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

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Printer: LG2 design

The Journal is published three times a year in April, July and November. Subscriptions are A$110 which includes GST for Australian subscribers and postage for all. Overseas subscriptions are A$130 which also includes postage.

Subscriptions, orders for back issues, advertisements and business correspondence are handled by the Membership Services. Papers for publication, material for review (books, reports, journals, audio-visuals) and editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor. ‘Notes for intending contributors’ are at the back of each issue.

Opinions expressed in the Journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ALA. The Journal is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA. It is abstracted by the Australian Education Index, Educational Administration Abstracts, Australian Public Affairs Information Service and Current Index to Journals in Education. ALA members can download Journal papers from http://www.ala.asn.au/members. Non-members can order them for A$8 each via http://www.ala.asn.au/pubs/AJAL/ajal.htm. (Within Australia, the purchase of papers attracts 80¢ GST.)

ISSN: 1443-1394

AJAL is listed in the SCOPUS database.
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Isn’t it fascinating how Australians come to know and remember major reports by their Chairs? For example, do you recall these reports, just to mention some, that have had implications for adult learning over the years: Duncan Report (1944), Kangan Report (1974), Kirby Report (1985), Deveson Report (1990), Finn Report (1991), Maher Report (1992) and another Kirby Report (2000)? And then, of course, who could forget the two landmark Senate Reports, famous for characterising adult and community education as the Cinderella sector, of 1991 (Come in Cinderella: The emergence of adult and community education) and 1997 (Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society)?

Recently, we have had a plethora of major reports on issues of relevance to adult learning. There have been the Cutler Report, Venturous Australia—Building strength in innovation (September 2008) on gaps and weaknesses in Australia’s innovation system and ways to correct them; the Australian Government’s response, Powering ideas: An innovation agenda for the 21st century (May 2009); the Bradley Review, Review of Australian higher education (November 2008) on higher (perhaps more accurately, tertiary?) education; the Australian Government’s response, Transforming
Australia’s higher education system (2009); the Skills Australia Report, Australian workforce futures (March 2010) on national workforce development; and the Baird Review, Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: Supporting international students (March 2010). All these reports are having and will continue to have impact on the context in which we work.

If you are in a position of authority as a leader and/or manager in adult learning, then you need to read these reports carefully, reflect on their implications for your sector, your organisation, your staff and yourself. If you a practitioner in adult learning, then you also need to read these reports, think creatively about what they mean for your practice and bring them to the attention of your leaders and managers. If you are a researcher in adult learning, and/or thinking about undertaking a higher degree, you need to read these reports, critique their concepts and ideas, and derive possibilities for your research that will help to flesh out the detail that may be understandably missing from such treatises as they focus more on the big picture and the strategic directions.

There is no doubting that these reports will have ramifications for adult learning, in the ACE sector as much as the higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET) sectors. For example, the Bradley Review’s advocacy of ‘a more integrated tertiary education system’—what would that look like? Its 46 recommendations, particularly those on targets in tertiary education numbers and student composition (and the Australian Government’s decisions on these)—what implications will they have for the ACE sector and for adult learning in general, wherever it occurs? The Skills Australia Report and its promotion of the concept of workforce development—what exactly does that mean? What impact will that have on the workforce involved with adult learning and teaching, and those whose mission it is to develop it? What implications for ACE lie in the report’s advocacy of a national adult language,
literacy and numeracy strategy? The Baird Review and its 44 recommendations—what will they imply for providers of international education and training? The list goes on. The establishment of national regulators for VET and higher education—what impact? The press to lift quality—what impact? The breaking of the nexus between immigration and education—what impact? These are indeed interesting (and exciting?) times!

This year, Adult Learning Australia and the Australian Journal of Adult Learning enter their 50th year! It will be a time for great celebration! You will be hearing much more as the year proceeds: for example, the 50th National Conference of the Association will be in Adelaide on 11–13 November 2010, and we will be celebrating in the November issue of this Journal.

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**Adult Learning Australia’s 50th National Conference**

On 11 November 2010 the 50th National Conference of Adult Learning Australia will convene in Adelaide, South Australia, the place of the first National Conference of the Association.

The theme of the Conference will be **Looking Back—Moving Forward: Celebrating 50 years of Adult Learning Australia.** We will be celebrating the association’s achievements from the past, with a focus on present practice across the adult learning sector and a view to the role and challenges in the future for the adult learning and community education sectors.

The Hotel Grand Chancellor  
65 Hindley Street, Adelaide, SA 5000

Abstracts need to be received on or before **Friday, 14th May 2010**

See: [http://www.alasn.as/427/Events+About+ALA+50th+National+Conference.aspx](http://www.alasn.as/427/Events+About+ALA+50th+National+Conference.aspx)
In this issue, we pick up on some of the themes aired in recent national reports, such as the learning society, pathways into higher education for learners from diverse backgrounds, men’s and boys’ learning, internships and experiential learning, recognition of prior learning and employment-based training. There are seven refereed articles, one practice article, one reflection and five book reviews.

Ya-Hui Su teases out what is meant by a ‘learning society’, and particularly its relationship to change. She presents two justifications for a learning society, contending that it should not be advocated only by reference to external relationships (the ‘extrinsic view’), that it is a necessary response to changing times, but also as a good per se (the ‘intrinsic view’), that it is an open learning practice to be appreciated in its own right. She sees that it needs to be established in terms of its final value rather than its instrumental value.

Robyn Benson and colleagues explore the pathways of a group of learners from diverse backgrounds as they enter higher education. The researchers were specifically interested in whether their enrolment was primarily the result of transformative experiences or of other aspects in their lives. Based on the experiences of these 14 learners, the authors reach the conclusion that for some the decision to enrol was not primarily the effect of perspective transformation, but rather the result of other aspects on their lives. These aspects included: socio-economic background, family difficulties, gender, being first in the family to enter higher education, migration, location and schooling experiences.

Barry Golding focuses his paper on the learning of men and boys, examining what is known from international research and highlighting gender segmentation in education and training in Australia. He cautions against ‘complacency’ in relation to national educational aspirations, concluding that there is ‘significant gender segmentation and gender blindness, in pedagogy and practice, in both work and education in Australia’, and calls for consideration of
how wage and professional parity might be achieved. In particular, he claims that our ‘so-called knowledge society’, where one-third of adults are functionally illiterate and where birth location has the primary effect on educational achievement, is ‘desperately’ in need of a properly-funded, national adult education sector similar to those in Scandinavia.

Robin Freeman and Karen Le Rossignol write on the popularity of the notion of internships and experiential learning within formal study programs. Using two case studies, they analyse how their professional and creative writing degree at Deakin University provides the opportunity for what they call ‘creative risk’, which challenges learners’ perspectives and judgements, together with their ability to analyse and reflect on their writing and creative practices. The workplace-based experiences provide learners with opportunities for the transformation of theory into applied situations, such that they are able to reflect on the transition of their knowledge and skills into workplace contexts in the creative industries.

Jen Hamer examines the issue of power with the assessor-candidate relationship in recognition of prior learning (RPL) situations. Her paper, drawing on recognition theory, raises questions about the view of RPL being ‘an empowering and emancipatory activity that opens doors and increases the cultural and social capital of those who access it’, and highlights concerns regarding its application. To extract full value from the process, she argues that the assessor-candidate relationship requires considerable attention, and suggests strategies that could transform RPL from an under-utilised social resource to an even more effective element of Australia’s education and training systems.

Hitendra Pillay, Kathy Kelly and Megan Tones focus on the notion of ‘transitional employment’, defined here as paid employment beyond official retirement that may be part-time or full-time. They explored the perceptions of transitional employment and training
and development amongst blue collar workers employed in technical, trade, operations or physical and labour-intensive occupations within Australian local government. Data came from two national surveys—the Transitional Employment Survey and the New Initiative Survey. The authors found that occupational level of these blue collar workers generated differing profiles of transitional employment aspirations, that educational level affected intention to participate in transitional employment, but that aspirations were also influenced by other factors such as health and finance.

