

# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Last December, we witnessed the publication of the *Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education* (Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) by the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education. This Ministerial Declaration is an update of the July 2002 version. It confirms its values and commitments on the value of ACE in developing social capital, building community capacity, encouraging social participation and enhancing social cohesion, but also

... extends acknowledgement of the value of ACE to its potential to respond to changed industrial, demographic and technological circumstances, and encourages a collaborative approach to ACE to allow the sector to make a greater contribution to supporting the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) productivity agenda for skills and workforce development. It also identifies ACE as a key player in the response to the Australian Government Social Inclusion agenda. (p.1)

From these Declarations, we obtain official confirmation of the value of our sector – how it is perceived from above. Such statements reinforce what ACE practitioners know, but it is reassuring to hear them from Ministers. It is clear from the language in these Declarations that there is a swing in the contextual pendulum

towards a higher expectation of the vocational contribution from the ACE sector. It is a sector which 'offers highly supportive pathways into learning, further education and training, and work' (p.5). The Declaration acknowledges that ACE providers have responded to the rising demand for vocationally orientated training – it cites (p.5) figures that in 2005, they provided accredited vocational education to 256,101 learners (15.6% of all VET students).

Among the Strategies in the Declaration, I note such examples under its four goals (pp. 8–9) as:

- promote the significant role played by the ACE sector in developing pathways to further training and workforce participation,
- promote examples of best practice among ACE providers,
- promote the development of a culture of continuous learning and opportunities available within ACE,
- develop a framework to establish a stronger evidence base for the contribution of the ACE sector to the national education and training effort, and
- leverage existing research effort to further explore key issues impacting on policy and practice, for example, addressing the barriers to participation in learning and work for socially excluded groups and issues relevant to service delivery for community education and training providers.

I am confident that the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* has been contributing, and will continue to contribute, valuably in these kinds of ways. As the journal glides into its 49<sup>th</sup> year, its longevity and its role in promoting the value of adult learning are to be mightily celebrated!

In this issue, a number of papers set out to provide frameworks or to challenge existing ways of thinking about practice. They provoke thought, they stimulate debate and they encourage new practices.

**Benjamin Tak-Yuen Chan** provides for us an overview paper which establishes a framework for research in conceptualising adult and continuing education practice. The author argues that the marginalisation of practice as a research topic in ACE is a serious consideration when compared with school education, and proposes a teaching practice model and a program planning practice model, based on systems theory, as guides for future research.

Next is a paper by **Barry Golding, Mike Brown** and **Annette Foley** interrogating the notion of informal learning, often perceived as the 'poor cousin' of formal learning. Their key focus is on power relations. They contend that the 'very nature of informal learning, particularly its unstructured and organic quality, works to disempower a range of adult stakeholders and diminish its value as a meaningful educational pursuit in a system that values highly structured, systematised, outcome-driven approaches to young people's learning'. Thus, the authors consider formal and serious research into adult and community education as critically important.

This is followed by the analysis by **Molly Rowan** and **Sue Shore** of two issues associated with Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system – recurring declarations for universal access to vocational education and training as the right of all Australians and the continual processes of change associated with the sector over the last two decades. These authors seek a rethinking of these two characteristics. They suggest that Foucault's work provides a challenging set of analytic resources, 'a toolkit' helpful in examining the continuities and shifts foreshadowed by recent documents revealing a new epoch of change in Australian VET.

**Catherine Arden, Kathryn McLachlan** and **Trevor Cooper** explore the issue of university-community partnerships. They investigate the critical success factors for the sustainability of such partnerships, with particular reference to the *GraniteNet Phoenix Project* between the University of Southern Queensland and the

Stanthorpe community in Queensland. Concepts of learning community, social capital, university-community engagement and partnerships, and co-generative learning through participatory action research and evaluation are brought together to provide a framework for evaluating the sustainability and efficacy of the university-community relationship. The aim of the authors is to contribute to the evidence base in this field.

The views of Australian state and national union leaders about their approaches to union education and training are investigated by **Tony Brown** and **Keiko Yasukawa**. Their research furnishes a picture of the state of union education and training in Australia as viewed by its leadership – a picture that does not foreground education and training as an important element of union building, renewal and sustainability. The authors believe that there are greater possibilities for a national education centre than are currently being contemplated by union leaders. They conclude that it is short-sighted to expect ‘delegates and union officers to work effectively in the challenging industrial, social and political environment of the early twenty-first century without a contemporary education program to educate, support and develop them’.

**Marjatta Takala**, **David Winegar** and **Jorma Kuusela** examine the developmental needs of business leaders. Using data from 190 leaders from 22 countries, they focus on leadership development via training rather than experience. They argue that companies benefit from a culture of leadership development and that the development of leaders is important to the long-term health and success of organisations. From their research, they have developed a 14-item form for evaluating developmental needs that will be used in future training. Their research showed that an individualised approach and artificial experience building are very well received by participants and hold considerable value in leadership training.

The final refereed article by **Joy Penman** and **Bronwyn Ellis** explores the notion of love of learning. Their small study involved a survey of regional campus academics’ perceptions of the love of learning and its importance, and how they sought to foster its development in learners. These academics affirmed the importance of a love of learning, but had varied ideas concerning what this meant and how to inspire it in students. The authors conclude that the potential benefits of this study include: ‘increasing awareness and knowledge of how to inspire awareness of the inner capacities of students so as to encourage a love of learning; understanding how this transpires through interaction or engagement amongst all concerned ...; identifying ways by which academics may be supported to inculcate love of learning; and understanding factors that may enhance or deter the love of learning’.

There follow two practice papers. The first by **Judi Apte** resumes the theme of the first article on frameworks for practice. In this case, the paper explores some of the challenges involved in facilitating transformative learning, developing a framework from the perspective of the facilitator. Her framework comprises four components: confirming **and** interrupting current frames of reference, working with triggers for transformative learning, acknowledging a time of retreat or dormancy, and developing the new perspective. Using these four components, she poses a series of questions for reflection. Through detailed reflection on aspects of program design and the interactions in the learning group, she believes that we can further our knowledge about the transformative aspects of our programs. The second by **J. Gbenga Adewale** investigates the effectiveness of non-formal education approaches in providing basic education in Nigeria. Using a life-skills achievement test administered to 876 learners, the author finds that the competency level in life-skills of the majority of the learners was below the national benchmark of 50%. Rural dwellers were more competent than urban dwellers and younger learners were more competent than older learners. The paper

concludes with recommendations for raising this low level of competence in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Altogether, this is a bumper issue with nine articles and six book reviews. I hope you enjoy reading them, and rethinking approaches and concepts. Have a good year, and happy reading of this first issue for the 49<sup>th</sup> volume!

**Roger Harris**  
Editor

**Conceptualising adult and continuing  
education practice:  
towards a framework for research**

Benjamin Tak-Yuen Chan  
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*Adult and continuing education practitioners are the core group of staff that enable the lifelong learning enterprise. However, there are few studies that look into the domain of practice of these practitioners, which is shaped by the organisation and its wider external milieu. Research on this topic naturally calls for the elucidation of practitioners' values and practice-related orientations that have structuring properties on practice. This paper argues that the theorising of practice must pay attention to the issue of 'duality of structure' for the values of practice. It also suggests drawing from a range of theories to help establish the practice-to-milieu connection. Theories may also assist in bridging the abstract-to-reality gap when translating from values to actions. Whilst theories can offer explicative potential for practice, their use is facilitated only through availability of analytical frameworks to organise the practice of teaching adults and program planning into a logical*

*series of components and processes. In this connection, a teaching practice model and a program planning practice model, based on systems theory, are proposed to guide future research.*

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## **Introduction**

The literature on adult and continuing education (ACE in this paper) is replete with studies about learners, programs, policies and various types of theoretical propositions. Surprisingly, there are few studies that focus their attention on ACE practitioners. This category of workers in ACE (who carry functional titles such as tutor, coordinator or program leader), has a major responsibility in planning programs and may have a minor role in teaching. In most university departments, the academic study of ACE is separate from the continuing education unit, essentially meaning a separation of the academic study of ACE from its field of practice. This separation has led to the diversion of research interest away from fundamental questions connected with front-line practice into subject matters such as: the learner, the provision of learning and the wider implications of learning in society. The research focus on learners and their needs is consistent with the learner-centred disciplinary discourse of ACE generated by academics, and may serve to perpetuate it. The preference for researching learners over teachers and program planners also reflects the distance between 'theory' and 'practice' as academic researchers try to construct a corpus of knowledge for the field inhabited by their practice-oriented peers, the ACE practitioners.

This paper argues that ACE practice is a legitimate research topic, in view of developments in the parallel field of teacher and teaching research in education, and the challenges faced by program planning when responding to forces of the market and government policy. It surveys the literature to conceptualise ACE practice into four major research themes, wherein practitioners' thinking emerges as the

main area of interest. Research in this direction leads to the study of practitioners' values and practice-related orientations, which produces some descriptive profiles of practice. These profiles would require explanation by theories to help understand the nature of practice as a product and driver of change, and to connect subjective practice to its external milieu at both organisational level and the macro-level environment of society, culture, economy and politics. Finally, two separate models of teaching and program planning for ACE are proposed from synthesis of previous studies in these areas.

## **Researching practice**

The marginalisation of practice as a research topic in ACE is a serious consideration when compared with school education, where teacher-initiated action research has gained considerable popularity in recent years. In carrying out action research, teachers were encouraged to become reflective practitioners who could assume the role of agents for change by evaluating the outcome of their own actions in the classroom. Much of the impetus driving action research has come from school improvement initiatives and the effort is believed to promote professionalisation of teachers.

In comparison, the ACE practitioner's role does not equate with that of the classroom teacher, as the former mainly engages in program planning and often directs part-time staff to deliver the content, whereas classroom teachers perform the teaching themselves. The closest equivalent to the ACE practitioner's role in school education is a curriculum officer, although in ACE, it naturally comes with additional administrative and entrepreneurial responsibilities and may not involve as much curriculum development work as their mainstream counterpart. ACE practitioners do not have the status of professionals as teachers do, and may or may not belong to any professional ACE association which by itself may also not enjoy widespread public recognition. There is no doubt that the ambiguous

role of ACE practitioners and the lack of recognition for them as a profession has made this occupational group a less attractive subject for study. Reliance on ACE practitioners to carry out action research type of inquiry will require overcoming their lesser inclination towards research. This regrettable state is largely caused by ACE practitioners' preoccupation with managing educational provision that has skewed their attention significantly.

The dearth of research on practice, apart from having an obvious effect of creating a knowledge gap, has additionally called into question the merit of doing such research inquiry. This raises the question of whether understanding the practitioner is equally as important as understanding the learner. In the real world of program planning, practitioners are responsible for managing a myriad of details and variables that can influence planning and they are assumed to mediate between the needs of various stakeholders. In this regard, practitioners answer not only to learners but also to the organisation where they work and to society at large. Thus, in the discharge of their duties, practitioners have to navigate between the needs of these different stakeholders and to negotiate multiple and at times conflicting interests. Program planning, as the most important aspect of ACE practice, is definitely a more contentious activity than teaching and should not be viewed as just employing simple technical rationale in its process. In conceptualising planning theory in ACE, Sork (2000) has called for simultaneous attention to be paid to the social-political environment and ethical dimensions apart from the technical skills and knowledge required in planning. This representative move by North American ACE researchers to infuse 'power' into program planning theory represents a break from the technicist model of practice prevalent up to the late 1980s. Replacing this outmoded model is the conception that in program planning, practitioners enter into social relations involving negotiation of interests and power interplay. Successful program launch implies not only success made in the steps of assessing needs, finding

resources, deciding on content, doing marketing and conducting evaluation. It also includes many aspects of the strategies used to canvass support for the program and to eliminate opposition (Mabry & Wilson 2001). In order to be responsive to the ever-changing needs of learners and the dictates of funding agencies, it is now realised that program planning should open up to a variety of external factors such as government policies, requirements set by professional bodies and market forces. This latter in particular has aroused extensive discussion on how practitioners will need to conduct their practice in an ethical manner.

Market-driven programs have been viewed by some as antithetical to the philosophy of adult education and, as such, are a source of internal conflict when the personal beliefs of practitioners clash with those of the organisation or their clients (Kerka 1996). As a result, addressing this conflict through the formulation of ethical guidelines for practice is considered a priority (Gordon & Sork 2001). With the advent of government supported use of lifelong learning as a concept to replace ACE, government policies and regulations have increasingly impinged upon practice. The policy influence is often exerted indirectly through the organisation where the practitioner works, which can provide the opportunity for studying acceptance, resistance and redefinition of change to the practice setting (Belzer 2001).

These developments underscore the importance of studying practice and lend support to its status as a research topic in ACE. Adopting Weiland's (2000) categorisation of inquiries in adult education, research on practice can be considered for primary inclusion under philosophy and management (leadership and administration) with a secondary inclusion under sociology. This view is reflective somehow of the difference in research traditions in adult education between North America and Europe, where psychology and management

sciences are the main underpinning disciplines for the former, whilst sociology serves to inform research in the latter.

### Conceptualising practice from the literature

A survey of the literature on ACE practice published from the 1990s has identified four main research themes. The bulk of these contributions come from North American research which highlights efforts connected to the on-going process of professionalisation and the need to formulate ethical guidelines of practice. Other studies look from within the organisation for processes and strategies employed by practitioners to negotiate power and interests with stakeholders when planning programs. A third research theme involves analysing practice as being based on a system of values held by practitioners, the elucidation of which can promote reflection and create possibilities for change. This research theme is complemented by a fourth stream – philosophical and sociological theorisations of practice as a form of social relation occurring in organisations and embedded within particular historical-societal contexts. Research of this nature, as informed by critical theory and philosophical pluralism, can allow for broader issues of the economy, politics and social transformation to be connected with practice and professionalisation. Issues within these four identified research themes of ACE practice are summarised below.

#### Professionalisation and ethics

The professionalisation of adult education progressed rapidly in North America during the 1950s when academics who were engaged in teaching adult education in universities took the serious step of creating their own discipline. This move by the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) led to the founding of adult education as a specific academic field. By the end of the 1960s, the field was characterised by a theoretical consensus consisting of technical rationality and a focus on the affective self-fulfilment

of learners. This theoretical consensus represents what Podeschi (2000: 618) calls a 'behaviorist-humanist merger' and is exemplified by Knowles' theory of andragogy. Contributing to the move towards professionalisation are three elements: knowledge base, graduate programs and professional associations (Imel, Brockett & James 2000: 629).

A knowledge base constitutes theories of adult learning and practice. Its generation is determined by what counts as knowledge and how this is produced. Until now, academics have been the main producers of knowledge about the field, which raises questions about the inclusiveness and validity of their knowledge claims. Graduate programs can contribute to professionalisation through their ability to foster a professional identity of adult education by way of legitimising the field as an academic discipline. As such, it is a focal point for scholarship in perpetuating production of the knowledge base. It also serves as the channel for practitioners to improve their knowledge and skills of practice. However, the value of graduate study is limited by the ways in which field-based practitioners view the merit of such forms of training in comparison with those provided by associations of personnel development and training.

Academic associations in ACE exist to provide opportunities for the personal development of their members, and to represent a unifying voice for the profession. However, these associations generally lack a strong focus, as members come from different contexts of practice and the associations have largely been unable to influence government policy. Other weaknesses and threats include *ad hoc* participation by members, social inactivity and the drift towards elitism. Further effort towards achieving professionalisation is hampered by academics' inability to bridge the gap between orthodox conceptions of practice and real-world practice. There are also objections to the imposition of standards of practice through certification and regulatory measures, as these tend to impose further barriers on ACE practitioners who



are working outside the mainstream. Imel, Brockett and James (2000: 629) contend that ACE practice does not fit the traditional notion of professionalisation in other professions. Hence, the notion of a 'weak professionalisation' has been floated by Tobias (2003) as the course to take for future professionalisation. This approach is characterised by three features: (a) common identity based on undertaking similar activity; (b) membership in a loose organisation for expression of shared purpose; and (c) voluntary participation in training that is not linked to licensure for practice.

Closely connected with professionalisation is the development of ethical guidelines for practice. This need has arisen because practitioners work in an environment where ethical problems could surface and which would require making difficult decisions to resolve those dilemmas. Lawler (2000) stresses that part of the responsibility for personal development of practitioners is to engage with ethical issues arising from practice. She sees this as a three-step process of defining the nature of ethical problems, identifying ethical problems at work, and engaging in ethical decision-making to resolve the dilemma. In order to prepare for this, practitioners must have an understanding of their own values and of the values of other stakeholders so that decision-making based on meeting the maximum possible of ethical obligations to all parties can be obtained. Studies in North America suggest that practitioners strongly support developing a code of ethics but only for the purpose of guidance and not for strict enforcement (Gordon & Sork 2001).

#### Negotiations of power and interests

Adult education practice, in particular program planning, is now recognised to be more than a normative process, and as one that takes place in a social setting involving power relations and interests. The practitioner's role is to negotiate multiple interests of stakeholders where power differences are often present. Yang, Cervero, Valentine and Benson (1998) choose to study this using a quantitative method

to reveal a pattern of power and planning behaviours which are classified into seven influence tactics (reasoning, consulting, appealing, networking, bargaining, pressuring and counteracting). Successful planning therefore hinges on the match between understanding the planning situation and the influencing strategies employed. This finding is further extended by the qualitative study of Mabry and Wilson (2001) who found that the use of strategies also depends on how the practitioner perceives the power that stakeholders have. In other words, how planning tactics were chosen would depend on how much involvement the practitioner wanted from the stakeholders. There are ethical implications arising from this strategy selection as undemocratic and covert planning practices will be questioned. Another line of research that tackles practitioners' engagement with power differences is to examine how their practice can be changed by policy, and vice versa. Belzer (2001) explores how the policy reform of adult basic education, linked to welfare reform, has acted to change practice, and how practice may actually redefine policy intents in a 'bottom-up' fashion.

#### Practitioners' thinking

Teacher thinking in adult education is studied with reference to the model used in school education. For this purpose, Clark and Peterson's (1986) model of teacher thoughts and actions has been alluded to but is considered an inadequate model because it does not reflect the totality of orientations related to practice (Campbell 1999). A systematic model called 'Personal Pedagogical System' has been proposed by Taylor, Dirkx and Pratt (2001) and consists of core beliefs, foundational knowledge and an informal theory of teaching. This model can help educators of adults to understand their personal approaches to teaching, to realise meanings that they attach to certain actions and decisions, and to compare their personal values held with the manifested actions (espoused theory versus theory-in-use). Campbell (1999) considers it essential to understand the values and

practice-related orientations of practitioners in order to influence change. The connectivity between values, thought processes and the organisational context of practice has been highlighted by Nesbitt (1998). This has led to further theorising that situates the values of practice within social structures, and that defines change within a conception of structure-agency relations under structuration theory (Dirkx, Kushner & Shusarski 2000).

#### Social and political theorisations of practice

It is considered that ACE practice in North America, which has been dominated by technicist and instrumentalist theories, lacks adequate sociological and philosophical theorisations to deepen an understanding of practice. Podeschi (2000: 614–615) attributes the neglect of philosophical study to the rush in achieving professionalisation in the 1950s. Although there has been a stream of subsequent research seeking to elucidate practitioners' values, such studies are decontextualised and so cannot attain social relevance (Apps 1973, Elias & Merriam 1995, Zinn 1991). Quigley (2000) asserts that adult education should reclaim its historical identity of playing a clear social mission through attempts at influencing social policy and helping to build the civil society. This will serve to stop the singular dominance of individualistic ideology and limitations of functional humanism, which are currently directing ACE policy and informing conceptions about practice. Towards this end, a pluralistic philosophical framework that integrates personal beliefs, institutional culture and historical-social forces has been formulated by Podeschi (2000) to help understand the daily dynamics and conflicts of professional practice. Sociological analyses using conflict perspective or critical theory regard practice as a social construct which reinforces certain interests, privileges and status of practitioners. Professionalisation is therefore conceived as a process of struggle and conflict of interests where broader tensions and contradictions of the

organisational meso-level and other macro-level contexts can spill over to create ethical issues for the practitioner (Tobias 2003).

#### Implications for research practice

The above review of literature accentuates the critical role of the ACE practitioner in enabling the proper functioning of the lifelong learning enterprise. 'Lifelong learning enterprise', as I define it, collectively consists of: the learners (market), the organisations that provide learning opportunities (learning providers), the regulatory agencies of the government and professional bodies (regulators), the laws and policies, social expectations and cultural assumptions about learning (political, social and cultural environments), and the employment market that drives demand for skills acquisition (economic environment). These elements interact with one another, and the various stakeholders' interests, priorities and concerns are negotiated through the process of program planning wherein the practitioner plays the important role of mediator. During this process, power relations played out can create ethical dilemmas for the practitioner when trying to achieve a balance among various competing interests. When practitioners have chosen to adapt their practice in line with government policies, organisational interests and market demand, it would create continuity for the development of ACE from a consensus perspective. Alternatively, when the beliefs of practitioners run into conflict with externally determined goals, it could lead to subversion of those goals and cause the frustration of change. This latter reactionary stance that fits the conflict perspective would put the practitioners' will in resisting change to the test. In sociological terms, the practitioner as agent is pitted against dominating structures (organisation, government, society) for a competition on whose values would predominate in program planning.

The nature of practice and how it consolidates or drives change fall within the classical sociological issue of 'structure-agency

dualism'. To overcome this divide, a third approach following the structuration theory of Giddens (1984) can be invoked. This theory assumes that practitioners' values and the practice-related orientations that underlie their practice are both a given and a construct continually moulded by practice. The practitioners' values are useful for understanding the nature of teaching and program planning practice but do not necessarily offer an explanation of causation. The reason is that although values of practice as a 'structure' would precede 'actions' carried out during teaching and program planning, the said values could nevertheless be reinforced or changed through the transformative potential of human agency. As such, the validity of values would hold only insofar as the actions are continually reproduced across time and space. This qualification of values as a 'structure' is consistent with the 'duality of structure' expounded in Giddens' theory. It should also be noted that research on practitioners' thinking is not concerned with studying the manifested outcomes of practice (actions) but rather with the values and practice-related orientations that have structuring properties on the practitioners' actions carried out in their work context. As Nesbitt (1998: 161) contends of teaching in adult education, 'classroom teaching processes in adult education can be linked with, and influenced by, institutional and social forces ... teachers' pedagogical choices might be affected by both their intentions and certain "frame" factors outside of their control'.

The use of structuration theory to study the values of ACE practice could also bridge the gap between sociological and philosophical discourses on the topic of practice. The contextualist perspective for undertaking philosophy of adult education proposed by Podeschi (2000) aims to situate practice within organisational and cultural frames of reference, but without losing the creative individuality of the practitioner. This opens up potential for actions to be transformational in a similar fashion to structure-agency relationship posited under structuration theory. Structuration theory has also been

used to study change in teaching practice for adults (Dirkx, Kushner & Shusarski 2000). Other developments in macro-sociological theories, particularly on the application of social reproduction in education, have also incorporated structuration theory as a form of transformational model in its dialectic of agency and structure (Morrow & Torres 1995). Structuration theory therefore can be used to deepen understanding of change occurring in ACE practice.

### **Relevance of theory**

The study of ACE practitioners' values and practice-related orientations is related to aspects of macro-level analyses, socio-cultural and political. Social, cultural and political theories are useful for explaining the structures (values, rules and institutions) that bind ACE practice. The explicative utility of these theories is evident because the purpose of elucidating practitioners' values of practice is merely limited to generation of descriptive profiles of practice. Social theories can, for example, try to account for why practitioners favour certain assumptions about adult learning and adult development goals as suggested by the values that they profess. Cultural theories can draw from the postmodern discourse of consumption to help explain favoured approaches to the marketing of programs. Political theories can utilise various discourses of politics and power to explain why practitioners hold certain views towards lifelong learning as a public policy. These theories are useful to the extent of supplying plausible explanations but cannot predict subsequent courses of practitioners' action. Thus, an explanation of why practitioners hold certain views on the policy of lifelong learning does not imply that a particular stand or practice strategy will be taken by the practitioner. This 'abstract-to-reality' gap remains within the domain of creative human agency in which understanding it will require a different research epistemology, perhaps one that assumes a micro-sociological perspective.

The success of applying macro-level theories to researching practitioners' thinking would depend on two conditions. First is the need to find relevant theories or their combinations for theorising the structures that define ACE practice. Second, local research on ACE that demonstrates application of these theories would need to be identified in support. On the first task, it would be important to denote not only an eclectic use of theories but also to have sensitivity towards the nature of these structures. For example, in some context, the economic dimension of the market may be more prominent as a defining variable for the structures rather than social, cultural and political dimensions. The second task is complementary to the first as it tries to map previous efforts of theorising in order to offer a temporal and spatial organisation of the structures. As such, lifelong learning structures can be defined by several dimensions: social, cultural, political, economic and so on, each with values that shift across time, but which need to be understood in relation to one another to identify a unifying trend or to locate major directions of change. When researching practitioners' values and practice-related orientations, macro-level theories are complementary to structuration theory for providing a basis for explaining the characteristics of these structures and their relations to the elucidated values and practice-related orientations of practitioners. The explicative potential of these theories is therefore of importance in establishing the 'practice-to-milieu' connection as shown in Figure 1.

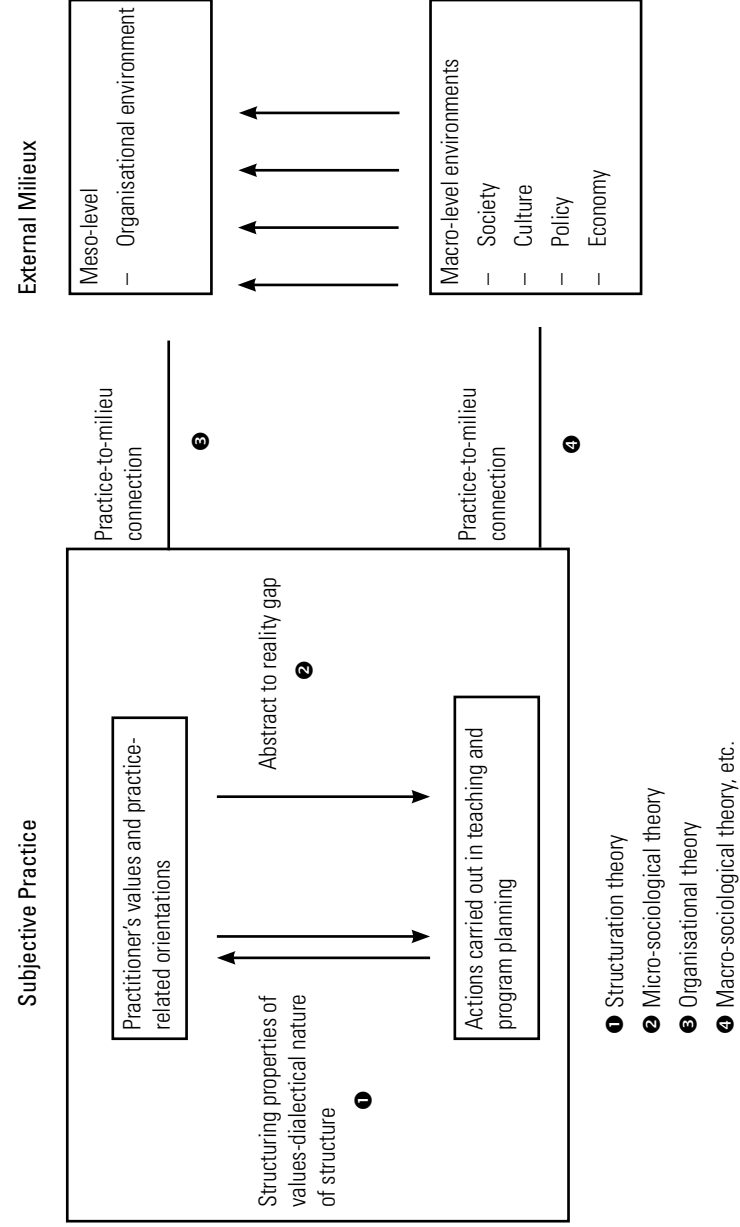


Figure 1: Explicative utility of theories in adult and continuing education practice research

### **Proposed models of practice**

The theorising of subjective micro-level ACE practice can be achieved by locating it within the meso-level organisation that is itself situated within specific social-cultural-economic-political milieux of the macro-context. In this connection, relevant theories as explained above could be enlisted to explain various facets of the 'practice-to-milieu' connection. Since there could be a range of theories from various disciplines rather than one single meta-theory that would offer plausible explanations for the elucidated values of practitioners and their practice-related orientations, a way of organising the components contributing to a practice model and the relations amongst the components must first be formulated. For this purpose, the model should be able to accommodate different perspectives within one integrated framework. Such a framework should be dynamic and open to change from the external environment. A theoretical framework is useful because complex relationships and interactions can be depicted, and on the basis of these decisions about what explanatory theories to draw from can then be made.

A model based on systems theory would be able to meet the above-stated criteria. It has been applied by Ballantine (2001) to break down parts of the institution of education so that appropriate theories can be matched and used to explain those parts of the education system which are of interest. The systems model contains a five-step process starting from the 'organisation' that includes both the structure and processes inside it. The 'organisation' is in interaction with the 'environment' through 'input' that it receives and 'output' that comes out of it. Adaptation to the changes and demands in the environment occurs through a constant process of 'feedback'. The systems model has been described by Olson (1978, cited in Ballantine 2001: 17–18) in the following manner:

It is not a particular kind of social organization. It is an analytical model that can be applied to any instance of the

process of social organization, from families to nation ... Nor is [it] a substantive theory – though it is sometimes spoken of as a theory in sociological literature. This model is a highly general, content-free conceptual framework within which any number of different substantive theories of social organization can be constructed.

Two models are required to depict separately about a system of teaching practice, and another one on program planning practice that takes place within the organisational context.

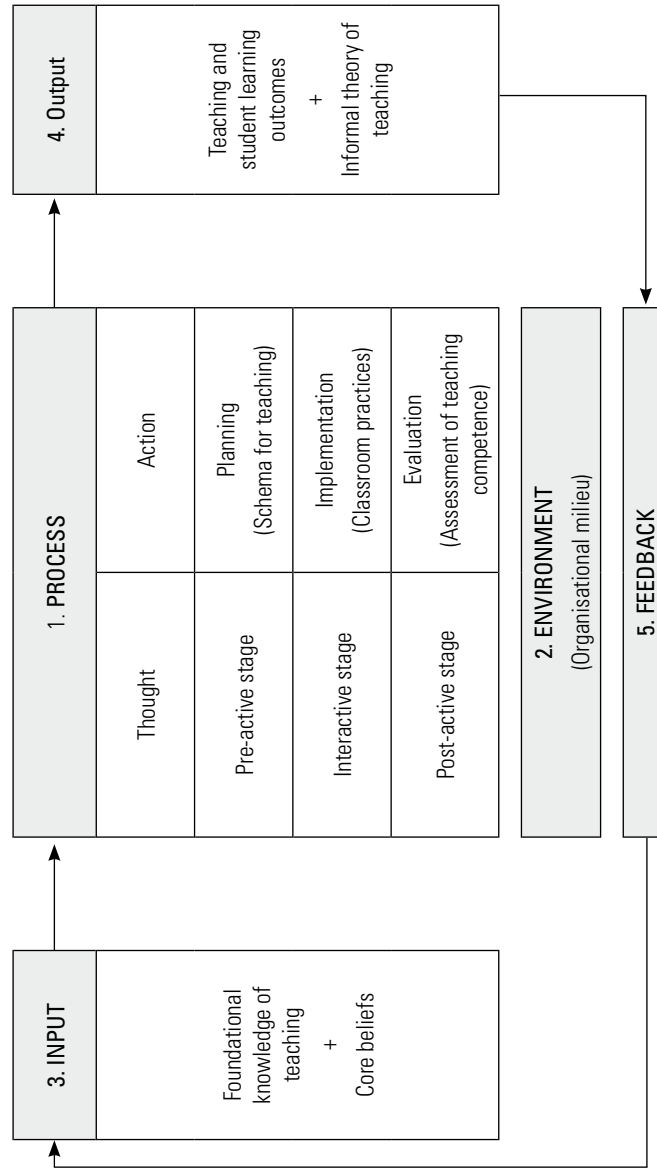


Figure 2: Teaching practice model in adult and continuing education

The model in Figure 2 is a hybrid model that takes as a central ‘process’ component the thoughts (pre-active, interactive and post-active stages) and actions in Clark and Peterson’s (1986) teacher’s thinking model. Borrowed from the personal pedagogical system of Taylor, Dirkx and Pratt (2001) are the ideas of core beliefs (assumptions about adult teaching and learning) and foundational knowledge (knowledge and skills for effective teaching of adults) that form the ‘input’ whilst an informal theory of teaching (sense of identity and purpose) arises as an ‘output’. This new model of teaching practice in ACE assumes that feedback will operate in the system as the student learning outcomes and informal theory of teaching (output) are compared with core beliefs and foundational knowledge (input) leading to changes in thoughts and actions about teaching in a continuously occurring chain of reflection. The model can also be considered as a heuristic for understanding the complex meaning of teaching in the adult educational setting. Although teaching cannot exist in isolation from the teaching institution, in reality, it is generally regarded as an independent activity of the teacher. As the focus for most research studies on teacher thinking is on relatively discrete aspects of thoughts and actions rather than on the whole process of teaching as a social or cultural practice (Campbell 1999), this subjective model would be pertinent to research that adopts a micro-level perspective focusing on the teacher’s thoughts and actions. It would be less effective to serve as a model for linking teaching practice to its meso-level environment represented by the teaching institution.

