshop tools and teaching aids to ten technical colleges in Nigeria to promote the vocational training of youths. However, the more outstanding

contribution to the social, economic and educational development in the country has been in its two very active areas, namely, agricultural schools, and the scholarship and associate program.

The agricultural school program of the Foundation was started with the inauguration of two schools in 1987 – one in Ilesa, Osun State (formally part of the old Oyo State) and another in Dongo Dawa in Kaduna State. A third school was inaugurated in Panda, Kano State in 1998; this was, however, in collaboration with the Kano State Government. By 1999 a fourth school was established at Agenebode in Edo State. The general administration and supervision of these schools rested on the Foundation's Head office in Lagos.

The training in the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools (LFNAS) has the objective of creating in Nigeria a new generation of committed young farmers who will act as catalysts for agricultural development in their immediate community. Over the long term, these youths are expected to develop their state and the nation at large, especially in the area of food production. The question now is: 'are the Nigerian youths who volunteered and made themselves available for this national developmental training trainable for the LFNAS programs?'

This study aimed to assess the trainability of the Nigerian youths who enrolled for the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools. As stated by the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) (1999), candidates to be eligible for admission to these schools must meet certain requirements. These requirements include the ability to speak and write English, having access to two to three hectares of land, declaring intention to start working on their own farm after leaving the school and having good standing in their respective villages. The 23 August 2004 advertisement (Punch 2004) for admission to the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools specifically stated the following requirements for admission for prospective candidates:

- must be between 20 and 35 years of age
- have a solid farming background
- must have completed junior secondary schools
- be able to speak, write and read English
- have a minimum of half a hectare of farmland
- be physically fit and willing to work hard
- be prepared to undergo written, oral and physical tests prior to final selection
- must be prepared to return to farm upon completion of training.

On completion of the program, which lasts for one year, the trainee receives a 'statement of participation'. This statement is not to be used for seeking outside employment, rather they are expected to work on their own farm and set up exemplary farms in their immediate individual community. They will, however, continue to enjoy visitation on their farm over a two-year counselling and extension service. The question again is: what is the trainability of the enrollees of the program vis-à-vis the requirement/expectation of the LFNAS and the Nigerian society at large?

Purpose of the study

As laudable as the objective of LFNAS is, it is only realisable if the right candidates are engaged in the program. The enrollees remain perhaps the singular most important factor in this regard. The study therefore aimed to assess the trainability of the enrollees in the three operating LFNAS.

Specifically the study attempted to answer the following questions:
1. What is the age range and average age of the enrollees in the LFNAS program?
2. What is the educational background of the enrollees before enrolling in the LFNAS program?
3. What is the occupational background of the enrollees before enrolling in the LFNAS program?

4. What is the career motivation/aspiration of the enrollees before enrolling in the LFNAS program?
5. What is the profile of the trainers of the enrollees in the LFNAS program?

Methodology

Study type

This was an evaluative study in which the investigators, as outside evaluators, assessed the schools with a view to ascertaining the execution of the program, monitoring the program so as to suggest ways of reviewing it, and paving the way for its improvement. It was, simply, a form of formative evaluation. The evaluation model adopted for the study was the CIPP model introduced by Stufflebeam (1971). CIPP is an acronym for content, input, process and product evaluation, which can be briefly summarised in relation to this study as:
- content evaluation: this involved the specification of stakeholders' goals and objectives of the program
- input evaluation: this was a means of identifying available resources as well as the constraints of the program in terms of personnel, facilities, equipment, funds and so on
- process evaluation: this was concerned with interaction activities within the members of the schools' communities and the schools' management authorities
- product evaluation: this was concerned with the gains and outcomes of the program.

In this particular study, however, the first component, content evaluation, was the prime focus since the focus was actually on the trainability of the enrollees.

Target population sampling and sample

There were only three operating LFNAS at the time of this study. The total number of students in the three schools combined was below 400, therefore all the enrollees in each school became the sample. Population and sample thus became same thing. A total number of 247 enrollees participated in the study: Ilesha (n=124), Kaduna (n=62) and Kano (n=61). The trainers of the enrollees were also part of the study: there were 10 at Ilesha, 12 at Kaduna and 8 at Kano, making a total of 30 trainers.

Instrumentation and data collection

Three sources were used for gathering information: two questionnaires, one for the trainees and one for the trainers; short structured interviews with each of the school principals; unstructured interviews with some ex-trainees. The trainees' questionnaire was made up of two sections: Section A had items about the characteristics of the respondents, Section B contained 14 items. The questionnaire was trial tested on 30 of the enrollees in Ilesha School to check clarity of items and remove ambiguity. An internal consistency reliability of 0.87 was calculated for the instrument using split half method.

The trainers' questionnaire consisted of five items on the profile of the trainers. The questionnaire was trial tested on trainers at the Kaduna School. An internal consistency reliability of 0.92 was estimated for this instrument.

Trainees were also observed on various activities in the schools at different times for two days.

Data analysis

Simple descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of data – these involved calculations of percentages and frequencies.

Results and discussion

Study question 1: What is the age range and average age of the enrollees in the LFNAS program?

The age range and the average age of trainees enrolled in the LFNAS program in the three locations are shown in Table 1. The average age of enrollees in Ilesha was 22.2 years while that in both Panda and Dongo Dawa was 25.4. The required age range is between 20 and 35 years of age. Many are still within the advertised age range though more deviations were observed in Dongo Dawa and Panda. Nevertheless the levels of deviations were not significant; they could be an indication of the peculiar characteristics of the people in these geo-political zones of the country.

Table 1: Age range and average age of enrollees in Ilesha, Panda and Dongo Dawa LFNAS

Age	Ilesha	Panda	Dongo Dawa
Age range	19–35	18–39	18–39
Average age	22.2	25.4	25.4

The primary objective for the establishment of the LFNAS is to train young Nigerian small-scale farmers in a number of modern farming techniques and management. The youth, young and agile men, are expected to enrol in the program.

How, then, do these age ranges and average ages conform to the requirement of the organisers of the programs? To explain this, we need to consider both the lower and the upper limit. Below age 20, most youths in the rural areas of Nigeria are still battling with primary and secondary school education. It is thus difficult to ascertain the career plans of such youths, especially those in communities where the rural institutions lack merit and quality. We can only hope that the one year exposure to the program can be a positive influence on such youths to develop early but lasting interest

in farming as a career. The lower age limit should not be less than 20 years, even as stipulated in the Foundation's requirement.

Above age 35, most youths in this category in the villages have settled down, and typically, such youths are married with marital responsibilities. It is therefore difficult to attract such youths into a regular and structured learning program that will last one year. For those who are eventually attracted, their commitment to the program would not be as fully expected and they are not easily amenable to new ideas. Although one can say that age has no significant relationship with intelligence, more especially after adolescence (Piaget 1972, Bloom 1976, Anastasi & Urbina 2004), it is however important in decision-making. This is more so given the LFNAS is a one-year intensive program after which trainees are expected to become professional farmers.

Study question 2: What is the educational background of the enrollees before enrolling in the LFNAS program?