In the final refereed paper, Sarojni Choy and Sandra Haukka investigate employment-based training models for childcare workers. Their research involved interviews with 16 directors, employers and workers located in childcare services in urban, regional and remote locations in the State of Queensland. The study proposes a ‘best-fit’ employment-based training approach characterised by a compendium of five models instead of a ‘one size fits all’. These models are held to: be pedagogically sound, lead to quality skill formation, have positive outcomes for both individuals and enterprises, be functionally operative, and be effectively enacted and sustained over time. The authors therefore reason that they have applications in other industries as well as outside Queensland and Australia.

In the practice paper, James Athanasou evaluates a 20-item assessment of citizenship literacy in an adult sample comprising 179 persons of English-speaking and non-English-speaking background. The results indicated that the assessment was internally consistent and that it distinguished English-speaking from non-English-speaking participants. However, it also highlighted some limitations—where it fails to tap the ability levels of those with higher knowledge and indicates some deficits in adult general knowledge. While the pattern of responses provided an initial, albeit partial, understanding of what might constitute citizenship information, the results hold implications for proposed revisions to the Australian Citizenship Test.
Susan Shaver in her Reflection centres on the issue of power in workplace relationships. Drawing on experiences observed during her doctoral studies in Canada, she ponders on ways staff use and mis-use their influence in the workplace. In particular she zooms in on how staff choose to use their influence—how they operate within what she labels the ‘unwritten rules’ in organisations. The key aspect for her is that staff should talk about these unwritten rules as a start towards nurturing working relationships.

Enjoy your reading ... and remember, it is the 50th year of our Association and our Journal! Celebrate!

Roger Harris
Editor
The learning society: Two justifications

Ya-hui Su
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This article examines the view that has long been fashionable in related policies and literature that the establishment of the learning society is a necessary response to changing times. This article suggests that the association between the learning society and current change may be defensible but is limited. The justification of the learning society should be expanded beyond that association, and the learning society should be promoted as a good in its own right. This article begins with an exploration of the phenomenon of change, which has been the primary argument for the establishment of the learning society. Then, it examines the claim that the learning society is essential. Finally, I suggest that discussions of the learning society should shift from the current paradigm of justification based on external relationships to an appreciation of the learning society in its own right.
Change tends to lead contemporary societies to consider the conversion into a learning society as an important aim (European Commission 1996, Faure et al. 1972, Husén 1986, NCIHE 1997). What evidence supports the association of the establishment of the learning society with adaptation to changing times? Discussion in the related academic literature has tended to focus almost exclusively on how the development of a learning society helps in dealing with current change, but little has been written on the more fundamental, underlying issue of what status the learning society is granted by this emphasis on its association with change. Thus, there is a need to examine the argument for the establishment of the learning society and thus perhaps to change our conception of the role of the learning society.

This article begins with an exploration of the phenomenon of change, which has been seen as the distinguishing challenge of current times (Smart 1992) and has been used as the key argument for the establishment of the learning society. Then, I examine the claim that a learning society is essential as we work to respond to our changing times. This article suggests that the extrinsic view of the association of the learning society with current change may be defensible but is limited. Indeed, this association fails to justify the perpetual existence of a learning society. Our justification of the existence of the learning society should be expanded beyond that association, so that the learning society is promoted in an intrinsic mode without specific dimensions as in current discussion, but rather as an open learning practice that is of great value and is appreciated in its own right.

The phenomenon of rapid change

It has become customary to observe that ‘the tempo of social change accelerates and reaches an unprecedented pace’ (Böhme & Stehr 1986: 17). As Platt (1966: 196) said, “We may now be in the time of the most rapid change in the whole evolution of the human race,
either past or to come”. The phenomenon of rapid change is said to be occurring in all aspects of society, including the economy, culture, technology and population trends. For instance, most developed countries are said to be changing from an industrial to a post-industrial (Bryson, Daniels, Henry & Pollard 2000: 16, Husén 1986) or knowledge-based economy (Dunning 2000), and skills or knowledge demands in employment now tend to change with greater frequency than before.

In terms of culture, the direction of change is said to be towards a consumer culture (Featherstone 1991, Field 1996, Lury 1996) or lifestyle culture (Edwards 1997, Giddens 1991). In information technology, unprecedented progress is occurring in the changing human concepts of time and space. Because of the capacity of technology to transgress frontiers and subvert territories, Morley and Robins (1995: 75) point out that ‘the very idea of boundary—the frontier boundary of the nation state, for example, or the physical boundaries of urban structures—has been rendered problematical’. Technology de-spatialises, opening up new forms of gathering and different opportunities to bring people together (Maffesoli 1996).

In population trends, the demographic structure of the population is also changing in terms of the proportion and distribution of age groups in society. Not all of these changes are necessarily occurring rapidly. For instance, the claim that the skills required in employment are changing with greater frequency than in the past does not imply that all skills are changing (Halliday 2003). The point is that change in all these aspects of society is rapid enough that it characterises the human condition in current times.

However, if this idea is taken further, it is soon recognised that things changing over time is natural. While society is changing rapidly today, it also changed in the past. If that is the case, why is contemporary society in particular characterised by change? In the literature, the uniqueness of the situation in which we now find ourselves tends to
be attributed to its rapidity, with the term exponential growth used to indicate the shortening time-span for important change. This sense of ‘shortening’ is derived from the comparison of ‘the past’ with ‘today’. As Whitehead (1933: 118) puts it, ‘In the past the time-span of important change was considerably longer than that of a single human life... Today this time-span is considerably shorter than that of human life’. Accordingly, it seems that the exponential growth of the change, rather than the change itself, is what impresses us and leads us to conclude that our times are characterised by change.

The perception of acceleration in change is by no means unique to current times, and this acceleration must also have been perceived at many different times in the past. People of the past, for whom the past was their ‘today’, perceived the same acceleration when looking back to the more remote past, which for them represented ‘the past’. Times have always appeared to change rapidly for any generation, and the time-span of change has appeared to shorten. As Price (1963: 14; italics in original) said, ‘This result [of an exponential growth], true now, must also have been true at all times in the past’.

The claim that the phenomenon of change in contemporary times is unprecedented cannot simply refer to the ‘phenomenon of quantitative growth’. Rather, it refers to ‘a qualitative transformation affecting man’s most profound characteristics and, in a manner of speaking, renewing his genius’ (Faure et al. 1972: xxi–xxii). For example, Schön (1971) thinks that the uniqueness of change in our time is not only in the fact that ‘[w]e are reaching ever greater levels of scientific and technological activity and performance, both absolutely and in relation to the society as a whole’ (italics in original; p. 23), but also in ‘levels or degrees of novelty’ (p. 24). In this view, it is the pervasiveness and the extent of novelty that count. As a result, their effects on our everyday lives are on a grand and penetrating scale. However, the argument against rapidity as what is peculiar to our changing times can be applied here again. Given the contrast
between change in ‘the past’ and that of ‘today’ as proposed by Whitehead, the relative nature of novelty must also have been at play at many different times in the past as it is nowadays. All generations have always experienced rapid change through innovation.

The question remains of whether there is anything unique about change in contemporary times. I argue that one significant way that change in current times can be distinguished from change in previous times is what Barnett (1997, 2000) calls ‘supercomplexity’. Supercomplexity is the ‘form of complexity in which our frameworks for understanding the world are themselves problematic’ (Barnett 1997: 11). Janne (1976: 140) notes that some factors that constitute the world are not fixed but are rather changing and uncertain, while some factors are change-resistant and certain, so they can be taken as the framework of the world. The change-oriented factors and the relatively change-resistant factors are multi-dimensionally intertwined and interwoven. However, Lyotard (1984) points out that even meta-narratives themselves, as the frameworks of the world which should be the most change-resisting and underpinning bases, can be problematic and uncertain.

The move from certainty to uncertainty at the epistemological level relates to the phenomenon of reflexivity and the rapidity of change. Beck (1994) sees reflexivity as an occurrence that refers back to itself as an automatic response to a stimulus. This is an automatic self-generation and self-confrontation that occurs in an unconscious, unintentional, involuntary and therefore unpredictable way. In supercomplexity, the meta-narratives as the frameworks for understanding the world change reflexively, but in a different way from what occurred the past. In the past, reflexivity was seen as a character that the frameworks owned and that helped the frameworks to self-reinforce towards renewed certainty. Today, reflexivity is seen not so much as justifying the frameworks, but as contesting them by casting doubt on their certainty and subjecting them to competition
with opposing voices. These frameworks are considered to be settled for the time being—they are only temporarily certain. Therefore, within the current supercomplex context, it is always possible that the frameworks become problematic.