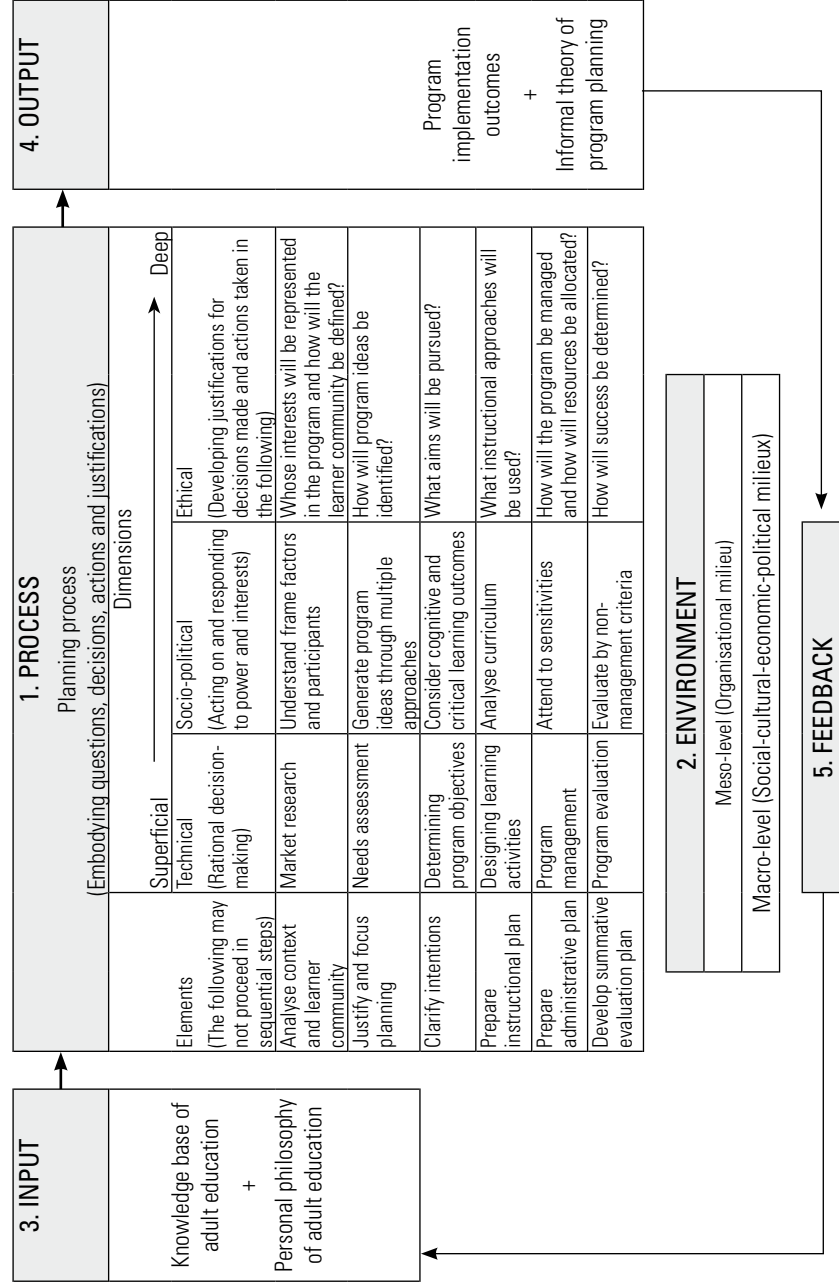


Figure 3 Program planning practice model in adult and continuing education practice

In comparison with teaching practice, program planning practice would require a model that places more emphasis on the influence exerted by the organisational environment and other external milieux. The model shown in Figure 3 has incorporated dimensions of socio-political and ethical concerns to counteract criticisms about singularity of focus on the technical dimension when conducting program planning. It draws from the planning framework of Sork (2000) with further borrowing from the interactive planning model of Cafarella (1994) to define the tasks involved in the different steps of the planning process for each of the three dimensions. For the ‘input’ component of this model, the ‘foundational knowledge’ in the teaching practice model is replaced by a ‘knowledge base of adult education’, which would include core concepts such as: andragogy, models of participation and motivation in adult learning, perspective transformation, program planning, learning projects and self-directed learning (Long 1991). On the other hand, ‘core belief’ is replaced by a ‘personal philosophy of adult education’ as elaborated by Elias and Merriam (1995). The ‘output’ component is defined in terms of ‘program implementation outcomes’ and ‘informal theory of program planning’. As the central process of program planning is continuous with the organisational environment and other external variables, such underlying subjective incorporation by practitioners of meso- and macro-level influences would ensure a regularity of feedback working in the system. This would also facilitate the theorising of practice by any relevant organisational or sociological theories to bridge the ‘practice-to-milieu’ gap.

**Conclusion**

The two models proposed in this paper aim to provide practical frameworks for guiding future research on teaching and program planning practices in ACE. Based on a synthesis of studies on teacher’s thinking and models of teaching in ACE, the components contributing to a model for describing teaching practice have been

identified. The positioning of these components in relation to one another is proposed primarily as an analytical scheme following that of a generic systems model. Formulated in close relation to this teaching practice model is the program planning practice model, which takes the subjective thoughts and actions of practitioners not as isolated processes but opened to external influences of the organisation and its external environment. In both models, central to the research process, however, is the elucidation of practitioners' values and their practice-related orientations. As these have structuring properties on practice and are at the same time subject to forces of human agency by the practitioners, structuration theory can be invoked to help understand the dialectical nature of ACE practice. At the same time, a complement of meso-level organisational theory and macro-level sociological theories can be enlisted to help explain the 'practice-to-milieu' connection. While the current approach to conceptualising ACE practice would need further evaluation on the soundness of its assumptions and formulations, it could nevertheless serve to stimulate discussion about ACE practice leading possibly to more research on this topic.

### Acknowledgement

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## **Informal learning: a discussion around defining and researching its breadth and importance**

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*Informal learning has often been seen as formal learning's 'poor cousin'. Our paper explores and discusses new and different ways of thinking about defining, valuing and researching the breadth and importance of informal learning in diverse national and cultural contexts. This includes a consideration of the power relations that can act to devalue informal learning. It is underpinned by a recognition that not only do a relatively small proportion of adults currently engage in formal learning, but those who do tend already to be dedicated and successful lifelong learners. It leads to a discussion about how informal learning might be framed as part of the solution to adult exclusion, seen to be aggravated by unnecessary adult educational hierarchies, accreditation, assessment and formality.*

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### **Introduction**

Our paper proceeds from a brief review of definitions of informal learning to examine and focus on the conceptual terrain and power relations surrounding learning in/formality. At its core is a critical reflection and discussion of our role as researchers into informal learning. Our essential argument in this paper, using insights from other researchers and reflections from our own research, is about power relations and the central role power plays in the value and identity of both formal and informal learning (with an emphasis on the latter).

Power is a central concept in understanding the formations of social difference and inequity. Power is connected to meaning-making, social relations and the ways in which certain discourses gain hegemony, the formation of policy and the ways that certain identities are legitimated and privileged over others and valued across educational contexts (Burke & Jackson 2007). Power operates across all levels of social life – individually, institutionally, regionally and nationally. Identities are always tied to shifting power relations. For this purpose, we find Foucault's (1977) theory of power useful in understanding and conceptualising power as discursive. As educational researchers, we are interested in the way power is linked to wider structural inequities in education and what we see as adult educational hierarchies or power differences. We also recognise that, as researchers in the field of higher education, when we work at defining informal learning, we take up a complex and a contradictory position. While we provide evidence in our paper that academic and practical opportunities for informal learning through adult and community education (ACE) are shrinking in Australia, we highlight the need for greater acknowledgment of the value of informality in learning.

### Defining and theorising informal learning

From the 1960s, Tough (1967, 1971) began working in Canada with the notion that adults can teach themselves, what he originally called self-teaching, and published as *Learning without a teacher: a study of tasks and assistance during adult self-teaching projects*. Basically, Tough showed that most adults set themselves projects to undertake and, as part of these projects, need to learn new things which they very often do without recourse to a teacher. This form of learning is both intentional and unintentional and occurs as a by-product of the project-orientated activities. His research into this idea spread over two decades as he sought evidence and began to theorise what became one of the most cited threads of informal learning.

Coming from a United Kingdom perspective, McGivney (1999: 1) in *Informal learning in the community*, determined that:

There is no single definition of informal learning. It is a broad and loose concept that incorporates very diverse kinds of learning, learning styles and learning arrangements. Informal learning can be unpremeditated, self-directed, intentional and planned. It can be initiated by individuals (for example in the home, in the workplace); it can be a collective process (arising from grassroots community action or social protest), or it can be initiated by outside agencies responding to perceived or expressed needs, interests or problems. These may include educational providers who wish to offer previously excluded groups learning experiences in their own environment.

Having acknowledged many different definitions, McGivney broadly defined informal learning for the purposes of her report as:

Learning that takes place outside a dedicated learning environment, which arises from the activities and interests of individuals or groups but which may not be recognized as learning (learning by doing, listening, observing, interacting with others, and so on). Non-course-based but intentional learning activities (which might include discussion, talks or

presentations, information advice and guidance) provided or facilitated in response to expressed interests and needs of people from a range of sectors and organisations (health, housing, social services, employment services, education and training services, guidance services) (McGivney 1999: 1–2).

The conceptual terrain around learning in/formality

Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002) provide a particularly rich and comprehensive analysis of the Anglophone literature of the conceptual terrain surrounding learning in/formality. It is important from the outset to acknowledge the impact of positivist and rationalist thinking (well before the recent debates about the value or otherwise of informality) that led to the valuing of formal, structured learning over what was perceived as common, simple or everyday informal learning. Formal learning, as Bernstein (1971) noted, opened up high status knowledge, particularly if it was located within schools or universities, and especially if it was seen to be propositional, accumulative and generalisable. Non-institutional learning, even if it was formal, tended to be overlooked or dismissed. Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002: 2) observe that very few authors feel the need to explicitly define the terms, nor view them as problematic.

Table 1 is drawn from the extensive literature review by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002) which contrasts characteristics and features of both formal and informal learning. Many are presented as binary opposites.

Table 1: Possible ideal types of formal and informal learning (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm 2002, Table 7, pp.14–15)

Formal	Informal
Teacher as authority	No teacher involved
Educational premises	Non-education premises
Teacher control	Learner control
Planned and structured	Organic and evolving
Summative assessment/accreditation	No assessment
Externally determined objectives/outcomes	Internally determined objectives
Interests of powerful and dominant groups	Interests of oppressed groups
Open to all groups, according to published criteria	Preserves inequality and sponsorship
Propositional knowledge	Practical and process knowledge
High status	Low status
Education	Not education
Measured outcomes	Outcomes imprecise, unmeasurable
Learning predominantly individual	Learning predominantly communal
Learning to preserve status quo	Learning for resistance and empowerment
Pedagogy of transmission and control	Learner-centred, negotiated pedagogy
Learning mediated through agents of authority	Learning mediated through leader democracy
Fixed and mediated timeframe	Open-ended engagement
Learning is the main, explicit purpose	Learning is either of secondary significance or is implicit
Learning is applicable on a range of contexts	Learning is context specific

UNEVOC (2008) has gone further to distinguish informal learning from other forms of learning, namely formal and non-formal education as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: An overview of different conceptions of 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal', as applied to education and learning (UNEVOC 2008, Table 1: 6)

	Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal learning
Green, Oketch & Preston (2004)	'organised' and "intentional" learning whose outcomes are accredited'	'results from organised activities within or outside the workplace which involve significant learning which is not accredited'	'that which occurs "unintentionally" or as a by-product of other activities OECD (2003). New classifications of learning activities are currently being developed for the EU Adult Education Survey and these will form a good companion to ISCED definitions for informal and non-formal learning, especially for the developed world.' (see below)
Tight (2002)	'Formal education is that provided by the education and training system set up or sponsored by the state for those express purposes' (Groombridge 1983: 6)	'any organised, systematic, educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system, to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children. Thus defined, non-formal education includes, for example, agricultural extension and farmer training programmes, adult literacy programmes, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial educational purposes, and various community programmes of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, cooperatives, and the like.' (Coombs & Ahmed 1974: 8)	'The life-long process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally, informal education is unorganised, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of even a highly "schooled" person.' (Coombs & Ahmed 1974: 8)
		'education for which none of the learners is enrolled or registered' (OECD 1977: 11)	

	Formal education	Non-formal education	Informal learning
Eurostat (2004)	<p>‘education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous “ladder” of full-time education for children and young people, generally beginning at age of five to seven and continuing up to 20 or 25 years old. In some countries, the upper parts of this “ladder” are organised programmes of joint part-time employment and part-time participation in the regular school and university system: such programmes have come to be known as the “dual system” or equivalent terms in these countries.’</p>	<p>‘any organised and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out of school children, life-skills, work-skills, and general culture. Non formal education programmes do not necessarily follow the “ladder” system, and may have a differing duration.’</p>	<p>“‘intentional, but it is less organized and less structured ... and may include for example learning events (activities) that occur in the family, in the workplace, and in the daily life of every person, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially directed basis.” As defined in the report of the Eurostat TF/MLLL (paragraph 32, page 12). The UNESCO manual for statistics on non-formal education (page 6) reads:</p> <p><i>‘Informal learning is generally intentional, but unorganised and unstructured learning events that occur in the family, the workplace, and in the daily life of every person, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis.’</i></p>

Tables 1 and 2 suggest that formal, non-formal and informal learning can be characterised and differentiated from each other. Formal and informal learning in both tables are presented as polar opposites with non-formal learning taking up characteristics of the middle ground in the UNEVOC model. Of the four definitions of informal learning provided in Table 2, informal learning is regarded as unintentional, often occurring as a by-product of other social activities. It is a lifelong process, that is unorganised, unsystematic yet it accounts for a great bulk of any person’s total lifelong learning. Faris (2005) in Duke, Osborne and Wilson (2005) reviewed studies in Canada and Australia and suggested that up to 70% of the learning that occurs in workplaces is of this nature (p.30). Informal learning occurs through all kinds of activities and in a wide range of social contexts such as families, workplaces, communities and leisure activities – through the daily lives of every person.

#### Analyzing the power relations around in/formality

One of the numerous traditions within adult education and adult learning can be characterised by its tendency to encourage adult learners to be analytical and critical about all things familiar and which tend to be taken for granted. This critical tradition asks learners to consider power relations as they are perceived or manifested within existing relationships and cultural practices. Freirean educators (Shor 1992) call for a remaking of the world yet, when it comes to informal learning, many of these educators join others across the adult education field in the uncritical acceptance of informal learning as unproblematic. Colley *et al.* (2002) explain that when the terms informal, non-formal and formal are added as qualifiers to the concept of learning they are often added without definition or explanation as to what they are understood to mean. Accordingly, the contested and blurred understandings of their meaning are ignored. These authors suggest that it is very useful (and indeed, necessary) for readers to see how different authors are

using these terms along with the conceptualisation of learning that they are utilising when they use these terms.

Hager and Halliday (2006) state they have never come across adult educators who have not been able to distinguish between the notions of formal and informal learning. For them and most others, the differences are clearly distinguishable and apparent. Billett (2002), for example, provides one of the exceptions in the literature, when he argues against the unquestioned acceptance of the terms formal and informal learning and their associated meanings which depict learning that occurs under the guidance of the teacher as the positive benchmark. Billett contrasts this against, and in opposition to, learning which occurs through the efforts of the learner. Or putting it more directly, when learning occurs through the self-direction of the learner or as part of an activity undertaken by the learner alone, this is described as ‘informal’ learning. Might ‘natural’ or ‘everyday’ be just as suitable as qualifiers for this learning?

Coffield (2000: 8) urges us to rethink how we think about informal learning:

Informal learning should no longer be regarded as an inferior form of learning whose main purpose is to act as the precursor of formal learning; it needs to be seen as fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right, at times directly relevant to employment and at other times not relevant at all.

Coffield raises the point that sometimes informal learning will be seen as relevant and other times not so with regard to the social activities or practices where the learning arose. This is a crucial point. Hager and Halliday (2006) in their work on ‘recovering the informal’ explain that a key feature of informal learning is that it is indeterminate. They also suggest that informal learning tends to be opportunistic, ongoing. Where McGivney writes about the motivations that drive informal learning and its alignment with different forms of progression, these educators write about its alignment with external and internal goods.

### **A critical reflection on our role as researchers into informal learning**

Having identified some of the power relations around analyses and definitions of learning in/formality, it is appropriate for us to take the advice of some of those cited above and to explicitly state our view of learning, so that readers can understand the way in which we think and use these terms in our research into adult and community education. We lean towards a Vygotskian-based, social constructivist perspective of adult learning (Kozulin 2003), that is, where some acceptance can be given to the fact that individuals learn in social situations, in particular places and contexts, making their own culturally negotiated meaning and understandings – where learners are always learning, through activities and guidances, though this can often be in indeterminate ways.

By way of an example, imagine a traveller, who arrives at a large railway station in a foreign land where there are several ways to ensure that they arrive at their final destination safely and efficiently. Three obvious strategies are that they can either ask someone who might know for some assistance, they could catch a taxi and anticipate that the driver would know or be able to find out, or they could obtain a map and use it to find their way on their own. All three strategies are about seeking and obtaining forms of guidance. Similarly, as part of learning to learn, it is the learner’s role to develop and find ways of guiding their learning as required. The motivation for learning is important and needs to be taken up by the learner. A useful way of understanding some of these motivations is through McGivney’s notion of progressions. She argues that learning is aided by connection to forms of progression. These she describes as being either individual, social, educational or economic forms of progression. Hager and Halliday (2006), working instead from a philosophical foundation, name these as external and internal goods.

In our academic role as Australian researchers of Australian adult and community education, we are part of both the solution and the

problem of formality. On the one hand, we share the concerns raised by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002: 5) in the United Kingdom that ‘... changes to the funding regulations for education, and for adult education in particular, have imposed increasing degrees of formality on areas of informal learning’. In recent decades, state and federal government pressure in Australia for adult education to increasingly become user-pays, vocational and outcome-based has squeezed what Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002: 21) described as ‘the ‘politicized’ and ‘aspirational’ strands of ACE’ into an increasingly small envelope. In 2008, ACE as a discrete, state-supported sector characterised by its learner-centredness and informality is hanging by a very narrow thread, in the very few Australian states where we perceive that the thread has not already been severed.

On the other hand, as a contradiction, one of us (Golding) has assisted with a Victorian state project (A-Frame) to develop a mechanism to formally recognise and validate informal learning in ACE settings (ACFE 2002). Using the A-Frame as a template, ACFE (2008) recently moved to define all learning as either accredited or pre-accredited on the assumption that it

... assists teachers, learners and providers to think through what will be learned, for what reason and how teaching and learning will occur. Importantly it addresses the pathways and future options that flow from learners’ achievement.

In part, this project is in recognition of alternate but not necessarily mutually exclusive pathways assisted by what McGivney calls ‘progression’, but in which she distinguishes different forms, namely economic, educational, personal and social. Recognition and acknowledgement of those skills and knowledge which others will financially reward, what McGivney describes as ‘economic progression’, is a most desirable outcome for many learners, especially male adult learners, though it is not the ‘be all and end all’ of adult learning. After all, this is just one of the reward systems

or progressions in play. While it is the one most supported by the interests of the neo-liberal state, others are possible. For starters, McGivney has identified three other forms of progression worth exploring beyond the economic and as mentioned above these are educational, personal and social.

We also recognise our contradictory roles as university-based researchers imposing formal research techniques and discourses in order to explore and formally report on the informality of adult education. While one of our recent research interests has been the informal learning potential of the embryonic and highly informal, Australian community men’s shed movement (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007), we also see the potential for it to be colonised by a neo-liberal skills agenda which, with the support of data generated by our research, would push it towards more accreditation, evidence-based practice and formality.

We particularly acknowledge the contradictions inherent in this recent research into community-based men’s sheds. That research intervention is far from benign in terms of its impact on what we perceive to be its current informality. Community-based sheds come close, on almost every ‘ideal type’ criteria in Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2002, see Table 1) as ‘informal learning’. And yet our research (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007) presupposed learning in a postulated (but very loosely coupled) sector where learning is only one of many possible ways of framing, researching and measuring participant activity (the others including community contribution and development, happiness, masculinities, sociality, wellbeing and health). By subjecting participants to formal surveys and interviews presupposing learning in our community men’s sheds’ study, we have at best produced, and at worst manufactured, learning-related participation and outcome data. These data are now in the public domain and able to be used by governments to justify, support and regulate shed practice.

The positive side of this research has been through the assistance it has provided to those working in the field to use the evidence to support policy initiatives, networking and funding applications.

## Discussion

### Informal learning as food for thought

Over the course of adult life, serious social and political issues can rise to prominence in a sudden or abrupt manner. Issues of particular significance to this discussion include those that arise that people have not been fully aware of during their learning experiences at school. For many adults, such issues include sustainability, global warming and climate change. For those adults who completed their formal schooling some considerable time ago, understandings about these current and critically important issues are often reached or at least enhanced through informal learning in an out of school context. Such understandings can be developed through discussions and explanations given through the media, through reading newspapers, listening to the radio or through watching television programs.

In this context, many adult educators are familiar with the work of the cultural theorist Raymond Williams. Williams' cultural theories are considered to have had a profound impact upon the field of adult education (McIlroy & Westwood 1993). In particular, Williams argued that the media has the potential to be utilised in the service of a democratic and lifelong community education (Inglis 1995). Williams saw this as a participatory, everyday, ongoing and therefore a social and culturally relevant form of learning. However, it is also important in this context to recognise that current media manipulation by refined 'spin doctors' has made much public media (including media about adult education) suspect as a source of educational information without considerable critical appraisal.

To summarise our thinking and to round off this discussion, we have come up with what we regard as a useful, albeit value-laden,

analogy between learning and producing food. Formal learning is akin to large-scale food production where there is an emphasis on commercialism, standard labelling and accreditation, processing, quality assurance and packaging. Producers of both food (and learning) at this large-scale end are particularly concerned with efficiency, economies of scale, throughput and consumer satisfaction with a well-marketed product and with brands that are recognised by a range of institutional and government stakeholders.

By contrast, informal learning, like informal, backyard and community gardening, is more organic and 'home grown'. The emphasis is on small-scale production of diverse items for their own use, informal barter or exchange with personal, social and community spin-offs. There is more emphasis on the personal, hands-on, collaborative, activity-based joys (and difficulties) associated with the process of informal production and less emphasis on a standard product as an end in itself. The non-standard products of both informal learning and home gardening, without formal product accreditation, have limited currency as saleable items in the commercial marketplace but are recognised for their organic and holistic nature. Here, the power imbalance is also tipped toward the discourses of product, and economic value in line with neo-liberal economic values.

The analogy is useful in that, in both cases, what is produced formally and informally – learning and food – are superficially similar products. What differ are the processes, context, content and purposes associated with production. Each of these four factors also appears in Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm's (2002) typology of learning in/formality. We perceive an opportunity to take our analogy further than the act of production to suggest that the *value* of informality extends beyond the act of production in each case to the act and experience of consumption. Highly processed food and vegetables from the home garden have a different and unique



taste, shape, smell and feel. The rewards, feelings and outcomes from personally completing an accredited, fee-for-service course and treated as a client or student are likely to be qualitatively different from those of learning informally, being treated as an equal participant in a shared activity, being collaborative, being mentored or mentoring in a community setting.

Our fundamental argument is that informality in the context of education and particularly adult learning is currently undervalued in economic terms. In other words, it holds less value and is less powerful by locating it outside policy priorities, and therefore situating it as excluded and a less economically profitable counterpart to formal learning. It may be timely for policy to re-examine and revise the value of informal learning which, we would argue, is currently dis/identified through hegemonic discourses and policy contexts that constrain, devalue and reduce opportunities for different learning preferences, opportunities and possibilities to be presented to different learners.

#### The value of theorising and researching informal learning

Formal learning is widely researched in part because of its ease of definition and analysis, but also because it is the domain of educators, providers and sometimes government funding where efficiency and standardisation are seen to be important by institutional stakeholders. These stakeholders have relative degrees of state-sanctioned power that support them researching their work. In fact, to support such research is in part to work at exerting degrees of control, power and influence. The work that occurs in these institutions becomes aligned to a shared agenda of interests, and we would argue educational priorities. In fact, some who work in the adult and community education sector might argue that there is a requirement to share these economic interests and agendas or get out and make room for someone who will. Learners, too, are required to share the aligned interests by way of 'skilling up', arguably

taking up the policy-driven identity of formal learning through skills acquisition. It should be noted, however, that no regime of power is ever absolute and resistances occur, and that academic research is often the realm used to document (and therefore participate in) these power struggles.

The notion of resistance can be seen to support what Foucault (1988: 11) described as 'spaces of freedom' where 'changes can still be made' despite economic drivers. Weedon (1997) claims that individuals are both the site and the subject of a struggle for their social and political identities. In their resistance and struggle to remain informal, the value of informality in learning can speak back to the current neo-liberal discourses through re-fashioned discursive sites and informal educational practices. This resistance acts to legitimise informal learning through discourses that speak back (Foucault 1978) to neo-liberal reform through the value and legitimacy of informal learning spaces that can engage, invigorate and reconnect learners.

Our paper is therefore an attempt as researchers to acknowledge the power imbalance that exists in the educational policy discourses, devaluing and excluding informal learning, as well as to acknowledge informal learning where there is much that is positive and valuable to be encouraged and included. In an attempt to remove ourselves from the prescriptive and powerful roles as researchers, we go back and re-look at a previous paper (Foley, Golding & Brown 2008: 3) where we noted that one of 'the standard academic rules is that academics show their hand in theoretical terms when undertaking and reporting research'. As in this previous paper, we seek to identify ethnomethodology (in other words '[studies of] how people "do" social life': Holstein & Gubrium: 483–505) as one of several useful ways of researching learning, particularly informal learning, and a way of allowing 'spaces of freedom' (Foucault 1988: 11) where learners can speak back for themselves.

We recognise and practise what we regard as the value of mixed method research that uses a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (such as in the community men's sheds' research (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007, but also in Golding, Brown & Foley, in progress 2008, and Golding, Foley & Brown, in progress 2008). However, like Garfinkel, we deny that on its own 'the social scientific formulation of objectively rational courses of action under "given" conditions is a useful or even workable procedure for the empirical study of social action' (Heritage 1984: 33) that we take to include education, particularly learning, and especially informal learning. We regard ethnomethodology in particular, as elaborated by Garfinkel in his suite of research over more than 30 years from the 1950s (summarised in Heritage 1984), as having particular relevance and explanatory power over learning *as we value it*.

Garfinkel, as Heritage (1984: 34) summarised,

... rejected absolutely the view that the ordinary judgments of social actors can in any way be treated as irrelevant or epiphenomenal [a secondary effect or by-product that arises from, but does not causally influence, a process] in the analysis of social action or social organisation.

This so-called ethnomethodological perspective holds that there is a

... body of common-sense knowledge and [a] range of procedures and considerations by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves (Heritage 1984: 4).

As we demonstrated in our learning-focused analysis of community-based men's sheds in Foley, Golding and Brown (2008), we recognise that diverse individuals and groups more broadly are able to make sense of and explain their learning and the benefits they experience and enjoy from participating in that learning in the least formal programs, contexts and settings.

As we observed in Foley, Golding and Brown (2008: 3), we also recognise the power of narrative:

Narrative research relates to interpretative qualitative studies, in which stories are used to describe human actions. Narrative inquiry enables narrators, in this case the men, to tell the stories of their lives and experiences. According to Chase (2005, p.658), the narrative approach can be used to highlight narrators' 'identity work', 'as they construct selves within specific institutional, organisational, discursive and local cultural contexts'.

We always optimistically hope and expect that some of the narratives we write and interpret, as in our community men's sheds and men's learning research, are accessible and useful to practitioners and positively influence policy and practice in a range of fields (research, education, training, health and wellbeing). If it were not so, we would not continue to do what we are doing.

We went one step further in Foley, Golding and Brown (2008: 3) to claim that informants who narrate, in this case the men with whom we spoke in the community men's sheds' research, were

... doing more than naively telling us their stories as shed participants without our intervention. Similarly, we are doing more than passively listening. The men we interview are also actively locating themselves in and responding in narrative to our own (sometimes different) theoretical presuppositions about what sheds are and what their function is. It is possible that we have accurately interpreted what the men would have spontaneously told us about health, friendship and community in the shed. It is also possible that we have, through our three different academic interests and presuppositions, in effect created and selected sheds, interviewees and narratives that suit our individual purposes and that match our presuppositions.

## Conclusion

Our conclusion from this extended discussion is that we tend, as academics, to choose theories of learning consistent with our value positions regardless of whether we are teaching or researching in formal or informal contexts. This conclusion is consistent with Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm's (2003: 6) findings that all learning situations contain elements of in/formality that are interrelated in different ways in different learning situations.

These attributes and their interrelationships influence the nature and effectiveness of learning in any situation ... [and] can only be properly understood if learning is examined in relation to the wider contexts in which it takes place.

We similarly conclude that the task of policy and practice, and we would add research, is '... not to see informal and formal attributes as somehow separate ... and the task being to integrate or hybridize them' (p.5). Both 'informal and formal attributes are present and interrelated whether we will it so or not' (p.5). Given Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm's (2003: 5) conclusion that 'in principle, any theory of learning can be used in any setting', we conclude that since we tend to place considerable value on the informal, we are inclined to place more purchase on 'theories which take a broad view of learning as social practice ... than those more centrally focused on individual development / cognition, or the acquisition of knowledge'. This conclusion aligns with the findings of Hager and Halliday (2006) that informal learning is particular and unique. They provide examples of how this occurs through leisure activities and continuing, work-related learning, particularly through survival when unemployed. For us, this points to areas for further, future research. We recognise and argue that informal learning can be located in particular times, places, communities, relationships and situations. Like Hager and Halliday (2006), we concur that informal learning is indeterminate, opportunistic and ongoing, and that it is fostered by alignment to external and internal goods.

We finally contend that there is a power differential that works to create a systemic devaluing of the least formal, informal and hierarchical education systems and sectors (and valuing/promotion of the most formally literate). This power imbalance is regarded as normal and desirable by most stakeholders and is legitimised through neo-liberal educational discourses such as standards, standardisation and accountability that permeate the educational structures in the contemporary Australian education system. We contend that the very nature of informal learning, particularly its unstructured and organic quality, works to dis-empower a range of adult stakeholders and diminish its value as a meaningful educational pursuit in a system that values highly structured, systematised, outcome-driven approaches to young people's learning. For all of these reasons, we regard formal and serious research into adult and community education as critically important.

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## Foucault's toolkit: resources for 'thinking' work in times of continual change

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*This paper was prompted by our interest in two issues associated with Australia's vocational education and training system: recurring declarations for universal access to vocational education and training (albeit in different forms across different epochs) as the right of all Australians and the continual processes of change associated with the sector over the last two decades. As we approach a time of yet more change in vocational education and training, we call for a rethinking of these two characteristics of a training system, as 'problems of the present', situations which in their present form are 'intolerable'. Reflecting a notion of 'thinking' work as personal, political, historical and practical, the paper offers a glimpse of Foucault (1926–1984) as a person. We explain his use of the term discourse as an overarching frame for understanding 'problems of the present'. We review two major aspects of his analytic toolkit: archaeology and genealogy. We close with reflections on the usefulness of these analytic practices as tactics of engagement for researchers interested in historical approaches to vocational education.*

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## Introduction

We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance. (Foucault, 1983b: 209)

[T]o understand properly the Rudd Labor Government's vision for the future, it will help if we understand the past. (Gillard 2009: 2)

The Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system, as Australia's primary public provider of vocational education, was born from concerted struggles to unite two admittedly stereotypical positions around instrumental training for work and a broader approach to education for life. The 1974 *Kangan Report* (ACOTAFE 1974) promoted a distinctive visionary charter for TAFE, the goal being to provide universal access to lifelong education via broad principles of individual self-improvement, job training and the needs of local communities (Ryan 1982). Since the late 1980s, this charter has been subjected to gradual but radical policy change. Shifts here included, but were not confined to adoption of neo-liberal economic fundamentalism – known in Australia as 'economic rationalism' (Pusey 2003: 10) and application of 'market principles' to produce a more skilful and flexible workforce. These shifts had profound effects on vocational provision in TAFE and on educators' work including:

... the establishment of the competitive training market with pressure on providers to compete with each other for tenders; the downward pressure on pay and conditions; the increasingly fragmented and casualised nature of available work; and the bureaucratisation of technical and further education (TAFE) institutes as these form themselves in the model of lean, mean, competitive business enterprises. (Sanguinetti 2000: 233)

Fast forward to 2009 and yet another overhaul of Australia's tertiary system. The Deputy Prime Minister of Australia (Gillard 2009: 5) argues that the vocational system faces new challenges which require new adjustments: "This is not about bolting on new policies to

an already complex system. It is about fundamentally rethinking separate systems and institutions to create better connected learning for millions of individual students". Here we see a new expression of some of the fundamental elements of the visionary charter expressed by Kangan more than three decades ago. This potted snapshot of Australia's vocational system and the epigraphs beginning this paper illustrate only a few of the connections between where we have been, where we are now and where we are going.