The distribution of trainees in the LFNAS according to their educational background is shown in Table 2. About 94% of the enrollees in Ilesha have completed at least junior secondary school compared with just under 70% of those in both the Panda and Dongo Dawa schools. Ilesha school had five enrollees (6%) with a post-secondary school qualification, while Dongo Dawa had only one. Panda school, at the time of this study, did not have enrollees with a post-secondary qualification.

Table 2: Classification of trainees according to their educational background

Educational background	Ilesha (%)	Panda (%)	Dongo Dawa (%)
JSS	1.21	13.1	12.8
SSSCE	92.6	55.8	55
OND	2.5	0	0
NCE	1.2	0	0
HND	1.2	0	1.6
B.SC	1.2	0	0
No education	0	31.1	30.6

The post-secondary education the enrollees claimed to have ranged from the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), Ordinary National Diploma (OND) to Higher National Diploma (HND) and Bachelor of Science (BSc). That we are having people with higher educational qualifications enrolling in a program designed for secondary school level is a reflection of the growing unemployment among graduates in Nigeria and a potential area of intervention and impact for the program of the LFNAS type. It is the belief of these investigators that many people with post-secondary school qualifications will continue to apply for the program in future, even though most in this category who are more academically mature and trainable will not be willing participants. There is the possibility that they would jump 'out of the boat' once they secure jobs in their primary area of interest or those commensurate with their qualifications.

There were reasonable proportions of enrollees (over 32%) in Dogon Dawa and Panda who had no formal educational background. None of this category was found in Ilesha. Discussions with ex-trainees of several sets showed that this percentage is on the increase in these two schools. The medium of communication in the training is English and those with no formal education may not be able to fully benefit. The question then is: should the medium of communication in the two schools be changed to Hausa? This issue is raised

because findings revealed that a large number of the enrollees in the two schools (Panda and Dogon Dawa) could only be effectively communicated with in Hausa, and yet most of the instructors do not understand the Hausa language. However, the school principals, instructors, enrollees and ex-trainees empathetically indicated that the medium of communication should remain English. The enrollees who could not understand English have been surviving by depending on their colleagues who understand the language and who give them extra lessons at their convenient time in the Hausa language. Educational background is the most salient factor in the trainability of enrollees, more so when one considers that the training not only entails practical work but exposes them to theoretical explanations of most of what they practise on farms in the form of lectures. The minimum educational requirement of school before enrolling in a LFNAS program is junior secondary school. The organisers of the program specifically stated that for admission, enrollees must have certain requirements, one of which is the ability to speak and write English (Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) 1999). To be able to speak and write English functionally in Nigeria, a person must have a basic education which formally terminates at the end of junior secondary school (NPE 2004).

Study question 3: What is the occupational background of the enrollees before enrolling in the LFNAS program?

Apart from educational background, another factor that affects the trainability of enrollees is their occupational engagement prior to enrolment in the program. Table 3 shows the trainees' occupational engagement before enrolling in the LFNAS.

Table 3: Occupation of trainees before admission in the LFNAS*

Ilesha	Panda and Dongo Dawa
Painting	Carpentry
Farming	Farming
Schooling	Poultry attendant
Photography	Photography
Assisting father at work	Technician
Employee at livestock farm	Employee at furniture company
Computer operator	Knitting
Electrician	Schooling
Just completed an agricultural program	Tailoring
Band business	
Assisting mother	
Apprentice artisan	
Petrol station attendant	
Jobless	
Business	
Technician surveyor	
Computer training	
Fresh graduate without a job	

* The occupations are presented in the order of popularity among the trainees. In Ilesa, the most prominent occupation of the trainees before enrolment was painting followed by farming. In Panda and Dongo Dawa, the trainees' most prominent occupation before enrolment was carpentry

The table shows that the enrollees in the LFNAS program came from very diverse occupational backgrounds. Categorising trainees' initial engagement prior to their enrolment as farming, artisans, business/ trading, schooling and jobless, gives the following figure.

Figure 1: Occupation of trainees before enrolment
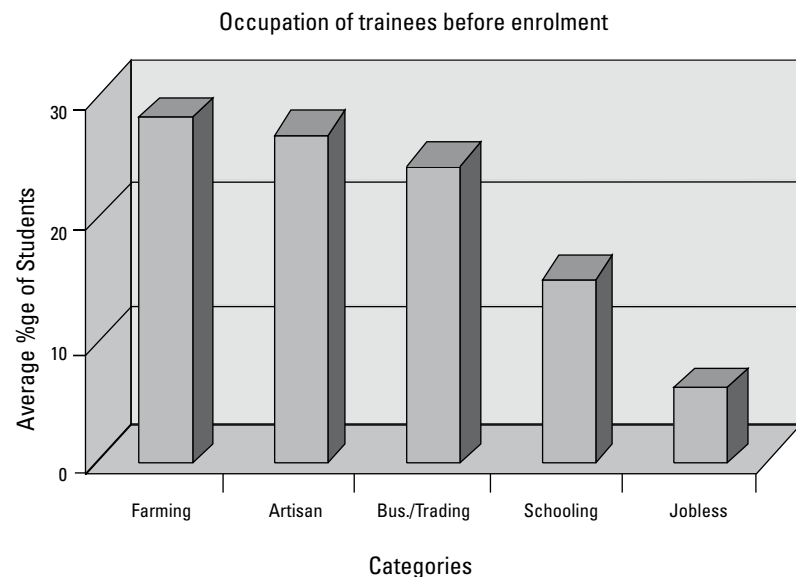
In the three schools, an average of 28% came from farming engagement and another 27% were initially involved in artisan work (carpentry, painting, electrician and so on), while 24% claimed to have been initially involved in a kind of business or trading. Fifteen percent were still schooling before enrolment and about six percent were attracted to the school program because they were jobless. Trainees are expected to take a wide range of decisions incidental to a career in farming, and efforts should be made to continue to admit young adults with 'good standing in their village' (Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) 1999) who can play the dual role of taking to farming as a career and acting as catalyst to other youths in their respective communities. LFNAS aims at producing ex-trainees who can positively influence their peers and community, engaging trainees with no education, as not being able to speak or write English will impair their trainability greatly.

For admission purpose, candidates for LFNAS must have access to two to three hectares of land, and declare their intent to start working on their own farm after leaving the school. This is in fact the reason why the organisers of the program want those who have hitherto been involved in farming to enrol in the schools. It is believed that those who had been interested in farming will be more trainable.

Study question four: What is the career motivation/ aspiration of the enrollees before enrolling in the course?

Career motivation or aspiration is one other factor that can affect the trainability of the enrollees at LFNAS. Tables 4a and b indicate the various reasons for enrolment and the expectation of the enrollees.

Table 4a: Proportion of enrollees indicating reasons for enrolling in the LFNAS program in Ilesa

Reasons for enrolment (Ilesha)	Number of enrollees	Percentage of enrollees
To learn about modern farming technique	92	74.2
To learn how to rear animals in future	58	46.8
To become a high ranking farmer	37	29.8
To learn about animal production and agro-forestry	24	19.4
To be able to vaccinate livestock	18	14.5
To gain and update knowledge on animal production and agricultural practices in general	9	7.3
To gain knowledge and experience in breeding birds, soap-making, cake and snack-making	7	5.6

Table 4b: Proportion of enrollees indicating reasons for enrolling in the LFNAS programs in Panda and Dongo Dawa (together)

Reasons for enrolment (Panda and Dongo Dawa)	Number of enrollees	Percentage of enrollees
To learn about the practical aspect of agriculture	74	60.2
To learn about livestock and modern farming techniques	67	54.5
To be self-reliant	56	45.5
To learn about animal production	52	42.3
To become a better farmer	44	35.8
To be an employer of labour	31	25.2
To be a farming engineer	22	17.9
To be a millionaire	3	2.4

It is clear that most of the stated aspirations are positive in relation to the goals set by the school. It is interesting to observe that some trainees believed they could become millionaires easily by using improved, mechanised farming techniques. Agriculture, certainly, is a profitable venture but the fact that more that 10% of the ex-trainees interviewed are not making a career out of farming is an indication that there could be obstacles.