Furthermore, the movement of supercomplexity towards uncertainty is exacerbated by the rapidity of change, which refers to the shortening of the intervals between reflexivities. As Crook, Pakulski and Waters (1992: 220) describe it, ‘[a]s soon as we attempt to acknowledge the rule of change by specifying its principal dimensions and fields of operation, we are left with only its empty husk: the phenomenon itself has moved on’. This may be exaggerated, but it reflects the pace of current change we are confronted with. Accelerating communications technology is responsible for this rapid change, since it is capable of transgressing the limits of geographical space and ‘has multiplied the degree of contact and interaction between persons’ (Bell 1973: 42). The internet, for instance, transforms the mobility of knowledge and its speed of transmission between people. The public, those who were previously identified as less qualified in producing knowledge, nowadays have the same right as the academic elite to participate in what Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny et al. (1994) call Mode 2 knowledge production, which is often generated with the intention of applying knowledge under actual conditions; this is unlike Mode 1 production which allegedly occurs for reasons of scientific discovery. By means of technology and greater literacy, the public has convenient access to the production, acquisition and reproduction of knowledge.

**The first justification: A response to change**

Once ‘change’, the unique quality that symbolises contemporary times, is clarified as above, we can ask what role related policies and texts consider the learning society to play. Jarvis (2000: 350) finds that ‘[e]ndeavouring to discover the certainty of an unchanging
world is a reaction to the learning society’. Confronted with uncertain change, a learning society is considered to emerge as a reflection on change. A reflection on the context implies that one is not born or ‘thrown’ into the context but instead ‘throws oneself’ into it (Lash 1994: 161). This metaphor implies not only that the learning society is aware of contemporary conditions, but also that it is proactive, with aims and intentions relevant to its situation. Reflective thought and action among humans form through the development of ‘reflection-in-action’ (during action) and ‘reflection-on-action’ (before and after action) (Schön 1983). According to Schön, learners (practitioners) define and restructure their thoughts and actions by reflecting on uncertain, problematic situations and then experimenting with thoughts they construct that might be triggered before, during or after action and practice. Reflective learning could disrupt tacit and spontaneous repetition and routines, in which case the society in question may have ‘over-learned’ (may be repeating what has been learned without adaptation to change), in Schön’s terminology (1983: 61).

The main reason for taking the emergence of the learning society as a response to change in the world, I believe, is that such a society emphasises the instrumentality of learning—that is, its helpfulness in allowing people to achieve certain tasks to keep pace with changing times. Most of the tasks associated with the learning society hold either an economic or civic appeal (Coffield 1997a). From the economic viewpoint, the direction of change determines how we take economic action, regardless of whether it is the direction in which we should act. The idea that competitive learning is required to keep oneself informed about change is largely based on economic grounds (European Commission 1996); the basic point here is the emphasis on encouraging the renewal of skills and knowledge needed in the workforce (Boud 2001, Evans, Hodkinson & Unwin 2002). In contrast, the civic view insists that we should learn to promote social integration by directing social change in the desired direction,
rather than letting change overwhelm us. The learning society that
draws attention to social integration runs parallel with economic
competitiveness (Coffield 1997b: 450).

On the one hand, the civic/social perspective is opposed to the
economic perspective in its insistence that learning cannot simply be
a means to economic strength and that the links between learning
and economic imperatives should not be exaggerated. However, the
civic/social position is not essentially different from the economic
position, given that linking learning to human solidarity, while it may
seem more noble, is simply another way of taking learning as a means
to meet a public need. Despite their differences, these perspectives
use learning to achieve a public need—either the need to promote
overall economic strength or the need to promote overall solidarity.
These two appeals do not necessarily take us as individuals lightly,
but they do seem to take the overall public good as the justification for
the learning society, whose establishment is a resource for the public
dimension.

A learning society that moves towards economic competitiveness
leads to the ‘economisation’ of learning (Macrae, Maguire &
Ball 1997: 500), whereas a learning society that ensures social
cohesion may concentrate on the ‘socialisation’ of learning. These
two imperatives—the economic perspective and the civic/social
perspective—have acted powerfully to marginalise other possible
purposes of learning. The exploration of learning for individual
development seems to have little place in discourses on the learning
society. Even when this subject is raised, the discourse tends to
be subject to economic progress or the cultivation of citizenship.
Individuals themselves also seem to be instrumentalised in the
name of the learning society—in a sense, making it a term that serves
ideological purposes while giving those goals an innocuous-looking
appearance (Hughes & Tight 1995).
The learning society, if it is to stand firm, cannot be justified merely as a response to change, either economically or civically. Excessive focus on the statement that the emergence of learning societies is an economic or civic response to surrounding conditions leads to the justification of a learning society based mainly on the appropriateness to the surrounding situation. In this sense, the rationale for a learning society depends on external factors. This implies that once society changes in a different direction for unpredictable reasons, the strategy required to protect against new changes may be different from what the learning society can offer, and the concept of learning societies may be replaced. Thus, the emergence of the learning society as a strategy for response to change makes the learning society a contingent phenomenon.

**The second justification: A final value**

Instead of justifying the existence of the learning society by appealing to its instrumental value—that is, by grounding its value in the economic or civic help it provides in dealing with change—we can also justify it with regard to its final value. Before indicating what it means to consider the learning society as having final value, we must first consider the meaning of ‘value’, which is often somewhat ambiguously defined.

Saying that the learning society has value indicates that it is something that people value. That is, it is something that, as Zimmerman (2001) puts it, one judges to be good or thinks good and is therefore favourably disposed towards. With this in mind, there are two possibilities for interpreting the learning society as having value. One is that people are favourably disposed towards the learning society. The other is that people judge, find or believe the learning society to be good; that is, they think it worthy of approval. In the first case, the person who values the learning society *immerses* themselves in that value, practising it as a value. In the second, the person who
values the society *distantly* thinks or reflects upon it and judges it to be good. The result of this judgement does not necessarily lead to practice of that value, to *truly be* favourably disposed towards it.

So to value the learning society or see the learning society as having value means either that it *is* good and people are favourably disposed towards it, or that people *judge* it as good. ‘Good’, whether in terms of ‘being good’ or ‘judging it to be good’ does not only mean ‘good’, but more particularly means ‘good to someone’. This means that someone is favourably disposed towards the learning society or judges it to be worthy of a favourable disposition. As Thomson (1997) puts it, ‘[f]or a thing X to be good ... is for X to benefit someone or some thing Y ... in the appropriate way, or to be capable of doing so’ (italics in original; 289). The learning society cannot merely ‘be good itself’, but also ‘be good to someone’.

‘Good to someone’ means ‘good in some way to someone’. For the learning society to have a final value, it must be good to people by being ‘good for its own sake’. This term ‘good for its own sake’ refers to a learning society as good as a final, ultimate purpose rather than as valued for some other purpose (e.g. dealing with changes). In this view, the source of goodness is the fact that individuals become involved and engaged in learning activities (Lemos 1994), not the learning society’s use as a means to achieve some other good that people may need. However, unlike with final value, for the learning society to simply be good, it could, for instance, just help people to deal with change. This perspective values the learning society as an instrumental value—that is, as helpful in allowing people to accomplish certain other tasks. Its value is contingent on its helpfulness in relation to some other thing or purpose, rather than on itself as the final purpose.

Seeing the learning society as having a final value presupposes seeing it as having an intrinsic value, but not vice versa. Intrinsic value refers to something that is ‘good in itself’, while final value means
something that is ‘good for its own sake’ (Korsgaard 1983, 1996). Final value presupposes intrinsic value: if there is nothing good about the learning society in itself, it will be absurd to say that it is good for its own sake. Thus, it is first necessary to confirm whether there is anything valuable about the learning society in ‘itself’ that may lead people to become favourably disposed towards it; then, this ‘good’ can be considered as the final value if the result is positive. Taking the learning society as a final value means not only confirming that the learning society is good in itself but also accepting the ‘good in itself’ as the goal. On the other hand, intrinsic value does not necessarily lead to final value. What is judged to be good in itself is not necessarily taken as the ultimate purpose to pursue. The learning society can be taken mainly as a means for other ends while accepting its intrinsic good.