As workers in the Australian vocational system prepare for substantial policy change accompanied by a new round of implementation plans (COAG 2008), we argue the need to look anew at "our present circumstance" (Foucault 1983b: 209). According to Foucault, this requires us to resist conventional views of history as the logical and orderly fine-tuning of a problem via successive policy iterations. Rather a 'history of the present' (Foucault 1977: 31) identifies those 'intolerable circumstances' (Gutting 1994: 10) which we face in the present – what we identify in this paper as a mandatory focus on 'training and retraining' (Gillard 2009: 4) combined with incessant logics of policy fine-tuning to produce an efficient and effective pool of workers. We do not suggest we look anew at this problem with a view to establishing the trajectory of universal access to 'training and retraining' and hence to reveal new insights about barriers, completions and efficiency regimes in contemporary times. Rather, the aim of a history of the present is to show that 'our' problem is constituted through particular practices that order, structure and align as they are also contingent upon other discourses never spoken. Undertaking this kind of historical analysis demonstrates that things could be otherwise. We use Foucault's notion of a toolkit (Macey 1993) to explore the 'tactics' available to engage with these notions of history, vocational training and change.

The paper proceeds as follows. We introduce Foucault, precisely because 'thinking' work – the exploration of the limits of/and on

practice, including one's thinking practice (cf. Shore 2004) – is personal, political, historical and practical. In this case Foucault's personal history provides some insights into his theoretical body of work during his short life (1926–1984).<sup>1</sup> We provide an overview of discourse, a term central in situating the paper in the context of negotiations of power and vocational knowledge. We briefly describe two major aspects of Foucault's work, the archaeological and the genealogical, all the while emphasising that Foucault never acknowledged these as distinct stages of a modernist research agenda. We close by revisiting our contemporary 'problem' and considering what Foucault's toolkit might provide for vocational researchers interested in exploring how notions of participation in training and associated systemic change might be understood otherwise.

### Introducing Foucault

For many people who experience marginalisation or discrimination, Foucault's work is not simply theory. While not always easily accessible, his thinking resonates on a very personal level. Here was a man who typified the essential ideals of the Cartesian ego: white, male, European, able-bodied, upper middle-class and a beneficiary of a stellar education, both classical and modern. If he could have ticked the requisite heterosexual box, it is highly debatable whether his subsequent body of work would have generated such productive insights about those deemed marginal in society.

However, Foucault was homosexual and spent much of his life in an intellectual and social environment which viewed homosexuality with all encompassing 'horror' (Macey 1994: 14). As a French

academic of the 1950s and 60s, Foucault, if outed, would have faced immediate dismissal (Macey 1994: 30). Further, a criminal conviction could have brought a custodial sentence in a prison or a psychiatric institution. Religious condemnation remains virtually constant to this day. It is hardly surprising therefore, that Foucault 'never seriously entertained a view of the individual as a bearer of natural rights' (Rabinow 1997: xvi), or that he remained extremely reticent about his personal life. He made occasional commentary about his sexual orientation.

In my personal life, it happened that after the awakening of my sexuality, I felt excluded, not really rejected, but belonging to the shadows of society. All the same, it is a distressing problem when you discover it for yourself. Very quickly, it was transformed into a kind of psychiatric threat: if you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, you are sick. (cited in O'Farrell 2005: 20)

However, this was only later in his career when his academic place and stature were secure and the penal code, psychiatric diagnosis and public opinion on homosexuality had begun to shift. Nevertheless, his potential for being othered was a career-long presence in his work of 'writing the history of the present' (Foucault 1977: 31).

We do not intend to eulogise Foucault. Rather, this extremely selective bio-profile establishes two things from the outset. First, Foucault provides an interesting example of scholarship as personal, political, historical *and* practical: 'each of my works is a part of my own biography. For one or another reason I had the occasion to feel and live those things' (Martin 1988: 11). Second, his body of work exemplifies an engaged and in-process approach to thinking work (Shore 2004), dispelling any fabrication of a theory-practice binary. In the next section of this paper we explore two aspects of his intellectual toolkit, arguing that any thinking about universal access to Australian vocational education is always and already enmeshed in labyrinthine understandings of knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Molly Rowan, one of the authors of this paper, reminds us that a local example of this point is demonstrated by the intersection of influences in Myer Kangan's life, namely, the holistic German vocational education and training influences on Kangan, his personal research projects on Holocaust survivors (cf. Goozee, no date) and his vision of a new universally accessible TAFE in the 1970s.

### Foucault's research frame

Early on in his academic career Foucault followed in the footsteps of Nietzsche, amongst others, challenging the definitive claims of universal truth and rationality in Western philosophical thought.<sup>2</sup> He understood that the constructs used to articulate practice are social and cultural creations, not natural phenomena. He was interested in the 'rules of formation' (Foucault 1972) that constituted what could be known and said about the social world.

Questioning rationality was not simply a matter of revealing alternative truths, for discourses are enmeshed in complex truth, knowledge and power dynamics. Foucault argued that discourses are sets of statements that constitute how the world can be 'known': 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972: 49). But everyday meanings are not easily applied here. The word 'speak' is not a reference back to what is actually spoken. Rather, examining discourses reveals 'the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice' (Foucault 1972: 49). Discourses are *taken up* by policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in everyday practice but these discourses are also 'heavily policed [through] cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of *representation* systems in a given society' (Gandhi 1998: 77, emphasis in original). Care must be taken not to conflate discursive rules and commonsense notions of grammar. Foucault argues our attention should not be distracted by the 'slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between reality and a language' (Foucault 1972: 48). When deploying a discursive toolkit, a researcher pays attention to the dynamics of *how* what can be said – about productivity, about training, about participation, about progress – is constituted by and through discourses. The tension is evident here

<sup>2</sup> Our thanks to an anonymous reviewer for reminding us to make the point that Foucault was not alone in questioning the place of rationality in Western thought.

between an agentic subject central to the politics of change and a subject who simply mimics what is ordained in discourse.

One of the very real challenges of engaging Foucauldian research is how to make sense of a body of work by 'a nonhistorical historian' whose approach to writing employs a 'terse, impacted style, which manages to seem imperious and doubt-ridden at the same time, and a method which supports sweeping summary with eccentric detail' (Geertz, cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982/1983: xviii)! Indeed, it is unlikely that Foucault's writing would have met the refereeing criteria for this journal!<sup>3</sup> With these issues in mind, we present a snapshot of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical work, a tactic which he most likely would not have approved.

### Excavating for 'rules of formation': archaeological analyses

Foucault was ever keen to point out how individuals are always and already enmeshed in discursive practices. The aim of archaeology was not oriented toward 'a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice' (Foucault 1970/1994: xiv). Archaeology then requires one to 'reconstitute the general system of thought whose network... renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible' (Foucault 1970/1994: 75).

An archaeological analysis involves investigation of 'an archive', 'not to uncover the truth or the origin of a statement but rather to discover the support mechanisms which keep it in place' (Mills 1997: 49). As we have noted above, there is often some slippage between Foucault's

<sup>3</sup> Foucault's texts are tricky to read. At particular points he will develop a line of argument with great clarity and then some pages later position himself outside of that logic. One might well argue the benefits of a leaner approach to scholarship; nevertheless the skim read is not a useful way to 'get' Foucault. His are not texts one can dip in and across for key points. Experienced Foucauldians may well see evidence in this paper where we, too, have failed to provide explanations that reflect the *depth* and *discontinuity* across Foucault's sustained body of work.



notion of discourse and commonsense ideas about language. Mills reminds us that 'the archive' is not the examined texts *per se* but refers to the set of rules for what is sayable within an epoch. Rather than an approach that adopts linguistic analysis with the intention of producing meanings, Foucault's work examines the patterns of formation. In *The archaeology of knowledge*,

Foucault is exclusively interested in types of serious speech acts, the regularities exhibited by their relations with other speech acts of the same and other types – which he calls discursive formations – and in the gradual and sometimes sudden but always regular transformations such discursive formations undergo. (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982/1983: 49)

Paying attention to discursive formations renders visible 'the provenance of the very apparatus within which we think' (Mills 1997: 76). Two issues are particularly relevant here as we explore notions of universal access, training and retraining and the notion of persistent fine-tuning of a vocational system: the rules of formation of scientific discourse and the manner in which a discipline, history, constitutes understandings of truth via notions of succession, progress and continuous development. Foucault's interest in discursive formations was not in the history of an intolerable problem *per se* but in those discourses of development, continuity and progress that create unity, continuity and coherence around how one can understand the problem and trace its emergence.

Foucault (1970/1994: xi) argued that conventional histories did not reveal the '*unconscious* of knowledge', those unspoken, unacknowledged rules that applied across quite different scientific disciplines 'unknown to ... naturalists, economists, and grammarians [who] employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories'. An archaeology aimed to surface the rules in common for forming concepts *and* the rules for forming unity across quite different

disciplinary sites. Here, then, was a practice that worked counter to the strategy of tracing succession, continuity and progress about what could be said.

This resonates with the work of many researchers who talk back to the 'exhaustive ordering of the world' (Foucault 1970/1994: 74) governed by the principles of arithmetic accountability that drive the contemporary social, cultural and economic restructuring of Australian institutions.<sup>4</sup> An archaeological approach demands detailed critical work at a number of levels to identify the rules of formation of concepts that shape the production of knowledge across quite diverse scientific investigations and epochs. For this paper, it provides a way of understanding how different forms of universal access emerged as a solution to the problem of the present: relentless change and continual fine-tuning of the vocational system which is repeatedly constituted by and through discourses of productivity and welfare reform.

Archaeology also displays respect for differences, 'grasp[ing] them in their specificity' (Foucault 1970/1994: xii). Local criticism is possible, indeed necessary, but also requires one to locate oneself in relation to a form of reasoning (arithmetic accountability, for example) which is only one amongst many. Drawing out these specificities requires archaeologists to pay attention to discourses of change as much as the specificities of change itself. This requires an understanding of the protean and temporal character of discourse at the same time as we remember to remain alert to those practices of coherence that would paint a single story of the emergence of 'training and retraining'.

Despite attention to 'specificity', a common criticism of Foucault's archaeological writing is that it provided few avenues for individuals

<sup>4</sup> While not archaeologies *per se*, see for example Butler (1999; 2001), Sanguinetti (2000) and Scheeres (2003) who have taken up Foucault's invitation (1980a: 65) to access his toolkit, try out his 'gadgets' *and* make them their own.

to articulate social change. In exploring archaeological possibilities, repressive tendencies of power were more prominent. This period of activity might serve to undercut the relevance of Foucault's work for many vocational researchers if it had remained at this level. We return to this issue in our closing section: What is the work to be done?

### Unsettling the present

In reading across Foucault's work, it is apparent that he uses writing 'above all to change himself and not to think the same thing as before' (cited in Stoler 1995: ix). His genealogical work was prompted by reading Emmanuel Kant, his study of Greco-Roman culture and interpretation of the ethos of the Enlightenment. These influences offered possibilities for rewriting history mediated by different understandings of power than those shaping archaeological analyses.

Foucault (1976: 92) maintained that power was not a *thing* to be owned and monopolised. Nor was it 'a group of institutions and mechanisms to ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state... a mode of subjugation... a general system of domination exerted by one group over another' or other conceptions of power commonly in play. Rather, power is 'the multiplicity of force relations imminent in the sphere in which they operate *and which constitute their own organisation*' (emphasis added).

Genealogy works with the latter 'productive' elements of power not expressed within archaeological analyses to 'emancipate historical knowledges' (Foucault 1980b: 85) from those processes of knowledge production associated with the sciences. However, care is again needed here as discourses of emancipation are accompanied by a multitude of meanings in the fields of community services and adult literacy with which we are associated. In his genealogical work, Foucault argued that conventional scientific knowledge processes suppress, and continue to suppress, *two* kinds of knowing: those

understandings that are 'the products of meticulous, erudite, exact historical knowledge' (Foucault 1980b: 82) yet not recognised by the scientific community and marginalised local knowledges often deemed to be the knowledges of local communities, minorities, indeed even educators. As noted above, some of this thinking was evident in his archaeological work where Foucault demonstrated the force of constitutive rules in shaping what was able to be expressed, recognised and heard as, for example, substantive issues of access in any given epoch.

By drawing attention to these processes of ongoing suppression, Foucault reminds us that *disciplinary knowledge* is itself subject to a series of rules and regulations. He exemplifies this by noting that many 'have questioned whether Marxism [for example] was, or was not, a science' (Foucault 1980b: 84). Of relevance to our argument in this paper, the point is not to determine an answer to this issue, but 'to question ourselves about our aspirations to the kind of power that is presumed to accompany such a science' that denies Marxism a place within scientific knowledge. These erudite knowledges are exemplified by practices that portray paid work and skilled labour to constitute the rules of formation of *scientific* vocational knowledge. Local knowledges manifest in the vocational literature in terminology associated with priority areas and target groups. These categories point to the ways in which socio-economic status, age, gender, race, mobility, region and religion, and a myriad of other classifications, capture the knowledge of those in the 'shadows of society' and with whom Foucault felt such an affinity (O'Farrell 2005).

In our case, a genealogical approach holds promise for its potential to address the problem of the present posed at the beginning of this paper in two ways: analysing the notion of universal access and many of its more recent iterations such as access to training, equity, equality of opportunity, diversity management, user choice, parity of knowledges through recognition of prior learning and so on, and

unsettling the very provenance that constitutes 'the vocational'. For Foucault, this translated as follows:

the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state *and* from this type of individualisation which is linked to the state. (Foucault 1983b: 216, emphasis added)

This is the challenge for both of us as researchers, particularly as it applies to ascendant discourses of clarity, consolidation and streamlining of 'the national' (Gillard 2009) and those subjugated knowledges that belong to the unruly 'local'. This 'liberation' is not simply about disrupting a dominant discourse of effective implementation that has legitimated repeated changes to policy, pedagogy, research management and even conceptualisation of what counts as vocational knowledge. Genealogy aims to build a history of a problem *from the present* but its purpose is not to produce a linear trajectory of 'drivers' linked to remedies. To understand the difference, Foucault's use of the term 'eventalization' is helpful. Eventalization focuses on 'the event' in its historical and situated entirety. Avoiding the 'temptation to invoke a historical constant', it interrupts the pull to self-evident solutions, causes and connections, generating a procedure of 'causal multiplication'. Similar to many qualitative research processes, it encases events in 'a "polyhedron" of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite' (Foucault 2003: 249). Hence eventalization is not aimed at closure and thus presents a number of challenges for researchers in contexts of highly regulated knowledge production. This kind of 'qualitative research' would attend to 'little things' and 'details' (Foucault 1977) in the context of wider struggles associated with the subjugation of local and erudite knowledges of vocational training noted above. The importance of analyses of power is obvious here. Little things are often so obvious, so mundane, as to

be unremarkable. In one of Foucault's often misunderstood quotes, he argues:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper - and pessimistic activism (Foucault 1983a: 231–232).

Foucault was fully cognisant of the obstacles and struggles encountered by people involved in 'genealogical insurrections' (Foucault 1980b). He argued (1976: 95–96) that as every counter power moves within the horizon of the power it intends to overcome, it is likely that with resistance, a fresh counter power is provoked. People experience resistance from those institutions and people with investments in dominant discourses. Insurrections constitute and are constituted by those dominant discourses, hence they are never outside 'the rules which govern the production of utterances in general' (Mills 1997: 76), for example, about universal access. Struggles around the production of utterances necessarily involved not only activities of critical thinking and rigorous self-knowledge, but also interconnection with others, joining forces, sharing concerns and importantly a self-reflexive engagement with one's own complicity in those dominant discourses.

This approach has something in common with the circumstances of many contemporary vocational education and training researchers and practitioners who like us may well have lived in a time when vocational discourse was less driven by efficiency principles. We do not mean to suggest here a return to 'the good old days' of Kangan. Rather, we argue that Foucault's toolkit offers a way of engaging with a new period of policy implementation that reveals both continuities and dissonances with discourses from previous epochs.

Discourses are protean, as are vocational systems, even if they do not always seem so. With Butler (2001: 77), we argue that these conditions present us with 'choices to make and work to do'.

### What is the work to be done?

Many readers will recognise and may well support the broad tenets of change demanded of contemporary vocational policy and research. These vary from superficial and incessant fine-tuning of reporting systems to 'fundamentally rethinking separate [tertiary] systems' (Gillard 2009). In this paper we argue that these positions are often premised on caricatures of change that obscure historical struggles about vocational knowledge that Foucault identified at *two levels*: erudite and marginalised knowledges.

Starting with 'big theory' often works counter to the mantras of immediacy and relevance embedded in vocational discourses. Looking elsewhere, for example engaging with a Foucauldian toolkit, involves uncomfortable, difficult reading as we negotiate new disciplinary ways of thinking. Clearly, Foucault's readings challenge the 'keep it simple' mantras associated with vocational education and training.

However, looking to Foucault also runs the risk of capturing the local and situated experience of vocational education and objectifying it beyond recognition. This was one of the oft-mentioned criticisms of Foucault's archaeological work, and it is a recurring theme in the broad field of education when theory is instrumentally *applied* to lives. We argue that Foucault's research can be directed at the local and regional, the strategic and situated, as it also offers opportunities to explore a history of the present; how we arrive at this particular system of education and training at this particular time and with these particular features.

Foucault's work provides a challenging set of analytic resources. He encouraged people to consider his work as a 'toolkit to be used or discarded by anyone and not a catalogue of theoretical ideas implying some conceptual unity' (Macey 1994: xx). In response to critics concerned about the totalising tendencies of archaeological analyses *and* the apparently non-generalisable outcomes of genealogical investigations, Foucault (1980a: 65) argued that he used these 'gadgets' because he was 'involved in certain conflicts'. Thinking work of this kind was a tactical response with the local and the specific in mind. Despite others positioning him as such, he displayed a wilful reluctance to be positioned as the expert knower (Macey 1994). Nevertheless, in employing aspects of his toolkit, researchers can become particular kinds of knowers, actively involved in constituting understandings about systemic change as we also recognise the extent to which we are enmeshed in an archive we cannot name (Foucault 1972: 130). Balancing these tensions requires a good degree of self-belief *and* self-doubt, rigorous introspection *and* historical awareness: it takes time, flexibility, artistry, a strong voice and a willingness to let go of preconceptions. This is hard work, hard thinking work, that also requires an understanding of what Foucauldian analyses *are not*: that is, a toolkit that will reduce the 'fragmentation and complexity across our post-compulsory landscape' (Gillard 2009: 14). If anything, Foucauldian analyses surface the 'little things' that embody this complexity and fragmentation.

We think Foucault's toolkit and the selected analytic resources explored here are helpful in examining the continuities and shifts foreshadowed by recent documents (COAG 2008, Gillard 2009) revealing a new (and not so new) epoch of change in Australian vocational education. Working across these reports and delving into Foucault's toolkit reveals how that engagement is embedded within vocational discourses that are never simply contemporary.

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## Building capacity through sustainable engagement: lessons for the learning community from the *GraniteNet* Project

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*This paper reports an exploration into critical success factors for the sustainability of the partnership between the University of Southern Queensland and the Stanthorpe community during the GraniteNet Phoenix Project – the first phase of a three-phase participatory action research project conducted during 2007–2008. The concepts of learning community, social capital, university-community engagement and partnerships, and co-generative learning through participatory action research and evaluation are brought together to provide a framework for evaluating the sustainability and efficacy of the university-community relationship in the context of the GraniteNet project. Implications of the findings for the ongoing*

*sustainability of the partnership are discussed, as well as for the relevance and utility of identified critical success factors. The paper also discusses implications of the findings for university-community engagement partnerships that utilise participatory action research and evaluation processes to build capacity through co-generative learning.*

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## Introduction

According to Kilpatrick, Jones and Barrett (2006: 36), ‘research that engages communities presents many opportunities for regional universities and their communities to learn together’. Focusing specifically on evaluation of the university-community partnership in Phase I of the *GraniteNet* project, this paper aims to add to the existing body of knowledge on university-community engagement through an exploration of factors that both contribute to and undermine the sustainability of this partnership. It also identifies implications for the practice of university-community engagement that seeks to build capacity and support development of the learning community. Critical success factors for sustainable community-university engagement emerging from a review of the relevant literature are discussed and a set of 13 factors is developed as the basis for evaluation of the university-community engagement relationship in *GraniteNet* Phase I. The paper reports the processes and outcomes of the evaluation, and discusses issues impacting on credibility and trustworthiness in practitioner research as well as strategies implemented to address them. Implications of the findings for the ongoing sustainability of the partnership are discussed, as well as for the relevance and utility of critical success factors for university-community engagement. The paper also examines implications of the findings for university-community engagement partnerships that utilise participatory action research and evaluation processes to build capacity through co-generative learning.

## Background to the *GraniteNet* project

As part of a community development initiative, the Granite Belt Learners (GBL) group was established in 2001. During Adult Learners’ Week celebrations in September 2005, the initiative culminated in Stanthorpe Shire Council declaring the shire to be a learning community. Stanthorpe Shire is located on the Granite Belt of South East Queensland, with a population of 10,600, of which half live in the town of Stanthorpe with the remainder dispersed throughout the fifteen surrounding farm properties covering a geographical area of 2,669 square kilometres. Typical of smaller, rural communities west of the ‘great divide’, the town has an ageing community, a low median income, a lower proportion of the population with post-compulsory education qualifications and lower use of information communication technologies (ICT) in comparison with Brisbane metropolitan and larger coastal centres in Queensland (ABS 2001, 2006, cited in Cavaye 2008), all of which are considered risk factors in terms of the community’s continued prosperity and longer term sustainability.

Informed by the principles of lifelong learning and learning communities presented by Kearns (1999), Longworth (2007) and others, the Granite Belt Learners group identified information communication technologies as a potential tool for supporting the learning community initiative and proposed the re-development of *GraniteNet* – an existing but disused virtual community portal. The group, however, recognised the need for additional expertise and through the benefit of existing relationships, a research and development partnership was established with the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) which adopted a participatory action research approach to the design of a three-phase project that would culminate in the development and implementation of a virtual community portal designed to support Stanthorpe’s development as a learning community.

The group worked with researchers and discipline experts from the university for a period of 12 months, engaging in participatory action research involving a series of facilitated workshops and focus groups that combined the local knowledge of community members with the knowledge of discipline experts and the broader research community to generate foundation concepts, principles and frameworks that would, hopefully, serve to inform the development of a sustainable community portal. Outcomes of this phase of the project included community engagement and governance frameworks, specifications for functional requirements of a community portal, a community portal prototype and a number of recommendations around critical success factors and sustainability. Subsequent funding submissions to the Queensland Department of Communities have been successful and the project is now entering its third phase. The focus of this article is on evaluation of the university-community engagement partnership during the first phase of the project.

### Literature review and conceptual framework

#### Conceptualising the learning community

The learning communities movement emerged during the 1970s in response to a perceived need for rural and regional communities across the world to adapt to significant changes in the structure of their economies as a result of globalisation, the impact of technological innovations and changing demographics (Longworth 2006; Candy 2003). Learning communities, cities, towns and regions adopt a

learning-based approach to community development ... within a framework in which lifelong learning is the organising principle and social goal, [and] explicitly use lifelong learning concepts to enable local people from every community sector to act together to enhance the social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions of their community (Faris 2005: 31).

The so-called 'wider benefits' of this increased participation in learning are often defined and described in terms of enhanced human, social and economic capital as well as improved health and wellbeing (Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Bassett-Grundy & Bynner 2004). The concept of and rationale for the learning community of place, or geographic learning community (as distinct from online learning communities, communities of practice, communities of interest) draws on a number of theoretical constructs that are inextricably linked. These include:

- the notion of the community as a subset of society and related concepts of community development and renewal, individual and community capacity, active citizenship and civil society;
- the various forms of capital (social, human, cultural and economic) available to individuals and communities; notions of place and place management;
- theories of lifelong and life-wide learning;
- and, more recently, the role of information communication technologies in supporting networked learning and connectivity in order to bridge the so-called 'digital divide' that is said to exist between urban and rural communities (Bourdieu 1983, Putnam 2000, Candy 2003, Kilpatrick 2000, 2005, Knox 2005, Longworth 2006, Duke, Osborne & Wilson 2005, Williamson 1998).

Importantly, the notion of learning in a learning community is viewed from a social-constructivist perspective and is therefore seen to occur through the interaction of relationships and knowledge 'constructed as a product of the interaction and dialogue that occurs between specific actors, conceptualised as a complex diffusion rather than a systematic transfer of information' (Scoones & Thompson 1994: 43). A review of key concepts underpinning the Stanthorpe learning community initiative articulated in 'Learning for life on the Granite Belt: a community learning strategy for 2003–2008'



(Cooper 2003) reveals the premises underpinning the Stanthorpe learning community initiative to be firmly located in this theoretical framework.

#### The scholarship of university-community engagement

As institutions of formal learning that lie ‘at the hub of local life in all sectors of activity’ (Longworth 2007: 119), universities find themselves under increasing pressure to remain viable and relevant in the changing global environment and in particular to their local communities. Enhanced connectivity between universities and their communities ‘is the basis for accessing disparate sources of knowledge for new ways of thinking (“learning”) and acting (“enterprising”) to address regional futures’ (Garlick & Langworthy 2004: 2). Adopting a leadership role and utilising effective engagement processes, universities can work with their communities to explore problems relevant to those communities, facilitating problem-solving, fostering innovation and supporting capacity-building through the dissemination of ‘new knowledge, understanding and insights to the whole community’ (Longworth 2007: 118). Boyer (1996) used the term ‘scholarship of engagement’ to describe a range of scholarly activities that ‘connect the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems’ as well as the creation of a

special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge ... the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us (p. 148).

Community engagement, defined from a meta perspective (Garlick & Langworthy 2004), provides a number of principles and frameworks from which to conceptualise and potentially measure aspects of engagement and evaluate their success. However, it is arguable whether the current spectrum of engagement has the capacity to allow for a comprehensive evaluation of both the explicit and implicit

assumptions underpinning community engagement projects such as *GraniteNet*. Moreover, Garlick and Langworthy (2004) have identified a number of institutional, structural and philosophical barriers to effective university-community engagement including the narrow view of regional development that sees university–regional engagement as ‘project and discipline specific, small scale, and university dominated’ (p. 4). At a national symposium on community-university partnerships in 2003, Holland *et al.* (2003) noted:

A major challenge for our field is to derive principles and best practices from across this evidence base to facilitate the ability of emerging and existing partnerships to translate these into practice and policy, and to identify unanswered questions for future study and policy development ... [as well as to] ... strengthen the research and evaluation components of community-university partnerships for the purposes of continuous quality improvement, knowledge advancement and new partnership development (p. 2).

It is the aim of this paper to contribute to this evidence base.

Using participatory action research and evaluation in community engagement to build community capacity and social capital

Participatory action research is described by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 5) as ‘collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social ... practices’ (cited in Hughes & Seymour-Rolls 2000: 1). According to Merrifield (1997: 2), participatory action research ‘starts from the premise that research should be owned and controlled not by the researchers but by people in communities and organizations who need the research to act on issues that concern them’. As one of the scholarly activities referred to by Boyer, community-based, participatory action research and evaluation ‘presents many opportunities for regional universities and their communities to learn together’ through local research projects that ‘explore issues of national and/or global relevance in local

contexts ... and provide an opportunity for regional communities to examine their practices through a different lens' (Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones 2006: 36). Insights gained from previous participatory action research and evaluation projects conducted as a partnership between the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba and the Stanthorpe community support these claims. For example, data from project evaluations indicate that successful engagement of the university with the community through ongoing cycles of collaborative, participatory action research and evaluation projects can indeed serve to build community and university capacity through co-generative learning (Elden & Levin 1991) and enhance social capital by using 'brokers' to establish 'bridging and linking ties' between the formal education institution and the community (Kilpatrick 2000: 6, Arden, Cooper & McLachlan 2007, Arden, McLachlan, Cooper & Stebbings 2008).

Bringing together the concepts of learning community, social capital, university-community engagement and partnerships, and co-generative learning through participatory action research and evaluation, provides a useful framework for conceptualising as well as evaluating the sustainability and efficacy of the university-community relationship in the context of the *GraniteNet* project.

## Methodology

### Research paradigm

In dealing with a level of social reality focused at the interface between the *meso* level of the learning community and the *micro* level of the individuals who are actors within that community, the evaluation is firmly located in a paradigm that values and seeks to understand relationships. These are found among people in communities and between people and the 'formal and informal infrastructure' of their communities, as well as the nature of actions and interactions that are conducive to achieving positive

outcomes for individuals and communities. These occur through civic engagement, participation in lifelong learning and the building of social capital (Kilpatrick 2000: 4). Accordingly, the evaluation methodology adopted draws on models of participatory action research and evaluation (Wadsworth 1997, 1998, Elden & Levin 1991, Adult Learning Australia 2005) designed to model as well as foster effective community engagement practices by actively involving community members as research partners (see Arden, Cooper & McLachlan 2007).

Adopting a practitioner or participant researcher approach presents a number of challenges and dilemmas for the researchers in terms of ethical issues, research quality, trustworthiness of findings and ultimately, the credibility and utility of the research (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler 2007, Edge and Richards 1990, Wadsworth 1997). As practitioner and participant researchers cognisant of these challenges, we have attempted to address some of them through a systematic approach to each stage of the evaluation with a view to ensuring equal representation of 'insider' (community) and 'outsider' (university) perspectives. We hope this will go some way to mitigating the tendency for overly-subjective interpretation of data that would render the evaluation of limited credibility and utility. In addition, we have adopted a critical stance and dialogic process in the analysis and interpretation of the data that we hope will enable the evaluation to move beyond what Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007: 205) describe as a 'celebratory account' towards an 'emancipatory account ... that attempt[s] to address the more difficult and challenging substantive ethical concerns in relation to the wider social and political agenda'.

### Evaluation design: purpose, questions and processes

The purpose of the evaluation was twofold:

- to evaluate the effectiveness of the relationship between the university and community in Phase I of the *GraniteNet* project against a set of critical success factors for sustainable university engagement, with a view to recognising strengths and addressing weaknesses; and
- to ‘validate’ this set of critical success factors by determining the extent to which they were seen by stakeholders as being important in the partnership.

Building on earlier work on critical success factors for university-community engagement undertaken by Garlick and Pryor (2002, cited in Garlick and Langworthy 2004) and a review of literature focusing on university-community engagement (CDC/ATSDR 1997, Harkavy 2006, Holland, Gelmon, Green, Green-Moton, & Stanton 2003, Woolcock & Brown 2005) as well as participatory action research and social capital (Wadsworth 1997,1998, Elden & Levin 1991, Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones 2006), a set of ‘10 critical success factors for university-community engagement’ was devised against which an initial analysis of two community engagement projects was undertaken (see Arden, Cooper & McLachlan 2007). Some initial propositions were developed about the relevance, utility, validity and importance of these factors which resulted in the construction of an expanded set of 13 ‘critical success factors for *sustainable* community engagement’. These differentiated between implicit and explicit (or tangible and intangible) factors that were seen, in combination, to be important to the sustainability of the university-community partnership. It is this set of critical success factors shown in Table 1 below that has been used for the purposes of this evaluation. (The numbering of the various factors in the table reflects the order in which they were progressively added to the list.)

Table 1: *Critical success factors for sustainable university-community engagement*

More tangible factors (explicit)	Less tangible factors (implicit)
1. Written agreement (MOU/Contract)	3. Evidence of trust
2. Clear and agreed purpose to the relationship	6. A shared vision
4. Results orientated to meet community defined priorities	8. Sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources
5. Demonstrated commitment of resources and leadership	9. Commitment to learning
7. Interdisciplinary (university) and broad community involvement	10. Acknowledgement and respect for ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles, knowledge, expertise and perspectives
11. Demonstrated mutual benefit (university and community outcomes)	12. Effective communication
13. Ongoing evaluation	

The evaluation process was designed to achieve formative, summative and research evaluation purposes:

- **formative** insofar as project participants, through the process of review and reflection on the partnership, would be able to identify emerging issues impacting on the sustainability of the relationship that could be addressed in Phase 2 of the project;
- **summative** in that conclusions would be able to be drawn about key factors impacting on the effectiveness of the partnership during Phase 1; and
- **evaluation research** in terms of the learnings from the field that might contribute to the broader university-community engagement knowledge base.

A questionnaire was devised in order to investigate the perceptions of key community and university stakeholders about the strengths

and weaknesses of the partnership during Phase I, and to identify emerging issues. The intent was to focus on understanding the more implicit, less tangible factors of the partnership and to facilitate a reflexive engagement with these issues through a follow-up workshop. A set of 10 questions was devised to draw out information relating to the identified critical success factors without actually making these explicit to respondents – a strategy which was adopted in order to achieve the second purpose of the evaluation outlined above (that is, to determine the extent to which each of the 13 factors actually emerged in the data and which, if any, were seen to be of importance to the respondents). The questions were designed to be as open as possible and to seek feedback on what respondents saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship, the nature and extent of the investment from each of the partners, the benefits and outcomes achieved for each, and finally, what the respondents would identify as critical success factors for the partnership.