The study, however, reveals some negative perceptions among the trainees which can affect their trainability. These include:

- trainees are falling sick due to cultivation of many hectares to satisfy trainers
- trainees desire to be treated as adults who have goals to be great
- make certificate awarded at the end of the program suitable for employment
- trainees need more theoretical understanding of what they are doing
- there is too much drudgery in the program – for example, using trainees to do what should be mechanised

- trainees and trainers need more training materials, including computers.

These comments, most of which actually come from enrollees in the Ilesha School since they could express themselves more fully, were like complaints. From the discussion with enrollees, this could create a feeling of being in the wrong place, which will invariably affect their trainability, career plans and the ability to be a positive influence on peers and their community with respect to farming. Some of their comments say volumes about the method of cultivation used by trainees which entails a lot of 'drudgery', 'indecent treatment' and which make them 'fall sick'. Farming can only be made pleasurable if modern techniques are used. This is probably why the organisers of the program demand that the trainees must be physically fit and willing to work hard.

Study question five: What is the profile of the trainers of the enrollees in the LFNAS?

To appreciate the trainability of the enrollees, the profile of the trainers also needs to be examined; after all, the trainers cannot train beyond their own capacity. The characteristics of the trainers are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7 (the overall average age of the trainers was 40.1 years).

Table 5: Profile of trainers of the LFNAS program in Ilesa (average age: 38.2)

S/N	Age (in years)	Highest educational qualification	Field of specialisation	Experience in LFNAS (in years)	Courses taught or assignment	Average no. of trainees involved
1	35	M.Sc.	Agro-forestry and agriculture	5	Agro-forestry 101 Agro-forestry 102	65 65
2	37	T.T. Grade I (Agricultural Technician)	Agricultural mechanisation	5	Farm mechanisation	55
3	46	HND	Agricultural engineering	17	Agric. engineering Farm calculation Metalwork Maintenance work	63 63 82 82
4	39	B. Agriculture	Agricultural extension and rural sociology	3	General science Agricultural extension Extension visas to ex-trainers Market survey	60 60 60 60
5	32	M.Sc.	Agricultural economics	3	Rural finance Post-harvest technology Market survey Monitoring of ex-trainees	65 65
6	35	NCE (Home Economics) B.Ed. (Guidance & Counselling)	Home economics	10	Home economics (theory) Practical processing Cloth dying Processing of soya beans, cassava etc.	70 70
7	38	Postgraduate Diploma in Agriculture	Crop production	4	Crop production	70
8		HND	General agric. and horticulture	11	Crop production	60
9	44	HND	Crop production, Bee-keeping	7	Farm management Bee-keeping Agric. forestry Crop/agro-forestry	60 60 60 55
10	38	DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine)	Animal production	3	Animal production & traction Animal production & fish production Importance of toasting soya beans Identification of feed ingredients Feed formulation	38 40 38 40 70

Table 6: Profile of trainers of the LFNAS program in Dongo Dawa (average age: 40.5)

S/N	Age (in years)	Highest educational qualification	Field of specialisation	Experience in LFNAS (in years)	Courses taught or assignment	Average no. of trainees involved
1	43	Advanced Diploma	Accounting and finance	14	Communication skills, administration & supervision	79
2	49	M.Sc.	Forest resources management	2	Agro-forestry	60
3	50	HND	Animal health husbandry	12	Animal production & health fisheries, Animal traction/grass cutter	80
4	40	M.Sc.	Crop production	3	Crop production Farm management	85 85
5	35	M.Sc.	Crop protection and plant pathology	3	Crop production	100
6	38	HND	Agricultural engineering	3	Simple farm calculation, Agric mechanisation Fabrication work	60 65
7	36	Registered Nurse	Nursing	12	Rural education, Rural enterprise	
8	38	Trade Test	Welding arc & gas	16	Engineering practical (fabrication)	65
9	41	B.Sc. (Agric.)	Agricultural economics, agricultural extension	3	General agriculture, Rural enterprise	68 68
10	39	OND (Veterinary)	Animal health & production	9	Bee-keeping, Animal traction, Animal production	80 80 80
11	37	Primary School Leaving Certificate	Crop production	15	Crop production	96
12	40	WAEC	Home economics, family life development	16	Rural enterprise	68

Table 7: Profile of trainers of the LFNAS program in Panda (average age: 41.4)

S/N	Age (in years)	Highest educational qualification	Field of specialisation	Experience in LFNAS (in years)	Courses taught or assignment	Average no. of trainees involved
1	36	B. Engineering	Agricultural engineering	3	Farm calculations Agric. engineering	51 51
2	44	PGD	Soil science and crop production	6	(not clearly specified by the respondent)	70
3	48	ADPA/CHE	Community health & health administration	2	Health education, family planning, first aid	80% of the trainee population
4	45	HND	Electrical/ mechanical engineering maintenance	3	Training trainees to maintain & fabricate simple agricultural equipment	
5	44	MBA	Financial management	3	Use of English, Office practice	37 75
6	39	M.Sc.	Agricultural economics	3	Farm management & extension, Rural enterprise development	50 50
7	44	PhD	Agro-forestry	2	Agro-forestry, Bee-keeping	51 51
8	46	B.Sc.	Animal husbandry	5	Poultry production, General ruminant husbandry, Diseases & their control, Management practices, Development – administrative & identification	60 40 40 40 40
9	33	HND	Agricultural extension	4	Agric. science, General science/ chemistry Field demonstration	75 75 75
10	35	M.Forestry	Agro-forestry	2	Agro-forestry Bee-keeping	74 74

The tables show that there is a broad distribution of qualified people in most of the disciplines. Many of the trainers are highly qualified, including one with a PhD degree.

So as not to base the trainers' capacity to train solely on educational qualification, the trainees were asked to rate their instructors. The majority of the trainees indicated that the instruction assisted them in understanding their lessons (95.7%), that the trainers gave relevant examples (95.7%), that the instructors put emphasis on the important aspects of the topic which helped them to discover new ideas (82%) and that the instructors spoke audibly enough (82%). These are positive attributes of the instructors which can indeed enhance the enrollees' learning. However, only 61% reported that their instructors gave comprehensive notes. This is an area where the instructors could improve their training.