Accordingly, a learning society as its own end, in which the source of goodness lies in the fact that individuals become involved and engaged in learning, is a heterogeneous society in which there are a variety of individual tastes and preferences regarding learning content. Due to their heterogeneous character, individuals in the learning society will never agree about what to learn through the aggregation of individual preference orderings. Free choice regarding what to learn is exercised prior to any specific learning purpose. In a learning society grounded on a freestanding perspective, without reliance on any particular metaphysical or teleological view about what to learn, learning is seen as open to the pursuit of any individual learning purpose, which will vary from person to person. Learning as an activity does not depend on its utility for economic strength as a response to change or for citizenship in the development of solidarity; instead, it simply offers the hope for individuals to shape their own ‘learning projects’ (Tough 1979) or their biographical existence (Alheit 1999). Its value is not justified by public needs or its relation to outside change, but rather by its helpfulness to individuals on their own terms.
Instead of grounding the justification for the learning society in its helpfulness for some other purpose, we can offer an account that seeks to justify its existence for its own sake. That is, the learning society should be established in terms of its final value rather than its instrumental value. We should not only take the learning society as a good in itself, but also focus on the ‘good in itself’ as the ultimate purpose to pursue. While the literature focuses on the instrumental value of the learning society, this does not mean that its intrinsic value is always denied. However, the intrinsic value is largely overlooked, representing a failure to emphasise the concept of final value in terms of a society’s goodness for its own sake. To view the learning society as having a final value means neither that learning as a means to address public need is of little significance nor that the cultivation of learning in such an intrinsic manner should bar us from pursuing learning for external purposes as well. The principle of taking learning as an end does not eliminate the importance of economic efficiency and collective benefits. The goals of meeting public needs, such as economic adequacy and the strengthening of citizenship, are significant; these are requirements that make the practice of the learning society possible. They are required as the basis, however, rather than as the justification for development of the learning society as a final value.

**Conclusion**

This article develops the concept of the learning society itself as a final value. The learning society is its own end, which provides inner power and self-sufficiency to justify the acceptance of such a society on a more durable basis. This vision provides the starting point for developing a view of what the learning society can be—a re-description of what should happen that is a counterpoint to previous descriptions developed in the relevant literature. The alternative justification that I offer, rather than justifying learning based mainly on public needs as in the literature, grants the learning
society legitimacy as an open practice allowing for different kinds of learning rather than focusing on some specific learning practice.

There is ethical significance in seeing a learning society as legitimate in its own right because it turns the goals of learning over to people themselves. This ethical significance lies in the fact that, if a society allows its people to decide what to learn, respect for people’s goals and desires will be secured. When people are respected as the ultimate decision-makers and their choices and preferences for learning are fully respected, the learning society is then understood as a foundation for people to use to develop themselves and flourish. What people learn may not bolster economic progress or citizenship, both of which are important public needs. However, this does not reduce the ethical value that the learning society has in its own right in empowering people.

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Diverse pathways into higher education: Using students’ stories to identify transformative experiences

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This paper is based on findings from the first phase of a longitudinal project examining how a group of students from diverse backgrounds succeed in higher education. The concept of perspective transformation is used to explore students’ stories about factors that influenced them on their journey to university, including socio-economic background, family difficulties, gender, the effect of being first in family to enter higher education, migration, location and experiences of schooling. The paper argues that, for some participants, the decision to enrol was not primarily the effect of perspective transformation, but rather the result of other aspects of their lives. Finally, we comment on the value of narrative inquiry for revealing participants’ experiences and, potentially, for supporting the process of transformation.
Introduction

This paper focuses on the stories of a group of students from diverse backgrounds about their pathways into higher education. Participants include students from low socio-economic groups, non-English-speaking and migrant backgrounds, regional and remote areas, as well as students with a medical condition, or who are first in their family to enter university. The paper draws on findings from the first stage of a longitudinal research project which aims to provide insight into how these students succeed. In this three-stage project, on-campus and off-campus students at the commencement of their course discuss their pathways into higher education. Then, while their studies are in progress, the students comment on how they are managing. Finally, they reflect on their experiences at course completion (between two and four years after enrolment, depending on study mode and individual study patterns). The project, undertaken at an Australian university, adapts the research design of a similar project in the United Kingdom (Kirk 2006).

We use the lens of ‘perspective transformation’ (Mezirow 1978) to examine the students’ pathways into higher education and identify whether their enrolment was primarily the result of transformative experiences, or other aspects of their lives. The project was guided by a number of related theoretical perspectives, including critical theory (Brookfield 2005), experiential learning (Kolb 1984) and participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005). However, the concept of perspective transformation offers potential for examining whether or not the decision to enrol was the result of a fundamental shift in perspective. This analysis will allow subsequent comparison with any perspective shifts that appear to be related to the study experience.

In the following sections, we outline the evolution of aspects of Mezirow’s theory that are relevant to this examination, and explain the role of narrative inquiry in accessing evidence of perspective transformation. We then describe our research design and analyse
the students’ stories about their pathways into higher education to identify whether or not their enrolment appeared to result predominantly from perspective transformation. Finally, we discuss the outcomes of this analysis, suggesting that there is evidence of transformative experiences on the pathways to higher education of some, but not all, of the participants. We note the transformative potential of narrative inquiry itself.

**Perspective transformation**

Although Mezirow (1978) focused on the personal transformation of ‘everyday life’, his work was underpinned by critical theory. Subsequently, he related the three basic human interests (technical, practical and emancipatory) identified by Habermas (1971) to three domains of learning (instrumental, communicative and emancipatory) (Mezirow 1981, 1991). The emancipatory aspect of transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. Of the three types of reflection (content, process and premise) that he introduced in 1991, it is premise reflection that facilitates profound, emancipatory change. He originally saw perspective transformation as involving ten phases beginning with a single ‘disorienting dilemma’ (Mezirow 1981), but has since acknowledged that it could be a gradual, cumulative process (Mezirow 2000). Others (Dirkx 2000, Taylor 2000) have supported this view. Cranton (2002: 64) explains the ‘elegantly simple’ nature of Mezirow’s central idea: if through some event an individual becomes aware of holding a limited or distorted view and ‘critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning of the world.’
Collard and Law (1989) noted conceptual problems in Mezirow’s theory as Habermas abandoned the idea that knowledge is grounded in human interest and developed his theory of communicative action. They argued that Mezirow uncritically assimilated Habermas’s theoretical shift into his own theories. Mezirow (1989) disputed this, noting that he had changed his view about emancipatory learning but that this was irrespective of Habermas’s position. Following this change, he regarded emancipatory learning as a process that involves critical reflection and applies to both instrumental and communicative learning, rather than seeing it as a third domain of learning. Emphasis on the importance of the communicative domain has remained central to Mezirow’s view of perspective transformation, even as other aspects of his theory have developed. It is in the communicative domain that problematic ideas, values, beliefs and feelings are identified, the assumptions on which they are based are critically examined, their justification through rational discourse is tested, and decisions from the resulting consensus are made (Mezirow 1995). Similarly, although he has moved away from emphasising the three types of reflection (Cranton 2006), premise reflection continues to underpin the idea of critical reflection.