Questionnaires were issued to 10 community members and four university staff who had been closely involved in Phase I of the project. Of these, eight community responses were received and two from university staff. A number of attempts were made to organise the follow-up workshop, however this did not eventuate due to time constraints and other factors. The impact of this on the quality of findings is discussed in the following section on limitations. The process undertaken to analyse and interpret the questionnaire responses was as follows. Both researchers collaboratively reviewed and summarized the responses to each of the 10 questionnaire items, then subsequently independently reviewed and interpreted this summary against a previously devised set of seven critical questions designed to draw out the substantive issues in relation to the two evaluation purposes identified above:

1. How important are the identified critical success factors to the sustainability of the university-community engagement partnership?
2. Are there other critical success factors emerging from consultations with university and community partners that have not been identified so far?
3. Which factors are perceived as being most important from the different stakeholders' perspectives, and why?
4. What is the value placed by the respective parties on the ongoing sustainability of the relationship?
5. What are the perceived risks and barriers to the ongoing sustainability of the relationship? How can these be addressed?
6. What have we learned from this experience about successful university-community engagement?
7. How can we ensure that we incorporate this learning into future community engagement projects?

The two researchers then met again to discuss their respective interpretations of the data and emerging issues, a summary of which is reported in this paper.

#### Limitations impacting on the findings and emerging issues

As novice, qualitative researchers, we acknowledge the significant limitations of the study and their impact on the quality of the findings. As stated above, the lack of a follow-up workshop with respondents impacted on the sufficiency and richness of the data that were able to be collected and precluded the possibility of adequately and authentically representing the individual voices of the respondents – that is, of telling their stories. It could further be claimed that the trustworthiness of the findings is questionable as we did not re-check our interpretations with respondents. As a result, the following questions must be posed and answered: 'What warrant do we have for the statements we make? Why should people believe our version of

the story? What difference does our research actually make?’ (Edge & Richards 1998: 349). Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) maintain that ‘in the end, the quality of evidence ... will rest upon the ways in which it has been collected and the purposes to which it will be put’ and pose a series of ethical guidelines for practitioner research which they maintain ‘underpins an orientation to research practice that is deeply embedded in those working in the field in a substantive and engaged way’ (p. 205). They maintain that the research should ‘observe ethical protocols and processes ... be transparent in its processes..., collaborative in its nature..., transformative in its intent and action,... and be able to justify itself to its community of practice’ (pp, 205-6). While acknowledging the limitations of the research which means that the conclusions that are able to be drawn can only be tentative, we stand by the processes undertaken in terms of ethics and transparency, as well as a genuine attempt to ensure that both community and university perspectives are equally represented, and a degree of confidence that the insights gained as a result of this investigation serve the purposes for which the study was designed.

## Discussion

Factors contributing to and undermining the university-community engagement relationship and implications for the ongoing sustainability of the partnership

Factors seen by respondents as strengths and benefits of the partnership related to the sharing of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ knowledge and expertise, a demonstrated commitment to and focus on opportunities for learning, and a demonstrated commitment of time, resources and enthusiasm from both partners towards the achievement of shared goals and mutually beneficial outcomes. There was an acknowledgement of the element of reciprocity in responses from both university and community stakeholders – that is, that there were benefits on both sides as a result of being involved in the project. Community members valued the contributions from

university staff of specialist knowledge and expertise that enabled the progression of an ‘idea’ or ‘vision’ towards a more concrete reality. University staff likewise valued the commitment of time, energy and enthusiasm from members of the community as well as the contribution of local knowledge. The roles of the three major players in the project (USQ Chief Technology Officer and Project Manager, Community Development Worker and USQ Researcher and ‘Broker’) were noted as being important to the success of the project. Overall, the responses indicate an acknowledgement of commitment and enthusiasm from both parties and a general recognition that all participants made a valuable contribution considering time and resource constraints.

An analysis of responses to various questions on the survey alludes to the presence of the following critical success factors having impacted positively on respondents’ perceptions of the partnership:

- A clear and agreed purpose to the relationship
- Demonstrated commitment of resources and leadership
- Demonstrated mutual benefit (university and community outcomes)
- A commitment to learning
- Acknowledgement and respect for ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles, knowledge, expertise and perspectives
- Sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources

The strong focus on learning emerging in the responses from both partners is seen as significant and is discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Moving on from this admittedly ‘celebratory’ account, analysis of responses about the factors seen to be problematic in the relationship is revealing. It highlights the potential significance of evaluations such as this, not only in terms of understanding the impact of less tangible

factors on the engagement relationship, but also for challenging inherent assumptions and power inequities.

When asked about what did not work so well in terms of the community-university relationship, responses from community members almost invariably expressed the strong perception that the university was dominating the process ('felt sometimes as if USQ was running the show') and that university staff needs were privileged over those of community members. This appears to have manifested in a perceived lack of availability of university participants and lack of communication which resulted in 'disquiet and confusion' on the part of community participants. Interestingly, responses from university staff expressed a degree of frustration with waxing and waning levels of participation and engagement on the part of community members which required people to be 're-engaged and updated'. What is clear from the data is that differing levels of involvement and accessibility of stakeholders at various stages, combined with communication breakdowns and lack of information sharing along the way, contributed to a 'muddying of the waters', a diffusion of the vision, and created opportunities for misunderstandings to occur that resulted in an eroding of trust and feelings of resentment. This alludes to the importance of the following critical success factors for sustaining the partnership over the longer term:

- Effective communication
- Acknowledgement of and respect for 'insider' and 'outsider' roles, knowledge, expertise and perspectives
- Evidence of trust

Issues hinged on the communication processes that enabled the development of relationships based on trust and respect. This in turn facilitated effective learning processes whereby knowledge was shared for mutual gain (reciprocity). Where critical stages were impacted on through lack of availability of either party, the relationship was seen to stall. Seddon, Billett, Clemans, Ovens, Ferguson & Fennessy

(2008) believe that social partnerships are susceptible to these types of instabilities because of the absence in many community settings of the strong routines and resource buffers available within organisations and institutions. Moreover, given the perceived low status of community-university engagement in the tertiary sector at the present time, there is a concern regarding sustainability of projects that rely heavily on key leaders within universities who may well change over time.

What is clear is that the development and maintenance of the trust relationship that is critical to sustainability of the partnership is dependant on clarification and management of expectations, acknowledgement of and respect for the circumstances and constraints under which each partner is operating, as well as a commitment to effective communication that demonstrates respect for the other party as an important and valued partner. What is also clear is that those community members who had a consistent level of involvement in negotiations and discussions at all stages of the project were less likely to express mistrust and more likely to attribute responsibility for feelings of frustration and confusion to issues of communication and information sharing, rather than mistrust *per se*. Nonetheless, the issue of the power imbalance inherent in the relationship is not one that is easily addressed and will also be discussed later in the paper.

In terms of the implications for the sustainability of the partnership, it appears that clear articulation and management of expectations – at the outset of each project or project phase, and revisited on a regular basis – is critical. This is not new knowledge, as Holland *et al.* articulated exactly these sentiments back in 2003 on the 'ideal characteristics of effective partnerships':

In particular, there is continuing difficulty around the issue of partnership goal setting and the articulation of one's own expectations of the partnership. Too often, partnerships

are launched with a focus on a specific project or funding opportunity, and too little attention is given to the deeper and broader goals and expectations that participants bring to the table. In such a case, partners may assume they understand each other's motivations and rush on towards project and proposal planning. Absent an upfront and continuing investment of time and energy into a candid and comprehensive reflection on the goals and expectations of each partner, all the other features associated with effective partnerships will be difficult to implement and sustain [*sic*] (p. 3).

#### Implications for the scholarship of community engagement

##### *Avoiding 'the missionary position'*

In *Campus review* (1 July 2008), McNulty, chief executive of Trafford Borough Council in Manchester in the United Kingdom and 'visiting UK expert in lifelong learning' called on universities to 'have a little bit of humility – to work with each other and respect what we can learn from each other', rather than seeing engagement with their communities as 'a one-way activity ... simply outreach from a missionary obligation perspective' (p. 6). The data from this study show that the value of the relationship for the community participants was gauged by how it made them feel – the lack of communication (for information) produced insecurity for those who may not have participated as much as others or who were not in the 'inner circle' of responsibility and served to foster the perception of inequity in the relationship. It would appear that recognition and acknowledgement on the part of the university, not only of its responsibility to 'grapple with problems of relevance and significance to the local community' but to recognise that 'grappling with significant, local problems also has the capacity to begin mending a fractured academic community because the very enterprise depends upon the participation of a multiplicity of faculty and administrators from across the university' (Harkavy 2006: 19), is an important first step in addressing the problem of power imbalance in the relationship that inevitably breeds misunderstanding and mistrust.

##### *Validity and utility of critical success factors confirmed*

The evidence suggests that the critical success factors used to evaluate the university-community partnership were relevant and important to the respondents. In identifying the top three critical success factors, responses were consistent with the barriers mentioned by many of the community respondents and are listed in order of those mentioned most frequently:

- Open and effective communication and dialogue
- Shared vision and understanding
- Clear and realistic expectations and roles
- Commitment of project team members
- Identification and demonstration of tangible and measurable outcomes and achievements
- Respect

What emerges as a particularly interesting finding is that, without having explicitly asked respondents about whether or not, and what, they may have learned from their involvement in the project, and to what extent a commitment to learning may or may not have been important for success of the project, responses to questions about the strengths and benefits of the partnership consistently reflected a valuing of the opportunities that the project presented both parties for social and transformative learning, as illustrated in the comments made by both community and university respondents as shown in Figure 1.

*Expanding ideas to include people from out of town makes us think carefully*

*Excellent presentations (workshops)*

*Practical experience of working in groups*

*Sharing knowledge generously with community*

*Recognition and acceptance by all of the importance of a community-owned and driven project*

*Realisation of the complexity and difficulty of achieving project objective*

*Model of engagement used (participatory action research)*

*Commitment of community based on Stanthorpe being a learning community*

*Successful combination of local knowledge and outside expertise*

*Loved the learning and ability to contribute to community project*

*Liked hearing different ideas and being part of groups*

*Interested in online conference – potential benefits of ideas for other communities*

*Data for USQ about community needs adds to body of knowledge over time*

*Process streamlined and crystallised into a step-by-step process*

*Project brought a concrete reality that could be described with confidence and authority to others*

*Community engaged and evolving (learning)*

Figure 1: Responses to questions about the strengths and benefits of the GraniteNet Phase I partnership

Overall, the results appear to indicate that, while the less tangible critical success factors are considered by respondents to impact significantly on the quality of the university-community partnership, and that a commitment to learning is seen as a significant success factor for all participants in the project, the achievement of tangible and measurable outcomes is also critical, particularly for community members, and is linked – along with a visible ‘in kind’ contribution from the university – to the building of the trust relationship. As mentioned earlier, differing – and often unrealistic – expectations of individual community and university participants of the levels of commitment, participation, in-kind contribution, and resources that would be contributed by each of the parties, along with the different value placed by individuals on process (less tangible) and outcome (more tangible) factors, in combination, appear to have been significant in their ability to undermine the relationship.

#### Implications for subsequent project phases

There are a number of critical issues that have emerged for the researchers as a result of this evaluation, not the least of which is the need to ‘begin with the end in mind’ as noted earlier by Holland *et al.* (2003) and ensure that time and resources are allocated at project start-up to making the implicit explicit through ‘a candid and comprehensive reflection on the goals and expectations of each partner’ (p. 3).

In relation to critical success factors, it is pertinent to ask: at what level are these critical success factors gauged? At what point do trust and respect become counter-productive and lead to a lack of critical questioning around processes that undermine achievement of objectives? Close-knit networks can in fact impact on an individual’s ability to remain impartial and to be critically honest regarding the nature of interactions or problematic situations. Ongoing examination of how these factors play out in context will help us to better understand and transform our engagement practice.



In this sense, the willingness and capacity of the participants to engage in reflexive learning through formative evaluation has not yet been fully examined. The recognition of this fact will be used to guide the strategies and tools for evaluation that will be used in Phase II of the project to ensure that a greater emphasis is placed on making explicit the learnings that occur formatively as well as summatively. As important as the findings in relation to the identified critical success factors is the realisation that there is much more work to be done and, given the already mentioned perceived time paucity of participants, it will be necessary to involve participants in a discussion regarding the implementation of more in-depth evaluation processes.

## Conclusion

What has clearly emerged from this study is the importance for the success of the university-community partnership of an explicit focus on learning through the adoption of participatory action research and evaluation processes. As stated by Garlick and Langworthy (2004),

regarding all participants in an engagement process as learners in a learning situation, all bringing a different set of skills and experiences, is a way of minimizing impediments to dialogue and enterprising action that can result from the cultures and norms of different organization involvement (p.14).

The findings of the evaluation clearly validate the importance of critical success factor number 9, commitment to learning, and support the claims made by Garlick and Langworthy (2004), Kilpatrick, Jones and Barrett (2006) and others about the benefits for universities and communities of undertaking engagement projects using participatory action research and evaluation. It is through ongoing, sustainable engagement projects such as these that the capacity of universities and communities for sustainable engagement will, over time, be built. This will only occur, however, if critical success factor number 13, ongoing evaluation, is addressed through,

as recommended by Garlick and Langworthy (2004: 1), '[b]uilding a culture of improvement through evaluation in university/regional community engagement'.

What we see as critical to the sustainability of the relationship is to take the time to make explicit the less tangible factors related to management of expectations and communication and to explore strategies for working with university and community stakeholders that will encourage a critical reflection on and questioning of their own assumptions about working with one another and how this, in turn, impacts on their engagement practices, particularly in relation to communication. We therefore recommend the addition of two critical success factors to our list of 13:

- Clarification and management of stakeholder expectations
- Avoiding the missionary position

This last factor we see as being particularly useful for attempting the challenging and uncomfortable task of raising and discussing the power imbalance which, although normally unspoken and unacknowledged, is nonetheless an ever-present factor that serves to undermine sustainable and effective partnerships between universities and 'their' communities. It remains to be seen whether or not, and to what extent, this will serve as a useful recommendation.

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## Education at the centre? Australia's national union education program

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*Australian trade unions are at a pivotal moment. In 2007–2008, a review of the training and education programs of the Education and Campaign Centre (ECC), the education arm of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), was conducted through a series of interviews with leaders of twenty-five unions. The review found that Australian unions do not generally view education as a core strategic activity, and many see the ECC simply as a training provider that they could access if they did not have their own trainers. We argue that there are greater possibilities for a national education centre than are currently being contemplated by the union leaders. A key to realising these possibilities lies in unions articulating a shared purpose for union education, and its role in supporting leaders, officials, delegates and activists in the continuing challenges they face in their work.*

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### Introduction

Over the last twenty years, Australia's rate of union density fell from 46% in 1986 to 19% in 2007 (ABS 2008). The election of a Labor government at the end of 2007 has given the union movement new opportunities for renewal and growth. While legislative changes and new political alliances are significant factors in turning around the industrial relations environment and strengthening the voice of the unions, it is also important to contemplate what role education and training has in this rebuilding process, and in particular, what role a national union education centre can have in such a project.

The Education and Campaign Centre (ECC) is the education and training arm of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Australia's national peak council of trade unions. During 2007–2008 we researched the views of Australian state and national union leaders about their approaches to union education and training, and their views of the programs being offered by the ECC<sup>1</sup>.

The research provides a picture of the state of union education and training in Australia as viewed by its leadership. This picture is one that does not foreground education and training as an important element of union building, renewal and sustainability. This situation has not been the result of any deliberate downgrading nor does it reflect a shared vision or approach to education and training within the movement. While the picture represents the views of a significant group of union leaders, which may not necessarily match the views of groups of delegates, officials, rank and file members, and workers/members more generally, we argue in this paper that the union movement as a whole must engage in a debate about the role of education and training as part of its immediate and longer term strategies for renewal and sustainability. In particular, we argue that the Australian union movement has an imperative to engage in such a debate and to explore critically the possibilities afforded by a national education and training centre.

Australian trade union leaders, educators and academics are not alone in evaluating and re-thinking the role and purpose of union education in recent years. Unions in the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States of America have also reviewed the purpose, organisation and delivery of their education programs, and are addressing the similar question of what is appropriate and effective in meeting the changed conditions of work and community in the early twenty-first century.

In the United Kingdom, a review of the first ten years of the TUC's (Trade Unions Congress) Organising Academy has recently concluded (Holgate & Simms 2008). A number of other programs introduced by the Labour Government, such as the Union Learning Fund and Union Learning Representatives, have opened opportunities for unions to source additional funds and positions within the workplace. The value of these programs has also been the subject of considerable debate within labour and academic circles (Forrester 2005, Shelley & Calveley 2007).

In South Africa, Ditsela's (the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour, the training arm of the three South African union federations) fifth labour educators conference in 2006 debated the meaning and practice of workers' education: its impact on workplace restructuring and globalisation, reviewed its first ten years of practice, and considered how to build on collaborations developed with progressive educators at Universities in the Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal (Ditsela 2007).

In the United States of America, there has also been considerable change in the organisation of labor education. In 2002 the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations) abolished its Education Department, and since then a review of Labor Education focused on the breadth and scope of membership education (Byrd & Nissen 2003).

In this paper, we first provide a brief history of recent Australian union education in order to present some context for the review of the ECC, the methodology used, a summary of key findings, and a discussion of the implications of these findings in relation to the future of the movement. In the final two sections, we present our views on the possible roles that a national union education centre can play, and the dilemmas that we see the union movement has to address in order to realise and benefit from these possibilities.

### **Brief history of recent union education in Australia**

Union education and training in Australia has experienced significant changes in its structural base and its focus since the Whitlam Labor Government established the first Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) in 1975. When the Howard government's 1996 *Workplace Relations Bill* abolished TUTA and wound up its operations, it had the equivalent of 46 full-time staff and a budget of \$8.7 million. It owned the Clyde Cameron College in Wodonga, which contained training rooms and residential accommodation for around 70 participants with library and research facilities.

Under its Act, TUTA's functions were to plan, develop and undertake programs of trade union training; co-ordinate training; publish training materials; promote its provision; consult with unions on their internal training programs; and regularly review and re-assess that training. Amendments to the legislation were made in the 1970s and 1980s, and in 1994, TUTA underwent a major restructuring that decentralised training and resulted in the Union Training Scheme. This returned the responsibility for training union delegates to individual unions, resulting in a significant reduction in TUTA costs and staffing and rationalisation of its operations (Parliament of Australia 1996).

The changes since TUTA's abolition have been made in an environment of increasing hostility towards the union movement.

For a period following TUTA's abolition, union education was disoriented as new structures were established to replace it. A successor body, still referred to as TUTA, and the national Organising Works program for recruiting new, young organisers established in 1994, were mainstreamed within the ACTU and formally amalgamated on 1 January 2001. The ACTU established a national Organising Centre (renamed in 2005 the Education and Campaign Centre), which took over responsibility for Organising Works. Later, in 2003, with the funding support of the NSW and Victorian ALP governments, The Union Education Foundation (TUEF) was established to provide formal short courses aimed at delegate development. The Foundation would offer modules that were part of a nationally accredited set of union competencies at Certificate and Diploma level that came under the auspices of the Business Services Industry Training Board.

#### The current context of union education through the Education and Campaign Centre

Promoting and resourcing education as a key means of equipping delegates has been a recurring feature of ACTU reports since the mid-late 1990s. The election of the Howard government, the ending of Accord style politics and the introduction of more direct market mechanisms into employment, welfare, education and industrial relations brought into sharp relief the weakened position of unions in the Australian economy and civil society. Australian unions had for much of the twentieth century built their structures and adapted political frameworks from British unions; during the later post-war boom period, ideas from Scandinavian and German unions influenced Australian union development and were reflected in many policies of the Accord. However, the end of the Accord, the de-regulation of much industrial relations and a more aggressive anti-union agenda lead Australian unions to begin to look at how some American unions, especially those demonstrating successful growth strategies such as the Service Employees Industrial Union (SEIU), organised in a

similar environment. A number of study tours to the USA influenced the reports of the late 1990s and resulted in programs such as Organising Works, the establishment of the Organising Centre and the adoption of what became known as the 'Organising Model'. (Brown 2006, Crosby 2005).

This approach to growth and renewal aimed to rebuild internal capacity, establish new relationships with activist members and organisations outside the formal labour movement, and employ new education or development opportunities for union staff and members. An extensive literature emerged, particularly in the United States, which articulates the rationale and context for what are seen as new democratic ways of organising, alongside details and analyses of organising campaigns (Bronfenbrenner *et al.* 1998, Carter & Cooper 2002, Clawson 2003, Lopez 2004, Milkman & Voss 2004, Moody 2007, Fletcher & Gapasin 2008).

What has been missing in this literature, however, has been a close focus on how education and learning is, or can be, used as part of labour's response to the new world of work, to the rise of anti-unionism on the political front, and to how union renewal can be built on foundations that imagine a different future than that currently laid out.

The gap between knowing what needs doing and implementing it remains a difficult one to bridge. In the findings of a 1999 ACTU survey, 63% of unions reported that less than half of their delegates had received training in the previous three years; 88% reported that less than half of their delegates had received advanced training in that period; and 71% reported that less than half of their delegate education was related to recruitment and organising. The report concluded that there was 'a huge need for training, especially for job delegates, which unions find difficult to meet' (ACTU 2001). Following *unions@work* (ACTU 1999), the *Future strategies* report

noted that ‘overseas experience shows unions will not grow without investing in education’ (ACTU 2003).

Today the ECC employs around 20 educators in five capital cities. However, the low number of unions participating regularly in ECC activities, the low enrolments in courses and the high number of cancelled courses point to some of the challenges confronting the Centre. The ECC has four categories of enrolment. They are courses for Activists, Delegates and Representatives; for Organisers, Research & Industrial Officers, Lead Organisers and Assistant Secretaries; for Call Centre, Member Services and Administrative staff; and finally Conferences and Consultancy. Enrolments for both the first two groups of Delegates and Organisers were lower in the January–June 2007 period than the preceding six months, and as a combined figure lower than the corresponding 2006 period. Conferences and Consultancy figures were much higher during January–June 2007 than the preceding six months but lower than the 2006 period. The only consistently growing area of enrolments was among Call Centre, Member Services and Administrative staff where enrolments had risen over each of the three six-month periods.

The numbers of activists, delegates and representatives enrolled in the January–June 2007 period totalled 524, which as a proportion of overall union delegates is very low, especially when some of the large national unions have more than 5,000 delegates. The number of enrolled organisers and other union staff totalled 1,273 over the same period.

The cancellation in 2007 of around one-third of scheduled courses due to low enrolments was an important factor prompting the review. This represents not only a financial cost associated with wasting staff and physical resources, but a lost opportunity to educate and develop members and officers.

## Research aims and methods

After two years of operation, the TUEF Board in 2007 decided to undertake an evaluation of the ACTU’s education program. The evaluation had four components – an analysis of existing course participation data; structured interviews with key stakeholders, including high, medium and low-level users of the ECC; a telephone survey of selected course participants; and a formative evaluation of the ECC’s current on-line course delivery. The review sought to capture the experiences and views of both those who participated in the education programs and those union leaders with responsibilities for the education and training of their staff and delegates.

Our research focused on the second of these four components. Structured interviews were conducted with 25 national and state leaders from 21 unions with the aims of exploring how decisions about education and training were made within unions; discovering attitudes about the relevance and value of ECC courses and its overall program; identifying how low level users or non-users might be encouraged to use the ECC more; exploring attitudes to competency-based training for union education; and discovering perceptions about whether course participants are able to apply knowledge and skills after attending ECC courses.

Those interviewed included leaders from the five largest national unions ranging through to small state divisions. Unions covering manufacturing, construction, transport and distribution, public services, education, health and nursing, media and communication, hospitality, and retail were included. Some were regular users of the ECC, some only occasional users and some were virtually non-users of the ECC. Of those interviewed, 11 were from National Offices (10 were either National President or Secretary), and 14 were from State branches, (with 10 being either the State Secretary or Assistant Secretary). Fifteen interviewees were men and 10 were women. Interviews were conducted in roughly two phases with the

first group held in the days surrounding the 2007 Federal Election, and the second in the two months following the election. At the time of the first interviews, media expectations were that the Howard government would likely be defeated but among those interviewed there was a high degree of nervousness about the outcome and some interviewees feared for the future of their union if the government was returned.<sup>2</sup>

### **The state of union education and training in Australia**

The findings from the research paint a picture of Australian union education and training, and the unions' expectations of the ECC, as being reactive, fragmented and lacking in consensus. While there were unions that had their own well-developed programs and could provide evidence of how they had positioned education and training in their overall industrial and political strategies, overall, unions appeared to be desperately trying to survive in an increasingly hostile environment and did not appear to be factoring education and training into their overall planning. However, no union dismissed the importance of education and training.

#### **Reactive**

While union leaders were keen to talk about education and training in their unions, only a very few had what could be called a comprehensive education and training plan for their staff and delegates. Some had practices such as sending all of their new organisers to an ECC course, while others had a system of ensuring that delegates were systematically trained. However, no union could confidently say that they had a practice of follow-up after staff or delegates had been to training. Investing time and resources into co-designing, with the ECC, programs that did reflect the culture, political priorities and needs of the union appeared to be a luxury for most unions.

There was a stronger appreciation of and engagement with the ECC among those unions that have had closer contact with the ECC through concentrated work such as consultancies, curriculum reviews, campaign planning assistance and so on. One national president (NP17) commented that their union's close work with the ECC led to a successful program,

but I don't think it would have been a good program if we had just said, okay, you handle it ... [because] if you're trying to do training for officials, then the culture of the particular union and its political priorities and its industrial priorities do vary quite a bit.

Reflecting a lack of awareness of what the ECC could provide, a number of unions worked on the assumption that ECC course structures, content and approaches were non-negotiable: '[the courses are] formulaic and ... you can't question it ... other approaches to organising are not encouraged ... there isn't enough recognition of differences between unions' (SS10). Therefore relationships involving collaboration, which generate mutual understanding and trust, appear to be a key for the ECC in successfully engaging different unions.

Cost-effectiveness was an important factor for many unions, especially smaller and state unions, in deciding how to source education and training. Some that previously had their own in-house training units and staff had to shed these in response to recent financial constraints: 'we had a full-time education and training officer [but] four years ago, we were no longer in a position to have that as a full-time position' (SS16), and felt they had little choice but to use the ECC. For some others, the fact that training was organised by the peak body was enough good reason: 'it's run by the ACTU ... that's where our money would go' (SS1).



### Fragmented

The approaches to training varied from union to union. Some unions saw education and training as a pivotal part of their operation, and had a culture in the organisation that facilitated the integration of education and training with the conduct of campaigns. There were other unions that conducted training and/or accessed training programs but whose programs were reactive and divorced from overall operations.

Many unions approached training using a mix of in-house and out-sourced training, with some relying on the ECC for most of their training, supplemented by using legal firms or other private providers. Although the size of the union and their capacity to conduct in-house training influenced many unions' decisions, there were other factors such as the perceived uniqueness of the industry or their union, or their organising approach, that influenced unions' interest in participating in multi-union programs offered by the ECC. One national secretary, whose union has been doing its own training for many years, explained:

... we would probably take the view – not at any sort of antagonistic or hostile way – that the ECC people wouldn't really understand the nature of [our] industry and the nature of employment, the sort of situation our delegates find ourselves in to be able to do a course as we can do it (NS3).

This contrasted with views of others who saw benefits of organisers training in a multi-union environment, for example: 'I mean we're part of a broader movement, so if there's the opportunity for staff to go and mingle with other union staff, all good and well' (SS20).

What became apparent was that the lack of close connection between the Centre and individual leaders allowed for uninformed and often contradictory views about the ECC approach and practices to co-exist among unions. This was evident in views about approaches to organising, and relevance of courses. Some interviewees believed

the Centre was still stuck using ideas on organising borrowed from the United States in the 1990s, with one national secretary (NS13) of a union that is virtually a non-user of the ECC commenting that 'the impulses are good, but ... it's a very one-dimensional model that can be presented. I think it draws too heavily on some limited US experience'. Some felt the Organising Centre and/or the ECC had pushed or 'rammed down' a particular approach to organising and industrial work, while others believed that the Centre had abandoned such ideas some years ago.

All of the unions, whether users or non-users of the ECC, hold strong views about the relevance of ECC courses. One official from a 'blue collar' union expressed a view that:

... there's a problem [in that] a lot of the courses are very theoretically based, a lot of the case studies are very white-collar based, they haven't actually got experience within their unit to be able to articulate it in a blue-collar environment, which sometimes has completely different cultural aspects to it (NO2).

On the other hand, a leader from a public sector white-collar union felt:

There's no dialogue about trying to get some sort of examples [that are relevant] because it's very blue-collar, private sector dominated rather than looking at some of the variations (SS1).

### Lacking in consensus

Some courses, such as Lead Organiser Development and Union Management, were rated highly by many unions who participated in them. Others, particularly the suite of courses for Organisers, received mixed responses including strong recommendations for a complete overhaul. A third area, regarding the levels of courses, particularly the absence of advanced courses that extended the skills and knowledge of organisers, was a subject of concern.

Those interviewed expected the ECC trainers to have experience as organisers and/or union leaders, and to be able to draw examples from the industries that course participants could relate to; this was a point of tension in relation to multi-union training as expressed above.

There were diverse views about pedagogies – some liked interactive and experiential styles, while others felt a resistance towards those approaches. Respondents, however, rarely mentioned the skills, knowledge and experience of ECC staff as adult educators.

One state leader was critical that the ECC trainers were just ‘delivering the doctrine’ (SS20). Another state secretary’s criticism was that the ECC taught organisers to always ‘be in dispute, you always have to agitate’, suggesting that ECC Organiser courses did not show ‘a way to close the circle of a dispute’ (SS1). What made a good organiser, and therefore a course for organiser development, attracted different views not only between a union and the ECC, but also more generally:

... it’s not very open, but there is a difference of opinion about organising emerging in Australia, and ... in other parts of the world. It’s an evolution of the organising debate – we all still use the term “organising” but I think we now mean different things. One approach is much more paid employee focused where the union leadership or organiser controls everything, it’s very top-down managerial and the organiser learns how to fulfil tasks. The other is more focused on building unions in workplaces and industries – establishing democratic decision making and working with members to achieve this. This is a different skill set for organisers, ... it has a different ideological foundation (SS14).

However, there seemed to be little evidence of unions seeking to discuss these differences as a broader issue for the movement and the direction of union education in Australia.

When leaders were asked about the future of the ECC, their views indicated a general support for its continued existence; however, strategic ideas about its role in the overall union movement were not forthcoming. Moreover, there was not a high level of expectations placed on the ECC. Several mentioned that the ECC was a useful clearinghouse of new ideas and a meeting point for unions to discuss future directions about education and training. A number of others felt that an organisation such as the ECC necessarily had a limited role. Their ability to attract and retain good staff was identified as a critical issue. Another group felt that there was a need to modernise the education and training programs. A few commented on the need for the ECC to take its campaign role more seriously. One National Secretary expressed the view that campaign activities were sites of learning but that this was not being exploited in the ECC’s approach, and raised the possibility that the Centre should provide twin arms for education delivery alongside campaigning and research.

Finally, although most unions had heard of TUEF, the foundation set up specifically for delegate training, they were not aware of its exact role, the amount of funds it had, nor how that money could be accessed, by whom and for what. The leaders had some suggestions, however, on what TUEF should do, including: making funds more accessible in a more transparent manner; applying those funds for broader education and training needs in consultation between TUEF, the ECC and individual unions; supporting innovative and collaborative approaches to education and training to meet delegates different developmental needs; and increasing consultation with individual unions.

The views may or may not be informed by accurate or current information and experience. They are perceptions, and these perceptions of the ECC do have varying levels of influence on each of the union’s inclination to engage with the ECC.

### **Implications of the current state of Australia's national union education**

This research focused on the views of union leaders only, and although they spoke for their own union, they were not asked to present the views or experiences of officials, delegates, activists and rank and file members. This means that the findings around dimensions such as the quality of the delivery and the trainers, the suitability of the range of courses, and the value of undertaking training in-house or in multi-union settings may not reflect the views of their staff and delegates who participated in the training. We also do not know from this research if other officials and delegates share these leaders' views about the role of education and training in their union. United States research into the experiences of new organisers highlights the conflicting understanding union leaders and organisers have about the role of organisers and their training needs. They point to the need for creating an environment that sustains an organising culture in unions, and which includes paying attention to recruitment, retention, learning and mentoring support for organisers (Feekin & Widenor 2002, Widenor & Feekin 2002, Ganz *et al.* 2004, Rooks 2004). Nevertheless, the significance of the leaders' views cannot be ignored.

A noticeable change since the training reform period of the late 1980s, and again since the renewal reports of the 1990s, has been how education and training has lost importance as a central strategic concern. Together the ACTU and TUEF allocate considerable financial and human resources to education and training, yet there was little sense of ownership of or regard for the ECC and TUEF as important resources for the growth and renewal of their own union and for the movement generally. One explanation is that unions have been so much under siege that all they could do in the increasingly hostile recent two decades was to react to the next crisis in membership levels or industrial assault on their sector with some form of damage

control. This harsh environment in which unions have worked also forced them to reduce expenditures, and education and training was one area that was cut in a number of unions. However, in the new environment where unions do have an opportunity for renewal and growth, the question arises as to what roles a national union education centre can play?