Conclusions

Vocational training which is carried out in a way that provides trainees with the productive ability to secure gainful employment or be self-reliant (Longe & Adedeji 2003) is ever desired. If there is not enough financial backing from the organisers, the parents/guardians and even the government, training cannot be without its difficulties. Trainee (enrollees) in the LFNAS may not be enchanted if they cannot be self-reliant on completion, and if they must seek employment, they should be qualified for absorption into relevant vocations. However, according to the ex-trainees, there is that 'offensive' requirement that the certificates awarded cannot be used for gaining employment. People are therefore left to imagine what the Leventis Foundation means by this requirement. This restriction, along with some other factors identified, could determine to a great extent the trainability of enrollees in the Leventis Foundation (Nigeria) Agricultural Schools' programs.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Entering Research

Ann Lawless and Barbara Sedorkin

The 'Research report' section of the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* was 'rebooted' in 2006 after a short absence from the pages of this journal. The goal of the editorial team was to have at least one research report appear in each issue of the journal, and to rebuild the section in order to support dissemination of research works-in-progress and completed research projects, support first time and relatively inexperienced authors while also welcoming more experienced authors and researchers, and create a forum for dialogue about real-world practices in educational research. One member of the team took responsibility for prompting and eliciting submissions (Ann Lawless), and another for receiving and editing them (Roger Harris).

Understandably this editorial approach to an un-refereed publication tends to attract authors who are research students at a university, practitioner researchers and community-driven researchers.

One such author is Barbara Sedorkin who in 2006 submitted an extract from a book she is researching on the Parks High School in South Australia, shaping her research around a community perspective of educational issues, and for which she has consciously chosen to find an authorial voice which is accessible to the local community. She deliberately avoided dense academic language and abstract theorisation in order to privilege a grounded voice which can be recognised by (and comes from) the community with which she engages and of which she is a member.

As Barbara and Ann worked together, they realised they had common concerns and life experiences. Each proudly identifies as working class Australian, each is involved with studying at a university, each has a mobility disability and each values strong family and community connections. They were able to swap ideas about how to access and support local community resources. They discussed together why and how they use written language to represent the issues and communities that inspire their research.

As they talked they came to realise that amidst their common concerns and life experiences was a determination to live an active life while also managing their mobility disabilities; that they had each had critical moments in their lives when they had refused to surrender to pain and misery but make those difficulties assets and strengths in their lives. They asked each other – well, why haven't you become a victim of your disability? Each felt that social engagement was not a burden but a liberating force in their lives that contributed to their health and positive attitude to the aches and pains of life.

And out of that conversation came a decision to work together on a future 'research report' on how recent breakthroughs into

the sociology of health can help educators in their work with marginalised populations. In this short story of two researchers, we have shown you how we have 'entered research', that is, entered the earliest conception of research and the early formation of research collaboration.

BOOK REVIEW

Workplace learning: principles and practice

Robert W. Rowden
Melbourne, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, October 2006
ISBN: 1-57524-268-0 (cloth), 160 pages, US$26.50

This book (one in The Professional Practices in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Series) should be required reading in Australia or anywhere else for those people who are trying to solve the problem of skills shortages. This includes the managers of organisations that are feeling the pain of skills shortages; the educators who have the task of producing people with the necessary skills, and the agencies that fund the training and development programs and feel the need to quantify the outcomes.

Robert Rowden has been examining the various ways that workers learn to do their jobs for more than 15 years. He has done that from the standpoint of both industrial and academic positions. As a

consequence his publications in the area of workplace learning are based on practical experience as well as on research and study. He is currently an Associate Professor of Adult Education and Human Resource Development at Florida Atlantic University. It is worth noting that one of the editors of this series by Krieger Publishing Company is Sharan Merriam, well known for her work on adult learning.

While this book contains valuable material for the wider audience, Rowden specifically addresses the community of workplace trainers. He sets out to persuade them that they have to change their approach from one that 'fills empty heads' with explicit information describing repetitious activities in a remote classroom to one that facilitates the formation of learning communities in the workplace.

He is driven by the recognition that the revolution in information technology and communications has shifted the source of competitive advantage for enterprises away from production and processes to knowledge management. This applies across the entire society including private companies, not-for-profit agencies and the public service sector.

Rowden takes the reader through a carefully constructed argument that starts with the traditional practice of workplace teaching in which learners are presented with a set of codified practices, procedures and processes that they must know and apply in order to perform their job to the satisfaction of their supervisors. The attraction of this approach is that it includes many aspects that are tangible and can be quantified. Courses prepared and delivered, classroom learner-days, dollars expended and certificates of proficiency awarded can all be measured and reported as indicators of successful programs to produce skilled workers. He notes many shortcomings of this approach, including that work universally involves transactions between people, that division of work among team members can change over time, that explicit procedures are never sufficient and

need to be underpinned by tacit knowledge and that true learning cannot be divorced from practice. He develops a vision of a much expanded role for human resource developers and adult educators that supports the formation of learning organisations characterised by collaboration rather than competition, recognition of the differences in expertise and tacit knowledge between individuals, and social mechanisms for the resolution of conflict, the induction of new-comers, and the honourable departure of those that have reached their use-by date.

Throughout the development of his case, Rowden reiterates the necessity to respond to the new world environment and emphasises that the people whose prime responsibility is training and development must first undergo their own change process and embrace the new paradigm. He tells the trainers and developers of skilled workers that their first step is to become skilled themselves in the formation of communities of practice. He makes the point several times that management support is vital to the transformation of the approach to workplace learning. That is certainly true but Rowden misses an opportunity to emphasise that the management layers must not only be supportive but must also think of themselves as workers and change their approach from one which embodies a competitive posture and power derived from monopoly of information, to one that is the direct opposite, namely, information sharing and collaborative knowledge generation. This may be the most difficult hurdle to overcome before the new paradigm can take hold in those organisations where fierce competition and monopolisation of information are preconditions for promotion.

The argument is well structured, progressing from an early discussion of training and development which Rowden then places in the context of the modern globalised, knowledge-driven organisation. Having established that the old style teaching paradigm is no longer adequate to ensure that workers have the necessary skills (it probably

never was), Rowden describes individual learning, moves on to the importance of the workplace group in the process of continuous collaborative learning and arrives at a discussion of organisational learning, before wrapping up the presentation with a discussion of the process of transition from the old training paradigm to the new workplace learning paradigm and its future.

Rowden accepts that there is a place for the classroom type of training but demonstrates that this is not adequate to ensure that an enterprise maintains a competitive position in the globalised environment in which knowledge is the critical asset. The development, capture and application of knowledge are social processes. The Industrial Revolution exchanged technology and processes for social institutions. Enterprises that derive advantage from the Knowledge Revolution are rediscovering and reinstating social practices, albeit aided by technology that performs a necessary but not sufficient function.

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BOOK REVIEW

Teacher man

Professors of education at New York University never lectured on how to handle the flying sandwich situations. They talked about theories and philosophies of education, about moral and ethical imperative ... but never about critical moments in the classroom.

Angela's ashes introduced us to Frank McCourt's storytelling skills. It is a poignant account of growing up with poverty in Ireland. His third book, *Teacher man*, despite having no index or citations, is a text worthy of any reading list designed to develop educators. It offers a rich banquet of pedagogic wisdom and ideas for educational practitioners and writers.

In honesty, my initial responses to the academic value of this book was flavoured with many "buts".

But … he taught kids in the New York of the 60s and 70s, and I am involved in professional education in the high tech environment of 2000s.

But … he taught literature and creative writing, and I'm an educationalist struggling to make a difference in a Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning at a science-based university.