In his ongoing refinement of the theory, Mezirow (2000) conceptualised a frame of reference as comprising six dimensions of habits of mind (sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological and aesthetic), each expressed as a point of view and each comprising a cluster of meaning schemes. Changes to a frame of reference involving transformation of habits of mind and points of view usually occur through critical reflection and discourse. He comments that ‘[t]esting the validity of a transformed frame of reference in communicative learning requires critical-dialectical discourse’ (Mezirow 2003: 61), referring to discourse as dialogue involving a (rational) assessment of beliefs, feelings and values. Kitchenham (2008) provides a useful review of the evolution of Mezirow’s theory.
The contributions of others have generated discussion on many aspects of transformative learning theory. They include: keeping critical pedagogy central (Brookfield 2003); acknowledging the roles of emotion and imagination in constructing meaning, along with the conscious, rational and self-reflexive practices associated with Mezirow’s approach (Dirkx 2001); and the need to operate at a mature level of cognitive functioning for transformative learning to occur (Merriam 2004). The importance of other ways of knowing (beyond rational knowing) had also been acknowledged in several empirical studies reviewed by Taylor (1997), along with the importance of context, the varying nature of the catalyst of perspective transformation (which may not always involve a disorientating dilemma) and the role of relationships. Acknowledging both Mezirow’s rational approach and the extrarational approach of others who regard transformation as extending beyond cognitive ways of knowing, Cranton (2006: 77) discusses whether rational and extrarational transformation can occur suddenly and dramatically, gradually over time or as a developmental process, concluding that ‘from the perspective of the person experiencing transformation, it is more often a gradual accumulation of ordinary experiences that leads to a deep shift in thinking, a shift that may only become clear when it is over’. Taylor (2007), in critically reviewing further empirical research on transformative learning theory from 1999 to 2005, noted the challenge for longitudinal studies of separating what is related to transformative learning and what is related to normal development or external factors. He again noted recognition of the importance of context in perspective transformation and the role of relationships.

In this paper, we consider that participants demonstrate transformative experiences if their decision to enrol resulted from a change in frames of reference based on critical reflection and discourse as defined by Mezirow, or from extrarational processes. Where transformation occurs, we consider whether it was primarily the result of a disorienting dilemma or gradual change.
Diverse pathways into higher education: Using students’ stories

serendipitous events influence pathways to higher education (e.g. McGivney 2006, O’Shea 2007, Stone 2008), we regard their effects as transformative if they appear to result in a re-examination of habits of mind that transform points of view.

Research design

The role of students’ stories
Listening to students’ stories provides insights into their lives (O’Shea 2007, Daniels 2008). Narrative inquiry as a research method underpins this project. It is both the method and phenomena of study (Clandinin & Connolly 2000), capable of producing ‘richly-detailed expositions of life as lived’ which offer ‘insight[s] that befit the complexity of human lives’ (Josselson 2006: 4).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) note that, while the defining feature of narrative inquiry is the study of experience as it is lived, other commonplaces include attention to temporality, sociality and place. An important dimension of sociality is the relationship between participant and inquirer. Movement away from the researcher-researched relationship to a more relational view is central to narrative inquiry (Pinnegar & Danes 2007). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to the storying and restorying that occurs as researchers engage with participants’ stories, resulting in a mutually constructed account of inquiry. Listening to and engaging with students’ voices is an integral aspect of emancipatory research (Corbett 1998), particularly when their experiences and perceptions may be markedly different from their teachers. Trahar (2008: 260) notes that a narrative interview ‘may bear resemblance to broader definitions of semi-structured and unstructured interviews or it may be viewed as a collaborative activity, one in which the researcher shares the impact on her/him of the stories being told.’ In this project, our aim was to engage with participants and hear their voices so that meanings could
be co-constructed from their own words to gain insights into their lives and histories.

Taylor (1997, 2007) commented on the predominance of qualitative research designs in studies on perspective transformation, which have become more sophisticated through the use of longitudinal designs and other methods. Baumgartner (2002: 56) used narrative inquiry in a longitudinal study of perspective transformation in people living with HIV/AIDS, noting the need to make sense of a developmental process over time, rather than through a single (often retrospective) snapshot. Brooks and Clark (2001) suggested that narrative is useful for theorising transformative learning because: it moves from past to future; it spans the psychological, social, cultural and historical dimensions in content and form; and it includes cognitive, affective, spiritual and somatic dimensions. In this paper we use narrative inquiry to identify retrospectively whether transformation has occurred, so that we can also use it subsequently to compare evidence of perspective transformation as students complete their studies.

Procedure

We invited students entering the Bachelor of Social Work degree in 2006 to participate if they came to university via diverse pathways such as those noted earlier, or if they considered themselves as ‘non-traditional’ university students for another reason.

Participation involved three semi-structured individual interviews and two group meetings during their course to explore factors that contributed to their success in higher education and produce a ‘life and learning story’ for each student. This paper refers to the first part of these stories. Interview questions, focusing on how students succeed, were adapted to the Australian and institutional context from those used in the original study in the United Kingdom. Sixteen students (15 female and one male) joined the study and completed the first interview. Subsequently, two female students withdrew from
the course. Consequently, the following results refer to 14 students who have now either successfully completed the course or are progressing toward completion.

The first interview took place soon after the course commenced. Participants were asked about their experiences of primary and secondary school, what brought them into higher education, and their university entry qualifications. They explained their aspirations as they grew up, their sources of support and role models, and the expectations of significant people in their lives. Participants also commented on the obstacles they had faced, whether other family members had attended university, and provided other information about their higher education pathway that they considered relevant.

Interviews were audio-taped and the transcriptions verified by each participant. We then analysed the transcripts to identify common themes and points of difference between participants’ accounts. The overall aim of the study (how students succeed) directed the identification of themes which focused primarily on evidence of barriers to, and enablers of, success. Discourse analysis, as derived from Stubbs (1982) which concerns spoken and written language use beyond the level of sentence, was used in conjunction with content analysis (Crotty 1998) to identify the major themes in relation to the study aim.

Thus, narrative inquiry as both the method and phenomena of study, supported by discourse and content analysis, guided us through the processes of interviewing, verification and transcript analysis, towards sharing the meanings that emerged from the contexts of the students’ lives. Later in the project, the life and learning stories will provide the final representation of their lived experiences. Although perspective transformation was not specifically used in the design of the study, it is applied to our analysis so that it can be considered as a factor in informing our conclusions about how students succeed.
Pathways into higher education

This section highlights influences that helped participants overcome obstacles on their higher education pathways. In the next section we identify whether their enrolment predominantly resulted from perspective transformation, or other factors. Factors affecting participants are presented in relation to:

- family, socio-economic context and attitude to education
- school experiences
- expectations of others, sources of support and role models
- personal characteristics, including self-concept
- experiences which led to higher education.

Table 1 introduces the participants (using pseudonyms of their choice) and summarises some factors that affected them. School experiences and self-concept as a learner are classified as positive, neutral or negative, identifying dominant aspects where possible.
Table 1: Some factors affecting participants’ pathways into higher education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Socio-economic</th>
<th>Family difficulties</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>First in family</th>
<th>Migration</th>
<th>Rural/remote or regional factors</th>
<th>Positive (+), neutral (0), negative (-)</th>
<th>Self concept as learner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex Carole</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bettina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0/+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0/+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal maker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0/+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochelle</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesh</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family, socio-economic context and attitude to education

Whilst the family and socio-economic context presented barriers for most participants, families frequently made efforts to provide educational support. For Bettina, Harriet, Miranda and Rochelle,
support was tempered by limited guidance related to their parents’ own educational backgrounds. Harriet stated:

I went to one high school which was public, and not suitable for me, and then they paid for me to go to a private school ... but ... nothing specific was ever requested of me. Or suggested. And I really missed having some sort of direction or guidance, because I really didn’t get that from anywhere.

Later, she became aware of her father’s sense of academic inferiority as a truck driver who was ‘just as lost as I was’ in matters relating to higher education. Shannon was also left to make his own decisions because ‘that was our family dynamics’ but was influenced by his mother who, at 35, ‘decided to go to university to be a teacher.’

For three students who came to Australia directly from education systems overseas, there was family emphasis on further study. Anita had a Masters degree in her home country and was influenced by her single mother telling her: ‘If I didn’t have a degree and be a teacher, how could I manage right now?’ Similarly, Lam and Zelin were both supported by their parents through competitive school systems before coming to Australia.

Higher education was also in the family discourse of two participants from South Africa, though there were barriers to achieving it. Alex Carole’s grandfather encouraged her to become a nurse, but on her acceptance, did not want her to leave home. His subsequent death resulted in the family’s emigration to Australia. No one in Virginia’s parents’ family had been to university but ‘it certainly wasn’t out of my consciousness’. Rather, her father’s alcoholism, her parents’ divorce, and her mother’s inability to pay, prevented her enrolment when she completed high school.

The migrant experiences of parents impacted differently for other participants. Marie’s parents were from Europe and her mother supported education as a route to freedom for women. Her father was
an engineer who ‘kept getting retrenched’. Later, with his alcoholism and early death, she became ‘the person who was “dumped on” in the family’. Sesh’s mother, from a migrant background, supported a traditional role for women. Sesh grew up in rural Australia ‘where you’re expected to get married and have kids and become a farmer’s wife.’ Nevertheless, her parents pressured her to succeed at high school, which she did, but two failed attempts at university followed.