The research also found that most unions talked about the ECC as a training rather than education provider. While having skilled officials and delegates is undeniably crucial for any union, one could question whether the real value of a national union education centre is in its delivery of skills-based training. Is it enough for the education and training focus of the movement to be limited to meeting the particular instrumental needs of individual unions, or should the focus be broadened to an education that facilitates critical reflection of what the movement as a whole has just been through, including the highly successful *yourrights@work* campaign, and how it can renew itself into a more robust and sustainable movement?

### **Possibilities and dilemmas for a national union education centre**

In contemplating the possibilities of a national education centre playing a strategic role in the movement, there are some silences and gaps in the discussions about the ECC and union education that need to be examined. Many unions have suffered significant membership losses over the last two decades and are struggling to reverse the trend. During this time, there have been new generations of workers entering the workforce who have grown up surrounded by a strong neo-liberal discourse and have not experienced the presence of unions in their workplaces. This poses a challenge for the movement to help the workforce 'unlearn' what they have learned about their identity as workers and the nature of work. Union training and education focused only on the 'converted' may have limited impact on those who have come through ideologically-based labour market programs,

many of which were designed around employability competencies that were about individuals competing for recognition and reward rather than a collective consciousness about the workplace and other values that unions traditionally hold.

The ECC and many unions have also adopted a competency-based curriculum for some of their education and training programs. Although competency-based training (CBT) has a history in vocational and education training, including unions' strong advocacy of it in the 1980s, many union leaders are now questioning the value of CBT for union education. Many of those interviewed did not support the accreditation and certification aspects of union training. CBT is underpinned by a particular educational philosophy that is not shared by other pedagogies such as humanist or critical pedagogy, which seeks to uncover and address questions of power and justice through engagement of participants in critical reflective practices. The choice of pedagogy in union education will limit or enable different types of learning to occur. The CBT approach, where the focus is on pre-defining clear and measurable outcomes, may be effective in achieving a range of instrumental outcomes, but is less conducive to educating critically thinking union members who can engage reflectively and strategically to lead and grow the movement in changing and challenging times.

The question of who decides the pedagogical approaches a national education centre should adopt relates to a broader question about the 'ownership' of the ECC. What does it mean to be the education and training arm of the peak national body of the Australian union movement? Reviewing the role of the original TUTA, Voll (1997) problematises the relationship between the ACTU and the national education and training centre, arguing that, as a centre structurally separate from the ACTU, TUTA had greater autonomy in the design, delivery and pedagogy of its programs, and was more strongly informed by a range of adult learning theories.

There was little discussion about how 'problems' of pedagogy or content also have the potential to stimulate critical learning about some of the fundamental questions that the movement needs to address: how as a movement, leaders, officials, delegates and activists engage in naming and reflecting on what being part of a social movement means; what ideologies and beliefs are shaping the movement now; and how as a movement differences in views can be negotiated and overcome for what the movement needs to become. At a time when there is increasing discussion about 'community organising' and working in solidarity with different types of community groups, the ability to discuss, debate and learn together inside the movement can model how open discussion can be pursued with potential allies.

### Conclusion

The review of Australia's national union education program reveals that there is a wide range of educational activities being organised or provided by individual unions, but in the main, the degree of thinking and planning for education within unions has declined in recent years.

There is a somewhat fractured delivery system with a small number of unions providing their own educational programs, another small number of mostly smaller sized unions relying on the ECC's program, and another group who make use of the ECC only occasionally. There is little agreement about the core purpose of union education, and on what sort of coordinated union education should exist. A number of unions believe their situation is so different from others they think that there is little need for a common education provider. As a result, there is a lack of consensus about the idea of a national education 'centre'.

There is also a lack of knowledge about the current activities of the ECC. There are strong perceptions of the way the Centre 'trains',

some of which are drawn from personal experience of the Organising Works program, some from the activities of the Organising Centre and others from exposure to the ECC and its staff. Some of these perceptions are inaccurate or outdated yet they are firmly held and shape decision-making within unions. At the most practical level, many union leaders said they were not up-to-date with what was going on in the Centre, they had lost touch with Centre staff, and information about Centre activities got lost amidst the inflow of other notices and correspondence. This view was particularly strong when it came to discussions about TUEF, of which many union leaders had little recognition or familiarity.

These perceptions persist in part because many believe there has been less consultation between the Centre and unions than in the past. A number commented that previously TUTA and the Organising Centre had more contacts between education staff and individual unions to discuss their needs, which would be realised in the education program.

The intention of the ACTU reports of the late 1990s and early 2000s was to position education more centrally in the life of union renewal and growth (ACTU 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). Of those interviewed, only one Secretary made any reference to the reports that shaped the planning for organising and education. One conclusion that could be drawn is that that thinking has become so ingrained that there is no longer a need to refer to it. Alternatively, it may be that, with the passing of time, the impact of those reports has diminished, or that the lack of reference reflects a gap between what is espoused in policy documents and what is implemented on the ground. Some leaders sense that the momentum for linking organising, education and campaigning has stalled.

Some respondents from unions that were devoting additional resources to growth organising, and who were more advanced in restructuring their organising capacity, new campaigning methods

and establishing broader coalitions, did articulate a view of education and development that embraced informal learning approaches. Suggestions included whether the Centre can play a role of providing non-class-based educational support through initiatives such as mentoring, informal workplace learning, targeted seminars, forums and other ideas for the wider movement. In addition, there were views that organisationally the Centre should begin to give priority to developing a stronger 'campaign' arm that would include resourcing areas such as corporate research, coalition building, community organising, working with and learning from social movements and community organisations.

A critical step in overcoming the sense of hiatus is to clarify just what the purpose of union education is in Australia today, and more specifically what the role of the Education and Campaign Centre is. This raises a number of questions about what role unions collectively see a national education centre playing in the wider movement. In educational terms, should a body such as the ECC uncritically fit in with a particular union's approach? Does the ECC have a role in educating unions about new possibilities, as opposed to, or in addition to, individual staff and/or delegates? If so, how should it go about doing this? Is the ECC a service provider for individual unions, or a leader/stimulus of new thinking and working? Can union education be re-conceived as an ecology of provision to include short courses, consultancy, forums, leadership and organisational development, developing technology capacity, corporate research, community organising and campaigning so that this knowledge and experience becomes shared? It is around this mix of threshold and practical questions that more fundamental discussion is needed. If the ECC is to give effect to this broader vision, then further thinking is needed about the mix of skills and experience that Centre staff need as well as the ongoing development of those staff.

Expecting delegates and union officers to work effectively in the challenging industrial, social and political environment of the early twenty-first century without a contemporary education program to educate, support and develop them is short-sighted. Unions already commit significant resources to the education of their members, delegates and staff, but whether this commitment is achieving the intended objectives or reaping the anticipated benefits is less clear.

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### Endnotes

- 1 The full report, 'Education for organising and campaigning in Australian unions: a review of the Education and Campaign Centre', was written by Tony Brown, Geof Hawke and Keiko Yasukawa from the University of Technology, Sydney and presented to the ACTU Executive in June 2008. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ), *Labour, capital and change*, Newcastle, 4–6 February 2009.
- 2 When reporting interviewees' comments, we have used a code. NP, NS and NO refer to National President, Secretary or Officer, and the number refers to their interview number. Similarly SP, SS, SAS and SO refer to State President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary or Officer and their interview number.

## Leadership developmental needs – a system for identifying them

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*This study is an evaluation of the developmental needs of business leaders. Altogether, 190 leaders, representing 22 nationalities, participated in 12 four-day training sessions. The first aim of this study was to identify the key developmental concerns of leaders; the second was to determine what kinds of training methods the leaders preferred; and the third was to design a form that could be used for further training. Fourteen developmental areas were identified. The key areas that needed development were related to Interaction, Coaching, Giving and Receiving Feedback, and Everyday Work Skills. Artificial experience building and tailor-made training were preferred over lecturing. In further training, activating methods need to be used and demographics taken into consideration.*

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### Introduction

Today's leaders need skills of which their forebears had no conception. They are required to fulfil a wider variety of tasks and roles than ever before, and more and more demands are placed on them that are not directly related to the daily business work. The traditional model of a leader has been someone who is good at business; today's organisations demand much more. Leaders need managerial skills, creative ideas and also excellent people skills (Boleman & Deal 2006; Hatch, Kostera & Kozminski 2005). To be able to meet all these requirements, leaders need continuous training and support.

### Purpose

This study combines a review of recent literature in the field of leadership development with an analysis of twelve leadership development programs in European businesses. It has three main aims. The first is to identify the key developmental concerns of leaders in business organisations around the world (Europe, USA and India), taking cultural issues into consideration. Another aim is to determine how leaders prefer to develop their leadership skills. The third aim is to develop a form to be used in leadership training, which will incorporate the key developmental areas.

### Framework

The research material for this study has been collected from twelve leadership courses, offered to four companies, originally Finnish but now international. These courses were directed at middle and higher managers in order to develop their leadership skills. During these courses, artificial experience building as well as shorter and longer lectures, creative activities (photographing, painting, video) and discussions were used. Special care was taken to make the training personal and individual. The leadership courses were offered in



France, Italy, Belgium, Finland, the United States of America and India, from May 2004 to April 2007. All courses lasted four days and the participants (N=190) in each course consisted mainly of four to eight different nationalities, although in India and the USA the participants were mainly local people. The same multicultural team (N=4, two Finns, one American and one Russian; two males, two females) of trainers attended all courses.

### Learning and development in leadership

It is clear that companies benefit from a culture of leadership development. The development of leaders is important to the long-term health and success of organisations, (Ruvolo, Peterson & LeBoeuf 2004, Mumford, Hunter, Eubanks, Bedell & Murphy 2007), so it is worth the investment. This article focuses on leadership development via training rather than experience. People do not learn only from their own experiences, but also from the knowledge and experience of others. When personal experience is combined with training and time for reflection, a leadership development flow is created:

Experience + new knowledge + reflection (with support and feedback) + time (more practice/experience) = leadership growth and development (Ruvolo, Peterson, & LeBoeuf 2004: 14).

Leadership training is a big business and numerous forms of training are offered.

Today's pedagogy places a lot of trust in constructivism, where the participants together with the teacher form the knowledge base. The teacher is more a trainer, a modeller or a coach who 'scaffolds' the learners and helps them to reflect and build on their knowledge base. The role of meta-cognition, especially the participants' knowledge about their own personal cognitive-emotional processes, is central

(Rauste-von Wright & von Wright 1994, Steffe & Gale 1995). Coaching can be offered by trainers and by colleagues.

To respond in an ethical, authentic and effective way to different situations in organisations is challenging. In various research projects (e.g. Holliday, Statler & Flanders 2007, Roca 2007, Moberg 2007), the classical Greek concept of 'practical wisdom' (phronesis) has been used. This technique emphasises the role of play in developing understanding between individuals. In particular, communication among individuals from different backgrounds can be enhanced in a safe way through play (Holliday, Statler & Flanders 2007). In some such experiments, participants have used LEGO bricks for building a model of leadership, first an individual model and then a model made together in a team. Participants gave positive comments after such training, like: 'You could have just stood up in front of us and said, "OK, what you think leadership is?" and that would have been boring. But this way our ideas had to evolve' (Holliday *et al.* 2007: 127). During this kind of training, the participants were able to confront complex and ambiguous circumstances in a safe environment and to take risks with new roles and ideas.

Training methods where the focus has been on people skills, such as listening, building trust and understanding one's impact on others, have been successful, especially when combined with personalised, individual feedback from the trainers. This kind of training has helped to achieve greater self-awareness of and deeper insight into how one's behaviour affects others. The training is even more effective with a check-in after a year or two and with ongoing support and clear involvement from the participants' managers (Goleman 1995, Wasylyshyn, Gronsky & Haas 2006). Follow-up, or at least long-term training with specific milestones, has been shown to be particularly important, as well as commitment and support from the upper levels.

### **Artificial experience building**

Artificial experiences are used in many forms in business training, for example, with case-based learning or with computers. Case-based learning (CBL) with paper cases or acted cases is a widely used tool. The technique is most useful when combined with discussions after the case. Use of computer-based business training is also growing; it allows various simulations and can be adapted to different situations. (Lainema & Nurmi 2006, DeKanter 2005).

In the training courses studied in this research, artificial experience building was used as a teaching method. Three kinds of settings for these artificial experiences were created: 1) whole group situations, 2) small team situations and 3) one-to-one situations. Before these situations, all participants' personal development goals were studied thoroughly by the trainers.

- One whole group artificial experience was used where two actors performed a case in front of the whole group, one being the leader and the other the subordinate. After the acted case, feedback was given to the actors and the situation was discussed with the whole group. Giving feedback was safe, because it was given to the actors. It was also made rather light-hearted, to involve a play-element.
- In small team sessions, various challenging situations were practised, like giving positive or negative feedback or delivering bad news to a team. The actor was one of the team members and provoked the situation, a fact which helped the team to be tough enough to challenge negative feedback.
- The one-to-one situation used cases designed with company personnel before the training. Basic cases were tailored according to individual needs in the training situations. The cases were presented by actors, who are also educational professionals. In each case, the actor took the role of a subordinate and one participant acted in the role of a 'leader'. Another participant observed the situation and gave constructive feedback afterwards.

Special care was taken that the feedback was in line with the personal goals of the 'leader in role', as well as of the climate of this feedback session. After feedback, the roles were switched.

The reason for using these challenging exercises in the form of artificial experience building was to involve participants on a cognitive as well as an emotional level, both of which are required in effective leadership (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson 2007, Popper 2005). All these situations had time limits and a constructive personal feedback session was always held afterwards. Everyone was exposed to similar situations, but never in front of the whole group, only in pairs or in small groups.

### **Culture and demographics**

The values and beliefs of the society can be seen in leadership, which means it is culturally dependent on the context in which it exists. Therefore, there can be no 'one size fits for all' leadership. The current Anglo-Saxon theories on leadership place value on empowerment, power sharing, delegation and creating visions and strategic direction for the organisation (Mellahi 2000). Unlike the Western leadership model, the Asian model is more autocratic and directive: honouring family, kind-heartedness and compassion can be seen in Asian, as well as Arab and African leadership. In Asia the leader is very much in charge (Mills 2005, Mellahi 2000).

Mills (2005) mentions five leadership styles in America: directive, participative, empowering, charismatic and celebrity. He lists also main qualities of a successful leader in the USA and Europe – one of the most important is emotional resonance, the ability to understand what motivates others and appeal to it. This, he thinks, will become more important in Asia when living conditions improve there. Popper (2005) says that emotional influence is important, and it is composed of elements which are characteristic of transformational leaders (see Rowold & Heinitz 2007, Keller 2006). When comparing

American and Chinese managers in conflict situations, it was noticed that Americans relied more on a competing style, while the Chinese relied on an avoiding style. This difference in behaviour is thought to derive from cultural values, conformity and tradition in the East and self-enhancement and achievement in the West (Williams, Morris, Leung, Bhatnagar, Hu, Kondo & Luo 1998).

The effect of demographics on leadership skills was studied by Sarros, Cooper & Hartican (2006). Females scored 'compassion' higher than males, and older respondents scored integrity higher than younger ones. Managers with fewer than five years' experience scored lower for courage and wisdom compared to more experienced ones. It appears that wisdom and ethical leadership increase with age, experience and level of seniority. Leadership skills are cumulative and hierarchical. The existence of different needs at different levels emphasises the importance of tailoring leadership development programs (also Mumford *et al.* 2007).

### Study instruments and methods

Two main instruments were used to study the developmental needs of leaders, the pedagogy used and the outcomes in terms of leadership improvement.

- The developmental needs and outcomes were studied by using a form completed by the participants during the first day of training. In this form they wrote down two to six main personal developmental targets. The participants were encouraged to concentrate on issues which they personally felt were important. All participants did so.
- At the end of the course, each participant completed a general feedback form about the whole course, where every activity was rated from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent) and in addition open-ended comments were allowed. These activities included

lectures, artificial experience building (using individually designed roles), creative activities (painting, photographing), small team exercise (less than half of the group), whole group exercise (roles played by actors in front of the whole group) and video session. This feedback form was also completed by everyone (N=190), anonymously. Only the mean scores from each course are used in this paper.

- An additional feedback form about the pedagogies used during the eight courses was also completed.

The data received with the first instrument were analysed using content analysis. Content analysis was also used with the open-ended answers to the questionnaire about main pedagogical activities. The two other instruments were analyzed using frequencies, means and distributions. With the demographics (sex, age, profession, work experience and nationality) and the data cross-tabulations, t-test and ANOVA were used.

### Demographics

All together there were 190 participants from 22 different countries, with a mean age of 40 years, ranging from 27 to 64 years (standard deviation 6). The majority came from the USA (46) and Finland (43). Other countries represented were Italy (26), India (22), France (15), Germany (8), UK (6), Czech Republic (4), Brazil (4), China (3), Belgium (3), Canada (2) and Denmark (2). In addition, there was one participant from each of Sweden, Norway, Austria, Spain, Russia and Romania. The participants were mainly male, with 152 men and 38 women.

The professions were classified into six categories: engineers (80), marketing/sales persons (43), general management (32), finance/accountancy (13), customer service (12) and human resources (10). The level of these people in the company was either middle or

higher-level management. They came to the course voluntarily, or because their manager had suggested it, in order to develop their leadership skills.

The participants had considerable work experience: 19% (36 persons) had been working for 0-3 years, 17% (32) for 4-6 years and 26% (50) for over 10 years in the company. Unfortunately, 30% of the data is missing because in courses one, two and six this information was not requested.

### The developmental areas

When reading the written developmental needs for the first time, we found 30 different themes. When reading them more closely and searching for related themes (using content analysis), similar issues were recognised. After discussion within the authors, several readings and reassessment, these 30 were concentrated into 14 areas, which are presented in Figure 1 in order of frequencies and also in the text with examples from the participants' written developmental needs. The four most common ones were communication, coaching, work skills and giving and receiving feedback. The least often mentioned three were change management, managing information flow and non-performers. Main developmental areas, with direct quotes from the participants, are given in Appendix 1 which is also the form intended to be used in future training courses.

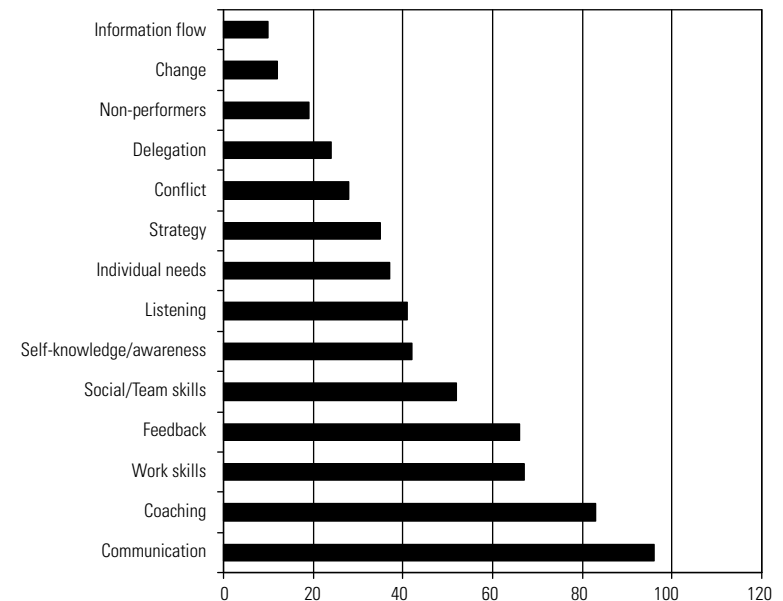


Figure 1: Fourteen developmental needs of leaders (N=190), by frequencies

The 14 developmental areas have been classified by the authors of this article and only minor changes were made after discussions. The 14-item tool has the variety necessary for further training. However, we tried to compress these 14 needs using factor analysis. Unfortunately, the factors obtained were not theoretically complete. However, it was observed that further thematic reduction was possible. When compressing these 14 items further according to their content, six categories emerged (Figure 2).

1. *Intercommunication* (communication, listening, social / team skills)
2. *Evaluation* (feedback, non-performers and conflict management)
3. *Personal growth* (individual needs and self-knowledge)

4. *Coaching* (skills that inspire, energise and develop subordinates)
5. *Managing today* (work skills, delegation).
6. *Leading tomorrow* (strategy, information flow and change issues)

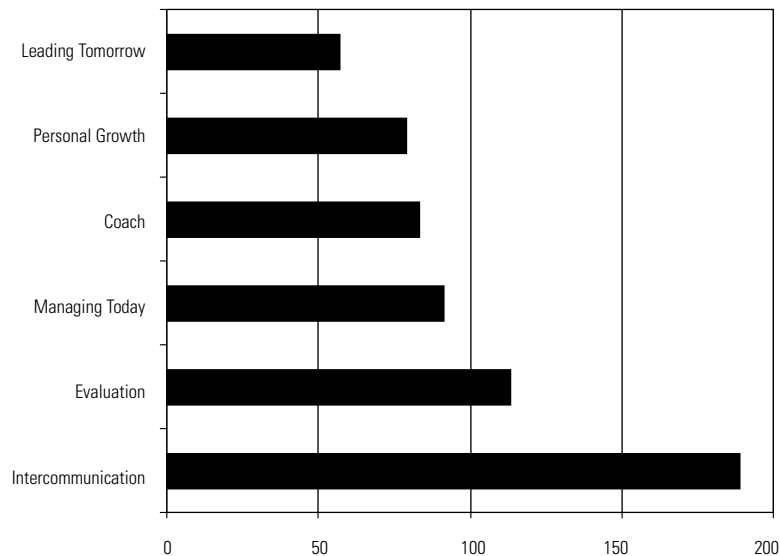


Figure 2: Six categories of leadership development

The reliability of the classification system was confirmed by the first two authors, reading 10% of all course material separately.

### Who needs what?

The results were studied separately for different demographics, and are summarised below.

#### Gender and nationality

Men (151) and women (38) did not have significant statistical differences in age, and both men and women were in all professional groups. On the 14-item scale, men and women did not differ from

each other, while Listening ( $p=0.32$ ;  $F=8.787$ ;  $df=3$ ) and Individual Needs ( $p=0.25$ ;  $F=9.365$ ;  $df=3$ ) were most often mentioned by the Indians.

#### Age, work-experience and profession

Participants were clustered into three age groups (1 = 27-39 years, 2 = 40-52 years and 3 = 53-64 years). When using the 14-item scale, some trends can be seen. The youngest group needed the most development in Work skills ( $p=.017$ ;  $F=4.140$ ,  $df=2$ ). The oldest group seemed to need most development in delegation, but this result was not statistically significant.

Work experience was divided into three parts: 0-6 years, 7-12 years and more than 12 years of experience. On the 14-item scale, managing change was most challenging for the most or second most experienced ( $p=.026$ ;  $F=3.722$ ,  $df=2$ ). The oldest participants needed skills in information flow ( $p=.046$ ;  $F=3.132$ ,  $df=2$ ). It needs to be remembered that 30% of the data was missing. Profession had no significant effect on developmental needs.

### Effective training questionnaire

The general evaluation form dealt with many matters, including accommodation and food. However, when evaluating pedagogical matters, these issues were excluded. The training methods in the evaluation form were divided into lectures, video-sessions, small group creativity activity and three different kinds of artificial experience building, namely small team experience, whole group experience and individual experience. All these were evaluated using a scale where 1 was unsatisfactory and 5 was excellent. The most appreciated way of learning was the individual, tailor-made, artificial experience building, the mean being 4.5 (range 3.6 to 4.8). The least appreciated activity was the lectures, with a mean of 3.8 (range 3.0 to 4.4) (see Figure 3).

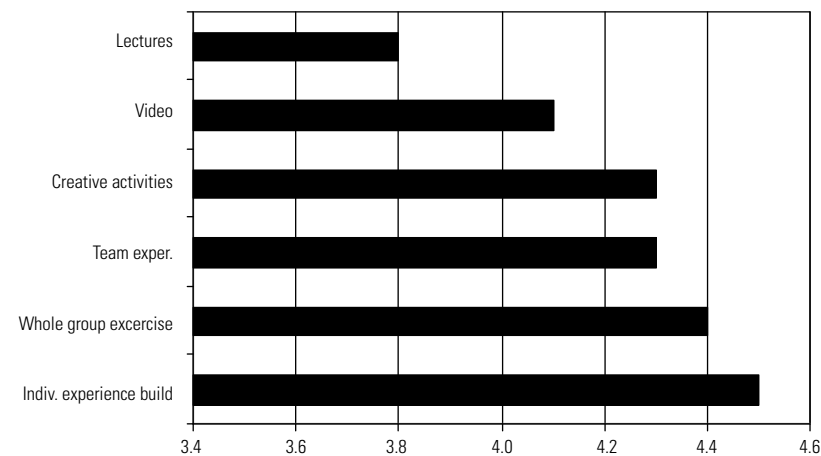


Figure 3: Evaluation of the training methods used (scale: 1=unsatisfactory to 5=excellent)

### Additional feedback questionnaire

Because information from the feedback form was quite general, another questionnaire was used to obtain more detailed information. The information from the questionnaire is in line with the previous set of data. Results from the questionnaire delivered to eight of the 12 courses reveal that the majority preferred mini-lectures with artificial experiences rather than long, powerpoint presentations (see Table 1).

Table 1: Leaders preferred learning modes in frequencies

Total N	Lectures	Lectures + activity	Activities
112	-	63	49

Sample statements from the questionnaires included:

- We need some tips and ideas, concepts, which we then practise. Otherwise there is no learning.
- If you just listen to lectures, you never do it.
- To improve skills, I need to hear something and practise, too.

Descriptions of the artificial experience building were requested and the most common comments included the following: 'enjoyable; instructive; interesting; inspiring; clever; concrete; powerful; helpful; challenging; useful even if sometimes painful; extreme'. The majority found this type of training useful. One participant in 2004 expressed it in a nutshell:

This was different from normal seminars because of immersion in the subject matter. Interaction, imagination and individualisation of the exercises were allowed, based on personalities and styles.

Similar kinds of comments were received in the research by Holliday *et al.* (2007).

### Discussion

The developmental needs of the leaders (N= 190) were grouped into 14 main areas, which have points of convergence with other studies (Mumford *et al.* 2007, Mumford, Hunter *et al.* 2007). The needs mentioned most often were connected to Communication, Coaching, various every day Work skills, giving and receiving Feedback, Listening and Team/Social skills as well as being aware of Individual needs of oneself and of others (see also Campbell 2007). These include interaction with people, knowing the business and knowing the co-workers, also on a personal level. It is also important to be able to function in conflict situations and to give and receive continuous feedback. People skills are essential as well as coaching subordinates.

The 14 areas of development share elements of the transformational and transactional models of leadership. Strategy and change issues could be seen as more transformational, while delegation and work skills issues related more as transactional matters. Other issues share elements from both models, such as listening or team skills (see also Rowold & Heinitz 2007). A modern leader wants to know the business, but that is not enough. S/he wants also to develop

relationships with subordinates and be more of a coach who takes care of teams and also has good self-knowledge. All this demands emotional resonance (Mills 2005) as well as sociability. A leader is a type of artist who knows both business and people, and is also a creative visionary. Leadership is important, although seldom can any single leader be said to affect the performance of a large organization. However, there are positive effects of leadership in the aggregate (O'Reilly, Caldwell & Chatman 2005).

Work skills and delegation skills were needed most by the youngest leaders. Listening skills and the ability to understand and be aware of individual needs was most often mentioned by Indians. The complexity of demands on modern business makes it clear that different training styles are needed. Also, the concept of a good leader is highly variable (see also Håland & Tjora 2006). Leadership is much more than a mixture of skills (Richards 2008).

Learning during the training sessions was socio-cultural, having a constructivist orientation (see Wilson 1996, Steffe *et al.* 1995). The most valued method of training was the tailor-made and personalised approach during the courses. Although modern ways of training via the internet are available, personal contact was preferred. Artificial experience was the preferred model, combining the cognitive and emotional part of learning and taking the leader as a whole person into consideration. Lecturing was the least preferred. Giving and receiving feedback was essential. Feedback has been observed to increase potency in educational research (Hattie 2003), and is one of the most important things when one is learning something new. The idea of experiential learning (Kolb 1984) was used and altered to include artificial experience instead of concrete experience from real life. However, the case was modified according to the person's needs in the role-play process as following: the participant acting in the 'leader' role received a new experience; the observer was able to reflect on it immediately, and the acting leader when given

feedback later. In the feedback discussion, they could discuss details on a meta-cognitive level about the phenomena that were realized in the simulated situation. This meant, for example, realising that subordinates were not necessarily difficult but that the acting leader might have problems in anger management. In this process, the four phases of experiential learning (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation) were realised.

We acknowledge that this research has limitations. The participants in the training were mainly men and the majority had a technical background. The companies studied were originally Finnish, exhibiting a Scandinavian company culture. No follow-up research was done about the developmental needs and learning. Also the form has not been tested in practice.

## Conclusions

In this research, a valuable 14-item form for listing developmental needs was designed in consultation with 190 leaders (see appendix 1). A scale from 0 (no need) to 3 (needs a lot) was later added to it. This instrument will be used in future training. The form has parallels in other research. For example, a similar scale was derived in a school context, in a study measuring good leadership of special school principals. An instrument called Essential Behavioural Leadership Qualities (EBLQ) was designed with subordinates. The subordinates listed essential items and together 18 items were chosen. The most important ones were good listening skills, honesty, ethics and fairness (Oyinlade 2006). The list and the process of developing it were similar to ours. Future training will reveal if our form is useful.

A good leader wants to develop soft skills as well as business skills. Communication and coaching, including energising and inspiring, are the two top skills to be developed. Good communication skills and a coaching attitude are excellent tools for a modern leader.

Our research showed that an individualised approach and artificial experience building are very well received by participants and hold considerable value in leadership training.

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## Appendix 1: Leadership Development Scale

(Takala & Winegar 2009)

Here are 14 areas of leadership development. You can choose whether you need 'a lot' of development (3), 'quite a lot' (2), 'some' (1) or 'not at all' (0). You might have some other areas where you want to develop yourself. Feel free to write them at the end of the scale. The black titles can be interpreted broadly. The italics after them are examples. You can write your own specification: if you think you need to develop your communication skills, write something in the space provided.

Area that needs development	0: I don't need any	1: I need some	2: I need quite a lot	3: I need a lot
<b>1) Communication:</b>	0	1	2	3
Convincing skills; Assertive communication; Communicating good and bad things to subordinates at the right time; Being approachable.	I need to .....			
<b>2) Coach/inspire:</b>	0	1	2	3
Showing concern about reports on their progress, achieving goals, rewards, feedback; Promoting continuous development; Personal progress of staff; Improving motivation; Inspiring; Energising.	I need to .....			
<b>3) Work skills:</b>	0	1	2	3
Prioritising; Decision making; Organising, Follow up; Analysing own workload.	I need to .....			
<b>4) Feedback:</b>	0	1	2	3
Giving feedback – positive and negative; Feedback seeking techniques; Continuous feedback.	I need to .....			

<b>5) Social/team skills:</b>	0	1	2	3
Treating people with respect; Treating different sub-ordinates with different approach and language; Empathy; Identifying understanding capabilities; Involving sub-ordinates in decision making; Moving towards 'we' from 'I'.	I need to .....			
<b>6) Self-reliance/ self-awareness:</b>	0	1	2	3
Saying 'no' instead of accepting/agreeing on opinions; Being tougher; Reflecting on own actions; Balancing work and private life.	I need to .....			
<b>7) Listening skills:</b>	0	1	2	3
Concentrating on the person with whom you are interacting; Not reacting without listening; Listening actively and patiently.	I need to .....			
<b>8) Individual needs/knowing them:</b>	0	1	2	3
Knowing your people; Adapting style to suit different people and situations; Knowing more about subordinates; Correcting approach in personal situations.	I need to .....			
<b>9) Strategy/vision:</b>	0	1	2	3
Extending vision; understanding what is more important; Bringing along people to achieve the common goal; Challenging the present status; Remembering the big picture; having a helicopter view!	I need to .....			
<b>10) Conflict:</b>	0	1	2	3
Handling difficult personal situations – work / non-work related; Handling disappointment of subordinates; Managing conflict for win-win solutions.	I need to .....			
<b>11) Delegation:</b>	0	1	2	3
Maybe I´m doing others' jobs; Learning to delegate more.	I need to .....			

<b>12) Non-performers:</b>	0	1	2	3
Being clear to non-performers; Working with difficult/non-performing/challenging employees.	I need to .....			
<b>13) Change:</b>	0	1	2	3
Trying out new ways of working; Coping with change resistance.	I need to .....			
<b>14) Information flow/control:</b>	0	1	2	3
Sharing information; Controlling information flow in order not to waste anybody's time; Presenting information that is not popular.	I need to .....			
<b>15)</b>	0	1	2	3
	I need to .....			
<b>16)</b>	0	1	2	3
	I need to .....			
<b>17)</b>	0	1	2	3
	I need to .....			
<b>18)</b>	0	1	2	3
	I need to .....			