But … the writing poetically and effortlessly reminds us how our work-based experiences, our own processes and limitations can become our best teachers. The quality of the prose gently eases the reader into critical reflection as the tasty relevance of his experiences hops lightly off every page.

> Here they come.
> And I'm not ready.
> How could I be?
> I'm a new teacher learning on the job.

The key ingredients of this gourmet guide to contemporary pedagogic survival are the Three Rs – Rules, Reframing and Risk-taking.

The traditional rules, enforced by school managers, remain familiar. The novice McCourt was expected to follow lesson plans, engage and motivate learners and so on. Then, as now, these rules and requirements fail to acknowledge the informal power dynamics operating in the classroom. McCourt offers alternative principles of engagement for surviving the realities of classrooms or tutorial groups.

> Watch your step teacher, don't make yourself a problem.
> They'll cut you down.
> They know when they have you on the run.
> Teachers and kids have to stick together in the face of parents, supervisors and the world in general.

> They like big words, they take them home and intimidate their families.

He reminds us to value honesty and openness when he admits: "… someday I hope to be a master teacher but meantime I can only keep trying".

He agrees with Paulie's mum that her son might never need to spell usufruct and that spelling handkerchief would be more suitable as he'll "be blowing his nose for the rest of his life".

This is a master class in the use of humour and storytelling to engage and motivate. Faced with disinterested, disengaged students, he recognised the potential of a draw full of forged parental excuse notes. McCourt read the contents out aloud, omitting names "to protect the guilty". He laughed along with his students at:

> Her baby brother peed on her story when she was in the bathroom this morning

or

> He was going over the composition on the ferry when a big wind came and blowed it away.

He set them new assignments like "write an excuse note from Adam to God".

> I thought I was teaching
> I was learning.
> And you call yourself a teacher?

The author consistently acknowledges students as his teachers and demonstrates how to reframe difficult situations:

> Mr McCourt you're lucky. You had that miserable childhood so you do have something to write about.

When the proud parents of Harry, the class know-it-all and major disruptive factor, asked whether their son behaves in class, they are told: "He contributes to all our discussions". In the face of blatant plagiarism our hero might be "given B+ for the effort of copying and typing".

Frankie was a risk-taker forced by experience and circumstance to be creative, innovative and develop subtle or less orthodox means of engaging learners. He told stories. "Classes listened, they participated. They didn't know I was teaching grammar." Unfortunately, this invisible teaching wasn't always identifiable by head teachers and his approaches did not offer an easy career path. Not all McCourt's bosses agreed with principles like: "if ever a class drags, turn immediately to the various forms of execution".

Educational wisdom says never threaten a class or individual but the account of the Benny Boom-Boom episode illustrates how sometimes taking the big risk pays off. We choose our risks and live with the consequences. McCourt's honesty offers us chances to be kinder to ourselves, learn from our mistakes, take another risk and feel alive.

Bringing subjective experiences to the classroom can be risky. Phyllis' reading of her family being torn between watching the moon landing and sitting with her dying father required the teacher to manage a classroom full of tearful students. Recalling my own social work experiences, I could hardly breathe as the author described risking a trip to the cinema with a group of 20 sassy African Caribbean girls. Believing attempts to teach the lippy gang leader had failed, he was relieved when she left his class. But willingness to take risks was repaid when her friend read the class a letter from this most disruptive of pupils:

> ... she says this gonna kill you, Mr McCourt but she is gonna finish high school and teach little kids, not big kids like us cos we just a great pain ... She says sorry bout the things she did in class. One day she is gonna write you a letter.

I guess we all had our flying sandwich moment where the skills required to manage a situation were never part of our professional development. Frank McCourt ate the sandwich hurled across the classroom by a disruptive student. His impulsive reaction impressed the kids but he was forced to swallowed the criticism of the head teacher and risk a parental complaint.

I'm left inspired to be brave and take equivalent risks in my teaching and my writing. Any pedagogue choosing to read *Teacher man*, a text book disguised as a novel, is likely to learn a great deal.

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BOOK REVIEW

Popular education: engaging the academy. International perspectives

Jim Crowther, Vernon Galloway & Ian Martin (eds.)
Leicester, UK: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2005
ISBN: 1 86021 209 1, 223 pages, £18.95

I write this review not as someone who works in the field of adult education, as the term is commonly used in this text, but as someone who works in the field of education and in a university, two major themes of this text. It caused me to reflect a great deal on my role and purpose within the academy and is a thought-provoking text for all those who work within adult education in the widest sense of the word. The co-edited book contains 19 contributions from around the world, mainly European but including Australian, South African, and North and South American. The editors have written much on the theme of popular education, including in Scotland.

This text aims to bring together experienced and new international writers to examine the relationship between popular and higher education.

> It shows how university-based teachers and researchers can use their work to support and resource popular struggles for democracy, equality and social justice, at a time when all the demands being made upon them are towards institutional *dis*engagement from social and political action (p.1).

The book intends to promote and debate the radicalisation of education. The editors argue that it is largely those who work at the marginal areas of universities who are mainly engaged in the debate. This text will be a contribution to widening the margin and comes at a time when radicalisation is a multi-faceted and important issue for research and discussion.

The book has three parts: popular education – values, contexts and purposes; generating knowledge, radicalising education; and engaging in educational practices. In the first section on values, contexts and purposes, there is a range of contributions which focus on the changes in contexts, debates about the role of higher education and its purposes. Astrid von Kotze, in a moving account of the changed face of the academy in South Africa, opens the first section with a debate about higher education's role in a democratic society with a tradition of radicalism in an undemocratic situation. She argues for five purposes and one stands out as central to the role of the academy in many societies, to ask questions 'that smoke out agendas and scrutinise conflicting interests, as opposed to simply positioning them as part of 'diversity' and 'stakeholder positions' (p.19). Michael Newman develops a conceptual framework for social action drawing on Freirian roots. He proposes three possible categories of action: conventional action, confrontational action and violence. He argues that the role of the academy is to teach about different forms of action, the sites of that action, domains of learning

and different forms of social action, but above all to teach about and support moral choice. Liam Kane's chapter 'Ideology matters' is a discussion of the role of ideology in practice. He argues that it is more than methodological techniques and develops a conceptual framework for how ideology shapes educational practice. Ralf St Clair uses the example of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, USA and Myles Horton to focus on the role of the academy in social change. He argues that academics 'have a role to play in popular education – not as experts or teachers, but as collaborators in the fight for change' (p.51). He debates the role of academics as researchers and argues for the responsibility of academics to respond to social change. Paula Guimãraes and Amélia Victoria Sanchez write about the Portuguese experience of low rates of participation in popular educational initiatives and in rates of formal educational achievement in comparison to other European countries. Their research suggests that a different model of popular education based in people's lived experience is the way forward. The first section ends with Rennie Johnston's chapter about the 'Problems of *praxis*'. He draws on a small survey and writings in the field to explore the relationship between rhetoric, especially empty rhetoric, and reality in popular education. His survey illuminates the breadth and diversity of contexts. He concludes that there is a need for more detailed research and mapping of popular education *praxis.*

The second part of the book has knowledge generation as its theme. Jonathan Grossman from South Africa argues that those working from the academy need to challenge notions of 'need' and engage with the knowledge of the most suppressed and marginalised in society. Lídia Puigvert and Rosa Vallis draw on the considerable experience of the Centre for Research on Theories and Practices at the University of Barcelona to argue for a dialogic model of learning in popular education: "Popular education movements are part of the process of paving the way towards more democratic societies through dialogic learning". The role of the academy is to support this through theory building and rigorous analysis of social processes. Bob Boughton writes about the Australian Marx School. He argues that an important task is the understanding of the socialist and communist education traditions of the past. Sue Mansfield writes as a feminist arguing for biographical writing and experience as a powerful source for learning, for connecting the personal and the political. Barbara Merrill in a later chapter speaks of biographical research. Drawing on a research project, she argues for the aim of collective learning through biographical research rather than the individualistic model more commonly employed. Maria Clara Buena Fischer's is the remaining chapter in this section. She writes of the process of 'systematisation' – 'a description and analysis of practice by those who experience it' (p.124) – and its potential both as a methodology in the academy and as a way of connecting to groups involved in social change.