In contrast, Lillian did not appear to have any supportive factors to counteract the lack of a close relationship with her parents, an alcoholic father, and a socio-economic context where university was never discussed. Similarly, Mealmaker’s memories of her family life are mostly negative, with constant arguments ‘every night’ during high school and ‘the noise levels when I was trying to study’ providing no support.

To summarise, most participants indicated evidence of educational support from their families, though for a number of them it was tempered by limited guidance, or by family or socio-economic issues that adversely impacted on their education.

School experiences
As indicated by Table 1, most participants had positive experiences at primary school and some at secondary school. Potentially solid foundations for later academic experiences seemed to exist for many of them.

Amongst those who conveyed positive school experiences, Harriet stated:

I remember my primary school days as being wonderful... I remember feeling very unfettered. And very free. And it was a bit like a wonderland where adults were only incidental ... I always did really well, and had absolutely no problems academically ...
Miranda and Shannon attended multiple primary schools but both did well. Sesh, too, attended a number of schools. While she was not an outstanding student, she had ‘no real stress’ at primary school. Her secondary school experiences were coloured by her parents’ separation and school provided social support. She achieved academic success because she ‘put the effort in’ and ‘everyone said: “You have to go to uni”.’

A number of other participants regarded themselves as average students but had some positive school experiences. Alex Carole was not ‘overly zealous’ and ‘excelled in some subjects more than others.’ Bettina ‘loved’ both primary and high school and expected to go to university because ‘our generation do’. Rochelle was ‘bit of a daydreamer’ who loved animals. Her parents sent her to boarding school in Year 12, which she ‘loved’, although she ‘didn’t do any work’. Virginia, although not a ‘great achiever’ at primary school, ‘had a lot of fun’. She responded when her mother told her to ‘pull her socks up’ during high school, and wanted to go to university. However, she hated high school, largely because of the problems at home which affected the academic achievements of both her and her brother. Anita, Lam and Zelin valued their school friendships despite competitive school environments, though Anita’s primary school experience was constrained because her mother was the headmistress.

Lillian and Mealmaker again provide a contrast, joined by Marie whose school experiences were mostly negative. Lillian was lonely at high school and hurt by the rejection of a former friend. She ‘flip-flopped in and out of groups’ but enjoyed gymnastics and the social club. She does not remember any career guidance and left school in Year 11. Mealmaker was always ‘getting into trouble’ at primary school. Secondary school ‘was good’ but her friends ‘got me into trouble’. She started to harm herself in Year 12. Although ‘never in class’, she passed and was interested in disability work. Marie could
not speak English when she started school and was very unhappy at her Catholic primary school, but was happier after moving to a state school in Grade 3. However, at secondary school she and her siblings experienced ‘an extreme amount of racism’ and she ‘hated high school’.

To summarise, most participants had positive school experiences, especially at primary school. Secondary school experiences were less positive, frequently because of adverse family circumstances. This is illustrated by the stories of several participants (Harriet, Lillian, Marie, Mealmaker, Miranda, Rochelle and Shannon) who either left school or had disruptive experiences in Year 11.

Expectations of others, sources of support and role models

All participants experienced some positive influences from the expectations of others, provision of support, or the existence of role models.

Influences were often from family members. Harriet’s mother (a nurse) was a role model, as was Shannon’s mother: ‘My thinking was that if my Mum could go to uni at 35 and now she’s a principal working in the Department, then I could do it at 27 or 28.’ Miranda had several positive family influences, despite obstacles in coming from ‘a long line of solo parents’. Her mother always expected she ‘would end up somewhere’ and was a role model, undertaking voluntary work after a mental breakdown, and always ready to ‘move on and to try something new’. Her Nanna was a stable figure who thought ‘I could run the world if I wanted to’ and her aunt, a career-oriented woman who worked in technical and further education: ‘Let me see that women can do anything ... you just need to be determined enough.’ Although Lillian did not have supportive influences when she was young, her second husband encouraged her to study.

Several participants with migrant backgrounds experienced positive expectations about education, though this did not always apply to
girls. Alex Carole’s grandfather encouraged her to become a nurse although ‘girls weren’t encouraged to have higher aspirations’. Anita’s mother was supportive, encouraging her to be ambitious but flexible. Lam’s father was also supportive, although he wanted her to study business, but her mother thought getting a ‘good, wealthy husband’ was more important. Marie’s European parents expected her to go to university. Though Sesh’s mother thought that education was more important for boys, both parents expected her to do well at high school. Virginia’s brother was a role model at school and later when undertaking tertiary study by correspondence. She is supported now by her husband and children. Zelin is from a Chinese one-child family. Her father wanted her to study ‘very, very hard’ and was willing to support her to PhD level, though her mother thought a Masters degree was sufficient for a girl.

The school environment was also important in developing expectations and providing sources of support or role models. Bettina’s English Literature teacher told her that she would be ‘a good writer’. Harriet admired her teachers ‘from afar’. Lillian’s sports teacher was a mentor who wanted her to go to teacher’s college and study physical education. Mealmaker’s teacher helped her in Year 11, inviting her home, while another teacher took her out of class and helped with her school work. Sesh’s Physics and Maths teacher was a ‘massive support’.

Other sources of inspiration included friends and influential public figures. Although Mealmaker’s mother had ‘given up on me’, a friend’s mother was a source of support in Year 12. For Rochelle, leaving her home town and living at a city university residence while studying a TAFE course, friends she made there made a difference:

... I come from a town where everyone becomes a tradesman... my brother’s a tradesman, my Dad’s a tradesman. Everyone’s a tradesman... so I never really thought of education. But then, being among people my own age ... they inspired me. They just
made me feel I could do it. I could actually walk into a uni. Because it’s terrifying that stuff.

Lillian gained support from another mother in her mothers’ group, while Virginia was influenced by people like Nelson Mandela, who did not take traditional pathways and became successful because they knew more about life.

To summarise, participants experienced positive influences in terms of expectations, provision of support or role models from families, the school environment, friends or others, though family support for some female students from migrant backgrounds was less evident.

Personal characteristics, including self-concept
Participants conveyed a mixture of determination and self-doubt in relation to education, the latter often resulting from lack of guidance. However, half indicated positive self-concepts as learners (Table 1) and several expressed the conviction that their current enrolment was right for them. For example:

I’m really passionate about the course that I’m doing! And I know that without a doubt, I’m ready to make a difference (Alex Carole).

I’m absolutely certain that this is ... it (Bettina).

Miranda’s independence and positive self-concept developed early, her role in the family making her stable and giving her a sense of obligation (‘I was the next in line ... when my Mum was out of action’). She felt that ‘the expectation that I was smart ... went a long way in getting me here because I believed them.’ Virginia, valuing the maturity resulting from life’s experiences, commented that ‘sometimes we’re not ready for certain things at certain times in our life. Maybe I would have been a really crap social worker at 21.’ However, she had a sense of social justice from an early age, was never afraid to express her views, and wanted to be a social worker since her first attempt to study social work in her twenties.
Anita also became confident and determined early (‘I was lucky because I was so determined’). Similarly, Zelin did not usually experience self-doubt, in choosing her course in Beijing and later deciding to move to Australia, though when commencing university in Beijing she felt ‘not good enough’ compared with other students with better English-speaking skills. Lam did not consider herself smart but gradually developed independence and, with conflict at home and her brother mentally ill, confidently make the decision to come to Australia (‘I get more independent and I think I know what I want’).

In contrast, Harriet and Rochelle were much more affected by self-doubt. Harriet was ‘completely lost in my early twenties’. Rochelle was very open to the influence of others. She originally wanted to be a vet and began an environmental science course but ‘pulled out’, commenting: ‘I don’t know why I decided I wanted study ... I never thought I was bright ...’ Lillian and Marie experienced substantial identity problems as young people. Lillian felt that ‘most of my identity was created through other people ... I wasn’t able to grow an identity from within myself.’ However, following early financial independence, she gradually developed ‘mental fortitude’, ‘self-determination’ and the ability to ‘survive’, though not considering herself ‘bright’. Marie had ‘no concept of myself’, as the carer in the family who was ‘sidelined too often’. Now, at 49, following a serious illness she states:

... all my life I’ve been led along by the nose and given in to what other people wanted. And this is the first time I’ve said: ‘No, this is what I want to do! And this is what I’m going to do!’ And no one’s going to stop me from doing it. And this is who I am.