## Regional academics' perceptions of the love of learning and its importance for their students

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*Whatever the course, mode of delivery or type of institution, most characteristics of good teaching remain the same. The teacher's ability to convey personal enthusiasm for learning is crucial in arousing and sustaining students' interest and curiosity in their discipline and beyond. This love of learning can be liberating and empowering as the students discover and construct their own knowledge. However, there is limited research addressing the development of a love of learning in the Australian context. This article draws on a small study – a survey of regional campus academics' perceptions of the love of learning and its importance, and how they sought to foster its development in their students. The*

*interviewed academics affirmed the importance of a love of learning, but had varied ideas concerning what this meant and how to inspire it in students. A range of approaches to developing this quality is suggested.*

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### Introduction

With changing emphases in higher education pedagogy – flexible/ blended delivery, problem-based learning, student-centred learning, service learning and other developments – along with a more diverse student body than in times past, higher education teachers need great flexibility and adaptability. They have had to come to grips with the requirements and opportunities provided by new demands, new technologies and new priorities. The teaching role has been transformed so that there is a much greater focus on the learning that it enables. There is also the matter of what is taught – much more than just course content. Many universities aim for their graduates to acquire a number of generic qualities so that they will be effective professionals and ethical citizens, able to work autonomously or in groups to solve problems, and be prepared to be lifelong learners. For example, the University of South Australia has developed a list of seven 'graduate qualities', with indicators to show that each has been achieved; assessment tasks help to ensure the development of these qualities (University of South Australia 2009). Some of the values and attitudes that university staff hope that their students will learn are perhaps 'caught' rather than taught, one of these being a love of learning. As a recent Australian higher education review discussion paper states, and with which we concur:

Higher education can transform the lives of individuals and through them their communities and the nation by engendering the love of learning for its own sake and the passion for intellectual discovery. (Australian Government 2008: 1)

The 'love of learning', a concept that can be used by people in many different ways, can be liberating, as learners feel 'a power and capacity to understand, discover, and grasp truth' (Nilsen 2004: 3), these being capabilities previously not imagined for discovering knowledge for themselves. However, research addressing this topic is limited.

### Love of learning

Learning has different connotations for different people. Some view it as acquiring information and skills (a positivist view), while others see it in terms of making meaning (a constructivist view). These ideas influence both teaching and learning, for example whether approaches to learning will be deep or surface or achieving (Paterson & Evans 1995, Biggs 1999, Prosser & Trigwell 1999, Ramsden 2003). Drawing on a number of educational researchers and theorists, Moore, Willis and Crotty (1996) have discussed this dichotomy in connection with a study of perceptions of student learning. In using this phrase 'love of learning', we recognise that it may encompass both views of learning. Moreover, it includes not only the idea of wanting to learn, but degrees of joy and enthusiasm attached to this desire.

For millennia, humankind has found delight in learning. For Socrates, as shown in Plato's dialogues, it was 'a perpetual ecstasy' (Sax 2006: 1). A modern philosopher likewise described the joys that learning gave him over the course of his life (Adler n.d.). The psalmist delighted in meditating 'day and night' on God's law (Ps. 1: 2, Revised Standard Version). The idea of 'learning for learning's sake', or knowledge being an end in itself, was expressed in 1851 by Newman in *The idea of a university* (Newman 1851/1962). He showed that this idea was by no means new, citing Cicero's belief (first century BC) that knowledge is the thing that attracts us once physical needs are met:

... as soon as we escape from the pressure of necessary cares, forthwith we desire to see, to hear and to learn; and consider the

knowledge of what is hidden or is wonderful a condition of our happiness. (cited in Newman 1851/1962: 79)

This was echoed more recently by Maslow's theory of motivation, with the need to know and understand, and for freedom of enquiry and expression, motivating people once their basic existence and relationship needs (Cicero's 'necessary cares') have been fulfilled (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, Reeve 2001).

Taking up Newman's ideas, Sax (2006: 2) suggests that currently we should have as our ideal that 'All academic work should always be inspired by love of learning', this 'devotion to learning' being a necessary if not a sufficient reason for engaging in such work. Universities, he holds, can be responsible for cultivating 'the desire to learn', just as countries seek to foster patriotism in their citizens (Sax 2006: 3).

Observation shows that children usually have a natural curiosity to learn about things, with an abundance of 'Why?' questions. Hunt (2008) elaborates on this phenomenon, suggesting how it may be nurtured. A recent discussion has explored the question: 'Do schools quash students' enthusiasm for learning?' (McLeod 2007). Others note a dwindling of 'curiosity and excitement' as students enter adolescence, with parents and schools often having less time available to cultivate these qualities (Stead & Starmer 2003: 1). Therefore, it appears that by the time people reach university this curiosity has often been lost, and needs rekindling and promoting.

Good teaching comprises a number of constant values, regardless of course or program, mode of delivery, or extent to which technology is used. The most important of these values is a 'passion for learning' according to Stein-Parbury (1999: 3), with others being concern and compassion and respect for students as individuals and as learners. This passion for learning 'reflects the value of interest in and inquiry about the world in general and one's discipline in

specific' (Stein-Parbury 1999: 3). This sense of inquiry or curiosity also relates to one of the other graduate qualities that the university upholds – the ability to pursue lifelong learning (University of South Australia 2009). Whether graduates have this quality depends to a large extent on 'the climate of intellectual inquiry in the institution', what influences that most being 'whether or not the academic staff members themselves manifest a lively curiosity, a passion for their subject and a predisposition towards being continuing lifelong learners themselves' (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994: xiii).

There are a number of reasons for communicating this value to students. For one, there is growing consensus that there is too much emphasis on accessing, gaining and imparting information in current educational systems (Nillsen 2004). While these are important, regurgitating information does not define a mature form of learning. Mature learning comes from within; it comes from 'seeing the immediate and more tangible learning task in a wider context, a context which enlarges the person' (Nillsen 2004: 4). Teachers today feel pressured to cover the content of their courses and try to teach 'everything' about their topics. In putting so much focus on content, which is growing with increasing knowledge and technology, they adopt practices that lead to stifling approaches involving little interaction and creativity. These of course fail to capture the interest and stir the imagination of students (Stein-Parbury 1999), with teachers not able to engage with their students in their learning or journey of discovery. Teachers' love of learning can have the effect of engaging students and promoting optimal learning. At the same time, demonstrating this to students benefits teachers as well by helping them remain up-to-date with advancements in their field.

While some may consider that willpower and determination in study will bear fruit, Simone Weil's opinion is that this is more characteristic of what may be needed in learning manual tasks, whereas 'The intelligence only grows and bears fruit in joy. The joy

of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running' (Weil 1973: 71). Another scholar has commented on this: 'in Weil's perspective, we go to school to ameliorate that attention deficit that is cured not by medication but by a desire to marry our deep gladness with the world's deep hunger' (Boys 2004: 3). A desire to learn has been called 'the greatest tool ... with which to achieve [one's] aspirations' (Lawrence 1998: 3), as is borne out by the accounts of many mature-age students who have come to university later in life.

Whether this love of learning can be taught has been addressed by Nillsen (2004). While doubting that it can be taught explicitly, for love 'cannot be imposed from outside' (p. 3), he maintains that 'it is possible to try and create an awareness in the student so that a love of learning can develop spontaneously' (p. 5). Remaining open to all possibilities for student learning, providing a learning environment which is free of fear and rich with opportunities to demonstrate the passion for learning, and facilitating events and circumstances whereby this occurs are ways of encouraging the love for learning. Other approaches that he mentions include providing time for reflection, the use of analogy and quotations, and continually looking for relationships within and across disciplines, the last-mentioned also having been highlighted by Newman (1962) as the great advantage of a university environment.

### **An investigation into academics' ideas about the love of learning**

Academic staff members from a regional university campus, located in a small city 400 kilometres from its state capital, were invited to contribute their thoughts concerning the love of learning. The selection criteria were that they were currently teaching or had taught previously (for at least two years) in any of the undergraduate programs offered through the campus, and that they were willing to participate in the study. Ten academics contributed, deemed adequate

considering the relatively small number of academic staff at the regional campus. They represented all program areas.

The campus, which is the headquarters for the University's Centre for Regional Engagement, currently has undergraduate degree programs in Business, Nursing and Social Work, an associate degree program (two years) in Engineering, a University Foundation Studies program, and postgraduate programs for students in areas such as health and community development. Staff are also involved in delivering courses to another regional centre in the south-east of the state, and farther afield to external students including a large cohort of Open Universities Australia students. The campus is host to a local University of the Third Age (U3A) group, who provide an on-site example of retired people continuing to learn for the love of it.

### **Aims and approach**

The aims of this study were to:

- clarify the notion of love of learning held by these rural academics
- determine the value they ascribed to love of learning
- examine how they sought to inculcate love of learning through their teaching, and
- explore how academics could be assisted in encouraging the love of learning amongst students.

A descriptive-interpretative approach to research was used to answer the questions on whether rural academics do in fact encourage love of learning and how they inculcate this in their students. This approach enabled an exploration of meanings associated with 'love of learning' and the identification of individualised methods of seeking to inculcate it.

Qualitative data were gathered by means of either short interviews or as written responses to four questions, depending on the respondents' preferences and time availability. In the case of interviews, which

were intended to be conversational, a semi-structured approach was taken, so as to guide the discussion and ensure that the same questions were explored with all participants. The purpose of the study, potential outcomes and actual involvement were explained to the academics who agreed to participate. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants provided written consent for the use of their comments in this paper, on the understanding that their names would not be used and that they would not be identified in any way in the reporting. Research data from interviews were documented, with participants having the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the notes taken and make alterations as necessary.

The following questions were used to trigger discussion of the participants' experience:

- What is your notion of 'love of learning'?
- Is it important to inculcate this in our students?
- Why is it important? (Or, if it is not important, why not?)
- From your experience as an academic, how do you inculcate this in your students?

### **Participants' perceptions**

Participants were able to express their views, thoughts, attitudes, feelings and experiences of the love of learning and share how they endeavoured to increase students' desire to learn at greater depth. Interpretive analysis of the responses to the questions follows.

What is your notion of 'love of learning'?

There were differing notions offered by the participants, ranging from references to the 'pleasure' involved to its unceasing nature, which provided 'pieces of the jigsaw puzzle' to complete the picture of what is meant by 'love of learning'. Several referred specifically to their own love of learning. 'The passion one has for new knowledge and understandings' was one participant's response, while two

others similarly mentioned 'getting pleasure' from studying and exploring the new, whether areas of knowledge or skills. It brought 'intrinsic rewards', being 'learning for its own sake' and with 'no other motivation'. One stressed that it involved going beyond what had to be learned as part of a study course. Continually learning as a part of one's lifestyle was mentioned by three participants, referring to their own situation, and so it was 'endless', involved maintaining a sense of curiosity, and had the potential to bring a measure of wisdom. It also involved empowerment, acquiring the knowledge that enabled better decision-making. Motivation for learning came from within the self, and involved seeing connections and a purpose and use for this learning, said another, diverging a little from the 'for its own sake' stance. Another similarly recognised that there was also satisfaction in finishing a course or a qualification, a point also alluded to by two other participants. Here is one participant's response, which highlighted the idea of the dynamic, exciting quality of learning:

My notion of love of learning is I like to see the lights come on in people's brains. I think it is not only stimulating learning but they can see more questions to answer and they get excited with the topic but also learning because it achieves something.

Is it important to inculcate this in our students?

The majority of the ten participants (seven) were quite definite about the importance of encouraging a love of learning in their students, using expressions such as 'very much so' and 'absolutely', and remarking that 'this needs developing'. One stated:

As teachers, we do not only impart content. We do more than that. We try to build capacity and empower students to learn for themselves.

Others recognised that some students had a love of learning that should be encouraged, but admitted that many students sought extrinsic rewards: 'gaining a prerequisite for another course, earning

a degree parchment as a pathway to a job, etc.', or 'a bigger pay packet'.

I think there is a continuum: some may enjoy the sense of achievement that they get from gaining good grades rather than the actual learning of new material.

One remarked on the workload of students, with 'so much to do that they haven't got time to exercise a love of learning'. On the other hand, this participant expected to see 'at least a strong interest in their subject' in honours students.

Why is it important? (or Why is it not important?)

The importance of encouraging a love of learning was seen in terms of personal, career and societal benefits. With regard to personal benefits, it was seen as part of 'personal growth', 'important for the development of the person', generally 'useful' and 'an enjoyable part of life'. Developing habits of learning and enthusiasm for it would assist them to 'become resourceful, independent, lifelong learners', which would be 'a need for all of them' in all aspects of their lives, and 'important for their professional practice'. In order 'to best serve their client, they need to continue to learn' was one comment from the human services area:

I think this is very important as the learning does not stop once they have their degrees, it is a lifelong process. So to encourage students to have a love of learning is very important for their development as professionals.

Without it 'there will be no improvement for imparting knowledge'. It was important for continuity of professional knowledge:

I consider it a type of handover and I want them to carry on the care and adjust it to their own needs and those of others.

These qualities would enable them to 'extend their influence' and 'benefit society as they will become the leaders of the future'.

Love of learning would counteract some of the less interesting aspects of some courses:

Because service learning is boring if there is no love/motivation for them to know the knowledge. I think it's definitely necessary for students to motivate themselves to learn. To look broader and seek information from a variety of resources including themselves as a resource for learning. Without the development of the person (love of learning), it is difficult for students to see the need to learn because they are separated from the knowledge.

Those disagreeing that it was important to inculcate love of learning in their students (though not saying that love of learning itself was unimportant) took the stance that it was unrealistic to expect to inculcate love of learning. These three participants thought that most students were there 'simply to do the work necessary to get a qualification to get them into a profession', as one expressed it, and lacked the time to do more than the essentials of their course.

From your experience as an academic, how do you inculcate this in your students?

One way of fostering love of learning and the recognition that learning was a continuing need was to emphasise to students that what they encounter in their courses is 'just the beginning', that they should recognise the 'need for extra learning' and realise that there is 'so much more to know'. This needed to be reinforced with lecturers' own experiences regarding the gap between what they had learned at university and what they still needed to learn later in their profession, thus 'showing the benefits' of learning.

While lecturers could not teach everything, they could help students to identify the gaps, and provide 'the tools for research and the skills in writing', teaching students 'the skill and know-how to find the answers'. Research tools would include knowing how to access the resources necessary for acquiring information – 'such things as books,

sites, journals', and learning 'analysis and problem-solving skills' and 'how to be resourceful'. These are related to the development of some of the University's 'graduate qualities'

Lecturers' enthusiasm and motivation were mentioned by several respondents; they acted 'as a role model' by being examples of a love for learning, 'showing passion for learning' and also talking about its importance, though this was secondary to demonstrating it. One commented:

What the lecturer is doing needs to be interesting and exciting so that students experience this and students will be influenced. If you have love for it, it will come through.

For another, motivation relating to the topics and towards passing this on to students was 'communicated to students and that enthusiasm then makes them want to learn and be part of the discussions'.

According to participants, links made between theory and practice were enhanced by remaining 'professionally alive'. These 'valid and useful' connections to real-life situations, relating what was being learned to 'practice experience', put the theory into context. Discussion of case scenarios helped in applying their 'tool kit' of theories and frameworks, and reinforced the need for gathering additional information to meet individual clients' needs. Newsletters and other links with professional bodies enhanced learning for the students, and showed the 'importance of networks and continuing professional development':

I use an experiential approach, as it is a good way to explain difficult concepts and to look at how others dealt with those issues plus impart and obtain further ideas. I think of the parable of the sower – some went on to thorny ground, some on stony ground and some into good soil. I hope our students are good soil and I try to provide good seed.



It was also important to provide students with 'opportunities for them to feel the rewards' of learning, and to work with them:

... being proud of them if they found the knowledge (acknowledge their efforts and direct them to another view ...). Stimulating them to seek out those links between what they know, their learning, other subjects (courses), and inquire into what don't know.

Even a participant who claimed not to have succeeded in inculcating a love of learning made comments that indicated ways of promoting this:

Of the many students I taught in my time (at two different campuses, one metropolitan and one regional), very few exhibited a level of enthusiasm that I would equate with a love of learning. I enjoyed interacting with such students and helped them study in depth things that other students didn't care about. I didn't feel I could claim any credit for them being like that – they just had that tendency and I fostered it.

The same participant emphasised the importance of making 'teaching relevant to the needs of their profession', even if that meant 'teaching some things that were just plain boring, no matter how you presented the material':

Basically, my first priority was the syllabus, which determined what had to be taught, and then I accentuated the bits I saw as most relevant, and tried to make them as interesting as possible.

Another was also unsure about success in presenting 'the ideal of pursuing knowledge irrespective of career outcomes', and yet greatly appreciated hearing students 'say that they had really developed a love of learning, and how their university study had broadened their outlook and transformed the way they saw themselves and their potential':

I remember once feeling really pleased when an engineering student told me that he was going to transfer and study English

literature because that was what he really wanted to do. While I would hope that many engineering students are studying in that field because they really want to, it was encouraging to hear some aims that weren't purely career-related.

Love of learning could be promoted in multiple aspects of university teaching:

Through my teaching, through the experiences I share, through the activities we do in tutorials and through assessment.

### **Discussion and implications**

Though participants revealed both positivist and constructivist ways of looking at learning, and a range of notions of love of learning and many approaches to inculcating this were uncovered, its importance and beneficial effects were highlighted by this study. The possession of this quality impacts on personal, professional, and societal growth and development, as affirmed by the participants, who indicated factors likely to enhance this love, such as environmental and relational factors, along with positive attitudes, values and behaviour of teachers and students.

Can we be more deliberate in encouraging a love of learning? A good first step is for the educator to provide an environment that transmits or communicates this love of learning to the student. Learning and love for learning has an element of fun/curiosity, which is not forced. Incorporating humour and laughter and an informal atmosphere can help ensure that the study environment is 'fear-free', something that Nillsen (2004: 1–2) identified as significant, one where students on their way to understanding are not afraid to give answers that may not be correct. A classroom climate characterised by anxiety leads to surface learning: 'Anxiety distracts students: the point is to avoid the threat, not to engage the task deeply' (Biggs 1999: 70). Hence building up good teacher–student relationships is pivotal, with teachers as facilitators and fellow learners in a partnership with students,

modelling their own enthusiasm for learning, and heightening interaction and engagement.

The concern expressed by several participants to convey to students the relevance of what was being learned to their future professional context reflects the necessity identified by Nillsen (2004) for 'seeing the immediate and more tangible learning task in a wider context ... which gives a long term point to learning new skills' (p.4), giving rise to a 'mature love of learning' (p.4). The 'sense of both strengths and weaknesses in one's knowledge and within oneself' (p.6), also part of this mature love, was also referred to by participants in emphasising to students that there is always more to learn.

Finding ways to foster love of learning in students can become part of what Boyer called the 'scholarship of teaching' (Boyer 1990). Such 'teaching both educates and entices future scholars' (Boyer 1990: 23), and great university teachers 'stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers, with the capacity to go on learning after their college days are over ... inspired teaching keeps the flame of scholarship alive' (Boyer 1990: 24). From our interpretation of their responses and also our knowledge of the participants, we can conclude that all of them exhibit this desire to continue learning. It is imperative for all higher education teachers to reflect on their own teaching philosophies and practices, so that they truly engage with their students.

An awareness of the fact that students will have varying preferences for ways of engaging with new content, peers and teachers is crucial; space needs to be created to accommodate these preferred approaches (Kolb & Kolb 2005). By incorporating a range of learning contexts and appealing to as many senses as possible, a lecturer will be more likely to ensure a quality learning experience for all, with a greater number of students continuing enthusiastically with their learning journey. Likewise, it is important to be aware of the range of experiences that the students bring to a course, including life

experience and 'prior experience of learning and teaching' so that links can be made and built upon (Prosser & Trigwell 1999: 175).

When evaluating teaching, a teacher's ability to inspire a love of learning in university students should be considered. However, it is debatable whether it is possible to measure the success of this. Certainly, as part of the 'scholarship of teaching', academics should reflect upon the extent to which their students have developed or increased in enthusiasm for the subject and for continuing to learn beyond it. The true influence of the academic may be seen only in hindsight years later. To determine whether lecturers' strategies are having the desired effect, students' perceptions should also be explored.

Some of the very basic ideas for nurturing young children's natural interest in learning also have application for older students, such as allowing time for thinking, and providing opportunities for first-hand experience in a stress-free setting (Hunt 2008). The students have a role to play, too, in motivating themselves, changing negative attitudes, moving away from simply focusing on a qualification, and being willing to commit to lifelong learning (Candy 2000).

The university and community environment as well should be conducive to developing love of learning. A regional campus with smaller classes has advantages for greater interaction and access to the facilities that are available, while it may have some disadvantages in limited resources and access to a range of experts. While it is easy to think that the World Wide Web has broken down all barriers, equity issues must still be borne in mind, as there are students unable to afford some of the latest technology.

Not only have academics involved in the delivery of courses had to adjust to changes in higher education, others who play a part in teaching higher education students have also been affected. For, as well as course lecturers and tutors, the term 'higher education

teachers' can be seen as embracing a broader range of professionals – staff involved in academic skills development, careers counsellors, library staff, clinical preceptors and other supervisors of placements and practica (for example, school teachers, in the case of teacher education students), information technology staff (at least those who interact with students), community role models, and fellow students in collaborative learning contexts. These other 'higher education teachers' may also make a significant contribution to the development of a love of learning.

In these endeavours, university administration can support teachers by making available relevant professional development activities to improve the quality of teaching and learning, making helpful resources available to encourage informal networking among all engaged in higher education teaching, and by funding academic developer positions.

The study had a number of possible limitations. To begin with, participants were not asked to define 'learning'; however, the ways in which they have referred to 'love of learning' gives some indication of whether they have a positivist rather than a constructivist stance or vice versa. Another limitation was that the questions were based on the assumption that the love of learning can be taught. In fact, it would have been appropriate to include a question on whether participants thought that this was possible. Another gap was that no evaluation has been included to determine the success of the participants' strategies in inculcating love of learning. Likewise, there is no measure of the extent or frequency of their use of these strategies. Another study comparing the responses of metropolitan academics with those of the current study participants would enrich our understanding. Students' perceptions with regard to the development of a love of learning have not been surveyed as part of the study. These limitations suggest scope for further research.

## Conclusion

This study has extended our understanding of notions of love of learning, drawing from the views of the regional academics involved. Love of learning as a concept is alive and well, conjuring up ideas of pleasure, satisfaction, endless quest for knowledge and understanding, empowerment and connection. It is important to encourage others to pursue it, as it has personal, professional and societal benefits.

While there are varying ideas and approaches to developing this quality among students, the following holds true for most of our participants, showing that love of learning is embedded in good learning and teaching principles, values and practices:

There can be no good learning or teaching without a sense of excitement, without an awareness that we are all, students, teachers and academic developers, on a path of continuous discovery. (Prosser & Trigwell 1999: 175)

Multiple strategies for encouraging love of learning mentioned by participants in this study include: talking specifically about it, increasing motivation by communicating enthusiasm, acting as a role model, drawing from one's own experience, explaining that learning is a journey, and providing tools and skills for research and further learning.

The potential benefits of this study include: increasing awareness and knowledge of how to inspire awareness of the inner capacities of students so as to encourage a love of learning; understanding how this transpires through interaction or engagement amongst all concerned: students, staff, and others contributing to higher education; identifying ways by which academics may be supported to inculcate love of learning; and understanding factors that may enhance or deter the love of learning.

It is hoped that other university academics may learn from the participants' strategies, or at least receive affirmation for their own successful teaching approaches.

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## Facilitating transformative learning: a framework for practice

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*This paper explores some of the challenges that are involved in facilitating transformative learning. It presents a framework for practice that considers transformative learning from the perspective of the facilitator. These ideas were developed through a doctoral study in which adult educators were interviewed about their experiences in facilitating transformative learning. The framework comprises four components: confirming and interrupting current frames of reference, working with triggers for transformative learning, acknowledging a time of retreat or dormancy, and developing the new perspective. Using the four components of this framework for practice, I outline a series of questions for reflection. Through detailed reflection on aspects of program design and the interactions in the learning group, we can further our knowledge about the transformative aspects of our programs.*

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## Introduction

Learning is about transformation, it's about change, it's about seeing yourself in relation to the world differently (Lyn in Apte 2003a:92).

This is the potential of transformative learning; how learning sometimes transforms people's perceptions, enabling them to see things differently and act differently in their world. Transformative learning involves change in the frames of reference that we use to make sense in our lives. Frames of reference structure the ways that we interpret the meaning of our experiences, and therefore guide our action and provide the rationale for our action (Mezirow 2000).

Much adult learning is additive; people gain new information, develop understandings, and extend their skills within their current frames of reference. However, we may be experiencing challenges that require us to do things differently. Our previous knowing, strategies and personal strengths may be blocking the emergence of new solutions.

Facilitating such transformative learning presents specific challenges for facilitators. I am particularly interested in the knowledge that experienced facilitators have developed about aspects of their practice, such as:

- What are the things that we do that create a greater likelihood for transformative learning?
- How do we increase the transformative impact of the program design?
- What do learning groups do to contribute towards transformative learning and how do we foster that?
- What do we need to be alert to at different stages in the process?
- What are the challenges and dilemmas experienced by facilitators?

The ideas in this paper have been developed from ongoing reflection about my own practice as a facilitator and from a doctoral study

of Australian adult educators' practice. The educators in the study facilitated transformative learning in such fields as social action, educational approaches for young people who have left school early, personal skills and relationship education, and HIV/AIDS training programs (Apte 2003a). In this paper, I present a framework for the practice of transformative learning, from the perspective of the facilitator. As Taylor comments:

It is imperative, in this new millennium, that we set a new direction of research for transformative learning theory that focuses on understanding with greater depth its inherent complexities (Taylor 2000:286).

## Overview of the framework for practice

Mezirow (1981) initially described the process of transformative learning by identifying a series of stages, based on his research into the experiences of women entering college in later life. In a later publication (2000), he reworks the stages and presents them as elements of transformative learning. They are:

- a disorienting dilemma
- self examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame
- a critical assessment of assumptions
- recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared
- exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
- planning a course of action
- acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
- provisional trying of new roles, and
- a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow 2000: 22).

Whereas the process outlined by Mezirow focuses on transformative learning from the participant's perspective, I explore transformative learning from the facilitator's perspective. The framework that

I present is comprised of four components, and I picture these components as the four quadrants of a circle. Each component represents a particular focus for the facilitator:

1. Confirming **and** interrupting current frames of reference
2. Working with triggers for transformative learning
3. Acknowledging a time of retreat or dormancy
4. Developing the new perspective.

As a facilitator, I have found that the significance of the four components varies between different programs and different participants. Further, I have found that transformative learning rarely occurs sequentially; the process is more likely to be circular and recursive, revisiting various components in a series of loops (Taylor 1997).

The framework has been designed as a resource for practice and it could be used in a range of ways. Firstly, it could be used when developing the program and preparing for the kinds of issues that might arise. Secondly, the reflection questions could be used when reviewing the program, to address emerging issues or to increase the impact of the program. Thirdly, it could be used when designing an evaluation of the program.

### **Framework for practice: questions for reflection**

The reflection questions are used to explore practice issues that relate to each of the four components in the framework. The questions guide reflection about the interactions within the learning group, about personal responses to the learning process, and about program design. The questions focus on what may be happening for the participants, and also focus on what may be happening for the facilitator.

Our reflections about the participants' perspectives indicate our emerging views. Our reflections may be based on observations,

remembrances and impressions; they may be accurate, inaccurate, or represent part of the 'realities' of the learning process. The reflections express our version of what is happening, and our version may or may not parallel the participants' versions. Through such reflection we can formulate, and review, the working knowledge that we are developing about the program.

<b>Confirming <u>and</u> interrupting current frames of reference</b>	<p><b>Questions: focusing on the participants</b></p> <p>What is regarded as 'normal' behaviour (in the participant's social world)?</p> <p>What examples are used to describe 'good' and 'bad'?</p> <p>What ideas or stories claimed people's attention, and what is gripping about them?</p> <p>What are people's expectations of themselves?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are any expectations seen as impossible?</li> <li>• Are their expectations coherent with other people's expectations?</li> <li>• Are their expectations contradictory or split?</li> </ul> <p>What information has the participant never contemplated before?</p> <p>Have previous practices become lost along the way?</p> <p><b>Questions: focusing on the facilitator</b></p> <p>What assumptions are embedded in the ideas that I am presenting and/or the materials that I am using?</p> <p>Which assumptions are likely to be compatible with those of the participants?</p> <p>Which ideas presented alternative frames of reference?</p> <p>What ideas or stories claimed my attention, and what is gripping about them for me?</p>
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<p><b>Working with triggers for transformative learning</b></p>	<p><b>Questions: focusing on the participants</b></p> <p>What are the differences in perspective among these participants?</p> <p>What evoked people's curiosity?</p> <p>What were people surprised by?</p> <p>What evoked people's anxiety?</p> <p>What specific dilemmas are they raising?</p> <p>What hopes do they express?</p> <p>Does the person experience any contradictions between who they want to be and who they are currently?</p> <p><b>Questions: focusing on the facilitator</b></p> <p>What evoked my curiosity – what am I thinking and wondering about?</p> <p>What was I surprised by?</p> <p>What evoked my anxiety?</p>
<p><b>Acknowledging a time of retreat or dormancy</b></p>	<p><b>Questions: focusing on the participants</b></p> <p>What indicates that people are having some doubts about the change?</p> <p>Is there inertia occurring around some things?</p> <p>What are participants avoiding?</p> <p>What provokes anger or defensive responses?</p> <p>What assumptions are people being 'pulled back to'?</p> <p>What unlearning might be required for them to move forward?</p> <p>What could the person 'lose' if their current assumptions are not confirmed?</p> <p>What aspects of the learning would require significant courage?</p> <p>Are there some risks that might occur if people move forward with this?</p> <p>What do people say is impossible for them?</p> <p><b>Questions: focusing on the facilitator</b></p> <p>What doubts have come to my mind?</p> <p>Are there points at which I experienced anger or defensiveness?</p> <p>What seems possible at this point?</p> <p>What seems impossible at this point?</p>

<p><b>Developing the new perspective</b></p>	<p><b>Questions: focusing on the participants</b></p> <p>What capabilities are beginning to emerge?</p> <p>How are views shifting over time?</p> <p>What strategies are people interested in developing further and testing in their own lives?</p> <p>How can the learning in the program be continued?</p> <p>What reactions do participants expect from people in their usual environment?</p> <p><b>Questions: focusing on the facilitator</b></p> <p>What aspects of the program are creating a mood of possibility?</p> <p>How can we take notice of the results that flow from the new possibilities?</p> <p>What do I hope for at this point?</p> <p>What barriers do I see in their usual environment?</p>
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### Issues in facilitating each component

Confirming **and** interrupting current frames of reference

Reflection on this component considers the ways in which the facilitator's frames of reference and the participants' frames of reference will interact. Which of the frames of reference implicit in the program might match the assumptions of the learners? Which might provide a different angle or perspective? In what ways might we be challenging the participants' frames of reference? Which ideas might provoke discomfort or conflict?

#### *Preparing the program*

Much of our reflection about this component occurs as we prepare the program: investigating learning needs, preparing learning materials, developing promotional materials and inviting participants to attend. We are tuning in to the participants' current frames of reference and considering ways that these might influence the focus of the program.



We are also reflecting on our own frames of reference and identifying the assumptions that we are bringing to the program.

If the program only confirms the participants' perspectives, we can limit the chance for transformative learning. If the program only considers the perspectives of our profession, agency or funding body we might position the participants as passively accepting/refusing a dominant knowledge. The facilitator is continually making significant choices along this interface, deciding when to confirm the participants' frames of reference and when to interrupt them. Our interaction provides a potential influence for change, both to the frames of reference of the participant and the facilitator.

#### *Tuning into the participants' social worlds*

As professional adult educators we are often working with people at a time when they haven't contemplated any prospect of change. People often act habitually when their life-world and their assumptions fit together. Their frames of reference may be quite invisible and are often presented as normal and self-evident. The expectations that the person holds of themselves may also mirror the expectations held by significant people in their world. Their inner and outer worlds are thus in a coherent relation, and they see their assumptions confirmed by events. It is a time of continuity and habitual action:

For as long as there is continuity between people's own individual stocks of knowledge and the socio-cultural temporal world in which they act, they are enabled to perform in an almost unthinking manner (Jarvis 1987:167).

We need to consider a participant's world from their perspective and consider those experiences that have confirmed their assumptions, and significant people who validate current, habitual practices. Information that disrupts current assumptions may be pushed aside or re-interpreted, particularly if the existing frames of reference are regarded as normal or superior. We are tuning into the ways that the

participant's 'inner world of concepts is entwined with behavioural coordination and social context that are co-emergent' (Lange 2004:137).

#### *Reflecting on gripping narratives*

Further, I have found that it is particularly important to reflect on the ways that some narratives claim dramatic attention in a learning group. These "gripping narratives" are a window into transformative learning potentials and dilemmas (Gergen & Kaye 1996). Some stories, experiences or ideas can grip a learning group with very high intensity, almost as if it was a magnetising force or 'black hole'. These gripping narratives often give us a clue about the underlying dilemmas, core anxieties and impossible expectations that people are grappling with. For example, educators in the study noted that powerful themes such as death and loss, inclusion or exclusion, gender identity, and contagion had gripping effects and required careful facilitation (Apte 2003a:103).

Gergen and Kaye (1996) suggest that one response by facilitators when faced with a gripping narrative is to act as the recipient of that reality and accept the story as told. Thus we convey respect for that reality, and we can engage participants in extending their skills and understanding within that frame of reference. However, if we make this choice then we are also confirming the existing frame of reference and the likelihood that it will remain fixed. As a result, the range of possible options is circumscribed by the existing story. This can be a particularly challenging dilemma when we are faced with a gripping narrative. In what circumstances do we decide not to confirm a frame of reference, but rather seek to interrupt its 'taken for grantedness' and the habitual practices that flow from it?