The final part of the book entitled 'Engaging in education practice' contains rich narratives to inform the debates about practice. John Payne writes about the experiences of British pensioners to illustrate the power of informal learning experiences. He writes of lifelong learning, what it means and why it matters. James Whelan, a lecturer at Griffith University, draws on this experience in Australia of an environmental group's campaign in Brisbane to inform his discussion of social action. John Grayson recounts the struggle of the British Tenants Movement and the part played by Northern College. Dan Baron Cohen engages with a radical movement in Brazil and discusses the role of the arts. Brid Connolly's narrative is of the Irish women's movement and she discusses the social forces that limit the power of such movements. Two other chapters by Claudia Flores Morena and Griff Foley focus on work in Mexico and argue for schools as a site of social action and emancipatory educational work respectively.

A review of such brevity cannot do full justice to such a comprehensive work and to the richness of the individual contributions. That notwithstanding, this is an impressive collection

and its aims are worthy and unusual today. The editors argue that the network from which this work arises aims to be 'political and partisan' (p.3) and to critique the position of higher education in a neo-liberal, managerialist and marketplace economy. Their argument is that 'there is not enough intellectual and political argument going on in the academy' (p.4). This is certainly true. Times have changed and the context is a complex one to engage with. One feeling I had as I read of the experiences of the past and the theoreticians of the past was of the welcome clarity and simplicity of the struggle for social justice then – there were clearer routes and positions. How to engage the mainstream and the margins of those who work in higher education in this 'bottom-up' rather than the top-down process of learning being pushed so heavily on universities, is a major challenge. There is much in this text to inform that thinking and to inspire.

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BOOK REVIEW

Political liberalism

Columbia Classics in Philosophy (Expanded Edition)

John Rawls
New York: Columbia University Press, 2006 (first edition 1993)
ISBN: 0-231-13089-9, 490 pages, US$27

The contemporary world is fraught with many conflicts which are in essence ideological: old battles between Catholic and Protestant resurface around the issue of women's access to abortion [for example, Portugal February 2007], while international relations are becoming framed by the even more ancient history of struggles between Islam and Christianity.

Australia has not been unaffected in all this: debates on abortion and stem cell research are fuelled by a Catholic presence in the Coalition Government's Cabinet; meanwhile, public fears of Islamic terrorism

have ignited debate about whether immigrants should have to subscribe to a set of 'Australian values', echoing Geoffrey Blainey's dire warnings about the risks of multicultural immigration policy.

Issues such as these are central to John Rawls' discussion in *Political liberalism* which deals with the question of how to maintain a stable and democratic civil society when there are significant divisions within it.

The late John Rawls (1921–2002) earned his doctorate at Princeton, teaching there and also at Oxford (where he was influenced by Isaiah Berlin and others) and ultimately becoming professor emeritus of philosophy at Harvard University. The book *Political liberalism* consists of a series of nine lectures in the following parts:

> Part I – The basic elements of political liberalism: fundamental ideas, and the powers of citizens and their representation
>
> Part II – The three main ideas of political liberalism: the idea of an Overlapping Consensus, the priority of Right and Ideas of the Good, and the idea of Public Reason
>
> Part III – Institutional framework: the basic structure as subject, the basic liberties and their priority, and a reply to Habermas
>
> Part IV – The idea of public reason revisited.

Central to Rawls' argument is the concept of *reasonable pluralism*. In an earlier work (*A theory of justice*), Rawls envisioned a stable society with a social order based on homogeneity and shared values, echoing traditional conceptions of justice which assumed that there was only one 'reasonable and rational good'. In *Political liberalism* on the other hand, Rawls presumes the existence of many *reasonable comprehensive doctrines*, each with its own conception of the good and therefore potentially in conflict with each other, but each compatible with human reason (p.134).

In this book, Rawls addresses the fundamental question: how can a society remain stable and just if there are deep divisions due to the existence of these reasonable but incompatible beliefs? His answer is that society can be unified, not by shared moral beliefs but by a shared commitment to a political sense of justice; that is, people with reasonable, but conflicting, views can agree that society needs to be regulated in such a way that all reasonable views can be supported. Rawls' proposition is that the potential for an *overlapping consensus* of beliefs enables a 'free-standing' political liberalism which is independent of particular doctrines and to which all can subscribe (p.140).

Thus *political liberalism* (p.138) is a new approach to the theory of social order whereby political values override religious and other principles, and questions of justice are settled by appeal to political values alone.

In his discussion Rawls makes a number of useful conceptual differentiations. Thus he distinguishes between self-interested *rationality* and the more collaborative *reasonableness*. He contrasts *reasonable pluralism* and mere *pluralism* – the latter permitting doctrines "that are not only irrational but mad and aggressive" (p.144). Furthermore, Rawls differentiates a stability established according to the principle of *toleration* (based on reasonableness) and one which is a mere *modus vivendi* based on self-interested rationality.

In addressing these issues around the creation of social order, Rawls illustrates his arguments by reference to older social conflicts such as Protestantism versus Catholicism in the 16th century and the anti-slavery campaign in the 19th century but also to more contemporary issues such as the Civil Rights movement (p.249), Women's Liberation and the rise of Islam.

Rawls is meticulously detailed in the way he addresses issues and precise in his logic. However, there are occasional silences which flow naturally from the argument but limit its range and strength. For example, Rawls appears oddly ambiguous on the matter of women's rights. On the one hand, he draws on the principle of *justice as fairness* (argued in his earlier work, *A theory of justice*) to lament the fate of women who "… continue to bear an unjust share of the task of raising, nurturing, and caring for their children" (p.470). However, he asserts that the approach of *political liberalism* doesn't apply in this instance, since there is a distinction "… between the point of view of people as citizens and their point of view as members of families and other associations" (p.469), arguing further:

> We wouldn't want political principles of justice – including principles of distributive justice – to apply directly to the internal life of the family … at some point society has to rely on the natural affection and goodwill of the mature family member (p.470).

Moreover, the issue of women's rights is limited to a discussion on the sharing of childcare roles within the family – to the exclusion of more potent issues such as domestic abuse, 'honour' killings and female circumcision. Unfortunately, a proposed revised edition of *Political liberalism* (which might have extended this analysis) never eventuated due to Rawls' illness and subsequent death (p.439).