Mealmaker’s personal characteristics reflect her difficult journey to university. Whatever she did ‘was never good enough’ and though affected by family difficulties, mental illness and chronic physical health problems, she comments: ‘I want to have a degree. I want to prove myself.’
Sesh had no ambitions when young but her high school success led to positive feedback and a positive self-concept as a learner. After her two initial unsuccessful attempts at university, where ‘I was supposed to achieve’, she gradually developed sufficient self-determination to override her family’s influence: ‘I don’t really care ... what they think ... it’s pure determination now.’ Shannon also cannot remember having any ambitions when young but knew that he was ‘a people person’, who could influence people and situations, and was confident in his learning ability.

To summarise, half of the participants appeared to have always been confident and determined with positive self-concepts as learners, but the others had to overcome considerable self-doubt, and a number of ‘false starts’, often well into adulthood, before they demonstrated the personal characteristics that allowed them to surmount the family, socio-economic and other difficulties that had affected them.

Experiences which led to higher education

A combination of life circumstances (involving gradual change or a personal life crisis), personal characteristics and external influences led participants to their current enrolment. In several cases, external factors included the impact of a serendipitous event.

Anita, Lam and Zelin followed traditional routes to university in their home countries. Anita was supported by her single mother, but it was a ‘very, very good professor at uni’ that led her to Australia to research Aboriginal people and eventually to her current course. Lam became interested in social work as a teenager due to her brother’s mental illness. Her growing independence allowed her to overcome conflicts with her father about career options and come to Australia. Working in an elderly daycare centre in the Chinese community then reinforced her desire to study social work. Similarly, Zelin made the independent decision to study social work in Australia, recognising this as a valuable profession, still new in China.
Significant illnesses impacted on the decision to study of three participants. Mealmaker overcame mental and physical problems to pursue her goal of having a degree and proving herself. Marie’s illness prompted her to take her life into her own hands and assert herself. Alex Carole’s health crisis resulted in her encounter with an ‘inspirational social worker’, which led her to think: ‘I can do something better. I can do something good.’

Bettina, Sesh and Rochelle were also influenced by serendipitous encounters. Bettina was working overseas as a social work assistant when ‘my boss said I was just made for this sort of work’, leading to her application for enrolment. Similarly, Sesh was working at a European childcare centre when her boss said: ‘We’re creating a position for you in custody disputes ... you’re the best person we’ve got that doesn’t cause arguments.’ Rochelle, while searching for life direction, was influenced by an ‘inspirational’ university staff member who said: ‘Oh, you should study something’. Subsequent mentoring at university led to her current enrolment.

Participants influenced by a series of life experiences included Shannon who attended university after finishing school but dropped out when he became a parent in his second year. He began work in a timber mill, took on occupational health and safety and training roles, moving to a supported employment facility (a timber mill where people with disabilities worked) and becoming interested in disadvantage. This led to a job establishing an agency for people with disabilities. At an inter-agency training day, social workers suggested ‘perhaps I should think about doing social work.’ He comments that: ‘I guess if I didn’t have children, I probably wouldn’t have been driven to set myself up.’ Virginia took even longer, having married and had three children and emigrated to Ireland and then Australia. However, she ‘always knew that I wanted to do it’, and though unable to complete the social work course she began in her twenties, her family’s situation has now made it possible. Lillian also had a long
journey into social work and her family circumstances have made it ‘the right time for me’. Having worked since she was 15, she realised as she grew older that ‘you needed an education to have ...autonomy.’ After her second marriage at 40, and the birth of her daughter at 42, it was ‘now or never’.

Harriet’s pathway was characterised by ‘crises’ during three previous enrolments. She made a ‘conscious decision’ to return to study later, becoming aware of social work when she enrolled in her first degree. Miranda gradually accumulated qualifications leading to her current degree. Contributing influences included abuse and neglect of her sister’s child when Miranda was a teenager which resulted in the child being removed, and some personal assessment at 15 or 16 (‘I started to look at my life and look at my friends and think mine was really different to theirs’). Another important influence was encouragement by a Salvation Army Officer at the job network to apply for a government job. This was unrelated to anything she had previously contemplated and eventually led her to social work.

To summarise, the enrolment of participants was the result of personal characteristics (pre-existing or evolving) that allowed them to overcome adverse circumstances or to take advantage of influences or events that now made it possible.

**Discussion**

Determining the extent to which the pathways to higher education of these students were influenced by transformative experiences involves distinguishing between perspective transformation, as proposed by Mezirow and others, and experiences which do not actually involve transformation. Table 2 summarises the outcomes of our analysis of evidence of perspective transformation from the students’ stories which we explain in the discussion that follows.
Table 2:  The role of perspective transformation in influencing participants’ pathways to higher education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of perspective transformation</th>
<th>No conclusive evidence of perspective transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health crisis provoked a disorienting dilemma (Alex Carole and Marie)</td>
<td>Followed traditional routes to university in their home countries (Anita, Lam and Zelin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments by others provoked a disorienting dilemma (Bettina and Sesh)</td>
<td>Disorienting influences occurred prior to adulthood (Lam and Miranda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradual transformation of psychological habits of mind (Harriet, Lillian, Rochelle and Shannon)</td>
<td>Enrolment made possible by circumstances but the result of a long interest (Mealmaker and Virginia)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Evidence of perspective transformation is revealed in the stories of Alex Carole, Bettina, Harriet, Lillian, Marie, Rochelle, Sesh and Shannon, in each case resulting from transformation of psychological habits of mind. Alex Carole’s and Marie’s health crises suggest the effect of a disorienting dilemma, causing them to reconceptualise their future and allowing Marie to overcome her perceived lack of a self-concept. The comments made by their overseas employers similarly affected Bettina and Sesh. For Sesh, the transformative impact is evident in her new determination to break free from her family. However, Lillian’s story reflects a gradual transformation of psychological habits of mind. With no ambition to study until she was about 30, she ‘needed to do a lot of identity work’ to achieve the autonomy she sought. Changes in circumstances supported her enrolment. Harriet, Shannon and Rochelle also indicate gradual development of habits of mind to envisage themselves as social workers. Shannon and Rochelle both responded to serendipitous encounters. Shannon’s path was partly driven by his family circumstances while changes in Rochelle’s self-concept appear to be based on emotional reactions, rather than critical reflection.

In contrast, there is no conclusive evidence of perspective transformation in the stories told by Anita, Lam, Mealmaker,
Miranda, Virginia and Zelin. Anita and Zelin developed habits of mind from an early age that did not require a change in perspective for them to enter higher education. Following traditional routes to university, they were arguably least affected by transformative experiences, although continuing their education in Australia was not originally anticipated. The professor who influenced Anita did not result in a change of perspective, but rather encouraged her to follow her existing interests in a particular way. Zelin discovered social work as a career option but did not indicate a major change in perspective driven by critical reflection or other powerful internal changes. Lam followed a similar traditional route to university and although influenced by her brother’s mental illness and the emergence of sufficient independence to break free from her father’s authority, these changes occurred prior to adulthood. Similarly, Miranda was primarily influenced by pre-adult factors, though the impact of the Salvation Army Officer may indicate a transformative experience if it occurred in adulthood. A long interest in social justice and social work led to Virginia’s enrolment, supported by her current family circumstances. Mealmaker also had a long interest in disability (and a need to prove herself), and her enrolment resulted primarily from overcoming the barriers she faced. Thus, with the possible exception of Miranda, the enrolment of these students does not seem to be primarily the result of re-examination of habits of mind that transform points of view as a feature of perspective transformation in adulthood.

**Conclusion**

This paper has identified the role of perspective transformation in influencing the pathways to higher education of a group of students from diverse backgrounds. Conclusions have been drawn from the stories participants told during the first phase of a longitudinal research project, which follows their progress from enrolment to success. Key factors that influenced them on their journeys to
university included socio-economic background, family difficulties, gender, the effect of being first in family to enter higher education, migration, location and experiences of schooling. Conclusions have been informed by aspects of Mezirow’s theory (including recent developments and those that have their origins in early explanations of the theory), along with other contributions that have broadened understandings of perspective transformation.