#### *Inviting participants to consider the case for change*

Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) outline ways that health educators can open up conversations about change when people are at the

stage of pre-contemplation. Educators may need to step out of any assumption that the person is ready for change at that time, and to present information that may be recalled at a later time. Therefore, comments are constructed to encourage exploration of the issues and potential consequences of the person's current behaviour, while not conveying any expectation of action in the near future. Such an invitational stance may 'open the window' for participants to look at the possibility of change while reducing the risks of resistance.

#### *Taking up the role of empathic provocateur*

Our actions and communications can confirm some of the participant's assumptions at the same time as they interrupt the certainty of other assumptions. As facilitators we can be perceived as provocateurs with each action, conversation, idea and resource that calls into question participants' frames of reference. When we do not affirm participants' frames of reference, they may perceive this as invisible, surprising or provocative.

Adult educators have written about the importance of their provocative role in representing relevant, unnoticed 'truth'. Stories of self that have been developed in a person's private social domain are frequently reinforced in public domains; for example, by discourses about gender, class, race and age. The legitimacy of the story is reinforced when there is mirroring of meaning in public and private worlds. For example, Tisdell (1998) argues that educators have a proactive role in challenging unequal power relations so that systems of privilege are not replicated in the educational context. The facilitator seeks to extend what the participants define as an issue of interest. Curry-Stevens (2007) outlines ways that community-based educators use strategies that are 'confidence shaking' as well as 'confidence building' with people who are ignoring the voice for change from others.

Facilitators are continually making choices about how to traverse the interface of participants' ideas and the ideas that they might speak for throughout a program. We are receiving, confirming, stretching and/or challenging a participant's frame of reference, and thus we are recognising, confirming and interrupting various selves.

#### *Working with triggers for transformative learning*

This component involves us in reflecting on the issues that are arising in working with triggers for transformative learning.

#### *Assisting people to face the contradictions and dilemmas*

Mezirow notes that certain experiences can provide triggers for transformative learning, particularly if those experiences provide a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow 1990:13). Facilitators can work with these triggers, and assist participants to pay attention to the dilemmas they raise:

... gently creating dilemmas by encouraging participants to face up to contradictions between what they believe and what they do... and discrepancies between a specific way of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting and other perspectives (Mezirow 1991:366).

Numerous educators have outlined educational practices based on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (Mezirow 1990; Courtenay, Merriam & Reeves 1998; Cranton 1992; Christopher, Dunnagan, Duncan & Lynn 2001; First & Way 1995; Lyon 2001). They outline the ways that they establish environments in which learners can uncover and critically reflect on assumptions. Cranton suggests that the role includes:

- recognising the learner's assumptions
- creating an environment to challenge those assumptions
- assisting the learner to identify the assumptions and consider the consequences of the assumptions

- providing psychological support to the learner as they revise assumptions
- supporting the learner to act on the revised assumptions (Cranton 1992: 151–152).

Overwhelmingly, the educators in the study noted that facilitating transformative learning requires them to focus on the emotional aspects of the learning. Lyn suggested that we need to be particularly alert to a participant's personal history and the range of factors that may have led to their participation in the program. Personal stories may be private and hidden, and may be creating a range of restraints in their response to the program. For example, Lyn outlined a range of reasons for the intense emotional reactions among participants in a program for volunteer carers of people living with HIV/AIDS:

Sometimes they may be more reluctant to shift around something for a whole lot of other reasons, not because they don't want to be good carers... I mean, the stated reason would be 'I want this information in order to be a good carer' but the underlying reasons why people want that information; 'I want to process my grief', 'I want to understand things that I didn't know when I was caring for someone'... 'I want to know what's going to happen to my friend when they get sick' (Lyn in Apte 2003a:105).

#### *The potential of diverse perspectives among the participants*

The educators in the study talked about the impact of encountering other people in the learning group who act as a trigger for transformative learning. For example, one facilitator talked about a man who found the group experience in the HIV/AIDS training program to be provocative:

Most of our groups are very diverse... we get a real mix of gay, straight, men, women, nuns, priests, sex workers, literally, I mean you can literally have those two people in the room at the same time... we had one particular course where what was unusual about this course was that there was only one gay man

in the course... he was very put off (at) the beginning ... He said, 'I've never spoken to a nun before'... and it seemed like it was quite a significant shift for him to make (Lyn in Apte 2003a:100).

The participant's experience of seeing issues from another person's perspective can disrupt the certainty of current frames and open up the possibility of alternate perspectives, 'and to actually almost look at it through the lens of all the differences of the people in the course' (Lyn in Apte 2003a:99).

Thus, differences among participants can introduce living, alternate frames of reference. This is the transformative impact of connected knowing, as participants listen to each other's stories, seek to understand them and enter into belief in relation to them (Belenky & Stanton 2000:87–89).

#### *The potential of surprise*

Bruner suggests that surprise indicates that an event violates presuppositions in some way:

Surprise is an extraordinarily useful phenomenon... for it allows us to probe what people take for granted. It provides a window on presupposition: surprise is a response to violated presupposition (Bruner 1986:46).

The educators in the study noted the ways that surprise enabled participants to move beyond their taken-for-granted frames of reference. In the study, Peter described the significance of surprise in opening a space for alternate possibilities:

... there is something that is sufficiently intriguing about doing it at that moment in the group and in that way which really invites, encourages some people to go into some part of their being in a way that they wouldn't normally (Apte 2003a:114).

Therefore, we can take particular note of those program activities that evoke surprise and consider what assumptions are being interrupted.

Surprise can provide a window for us to move into possibilities where things do not operate in the usual way.

#### Acknowledging a time of retreat or dormancy

The trigger for potential transformative learning may also prompt a participant's determination to defend their assumptions. At points of change, people may feel that they live in a threatened life-world, rather than feeling curious about the possibilities of a transformed life-world (Wildemeersch & Lierman 1988:20–23). People may feel confused, discontented, anxious, and angry during times of transformative learning (Lyon 2001; Taylor 1997). They may also feel angry or ambivalent towards a facilitator who is aligned with the case for change (Robertson 1996).

#### Facilitating throughout defensive responses

Participants may retreat from their exploration and return to the previous frame of reference. Lange suggests that such retreat or defensiveness is a stabilising response when information is discrepant with a valued frame of reference. People return to previous assumptions to deal with the disorientation that has resulted from the trigger event (Lange 2004:122).

People may return and consolidate a previous frame of reference even more strongly, in the hope that it can be reinforced and will continue to remain valid. This is more likely to occur when the trigger raises doubts about central aspects of a participant's identity. Further, people are more likely to perceive themselves as being threatened when the outcomes of change are very uncertain, when the experience evokes fear and/ or guilt, and when the context is unstructured (Jarvis 1987). Thus facilitators may be faced with significant defensive responses, or even despair, particularly if a participant experiences their context as 'unchanged, unchanging and apparently unchangeable' (Jarvis 1987:170).

A key component of our facilitation is managing the risk of increased defensiveness alongside the potential for transformative learning. We need to acknowledge the potential for participants to retreat as well as the potential for them to move forward: '... that doesn't mean that a person will not run away from it' (Peter in Apte 2003a:98).

#### Acknowledging the person's current position in regards the change

The facilitators in the study talked about transformative learning as a circular and erratic process. People may return again and again to the same issues until they feel they have enough power or capacity to implement this change (Pope in Taylor 2000:311). Importantly, the participant was described as the person who held the choice about whether the change is actually made: '[It's] up to her and what she takes up and what she doesn't' (Peter in Apte 2003a).

One of the activities I conduct with organisations and teams is The River of Change activity. We explore the experience of change via the metaphor of a river, and I often ask the person where they are positioned now in relation to the change. For example, some people describe themselves as in the middle of the river, trying to navigate all of its complexity such as waterfalls and rapids. Others describe themselves as on the riverbank, contemplating whether they will join the change or move away. The aim of this question is to acknowledge choice and the person's current position in relation to the change. We then discuss options for the future.

Peter also outlined one way he prompts the person to notice the path of change so far:

... so throughout the course of the year we go and check how she's travelling... same question, 'what is your answer?'... 'is this the same or different from last time?' (in Apte 2003a: 110).

Small but significant steps towards change can be overlooked, so questions such as this draw people's attention to the movement that has occurred. Our role may include acting as a provocateur if we

are presenting a case for change, but at other times we need to act as evocateurs, exploring where people are located in relation to the change. Change is thus acknowledged as a moving forward, moving back, and moving to and fro process.

#### *Pacing our response through a time of dormancy*

Dormancy is an empty, 'not-knowing' time, when a participant is poised on the edge of the unknown. This participant is neither engaged with the old frame of reference nor with an alternate perspective. For example, I noted that attendance in parent education programs often dropped about half-way through the series; parents had been really engaged with the ideas the previous week, and it was as if they 'took a breather' at this point. Others came but had a major drop of confidence that week, and needed to recap key themes rather than moving on to a new topic.

We need to avoid being driven by the timing of the program content, particularly during this component of the process. The facilitator needs the courage to stay with the participants in this time of uncertainty, ambiguity, ambivalence and distress, and resist the desire for premature closure and emancipation (Dirkx, Pratt & Taylor 2002).

#### *Developing the new perspective*

We establish opportunities for participants to trial new approaches, practice new skills and experiment with possibilities that might arise from the transformed frames of reference. Our reflections take us again to the participants' worlds, and the issues that they might face in following up the learning in their usual environment.

#### *Supporting tentative steps and experimentation*

Initial actions based on a transformed frame of reference are often quite tentative and exploratory. Participants are often only

experimenting with options for action at first. The educators in the study indicated the value of such experimentation:

Then I think people started seeing possibilities... I think it was when we had some sort of concrete proposals in front of us that went beyond 'do we' or 'don't we'... and when people started saying 'Well, we could do it this way' (Bev in Apte 2003a:98).

If the experiments indicate positive possibilities, the participant is more likely to continue to develop and test the transformed frame of reference. Participants become engaged with building their competence, in developing their confidence with new skills, in planning a course of action, and in assessing feedback arising from their efforts (Mezirow 2000:22). The focus of the facilitator is to establish a group environment that will foster the emergence of capability. In the study, Peter outlined ingredients of his work that support the emergence of capability. The ingredients include social contact and intimacy; respectful interactions; being expected to be capable in a situation; and decision and choice (Apte 2003a:116).

#### *Acknowledging any restraints in the participant's usual social environments*

Mezirow describes this as a time of re-integration for the participant, in which they re-engage in their social world in ways that are based on the new meaning perspective (Mezirow 2000:22). However, the educators in the study suggested that we need to remind ourselves that the person may experience their usual environment as a relative constant that counters the learning from the program:

People can see things in one particular environment and appear to make a shift in one particular environment and then you go back to a much more consuming environment, which has always been and continues to be a particular way (Lyn in Apte 2003a:101).

Experiences in the learning environment are therefore seen as creating the potential for transformative learning, but are not seen as the complete process. As Peter stated: '... if you have enough

experiences where you are more like this than that, then you might end up being more like this' (Apte 2003a: 101).

When educational programs are offered in conjunction with initiatives to develop the community environment or workplace environment, we are more likely to see the learning continue. Lyon (2001) makes the point that transformative learning often occurs over a long time span.

### Conclusion

As educators, we are not only an audience for participants' current frames of reference. We are also the audience for emerging knowledge and capability. Transformative learning is a possibility in many educational contexts, particularly when a person, organisation or community is facing a major challenge. However, facilitators of transformative learning are often navigating complex processes of learning and change (Apte 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Apte, Slattery & Bonser 2001).

This framework for practice has been developed to guide our reflection and to identify particular challenges that might arise throughout a learning process. By detailed reflection on aspects of program design and the interactions in the group, we can further our knowledge about the transformative features of our programs. On occasions we may also be prompted towards our own transformative learning – our assumptions may be reassessed and new possibilities emerge.

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## **Effectiveness of non-formal education programs in Nigeria: how competent are the learners in life skills?**

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*In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Nigeria adopts both formal and non-formal approaches to provide basic education for its citizenry. Thus, to determine the effectiveness of the non-formal approach in providing basic education in Nigeria, this study examines the competency level of Nigerian non-formal education learners on a life-skills achievement test. The test was administered to a sample of 876 learners. The competency level in life-skills of the majority of the learners was below the national benchmark (50%). Rural dwellers were more competent than urban dwellers and young learners were more competent than old learners.*

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### **Introduction**

The Nigerian government adopts both the formal and non-formal approaches to eradicate illiteracy by the year 2015. The formal education approach addresses children of school age (who are actually in schools) and the non-formal approach which could also be described as second chance education targeting children, youths and adults who have either dropped out of school before achieving permanent literacy or have never been to school due to a number of factors. Such factors include poverty and early marriage for girls in the northern part of Nigeria and drop out of schools by boys in some parts of the Eastern States in order to engage in economic activities (Adewale 2006). Therefore, the non-formal approach of education provides opportunity for these disadvantaged children, youth and adults to catch up on basic education and mainstream into the formal system if desired at any given point. As good as this non-formal education (NFE) approach looks, its delivery in the country is confronted with various problems such as ineffective mobilisation and coordination of efforts, lack of a reliable and current database on learner achievement, poor funding, shortage of teaching/learning materials and inadequate logistic support for monitoring of the non-formal program (Adewale 2006).

Research evidence shows that learners will achieve more if favourable support (for example, funds) are provided by the government or other bodies such as development partners because these grants received by schools or adult literacy centres could then be used to purchase those materials which are likely to promote learning experiences. Examples of such items are teaching aids and textual materials which are also recognised as predictors of student achievement (Farombi 1998, Onwuakpa 1998). Unfortunately, the trend has been to reduce governments' overall spending both nationally and internationally and, in many cases, those reductions have resulted in declines in



funding for education (Haycock 2005). Hence, it is not possible for schools to have all that is needed to increase students' learning outcomes.

In addition to the problem of inadequate funding of NFE, no systematised standard achievement test has been put in place to assess the effectiveness of programs across the board. Adewale (2006) carried out an item analysis of a life-skills achievement test for Nigerian non-formal education learners, using data collected during the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) of Non-Formal Education in each of the 36 States and the Abuja Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria. He did not consider the competency level of the adult learners in his study but limited his research effort to describe the characteristics of the test items used and selected the best items which were used in this study.

Though there are inconsistencies in the way competence is measured, generally competence is the ability to perform the requisite range of skills in practical terms (Atherton 2008). In all areas of practice, there are some skills in which experts are merely knowledgeable, for example, many nurses are more competent than doctors in taking blood samples. Therefore, it becomes evident to this investigator that one can be competent in one aspect and not necessary be competent in another. It can also be argued that male and female learners, old and young learners, and urban and rural dwellers may not be competent in the same way. Some of the different methods of measuring competency have been presented by authors like Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) who measured competency along five points: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. They see a novice as a rigid adherent to taught rules or plans with little situational perception and no discretionary judgment. They observe that an advanced beginner needs guidelines for action based on attributes or aspects; situational perception remains limited and

all attributes and aspects are treated separately and given equal importance. The competent individual copes with 'crowdedness' and sees actions, at least partly, in terms of longer-term goals, conscious deliberate planning and standardised and routinised procedures. They postulate that a proficient individual sees situations holistically rather than in terms of aspects, sees what is most important in a situation, perceives deviations from the normal pattern, decision-making is less laboured and uses maxims for guidance, whose meaning varies according to the situation. They conclude that the expert does not rely on rules and guidelines, but grasps situations intuitively based on deep tacit understanding, and uses analytic approaches only in novel situations or when problems occur.

Another presentation on the measurement of competence is from the Department of Education (1998). This competency framework identifies and defines the competencies needed for professional and business classes. They are further hierarchically defined in three levels: basic, intermediate and accomplished. A basic level of competency requires that those in this category know general terms, concepts, processes and objectives of the competency and be able to apply the competency to common tasks. An intermediate level of competency requires that those in this category are able to apply the competency consistently to perform common tasks. The accomplished level of competency requires those in the category to be able to use the competency consistently to perform complex tasks requiring creativity and judgment.

Generally, competence of a learner is determined in terms of knowledge, skills and values in a specialised context (Department of Education 1998). This can be achieved using assessment strategies. Assessment then becomes a learning experience in which learners are prepared to apply their knowledge, skills and values in an integrated manner. Assessment of knowledge and skills could be carried out using tests (especially an achievement test).

An achievement test in a particular subject, according to Obemeata (2000) and Ayodele, Adegbile and Adewale (2001), is a series of questions given (using a criterion-referenced test) to assess learners in order to determine their mastery level in the subject. Van Der Horst and McDonald (1997) suggest that criterion-referenced tests of the required outcomes are critical components of competency-based education, especially in life-skills.

Life-skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO 1993). Examples of these skills are communication/interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, coping and self-management skills. However, life-skills based education has been defined as one that develops knowledge and skills related to social and health issues, using sequenced interactive teaching and learning methods which provide opportunities to practise and reinforce psycho-social and interpersonal skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; and contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights (WHO 1993). It is expected that learners at this stage should have acquired skills in some day-to-day activities. These activities are either learnt in literacy centres or are passed down from parents. They were also observed in the environment. These are categorised into four groups – social studies, health and hygiene, general knowledge, and science and technology). The life-skills test was designed to assess learners' basic competencies in these four components.

The competency level for non-formal education is the same as that for primary schools in the formal education setting. A benchmark of 50% score in a subject is regarded as a minimum competency level for that subject. Therefore, if adult learners score a minimum score of 50% in life-skills, they are considered as being competent in the

subject – otherwise, they are not competent. It is thus necessary to determine the competency level of non-formal education learners through their performance in life-skills using an achievement test for which the item analysis was carried out by Adewale (2006). This study, therefore, provided empirical evidence on the competence level of non-formal education learners in Oyo State in terms of their performance in life-skills. Competency levels of learners in literacy centres in terms of their characteristics – sex of the learners, centre location and learner's age – were also examined.

### Research questions

1. What is the competency level of non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?
2. Is there any significant difference in the competency level of male and female non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?
3. Is there any significant difference in the competency level of non-formal education learners from urban and rural centres on the life-skills test?
4. Is there any significant difference in the competency level of young and old non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?

### Methodology

The target population for this study comprised all non-formal education learners in Oyo State. A multi-stage sampling design was used for the study. Sampling was done at senatorial level, local government level and adult literacy centre level. In each of the three senatorial zones, two local governments were randomly selected and in each local government area, five literacy centres were randomly selected to reflect two centres from urban and three centres from rural areas since there were more of the literacy centres in rural than urban settings. All the learners in the 30 literacy centres indicated

their willingness to participate in the study when they were informed about the study. Therefore, a total of 876 learners in all the 30 centres participated in the study. These were made up of 377 (43%) learners from urban literacy centres and 499 (57%) from rural literacy centres. The sample also consisted of 398 (45.4%) males and 478 (54.6%) females. The learners selected were between 10 and 61 years and majority of these learners were between 19 and 29 years.

The achievement test on life-skills was the only instrument used in this study. It had two sections. Section A dealt with demographics like age, sex, centre location, type of centre and so on, while Section B contained 40 test items on life-skills. Items on life-skills were developed using the NFE life-skills curriculum. Item analysis was carried out on the 40 items by Adewale (2006) in order to determine difficult items, easy items and not too difficult or too easy items. The result showed that there was an average item difficulty level of 0.56. This implies that the test difficulty level was moderate. The relatively difficult items were three in which less than 30% of learners got them right, and these items were reviewed. The psychometric property (Kuder-Richardson 20) of the test was established to be 0.87. This value was considered high enough, and the instrument was assumed to have a degree of internal consistency and construct validity.

Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, mode and graph) were employed to describe the data collected. In addition, inferential statistics such as the *t*-test were used to establish significant differences (at 0.05 level of confidence) among groups of learners.

## Results and discussion

Research question 1: What is the competency level of non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?

Table 1 shows the general performance of learners on the life-skills test.

Table 1: Performance on the life-skills test

Sample size	Mean score (%)	Standard deviation	Highest score (%)	Lowest score (%)	Modal score range (%)
876	36.94	13.76533	94.55	7.27	30-39

The overall mean score for the 876 post literacy learners who took part in this test was 36.9%, with a standard deviation of 13.8 showing that there was a considerable degree of variability in performances, probably because the samples used were heterogeneous, that is, they were drawn from different age groups from 10 to 61 years. Urban and rural settings, being heterogeneous, could also be a contributory factor to the high measure of variability on the life-skills test. The lowest score was 7.3% and the highest score was 94.6% – this again explains why the standard deviation was large. The modal score range was between 30% and 39%. Generally, the NFE learners could not be said to be novices, yet they also could not be said to be competent. If being competent is marked at 50%, then we may conclude that, on average, they are advanced beginners with a mean score of 36.9%. However, specifically, some of these learners can be categorised as novice, advanced beginners, competent, proficient and experts using the definitions of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). It should be

noted that the categorisation in term of the scores obtained by the learners are not based on any theory or literature. The categorisation was done based on assuming that the midpoint of 100% is 50% and the midpoint of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus range of competency is competent. So, in this study, 50% is equated with competent and the other 4 categorisations were done to reflect ordinal grouping as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Level and type of competency level of the NFE learners

Level of competency	Type of competency	Number and percentage of NFE learners	
		N	%
Less than 25%	Novice	210	23.97
25% <sup>o</sup> -49%	Advanced Beginner	342	39.04
50%	Competent	166	18.95
51%-75%	Proficient	114	13.01
76%-100%	Expert	44	5.03
Total		876	100

Many of the learners were novice and the majority of them graduated from being novices to advanced beginners (more than half of these learners were either novices or advanced beginners). Very few of them were proficient or expert. This conclusion is illustrated in the following figure.

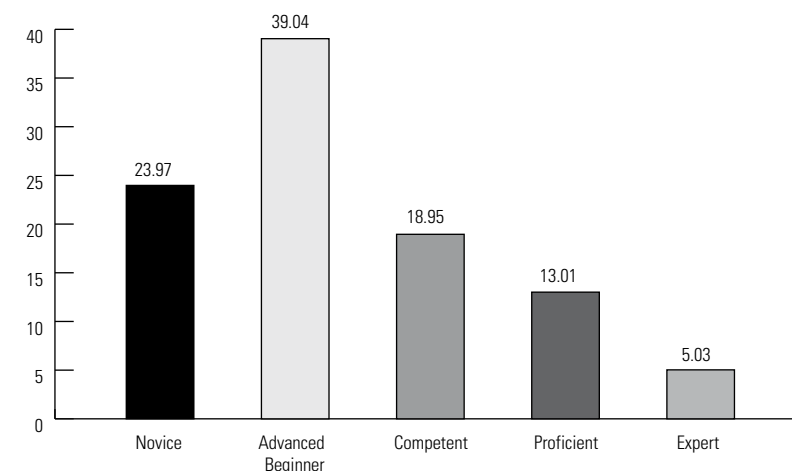


Figure 1: Pattern of competency of NFE learners

This figure looks like a positively-skewed graph where many learners failed and few learners passed. Many factors may be responsible for this low level of competence by the learners. One of these factors is inadequate instructional materials (Paiko *et al.* 2004). Instructional materials are found to have significant contributions to students’ achievement (Farombi 1988, Onwuakpa 1988).

Research question 2: Is there any significant difference in the competency level of male and female non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?

Table 3: Performance on the life-skills test by sex

Sex	Sample size	Mean score (%)	Standard deviation	Highest score (%)	Lowest score (%)	Modal score range (%)	t-test
Male	398	37.05	14.26	87.27	7.27	30-39	.392ns
Female	478	36.83	15.33	94.55	9.09	30-39	

The breakdown by sex (Table 3) shows that the percent mean score of male learners is slightly higher (the difference is less than one) than the percent mean score of female learners (37.1 and 36.8 respectively), with standard deviations of 14.3 and 15.3 respectively as illustrated in Figure 2.

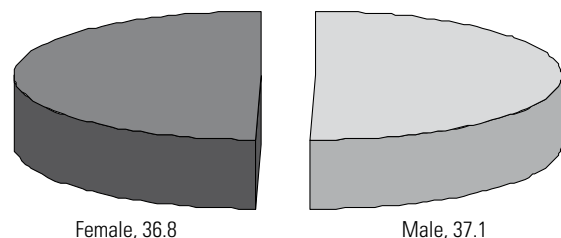


Figure 2: Competency level of male and female NFE learners

The two groups of learners had a modal score range of 30 – 39%. Interestingly, the lowest and highest percent scores of female learners are higher than those of their male counterparts, yet the male learners’ percent mean score is higher than the female learners’ percent mean score. One can explain this abysmal level of performance by exploring the standard deviations of the two groups. The scores earned by the females are more dispersed (scattered) from the mean than those of the males. Notwithstanding, if one were to find the best learner in life-skills, a female learner is likely to have qualified for such a position. However, the difference observed in the performance of male and female learners in life-skills, as shown by the *t*-test value of 0.392 (df=874; *P* > .05), was not significant to warrant concluding that male learners are better than female learners.

Research question 3: Is there any significant difference in the competency level of non-formal education learners from urban and rural centres on the life-skills test?

Table 3: Performance on the life-skills test by centre location

Location	Sample size	Mean score (%)	Standard deviation	Highest score (%)	Lowest score (%)	Modal score range (%)	t-test
Urban	377	35.12	14.78390	87.27	7.27	30 – 39	2.502*
Rural	499	38.75	13.72305	94.55	9.09	30 – 39	

\* = significant (0.05)

The result by centre location (Table 3) shows that learners in rural literacy centres performed better than learners in urban literacy centres, with the percent mean scores 37.75 and 35.12 and standard deviations 13.72 and 14.78 respectively. The learners’ performance is represented in the following figure.

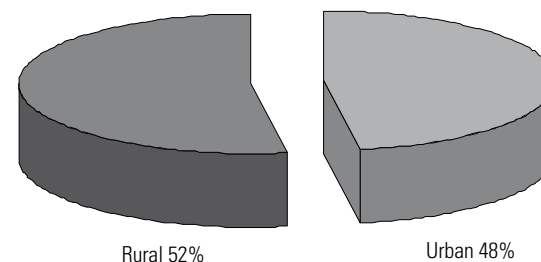


Figure 3: Competency level of NFE learners in urban and rural settings

The two groups of learners had a modal score range of 30–39%. The lowest and highest percent scores of learners in rural settings are

higher than those of their urban counterparts, which resulted in the learners from rural settings scoring more than the learners in urban settings. Despite the fact that learners from rural settings scored more than the learners from the urban settings, the scores obtained by the learners from urban settings are more dispersed (scattered) from the mean than those of the learners from rural settings. The *t*-test value of 2.502 (df=874;  $P < .05$ ) was observed, which implies that the learners from urban literacy centres performed at significantly lower levels on the life-skills post literacy test than learners from rural literacy centres. This is a puzzling result because one expects learners in the cities (urban setting) should perform better than learners from villages in rural settings (Farombi 1998) because of the concentration of learning facilities in the urban centres rather than in the rural settings. However, the finding in this study corroborates earlier findings of **Uekawa** and **Lange** (1998) where U.S. students from suburban settings had higher scores than urban students. Moreover, the findings of this study contradict earlier findings of some scholars which reveal that there are very slight rural-urban differences in high school and college performance regardless of sex and/or social class in favour of urban students in Korea (Education Forum 2004). Students with urban and suburban backgrounds consistently outperformed students from rural and small-town areas (for example, Education Forum 2004).

One of the reasons that can be adduced for this result is that learners in urban centres are very busy in the hustling and bustling life of the city—that is, many things compete with their time, like spending more time on the road due to traffic hold ups. Another reason could be because of the way city people enjoy social amenities like television, home video, movies and, as such, little or no time is devoted to their learning. If these learners are children, they could be disciplined and forced to do their homework, and to go to the learning centres, but where the majority of the learners are adults, there is a limit to the extent they can be pushed to do what they do not want to do.

Research Question 4: Is there any significant difference in the competency level of young and old non-formal education learners on the life-skills test?

Table 4: Performance on the life-skills test by age

Age	Sample size	Mean score (%)	Standard deviation	Highest score (%)	Lowest score (%)	Modal score range (%)	t-test
Young	315	39.24	12.45	89.73	8.57	30–39	5.43*
Old	561	34.43	19.23	93.34	5.35	30–39	

\* = significant (0.05)

In Nigeria, people who are 18 years and above are considered adults. In this study, therefore, ‘old learners’ referred to people who are 18 years old and above, whereas those learners below 18 years are considered young. The result by age (Table 4) shows that there are more old learners in the centres than young learners. However, young learners performed better than old learners in life-skills, with mean scores of 39.2% and 34.4% and standard deviations of 12.5 and 19.2 respectively. The learners’ performances are represented in Figure 4.

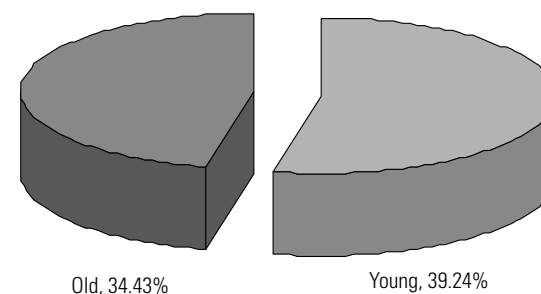


Figure 4: Competency level of old and young NFE learners

The two groups of learners had a modal score range of 30% – 39%. The maximum percent score for young learners was less than that for old learners but the minimum percent score for young learners was higher than that for old learners, which resulted in the large standard deviation for the old learners (individual scores of the old learners dispersed greatly from the mean score and from other scores). The *t*-test value of 5.43 (df=874;  $P < .05$ ) was observed, implying that the young learners performed significantly higher on life-skills test than the old learners. The findings reveal that younger learners performed better than older learners. The reason could be that the more mature (older) learners are encumbered with many economic activities to take care of their children, dependant relations, social expectations and so on. Apart from economic activities, older learners have many other commitments that have demands on their time. These economic activities and other engagements are likely to slow down the rate of comprehension and assimilation of what the instructors taught them. On the other hand, young learners tend to be internally motivated because, to them, non-formal education is more like a second chance education which could develop them socially and intellectually. The result of this study corroborates the study carried out by the Department of Educational Measurement and Evaluation within the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) (2002), which found that students' age had negative impact on students' learning achievement, meaning that younger students performed better than older ones. Conversely, the finding in this study is not in agreement with the reports on National Assessment of Educational Performance (NAEP) by the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan and the National Examinations Council (2006) in Nigeria, in which older students performed better than young students. The difference between this study and the report on NAEP is mainly due to the nature of the respondents in the studies. In this study, the old learners' ages range from 18 to 62 years and young learners' ages range from 10 to 17 years, whereas in the NAEP study,

old students' ages ranged between 15 and 20 years and the young students' ages were below 15 years.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The overall mean score was 36.9%, so with this type of result we can categorise the learners as neither novices nor experts. The most appropriate categorisation is likely to be advanced beginners (low level of competence). The ideal is to raise this low level of competence to the level of experts. Therefore, language of instruction should be structured to accommodate those who have some deficiencies in English language (which is the medium of instruction from primary 4). In addition, instructional materials like textbooks, primers and writing materials should be provided for the learners. The result on sex analysis is not conclusive about which of the sexes is better (no significant difference was found between males and females). However, if we consider group performance, boys were better, and if we consider individual performance, girls were better. Therefore, it is recommended that females should learn to work together in order to produce a higher group result like the males. The centre location analysis indicated that learners in rural literacy centres performed better than learners in urban literacy centres. This result contradicted expectations because of the concentration of instructional materials in urban settings rather than in rural settings. However, because of the involvements of learners in the cities in some commercial activities, less time is able to be devoted to their work. It is therefore recommended that learners in urban centres should re-set their priorities by devoting more time to their academic work. Finally, younger learners out-performed the older learners probably because the younger learners are determined to acquire what they missed in the formal school setting. Meanwhile, the older learners were likely to be complacent and to give in to fate. The performance of these older learners could be improved if they devote more time to, and determine to perform well in, their academic activities.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Rethinking work and learning: adult and vocational education for social sustainability**

Peter Willis, Stephen McKenzie and Roger Harris (eds.)  
Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2009  
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273 + xxiv pages, hardback price: \$A199

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Recently we sat and looked over the city of Sydney. We wondered what makes a city of this size socially sustainable. There are questions about whether Sydney will be environmentally sustainable in a hundred years time if it functions as it does today. More to the point, will it be socially sustainable?

Sydney now promotes itself as a city of villages. Are its villages true 'villages', discrete socially sustainable communities of people who belong, interact and 'sustain' each other? What about the apartment complexes or the suburban streets where residents often do not relate socially with their neighbours? Are the high-rise business complexes

socially viable units? Or is the focus really on economic sustainability? What gives people in each of these social contexts a sense of belonging, social justice and involvement as a healthy community?

These are the obvious questions we bring to our review of this book. What is not quite so obvious, however, is how education, and AVE (Adult and Vocational Education) in particular, can play a role in transforming the disparate elements of a given complex, like the villages of Sydney, into a healthy social environment. The contributors to this book have begun the search and research needed to make education for social sustainability a visible and viable part of the educational agenda for our society and others.

This valuable collection of essays focuses on social sustainability as distinct from economic or environmental sustainability, and the urgent need for incorporating this field into adult and vocational education. As Alan Mayne indicates in the Foreword, the aim is to fashion 'a just and sustainable world'. He also signals the need to re-think what sustainability involves in diverse contexts and to be sensitive to local knowledge systems. A Mumbai slum, for example, may have developed knowledge and skills that enable its communities to be sustainable in spite of apparent poverty.