With regard to the issue of slavery in America, Rawls suggests that Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists could have approached the problem by respecting the South's "shared political understanding on the slavery question" (p.45) rather than appealing to "the abstraction of natural rights", a principle that the South had rejected. However, Rawls admits this would only be possible in an otherwise 'ordered' society; and in a 'disordered' society any resolution can only come with the exercise of *force majeur*. Thus, in America during the Civil War, slavery was abolished only via military conquest of the South by the North. Similarly, during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, justice and civil order was achieved only by the imposition of Federal Law on recalcitrant Southern states. It seems, then, that political liberalism has little to say about radical social change, including political liberation movements.

At a more general level, Rawls' concept of *public reason* is problematic. Rawls argues for the dominance of *public reason* – the political good sense of people as citizens rather than as adherents of a particular doctrine. However, his notion of what is 'reasonable' seems at times to be modelled on a Western (and somewhat 'aristocratic' New England American) view of the world.

In *Political liberalism*, Rawls explores the sensible (but novel in terms of political philosophy) view that a just society is best achieved by seeking agreement on political rather than ideological principles – especially important in the context of contemporary social conflict. Rawls' discussion is meticulous in its thoroughness, but at certain points its range and impact are limited by the self-imposed restrictions on the arguments. Furthermore, the relentless lock-step character of the analysis can be somewhat daunting. Nevertheless, with this book, the patient reader has the opportunity to be taken on an important journey by a political philosopher with a fine mind.

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BOOK REVIEW

White men are liars: Another look at Aboriginal-Western interactions

Margaret S. Bain
Alice Springs: Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), 2005
ISBN: 0-86892-451-2; 43 + viii pages

With the publication of Michael Moore's *Stupid white men* (2001), followed by Margaret Bain's *White men are liars* (2005), Caucasian males may well be feeling a little ill-treated of late. Bain's work, however, is not a rant against untruthful men, but a useful addition to the body of work attempting to provide an insight into Aboriginal culture.

As she uncovers the underlying factors responsible for miscommunication and misunderstanding between indigenous and non-indigenous people (referred to rather anachronistically by Bain as Aboriginal and Westerner), Bain points the way forward towards mutual understanding and productive relationships between the two.

According to Bain, Westerners are more likely to talk about abstract concepts, such as hatred, love, truth, justice and rights, whereas Aboriginal people prefer to retain 'a direct link with the concretely real'. It is when Westerners break that link, through the use of generic remarks that are interpreted as specific references, that Aboriginal people conclude that white men are indeed liars.

Bain draws her evidence from personal experiences gained working in remote Aboriginal communities for 20 years – mostly in central Australia. There are numerous anecdotes throughout the text that provide interesting and often amusing data to support her thesis. Drawing heavily on an earlier work by Bain titled, *The Aboriginal-white encounter: Towards better communication* (1992), she presents her evidence in three distinct sections looking at language, worldview and social relationships – a logical and effective way to organise her information. Bain also recognises the limitations to her thesis, based as it is on her work primarily with Anangu in the Pitjantjatjara lands, and addresses concerns the reader may have in examining aboriginal and w estern cultures as dichotomies.

Language is the obvious place to start when considering communication and Bain's working knowledge of Pitjantjatjara has given her considerable insight into features of the language that support her thesis. The absence of abstract nouns and a generic verb meaning 'do' in Pitjantjatjara are given as evidence of an Aboriginal tendency towards discussing specific events as opposed to the generalist remarks of Westerners. This can particularly cause problems when government representatives visit communities to obtain general information regarding people's aspirations for housing or health, for example, and the community expects a specific outcome from the consultations. Similarly, Pitjantjatjara speakers make use of the conditional sentence in ways that differ from Westerners. A suggestion of a trip to town, followed by the sentence, 'if we go we will...' would result in the same Pitjantjatjara form as 'when we go we will...', grounding the possibility in reality.

The second section on worldview attempts to elucidate the 'Dreaming', examining Aboriginal people's view of space and time and totemic systems. This is a useful introduction to Aboriginal cultural beliefs, which draws on the work of Stanner, Strehlow and Elkin and makes a comparison with the Western worldview. It is not clear, however, how this section contributes to the overall thesis of the book, with only a rudimentary nod towards the 'consequences for communication' offered at the conclusion of the chapter.

Bain picks up the baton again in the third section looking at social relationships and interactions, arguing quite conclusively that interactions between Aboriginal people are reciprocal whereas Westerners are constantly negotiating interactions between people they do not know. The extensive and elaborate kinship systems of Aboriginal people mean that, traditionally, 'any person they met [could be slotted] into a defined category of "relative"' with its accompanying set of specified roles for giving and receiving and manner of interaction. Whilst Westerners do engage in such reciprocal interactions to a certain extent, they make much more use of negotiated interactions, such as doctor-patient, employer-employee or teacher-pupil. Bain argues quite succinctly that reciprocal interactions are linked directly to specific people or categories of people (mother, brother, aunt etc.), whereas negotiated relationships break this link with reality and enter the realm of the generic/abstract. It is here that Bain's work really offers something useful for people working in Aboriginal communities. She highlights the practical implications of the conflict between these two styles of interacting and draws particular attention to the problems created when Aboriginal people are placed in positions such as store manager or community chairperson. In these roles, Aboriginal people are expected to negotiate their interactions in a Western way, putting pressure on the existing reciprocal relationship.

In her closing remarks, Bain suggests a system of 'gears' is required to absorb some of the pressure created in these circumstances: the use of an intermediary or some attempt by Westerners to modify their communication style to accommodate Aboriginal language and culture. Bain examines this possible solution across a number of areas including law and order, governance and education, concluding on a positive note with a call for Aboriginals to decide how they deal with Western culture.

Overall, Bain's work presents an interesting thesis, which is well supported, and is a useful introduction to Aboriginal culture for those who have little experience in Aboriginal communities. At only 43 pages this book is an easy, yet informative, read.

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JOURNAL SCAN

Auluck, R.K. (2007). 'Mere nip and tuck? Training and development's changing role', ***Industrial and Commercial Training,*** vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 27–34.

The function and role of training and development specialists within organisations has been the subject of much debate and rhetoric. The flavour of these discussions portray the generally accepted view that the role of these specialists now has a greater strategic intent rather than a focus mainly on the delivery and management of training. The research reported in this article tests this belief using a rather novel research method.

In order to obtain some 'measure' of the changing focus of training and development roles within organisations in the United Kingdom, Auluck conducted an analysis of the content of job advertisements in one professional publication (*People management)* over two periods – 1997–1998 and 2003–2004. The author argues that job advertisements can act as a valuable 'marker' of organisations' perceptions of training and development roles and analysis of these artefacts can provide a way to track shifts in thinking. The content of

763 advertisements were scrutinised along 18 dimensions including job title, job description, sector, salary, location, reporting lines, qualifications required, key tasks, experience and expertise required for the role and the qualities required of potential candidates.

This study does not report significant empirical evidence, using this measure, to support the assertion that UK organisations are embracing a changing role for training and development specialists. Role descriptions in the examined advertisements placed greater emphasis on role functions associated with the delivery and management of training than on functions of a more strategic / organisational development focus. There was considerable continuity across time in relation to the skills and abilities desired for these roles, including communication skills, influencing skills, creativity and innovation. The author comments on the diversity of job titles used in the advertisements, suggesting that this is indicative of role ambiguity and how this might undermine the professional image of the occupational grouping in the eyes of the broader public. Auluck concludes by suggesting that an examination of the reasons for the gap between the 'rhetoric and the reality' in relation to training and development roles is needed.