The editors of this volume, in their introduction, emphasise a need for AVE programs to re-orient their systems to incorporate the research, types of knowledge and values crucial to developing AVE programs that will promote social sustainability. The steps cited for the implementation of this program include especially promoting equity between generations, transmitting awareness of social sustainability from one generation to the next and a sense of community responsible for maintaining this transmission.

The various authors in this collection of articles reflect a diversity of perspectives and possibilities for the future of social sustainability. Aidan Davison, for example, recognises that the very term

sustainability may originally be associated with the term ‘sustain’ (Latin *sustinere*), but the contemporary use, understanding and ‘grammatical contrivance’ of the word are ‘novel’, especially since the Second World War. Education, he argues, has become the handmaiden of sustainability, delegated with the responsibility of raising awareness, shifting attitudes and changing behaviours in a range of social contexts. Davison maintains that education for sustainable development must steer clear of universal prescriptions and consider exploring practical rather than instrumental reason in the messy world of social reality.

Patricia Cranton defines social sustainability as ‘a commitment to humanity in which social justice for all is the good, so as to preserve the human race’ (p. 94). This commitment, she argues, involves an identification with a love for all human beings, a recognition of social interdependence and a breaking down of the self-other dualism. Effective AVE, according to Cranton, requires transformative learning involving a ‘deep shift in beliefs and assumptions about self, others and the world around us that occurs through critical reflection, rational learning and intuition’ (p. 95). She articulates five perspectives on transformative learning that can inform those involved in AVE.

Peter Willis’ chapter challenges us to rethink the educational context and proposes an ‘imaginal’ curriculum which he links to Jon Hawke’s ‘fourth pillar’ of social sustainability, namely, ‘cultural vitality and life enthusiasm’. The task is to make humans aware of their location in social eco-systems as embodied aesthetic, rational and technological beings. As part of the pedagogy to raise this awareness, Willis proposes that learners explore their ‘life myths’ and link them to the myths implicit in social sustainability. This bold and imaginative approach utilises storytelling and dramatic portrayal as an entrée into a meaningful understanding of social sustainability.

One of the areas of concern in fostering a sustainable society is that of religion or spirituality. Heather Foster argues that organisations such as The Parliament of World Religions tend to focus on commonalities between religions rather than on the diversity of beliefs, symbols and traditions that a range of people of different faiths may hold in a common social space. As Foster reminds us, ‘Religion is often associated with an unscientific and anti-intellectual view of the world’. An AVE program needs to focus its attention on the way particular groups in a community find meaning through their respective religious symbol systems and to respect these as alternative understandings of reality. Foster’s contribution is complemented by Chris Provis who demonstrates the weakness of past approaches to inter-faith dialogue and proposes a model of dialogue where participants are to ‘see’ things as different rather than right or wrong, to understand others on their faith terms rather than on one’s own terms.

Joanna Crossman moves the discussion beyond traditional religious symbol systems to the more amorphous concept of spirituality, and ‘secular spirituality’ in particular. This spirituality need not be viewed as a form of resistance to organised religion, but personal interpretations of reality that discover meaning, mystery and interconnectedness in their world. Education in spirituality is emerging in workplace programs especially in America. The goal is for students to explore the spiritual dimensions of their lives and those of others at appropriate levels of intimacy and relevance. Crossman associates social sustainability with ‘safe places’, spaces where empathy, respect, tolerance and social justice can be explored at a deeper level.

Especially valuable is a cluster of articles that outline examples of how AVE programs in social sustainability were implemented in Sierra Leone, the Philippines and South-East Asia. Astrid van Kotze describes how, after the horrific wars in Sierra Leone, efforts

were made to restore society. She demonstrates how UNESCO principles do not necessarily work well in the living culture of a particular society in crisis, and what lessons might be learned from this crisis, especially in relation to community health. Richard Bagnall draws on case studies from five countries in the Asia-Pacific region to illustrate how non-formal education can enhance social sustainability. Edicio dela Torre is an adult educator working in the Philippines, interpreting social sustainability as a possibility lying at the intersection of social justice, environmental protection and sustainable development. The struggle for land reform was the crisis that has forced a re-thinking of social sustainability.

The writers in this book introduce us to a wide range of perspectives about social sustainability and well as a comparable range of possible agendas for the way education, especially AVE, may contribute to healthy social systems. The contexts explored include sustainable democracy, sustainable space, sustainable peace, sustainable health, sustainable communities and more. The educational models suggested for advancing social sustainability include transformative learning, practical reason, imaginal storytelling and more.

The dilemma for an educational body responsible for AVE programs of various kinds in diverse contexts, is how to identify which of these perspectives and strategies are best suited to a given curriculum context and how social sustainability may become a viable consideration as a core value across the curriculum. This volume presents a range of valuable options that curriculum experts will need to analyse and adapt to their curriculum contexts. That being said, this work demonstrates admirably how relevant education programs could be in the vital task of achieving social sustainability in socially fragmented world.

Each year, at the same time that the Archibald Prize is displayed, the Sydney Art Gallery has an Art Express by high school students. Currently, one large piece consists of 55 panels or boxes, each

separating one human from another – an image of unsustainable society. In the bottom panels appear the words: *TECHNOLOGY OWES ECOLOGY AN APOLOGY*. The notes of the student are concerned with the reality that societies are separating and deteriorating. It seems that one student in one school community, in one village of the city of Sydney is in tune with the authors of this volume.

**Professor Norman Habel,  
Professorial Fellow, Flinders University  
Associate Professor Janice Orrell, Adjunct Lecturer in  
Education, Flinders University**

## BOOK REVIEW

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### The science of subjective well-being

Michael Eid and Randy J. Larsen (eds.)

New York: Guildford Press, December 2008

ISBN-10: 1593855818; ISBN-13: 978-1593855819; 546 pages

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This is a substantial and authoritative book, at 546 pages, consisting of 24 chapters contributed by 36 authors, who attempt to give an up-to-date commentary on how research into subjective well-being has progressed over the past two decades. The enterprise succeeds rather well with authors who are well-qualified and, in many cases, have been responsible for conducting the research in question. The book represents the contributions of people who have been associated with recently retired Professor Ed Diener, who more than any one single individual, has been associated with the development of this scientific research area. The book claims specifically (on page 1) not to have been intended as a festschrift. But this is a festschrift in all but name.

Dr Diener came to prominence with a remarkable synthesis paper published in the *Psychological Bulletin* in 1984. That paper reviewed the (then) substantial, but diverse and disparate, literature on human happiness, and was largely responsible for the increasing use of the terms 'well-being' and 'satisfaction with life'. Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale has been used widely with different groups across the globe over the past 25 years. The scale is simple to use, is readily available from Diener's homepage in any of 21 languages (<http://www.psych.uiuc.edu/~ediener>). Readers interested in Diener's work might note that he and his son (also a researcher) have recently published an interesting and readable book on their work, but targeted more for the popular market.

*The science of subjective well-being*, through its various chapters, provides commentaries from notable scholars in which they appear to initially acknowledge Diener's contribution, and then inform the reader about a particular area of research which often then involves their own work. This has the advantage of presenting both a big picture, and individual contributions at the same time. For example, in the second chapter, the Dutch sociologist, Ruut Veenhoven argues cogently that subjective well-being represents the core business of sociology. He writes:

Most sociologists would be surprised to learn that happy people are typically better citizens, that they are better informed about political matters, that they use their voting rights more often, that they involve themselves more in civil action, and are, at the same time, less radical in their political views (p. 58).

Studies indicating that the components of human happiness are subject to genetic factors are reviewed by Richard Lucas in Chapter 9. Estimated heritabilities for the facets of well-being are found typically between .4 and .5. But of course genetic dispositions must not be confused with genetic determinism. The effects of one's life experiences on actual levels of well-being are profound, and this

theme is echoed across most of the chapters in this book. The level of happiness that people report is strongly related to their circumstances in life.

Indeed, one of the recurring findings coming out of well-being research concerns how much happiness there is around. Forty years of research has located practically no coherent grouping of individuals who maintain substantial levels of unhappiness for any length of time. One such candidate group appears to be the homeless in American cities, but homelessness and poverty in other parts of the world do not appear to be so devastating. Is happiness a basic psychological default position? There is an argument, supported by a sizable level of data, that this statement does not misrepresent human nature. Certainly, it is not difficult to locate unhappy individuals. But they are rarely, if ever, in the majority when group data are examined. People are clearly above neutral for most of the time in both moods and emotions, which gives rise to the interesting question as to whether it is desirable to raise levels of happiness in people who already display it to high levels. Indeed, Diener is on record as speculating that there is an 'optimal level' of happiness that may apply at the level of the individual (p. 507).

Other fascinating findings, as reviewed within this volume, concern the relationship between positive and negative emotions, a theme conveyed across several chapters. Many studies converge upon the notion that one key ingredient of happiness involves not the absolute level of such emotions, but their statistical ratio. Happiness entails that people experience positive events perhaps four times more often than negative events. Psychologically, bad outweighs good, by a factor of three plus. People who experience equal levels of positive and negative emotion appear chronically dissatisfied. Further, the critical factor appears to be the frequency of emotions, whereas emotional intensity appears to play a relatively minor role in such mental algebra.

The book is organised into several sections. The first five chapters attempt to present an overview of various theories about subjective well-being. The next three chapters are devoted to measurement concerns, and Pavot (Chapter 7) in particular presents a very sensible commentary on the various self-report scales and other instruments used in this area. The third section presents eight chapters concerned with the characteristics of happy people. In the fourth section, the focus is upon interpersonal aspects of happiness research, with chapters on family relationships, job satisfaction and cross-cultural studies. The fifth section consists of three chapters on research into interventions, that is, attempts to increase levels of happiness through manipulations or experiences. And in the final chapter, Ed Diener himself comments on how the research has undermined various myths about human nature.

As a statement of a broad area of research, does the book have any notable omissions? Probably not, although the contributions of economists to the total field appear under-represented. In antidote, however, there is a well-written chapter about the relationship between material wealth and well-being (Chapter 15, by Biswas-Diener), written from a psychological viewpoint. Income correlates with well-being at lower economic levels, but there are vastly diminishing returns at higher levels. Further, attitudes towards materialism are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being. Although it helps considerably for individuals to access moderate levels of income, actually desiring material wealth is toxic to people's overall satisfaction with life.

There is a rich personal anecdote that Professor Diener has been reported to relate. As a young recruit into graduate school he was asked what he wanted to study. Happiness in farm workers, he replied. The supervisor ruled this out of order. Happiness was not a topic suitable for study by any self-respecting behavioural scientist. Furthermore, whatever happiness might be, it just would not be

found in farm workers. On becoming faculty himself, Diener was able to completely overturn the thinking underpinning such counsel. Indeed, it has been established that farm workers, in common with other occupational groupings, are happy and productive individuals. People such as Diener and his collaborators have played a huge role in opening up significant areas of the human experience to statistical research methods. Hence, this volume represents a major summary statement from key writers as to how the statistical study of human happiness has developed to this point in time. As such, this book is most strongly recommended.

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**University of South Australia**

## **BOOK REVIEW**

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### **What should I believe? Why our beliefs about the nature of death and the purpose of life dominate our lives**

Dorothy Rowe  
London & New York: Routledge, October 2008  
ISBN: 978-0-415-46679-0, 312 pages

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Dorothy Rowe, clinical psychologist and author of thirteen books, has made a significant contribution to understanding depression. Although her books belong to the self-help genre, they are not superficial. In exploring the ways human beings construct their reality and the impact of that upon the way they live their lives, she has not shied away from religious and philosophical issues.

Those readers who are familiar with narrative, constructivist and social constructionist approaches to the 'self' will find themselves in familiar territory. It is worth noting that Rowe was promoting these ideas (although she would not have used this terminology) long before it was fashionable to do so. Instead, she has described herself as always being a personal construct psychologist (based on George

Kelly's Personal Construct Theory), initially without knowing it. Her approach to therapy seems to combine insights from psychoanalytic and cognitive schools. Unlike some cognitive therapists, she is not content to describe people's cognitive patterns but argues the link between these and family of origin experiences.

While metaphysical themes have regularly featured in her books, *What should I believe?* foregrounds the contemporary religious context to explore the social and political impact of our personal belief systems, using case material from 'therapeutic conversations' to illustrate her argument. In the Preface, Rowe says that she has written the book to provide genuine answers to the rhetorical questions posed by two militant atheists, Richard Dawkins, author of *The God delusion*, and Christopher Hitchens, author of *God is not great*: 'How can people be so stupid as to believe this nonsense?' (Dawkins) and 'How can intelligent educated men believe such things?' (Hitchens). Rather than dismissing such beliefs out of hand, she argues that 'our religious and philosophical beliefs are central to our sense of being a person', although they are often damaging on both personal and global levels. To solve the problem, she says that we need to recognise that our beliefs about life and death are 'fantasies' we construct to deal with the uncertainties of existence, rather than absolute truths we use to inflict pain on ourselves or other people.

An approach that purports to avoid polarising people into believers and unbelievers as Dawkins and Hitchens had done, and instead to encourage dialogue, is much needed in our contemporary climate. Rowe seems to promise an even-handed treatment of the issue.

Drawing on Karen Armstrong's (2000) distinction between *mythos* and *logos*, Rowe argues our need for both approaches if we are to avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalism. While *logos* is needed to solve practical problems and to make sense of the material world, it is limited by its binary logic. According to Rowe, fundamentalists, of whatever persuasion or role (even scientists), who rely solely on logos,

'see people in simple binary terms' (p.7), as either good or evil, right or wrong, allowing no room for dialogue.

Living just in logos and eschewing everything that is not immediately tangible and knowable removes our ability to live with uncertainty. Fantasy is all about the uncertainty, the entertaining of a multitude of possibilities. Fantasy is about doubt. Those who try to live only in logos find uncertainty and doubt impossible to bear (p.6).

Rowe's message is that we all create fantasies (use *mythos*) to deal with life. Chapter 3, 'Hemmed in closed circle of our own creating', includes case histories drawn from therapeutic conversations. These illustrate how fantasies originally chosen to defend us become the prisons from which we cannot escape because we don't see them as fantasies but as absolute truths blocking out other possibilities. These stories illustrate how a person's belief system is idiosyncratic, despite sharing a common religious heritage with others.

It is admittedly a challenge to do justice to religious pluralism, not just diversity between religions, but also within them, given the limitations of space. Although Rowe concedes in the first chapter that there is a range in all religions from fundamentalist to more liberal approaches, and although she occasionally includes a more progressive religious voice (for example, Rowan Williams and David Millikan), and although she acknowledges that some quarters of the church are concerned with world poverty, social injustice and the environment, the overall impression is that religion and not just fundamentalism is the enemy, and that we would be better off without it. She has often said that the church keeps her in business as a therapist. While that may be true, it is still perhaps questionable for the purposes of this book (which purports to be research) that she draws only on case histories which demonstrate the damaging role religion plays in people's lives. It seems important to distinguish between healthy (mature) and unhealthy (immature) religion. After

all, she warns her readers in Chapter 4 to beware of researchers with an axe to grind.

In this respect, Rowe's inclusion of her own 'religious' narrative (pp.222ff.) explaining how she positions herself is important. Certainly she is not a disinterested voice, but I am wondering if she is aware how reductive and patronising her treatment of religion is. Her reductionism is apparent in statements like this: 'In these cases our beliefs are no more than a magical comfort blanket which we hope will protect us from the terrors of life' (p.218), particularly the fear of death, and 'If there were no death there would be no need for religion' (p.214).

*What should I believe?* is an update of *The courage to live*, which was first published in 1982. It has been helpful in writing this review to return to the earlier version, which in some respects was more nuanced and coherent, perhaps because less ambitious in scope. The 2009 version, still aimed at a popular (and intelligent) rather than a specialised academic audience, includes additional material on the impact of religion on contemporary society, recent discoveries in neuroscience confirming a constructivist approach to reality and the implications of this for our developing subjectivity. There also seems to be a more conscious presentation of her material as research.

This book issues a timely and intelligently substantiated challenge to us to acknowledge that our beliefs (myths in the sense used by Armstrong and Rowe) do not constitute reality. This book raises an important question for me: if religion is merely a defense against human insecurity, as Rowe seems to imply, why do some people, whose lives demonstrate that they are not lacking in compassion, intelligence, self-knowledge and courage to confront the ambiguities and uncertainties of human existence, remain open to the idea that myths are 'humanly constructed symbols that may mediate, but never enclose the divine' (Holloway 2001: 57)? Those interested in such a

question might be interested in Richard Holloway's intelligent and compassionate treatment of some of these themes.

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- Holloway, R. 2001, *Doubts and loves: what is left of Christianity*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Analysing qualitative data in psychology**

Evanthia Lyons and Adrian Coyle (eds.)  
London: Sage Publications, 2007  
288 pages (pbk)  
ISBN: 9781412907835 (pbk), 9781412907828 (hbk)

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Among the many challenges for those new to qualitative research methods is finding a way into understanding the diversity of approaches and their relevance and application to different research contexts, while at the same-time coming to grips with the uncertainties that surround qualitative processes. Many texts focusing on qualitative research tend to do so from an assumption that readers have a relatively high level of prior understanding and/or experience with particular qualitative research approaches or that they will be at least familiar with complex issues like epistemology, social critique, subjectivity, reflexivity, discourse, meaning-making and interpretation.

Editors Evanthia Lyons and Adrian Coyle make no such assumptions in their comprehensive 2007 text: *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology*. Instead their aim is to provide easy to read, well structured and clearly set out methodological tools and ‘conceptual maps’ (p4) to help researchers navigate the field of qualitative research, with an emphasis on four particular methodologies: interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. As such it is a particularly useful text for undergraduate students encountering a variety of qualitative research methods for the first time; or for post graduate students or other adult learners seeking to understand the origins and application of interpretative phenomenological approaches, grounded theory, discourse analysis and narrative methods. The text focuses on the ‘doing’ of research and the ‘analysing’ of data. It is well structured, methodical and comprehensive. It is written in a clear and accessible style and uses contemporary research settings to explicate issues, making it of interest to established researchers as well as the novices it targets.

The academics, whose chapter contributions comprise the book, are noteworthy for being both theoretically accomplished in qualitative research methodologies, as well as experienced applied research practitioners in their specific fields of interest. All share a critical approach to the discursive construction of social issues. All demonstrate a great sensitivity and ethical reflexivity in their approach to conveying the richness and complexity of diverse research journeys. The book is not simply a description of abstract notions, about what qualitative research ‘is’, but rather a rich repository of applied contemporary research experience. The authors ‘locate’ themselves well and share their lived experiences of ‘doing’ research, not simply describing it. Each author is both contextual and candid when pointing to the challenges and uncertainties inherent in the method/s they discuss.

Most of the authors share a background in using qualitative research methods in health settings; for example, having conducted research exploring the perceptions and experiences of those in palliative and hospice care settings, mental health services, oncology nursing or community hospitals. Lyons has a special interest in research related to identity and social representation for multi-cultural groups, social memory, inter-group conflict, young peoples' trust in political institutions and the stigma associated with socially excluded groups such as those with mental illnesses or learning disabilities. Coyle has a particular research interest in identity, bereavement, religion and spirituality as well as in lesbian and gay psychology. Walton focuses on critical discursive analyses of masculinity and emotions, while Storey has a particular interest in the discursive constructions of 'Blackness'. The editors assemble the combined experiences of these established researchers well and provide a very comprehensive, thematically coherent, practically focused text that covers each of the four methods it highlights, from conceptualization to application and reportage.

The text is set out in two main sections. The first leads with a discussion about the uncertainties and quandaries posed by qualitative approaches to set the scene for the discussion of interpretative approaches in psychology. It contrasts qualitative approaches to 'scientific' more positivist approaches and discusses epistemology and subjectivities, a recurrent theme skilfully woven through the book to tie contributions thematically. The second section deals with the four identified approaches to data analysis. In each chapter there is a clear and concise summary of the particular method's theoretical origins, an explication of embedded philosophical assumptions and where appropriate a discussion of different versions of the particular method.

For example when Payne discusses 'grounded theory' as method she outlines the Glaser and Strauss (1967) approach and compares

this to the later Strauss and Corbin (1990) variation, unpacking some of the contentions that arose between the two approaches. She acknowledges the social constructivist version, the methodological hermeneutics version and the postmodernist take: all strands within grounded theory analysis. This breaking down of each research method enables the reader to more clearly see variations and subtleties within and between research approaches. The clarity of structure helps demystify and destabilise any tendency to see the specified methods highlighted in the book, as 'pure' or proscriptive approaches. Methods like discourse analysis for example can often seem scary and monolithic to new researchers unfamiliar with the fuzziness and flexibility inherent in most qualitative approaches. This book minimizes uncertainty and simplifies what can often seem grandiose and impenetrable.

The book makes research fun, full of light, texture and colour. Each of the chapters provides a boxed summary of its aims upfront. Each chapter lists key words and is then broken down into sub-sections. There is a summary at the conclusion of each chapter and where appropriate a list of further reading. There are diagrams and boxed excerpts of interviews or text analyses, drawn from practical applied and 'real' research settings to illustrate applications of the method under discussion. These exhibits provide a 'living' sense of the utility of the particular qualitative research approach in specific contexts. There are useful discussions throughout the text about the 'role of the researcher'. In Chapter 11, Lyons provides a particularly helpful discussion about ideology, social critique and the challenge of representing the 'other'.

Given the shared critical understandings of the authors and the nature of the four methods under discussion however, the text could perhaps have discussed issues of power relations more prominently throughout the book. While questions of power relations feature in the Lyons chapter and in relation to feminist research, more of this

analysis would have been useful. Questions of power, race, class and sexuality are crucial to how we make sense of 'meaning' and of 'other's meaning-making senses' in the political economy of the contemporary worlds that we, as both researchers and researched, inhabit. Systemic oppressions and disempowerment can shape responses and the interpretative task. While the inter-personal subjective positioning of researchers is well handled, how the political economy of power, structure and agency impacts qualitative research and data analysis could have been further explicated in this book.

*Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology* is an exemplary introductory text to four complex interpretative approaches within the repertoire of qualitative research methodology. It gives clarity and context to interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory approaches, discourse and narrative analysis. Its strongest contribution is its focus on 'doing' qualitative research, as well as understanding it. It is a book that should be commended for the rigour of its approach and widely recommended to all those interested in analysing qualitative data.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### Ramblin' on my mind: new perspectives on the blues

David Evans (ed.)  
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008  
430 pages  
ISBN: 13 978-0-252-03203-5 (pbk), 430 pages, RRP \$50.95

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I have been entertained and influenced by most forms of blues music since buying my first LP record in 1969 – Cream's 'Live at the Fillmore' album. This album was a classic example of a British group taking the blues form, exploring its endless possibilities for improvisation, and in doing so re-inventing it for popular audiences and creating a re-awakened interest in the original African-American blues performers. Many of these artists who were still alive by the 1960s experienced revitalised careers as a result, and most people would have heard of greats like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Sonny Boy Williams etc. The blues can range from simple and primitive forms as interpreted by the likes of Bo Diddley, to complex musical structures as explored by composers such as Gershwin. For beginners, the blues is easily accessible – like most

songs in the related folk music form, you only need to learn three chords on the guitar and you're off. As a musician myself, I have experienced over the last forty-odd years the powerful and almost visceral effect on performer and audience alike of playing the blues, and am still astonished that a white Anglo-Saxon of Central European origin can relate to and be moved by a form of music that originated in Sub-Saharan Africa.

As a musical form, the blues has mainly been interpreted, studied and analysed in relation to its historical, cultural, social and political roots and influences. Most people would know that the first identified blues form - the field holler - originated in the mid-eighteenth century American South when farm workers and slaves were prohibited from using any form of percussion to provide rhythm for their work and were left only with their voices. Yet by the 1920s, a 'blues industry' was well established in America with a thriving record and sheet music industry, literally thousands of performers, and recognised regional styles – Delta Blues, Piedmont Blues, Chicago Blues etc. Today we see a global world music industry that is inclusive of the blues and manifest in international events like the annual 'Blues and Roots' festival in New South Wales.

This book, therefore, as the title suggests, offers new perspectives on the blues by aiming for a higher level of scholarship and analysis, offering chapters by folklorists, musicologists, anthropologists, musicians, fans and collectors on a diverse range of related topics. This includes some extremely in-depth research into very particular aspects of musicology, for example a study of the blues scale, the origin of the 'blue note' in African music, by the Austrian Professor of Musicology, Gerhard Kubik. As the opening chapter, this sets the tone for the book, beginning with recollections of a field visit with a Memphis blues man (notably nicknamed the Wolfman), then launching into a 40-page technical exploration of scalar patterns, tonal resources, chordal harmonics and pitch variations using one

particular blues song as a case study – Skip James' 'Devil got my woman'. Complete with photographs, diagrams and charts, this is serious scholarship alright. However, Kubik's thesis is simply that one cannot apply a 'European music theory approach' to the analysis of blues music, and by comparing his extensive studies of African music to a study of the blues, he concludes that the latter has its roots in the former, with both forms demonstrating an independence from the Western tempered harmonic scale as first introduced to the modern musical ear by J.S. Bach.

Elsewhere, this micro-focus on aspects of the blues is exemplified by guitarist Andrew M. Cohen's empirical study of one single variable in blues performance – the use of the right thumb in finger picking guitar styles. With a sample of 94 blues guitarists from across the American South, Cohen has constructed a database and an analytical framework based on his own 40 years of experience in playing with many of them. The result, again using charts, photographs, manuscript examples and tables, is a *tour de force* of musical scholarship and fascinating stuff for the serious scholar of guitar playing. The fact that this chapter was based on Cohen's MA thesis shows the level of scholarship that study of the blues has now attained.

The editor of this volume, David Evans, contributes a chapter devoted entirely to the nicknames of blues singers, 'From Bumble Bee Slim to Black Boy Shine'. Having constructed an impressive database based on a sample of over 3,000 artists who made recordings between 1920 and 1970, Evans finds that over one-third of them were better known by their nicknames, which he has categorised by musical and non-musical terms including physical traits and location as well as symbolic traits associated with food, nature, status or sex. While some of the actual nicknames make entertaining reading (Too Tight Henry, Sweet Papa Stovepipe, Red Hot Shakin' Davis, Black Spider Dumplin'), Evans makes the point that this naming tradition

contributed to the establishment of the performing personas of blues artists and located them in their social, cultural and family relationships as a way of claiming identity. The fact that many of them had a signature tune describing and celebrating this identity strikes me as very similar to modern day rappers like Ice T and Fifty Cent, whose musical content revolves mainly around magnifying and talking up their own identity, prowess and activities.

‘The history of the commercial ascendancy of the blues is partially preserved in sheet music’, according to the perspective of historians Lyn Abbott and Doug Seroff, and their chapter sets out to demonstrate this with reference to the music of the Southern Vaudeville or Ragtime era, as characterised by its ‘father figure’, W.C. Handy, composer of the famous St Louis Blues (a song which later in the book features a whole chapter devoted to its many variations, particularly as interpreted by Ella Fitzgerald). Sheet music enabled any family with access to a piano to emulate the ragtime style which, while popular and originating in saloons, was based on classical music forms and became acceptable in salons, thus crossing class and race barriers. Basing their research on early twentieth century newspapers, playbills and music publications, Abbott and Seroff show how vaudeville theatres catering to black audiences and performers also created the opportunity for the blues to gain commercial acceptance and success. They also discuss the impact and response to the famous 1893 statement made in New York by my countryman, the Czech composer Antonin Dvořák, that ‘In the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music’.

Other chapter titles indicate the general focus and intent of this book to provide new perspectives on the blues. ‘Preachin’ the Blues: A textual linguistic analysis of Son House’s “Dry Spell Blues”’, analyses one blues song in depth for its integration of the sacred and the secular – a common theme in gospel blues music and ‘hard luck’ songs. ‘Some ramblings on Robert Johnson’s mind: critical analysis

and aesthetic value in Delta Blues’ critically analyses a single recorded performance of a Robert Johnson song to ‘examine emotional and visceral attributes, along with the musical and textual aspects’. (Serious blues exponents will also recognise this seminal song as the one chosen by Eric Clapton for his first recorded singing outing on the 1966 John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers LP).

‘Beyond the mushroom cloud: a decade of disillusion in black blues and gospel song’ focuses on the content of blues songs in the decade after World War II – a time of hardship, disappointment and eventually cold war paranoia. A quote from a November 1947 recording by Jimmy Witherspoon demonstrates not only the ‘temper of the times’ but the universal relevance of the blues, even today:

Money’s getting cheaper, prices getting’ steeper  
 Found myself a woman but I just couldn’t keep her  
 Times gettin’ tougher than tough; things gettin’ rougher than rough  
 I make a lot of money, but I just keep spendin’ the stuff.

I found this book at once fascinating and dense – not a cover-to-cover read, but a useful and valuable reference book that anyone with even a passing interest in blues music can dip into for many gems of information and inspiration. Most chapters have extensive reference lists and additional endnotes containing a mine of material, including discographies as well as bibliographies, and the book is rounded off with an index and notes on the contributors.

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**University of South Australia**

## BOOK REVIEW

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### **Applying social psychology: from problems to solutions**

Abraham Buunk and Mark Van Vugt  
London: Sage Publications, 2008  
162 + xiv pages, ISBN: 978-1-4129-0283-0 (pbk), price not known

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Social psychology has a long history of wishing to be applied and useful, but spending much of its time in the laboratory with experimental designs testing very theoretical models and ideas. Being useful and applied is tempting, but the scientific Holy Grail of generalisable findings or laws across all people has been even more tempting. Even more problematic in this writer's opinion is a blatant disregard towards what is happening in the other social sciences.

Abraham Buunk (University of Groningen) and Mark Van Vugt (University of Kent) have written a new book on applying social psychology. Reviewing it from within the social psychology history it is a good book and worth the effort of reading. They build the framework around their PATH model: Problem definition, Analysis, Test, Help. While hardly original, and perhaps puzzling to other social

scientists as to why you would need to formalise such things, the authors work through numerous examples. Two points worth noticing are that Analysis means theorising rather than contextualising, and Help means intervention (and is perhaps there to stop an acronym of PATI).

The book is well-written and for those within social psychology it is perhaps the best book along these lines yet to appear and is highly recommended. It is certainly the most systematic. For those still teaching traditional approaches to (experimental) social psychology, it would be a good book to recommend to students alongside their usual textbook.

The chapters are arranged around each of the four points of the PATH model. Each of these chapters outlines detailed examples. Chapter 2 gives various perspectives on how to define an applied problem and difficulties doing this. Chapter 3 specifically guides readers to analysis explicitly through theory-based explanations. Chapter 4 looks at testing the theories but little guidance is given and little in the way of methodological hints, with this chapter perhaps being the weakest part of the book. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at intervention but, as we will see, mostly draws on other applied work.

To give a better picture, let me give some examples from the book. In Chapter 3 on Analysis, the case of increasing safe sex arises. First, some conclusions from a literature review give starting points, such as: 'Most teenagers believe they have less than average risk of contracting an STD', 'Teenagers report difficulties with carrying a condom around' and 'Teenagers find it difficult to negotiate condom use with a sexual partner'. [Note here the over-generalised and de-contextualised nature of these starting points.] From here, some social psychological concepts are raised: risk perception, self-efficacy and optimism. [Note here the abstractness of these and the lack of searching for non-social psychological concepts and concrete practices.] Next, explicitly general theories are brought in, in this

case the theory of reasoned action, rational choice theories and even evolutionary psychology theory.

In Chapter 5, applied social psychology looks for interventions. As will become clear from those outside looking in, the interventions are dragged in from everywhere but are considered safe territory, unlike practical anthropology methods or participant community interventions which do not appear in social psychology at all. Typical methods are said to be: goal setting, fear communication, modelling, enactive learning, social comparison, implementation intentions, reward and punishment, and feedback. [Note that these are almost all individual interventions rather than group or community interventions.] An intervention is then constructed out of these generic methods and evaluations conducted.

There are two ways to review this book, therefore. From within social psychology, it sets out standard thinking and procedures in a very clear and useful way, and is a useful addition to the field. But from the world of real problems, there are dangerous limitations. Briefly, most of what is presented and suggested is taken out of its natural, social context. Findings are generalised, analysis is highly theoretical and context-free, testing is primarily with experimental methods (and therefore only in situations that allow random allocation), and interventions are generic and based only around individuals. There is also the drive to look for problems that fit the social psychology mould rather than looking at problems *per se*.

My experience with those students and others trained in social psychology who seriously take on applied work, is that they rapidly lose the traits mentioned above and become more social scientists than social psychologists. Real agencies require dealing with holistic problems and not carving out a theoretical perspective and looking exclusively at that. For example, in dealing with drug use among young teenagers, one cannot get away with just taking a theoretical perspective that such activities are about 'self-evaluations' by the

individuals and therefore we need to intervene with just better self-evaluations (from Chapter 5). There are a host of interconnected issues involving family, communities, schooling and so on that need to be taken into account, and the sort of approach promoted in this book does not cut it.

In summary, there are problems with social psychology and its use of generalisation and de-contextualisation. Notwithstanding that, for those with the discipline, this is certainly a good attempt to broaden the approach slightly and I hope it will encourage such students to take steps out into the world of real issues. They will need more guidance, but this is a good starting point for them.

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