Canning, R. (2007). 'Reconceptualising core skills', ***Journal of Education and Work,*** vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 17–26.

In this article the author tackles the seemingly endless debate about the existence of core skills. This debate is one that has crossed national and international boundaries and continues to give rise to rather heated exchanges between people who hold quite different understandings of the nature of these skills. The debate essentially revolves around the question of the existence of core skills – that is, are they genuinely 'generic' or sets of 'situated practices'? The author presents an argument that current understandings support

the idea that core skills can exist in some decontextualised manner and explores how this is made possible through current curriculum practices.

Core skills are usually taken to mean sets or clusters of skills that are considered to be foundational to effective functioning in the world of work and able to be transferred across different contexts. Within the literature, there appears little consensus about the exact nature of skills that are referred to as 'core' or 'generic', although most descriptions favour the inclusion of such skills as communication, working with others, numeracy, problem-solving and information technology.

Canning argues that the notion of core skills is underpinned by several assumptions that are difficult to sustain given what we now know about learning in the workplace and the nature of workplace practices. He points out that there is little empirical evidence available to support the notion that skills reside in an individual and that they can be 'transported' with the individual across contexts. In terms of learning, these constructions of core skills also ignore what we now know about the socio-cultural nature of learning from the work of theorists such as Lave and Wenger (communities of practice) and Engeström (activity theory). Canning offers a reconceptualisation of core skills, drawing on these theoretical frameworks and uses this as a basis to question current curriculum practices such as the embedding of core skills in curriculum as has occurred in Scotland and other places.

Costley, C. & Armsby, P. (2007). 'Methodologies for undergraduates doing practitioner investigations at work', *Journal of Workplace Learning,* vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 131–145.

Many educational institutions have realised the benefits of providing students with opportunities to undertake work-based projects as part of their learning. These projects, which usually revolve around students as practitioner-researchers, have been identified as critical to the successful development of key graduate outcomes such as innovation, creativity, problem-solving and managing change.

The purpose of this article is to report on the findings from a project designed to examine the teaching and learning associated with practitioner-research conducted as part of one university's undergraduate programs. The other key outcome of the project was the development of a web-based resource that could be utilised by teachers and students from across a number of disciplines to support this mode of learning. The authors provide an overview of the benefits of what they term 'practice-based' approaches to learning and the challenge of developing ways of managing research projects undertaken by students that are both sound as well as in keeping with the needs and expectations of all key players. They particularly emphasise the value of authentic work-based settings as sites for student projects, while also acknowledging some of the limitations associated with research in workplaces such as the generalisability of findings and the challenge of designing projects that are sensitive to the context in which they will be placed.

Costley and Armsby describe the processes they used to develop the web-based resource. Some of the key learnings from the project included the managing of the tension between attempting to maintain a transdisciplinary focus when developing the web-based resource and the tendency for parties to align themselves with their specific discipline. It was also important to ensure that research-based approaches to student projects were informed by an awareness of

current events and thinking in the field and acknowledgement of the role of students as 'insiders'. The authors also examine the types of research tools and methods that might be available to students undertaking these forms of research, the ethical considerations that necessarily arise out of conducting research in workplaces, and the importance of managing collaborative relationships and the subsequent impact this has on the ways in which a project might evolve over time. The authors conclude by emphasising the importance of acknowledging the differences between students undertaking research in their work situations and other kinds of research that might be undertaken within university settings.

Levy, P. (2006). 'Learning a different form of communication: experiences of networked learning and reflections on practice', *Studies in Continuing Education,* vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 259–277.

Networked learning utilises information and communications technology to link learners and learning facilitators with resources. Approaches to facilitating this form of learning draw heavily on constructivist and social learning theories to explain how learning occurs. Particular emphasis is placed on dialogue and collaboration within these learning sites.

This article presents a case study of the experiences of learners and a facilitator engaged in a course entitled 'Networked learner support in higher education' designed for practitioners who work in learner support roles in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. The course aimed to provide these practitioners with opportunities to engage with new ideas and build technical expertise in a networked learning environment. The course was offered totally on-line and required practitioners to devote between six and eight hours per week to their learning over a 17-week period. Within the learning environment, practitioners were exposed to a variety of learning resources including web-based, asynchronous and synchronous conference tools to facilitate access to information and social engagement with other learners.

The case study presented in this article largely takes the perspective of the learners who were engaged in the course, although it also includes the experiences and reflections of the author (who was a facilitator for the course). Data used to assemble the case study were collected from a variety of sources including participant observation, analysis of on-line conversations (transcripts), face-to-face interviews, on-line dialogue, reflections with peer tutors and a post-course questionnaire.

The author provides a detailed description of the course including some of the key activities that learners were required to complete. The experiences of the learners as they worked through their learning experience are richly portrayed. Issues addressed include: 'making relationships' in the learning environment, the challenge of presenting oneself in writing via messages posted to forums, the impact of different sized groups for on-line discussion, and the challenges associated with learning the different forms of communication needed to negotiate successfully the learning environment. The success of the learning environment is evaluated with reference to task, information, and socio-technical and tutoring issues.

Walter, P. (2007). 'Adult learning in new social movements: environmental protest and the struggle for the Clayoquot Sound rainforest', *Adult Education Quarterly,* vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 248–263.

This article provides a brief overview of the environmental protests in 1993 to save the old growth temperate rainforests in Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, Canada. Walter uses this story as a case

study to examine the philosophy and practices of the learning, education and activism embedded in these events. As such, the article aims to add to the small but growing literature on new social movements within the field of adult learning.

In the first part of the article, Walter locates the study of new social movements (for example, environmental and peace movements, civil rights, feminist, gay rights) as opposed to the old social movements (trade unions, labour movement, working class political parties). The study of new social movements itself rests on two broad traditions of thought – the American and European traditions. The American tradition is most commonly associated with resource mobilization theory and, more latterly, political process theory. This theory rests on the notion that people will make rational choices and seek to maximise self-interest in pursuit of collective goods. In contrast, the European tradition focuses more on collective identity rather than collective interest. Within this paradigm, new social movements are understood as 'instances of cultural and political praxis through which new identities are formed, new ways of life tested and new forms of community preconfigured' (Carroll cited in Walter, p. 251). Within the adult learning literature that deals with new social movements, both these traditions are not strongly represented – particularly the US tradition. Rather, theorising in the adult education literature focuses on social movements as localities for identity, learning, generation of knowledge as well as personal transformation and social change. Ideas drawn from the writings of Gramsci and Habermas have been taken up in this discourse, particularly those writing about the place of adult learning in environmental adult education.

Following this theoretical framing, the author provides a rich description of the Clayoquot Sound as the setting for the protests and how they unfolded over the summer of 1993. The role of the Peace Camp is signalled out for particular attention for its educative role and the manner in which it embodied many of the theoretical

perspectives evident in the literature on environmental adult education. Walter concludes by making a case for the importance of historical analyses of events such as Clayoquot Sound for the field of adult education.

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