Evidence from the first phase of the project suggests that, for some participants, the decision to enrol was not primarily the effect of perspective transformation, but rather the result of other aspects of their lives. Where transformative experiences occur, some changes are gradual and some are triggered by a disorienting dilemma. Transformative experiences all involve a change in psychological habits of mind and usually do not appear to have involved discourse as a form of dialogue involving rational assessment of beliefs, feelings and values. The focus is more on personal change than exploration of its social dimensions, although the latter are often evident from the family context.

The role of narrative inquiry has been important in nurturing discourse, allowing participants to articulate their experiences through their stories and ‘offer a perspective about their perspective, an essential condition for transformative learning’ (Mezirow 2003: 61). By encouraging participants to reflect on, explore and share their stories, narrative inquiry provides a means of developing their understanding of themselves, uncovering meanings through dialogue with interviewers. The tools of discourse and content analysis were used to identify themes in relation to the study aims. This study suggests the potential for narrative approaches to foster students’ critical reflection during their course of study, potentially leading to greater evidence of transformation of other dimensions of habits of mind (sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical
and aesthetic), especially if learning is embedded in a context that supports the establishment of relationships which facilitate discourse.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Australian Department of Education, Science and Technology’s Higher Education Equity Support Program for funding this project and for the research support provided by Cathi Flynn and Yolande McNicoll. We thank Kate Kirk from Manchester Metropolitan University for the research design on which the project is based and we especially thank Alex Carole, Anita, Bettina, Harriet, Lam, Lillian, Marie, Mealmaker, Miranda, Rochelle, Sesh, Shannon, Virginia and Zelin for sharing their stories with us.

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The big picture on men’s (and boys’) learning

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This paper focuses on what is known internationally from research about some aspects of men’s learning. It explores the similar and different factors that shape men’s attitudes towards learning in diverse national and cultural contexts. It also identifies some possible parallels (and differences) between the experiences, participation and outcomes in education of men and boys. The paper proceeds to make a case for recognising and addressing the factors that affect gender parity in educational contexts, including Australia, in which several tertiary outcome measures tend to be skewed towards girls and women. The paper forms part of background research for Phase 1 (in several Anglophone nations) of a major international research project into men’s learning in community settings that includes several Australian study sites.
Introduction

Gender parity, achieving ‘the same proportion of girls and boys that enter and complete schooling’ (Aikman & Unterhalter 2007: 2), is an ideal shared by most world nations. And yet school-based education is characterised by extensive gender inequalities in many world nations. This paper begins by recognising that the gender participation pendulum in schools, worldwide and on balance, remains stuck well towards boys. It takes up Jha and Kelleher’s (2006: 10) argument that ‘gender equality cannot be viewed in isolation from other forms of inequalities’ that arguably exist in Australia. It also presupposes that gendered differences ‘often get sharpened by other dimensions such as race, ethnicity, location, class and other social or economic groupings’ (p.10) that arguably divide Australian and other societies.

An opening explanation is required to explain how this necessarily brief but complex paper is developed. After examining the diverse and complex gender disparities in upper school to vocational education and training transitions internationally, I tentatively identify gender segmentation (separate and different gender roles in the labour market) as one of several missing links. I also tentatively explore gender disparities in education and training (and possible remedies) in just one nation, Australia. My paper returns, in the Discussion, to caution against complacency in relation to evidence of gender inequity in some post-school and adult and community education (ACE) educational aspirations and outcomes in Australia.

In brief, my interest is in how today’s men experienced learning at school, with the purpose of thinking about how these experiences might be improved for future men. My particular focus is on how men’s attitudes towards lifelong learning appear to be shaped to cause what McGivney (2004: 55) describes as the ‘significant and sometimes lasting impact on subsequent attitudes towards education and patterns of post-compulsory learning’. My argument is supported by evidence in McGivney’s (1999, 2004) research in the UK, baldly
but accurately encapsulated in her 2004 book title, *Men earn, women learn*. My claim is that most Australian education systems, and particularly workplaces, are already highly gender-segmented. This gender segmentation remains likely, in 2010, to continue to place more men on unbroken, lifetime working trajectories and more women on broken, lifelong learning trajectories.

My recent and ongoing research interest, with colleagues, is what happens to men when the work ‘treadmill’ stops (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007). While boys are briefly considered, the focus of my broader concern is not with gendered schooling *per se*. I consider it too simple and easy to blame education providers for mirroring and reproducing the existing, gender-segmented inequities in the community, families and workplaces. It is unrealistic to expect schools in Australia to single-handedly achieve gender equity while the workplace, families and community cannot.

My particular concern, beyond the scope of this paper, is with evidence of longer-term effects of gender-related outcomes from school on men’s life outcomes and wellbeing (Golding, Foley, Brown & Harvey 2009). I share Jha and Kelleher’s (2006: 56) argument that ‘... [b]oys’ achievement, measured as either participation or performance, is the result of a complex interplay of forces; it is not a creation of school processes alone’. I also share their contention that solutions must lie beyond school spaces and facilities. The solutions ‘... have to include challenging established notions of gender roles, relations and stereotypes using all possible interventions inside and outside the school’ (Jha & Kelleher 2006: 63).

**The big picture of gender inequality**

A brief look at gendered participation across nations

In the big picture, it is women and girls who are most excluded from education across the world. Aikman and Unterhalter (2007: 4) note:
At a time of enormously expanded access to all levels of education, of high aspirations for political participation and huge growth of knowledge economies, 77 million children are still out of school, 57 per cent of whom are girls (UNESCO 2006: 30). Seven-hundred and eighty-one million adults are illiterate and 64 per cent of these are women (UNESCO 2006: 59). Nearly one billion people, one sixth of the world population, have little or no education. ... Two thirds of these people are women and girls.

Another way of measuring participation is ‘school life expectancy (SLE), representing the average number of years of schooling that individuals can expect to receive in different regions’ (Jha & Kelleher 2006: 4). A global glance at SLE data points to some intriguing trends that cut across the big picture painted above. When these data were analysed by world region, Jha and Kelleher (2006: 4) concluded:

... while SLE is higher for boys in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific and South and West Asia, it is higher for girls in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western Europe.

A closer analysis by Jha and Kelleher (2006: 5) of all world regions by nation reveals that ‘this trend in boys’ under-participation is largely confined to areas that have experienced higher growth in educational attainment rates’. So why is it that countries that have achieved universal access and high participation rates for both boys and girls, at least to the primary age of schooling, are exhibiting gender disparities in favour of girls? In particular, what is the situation in Australia?

A brief glimpse at gendered achievement and post-school outcomes in Australia

Australia has few obvious, statutory impediments or other factors limiting access to education and training by gender. The most obvious factors at school are likely to be student family background, location and cost. One might intuitively anticipate that these factors would operate similarly for boys’ and girls’ achievements and outcomes.
at school. One might also expect, in an educational environment committed to gender equity, that schools might make a difference in flattening out existing, gender-related trends in achievement and post-school outcomes. In an ideal, inclusive and equitable education system, other existing inequalities, including socio-economic status of commencing students, might not be expected to be reproduced at exit. There is considerable evidence from Australia that many of these differences are reinforced and become intergenerational. Only two data sources are examined and discussed in this brief paper. One involves Australian school achievement data; the other involves post-school tertiary enrolment data from the Australian state of Victoria.

Jha and Kelleher (2006) examined case study data on boys’ underachievement from four diverse nations including Australia. They examined and carefully dismissed some of the ‘usual, simple suspects’ in school gender analyses, including having male teachers and all-male classrooms (p. 64). They also dismissed some other factors likely to affect both genders, such as the paucity of qualified teachers and school places (p. 42), Jha and Kelleher identified three broad categories of factors as explanatory. Two categories of factors are seen to apply particularly to Australia. These are social, economic and occupational practices, as well as conformity to masculine gender identity and feminisation of schools. The third category, paucity of school places and facilities, arguably applies less generally to the Australian context. Jha and Kelleher (2006, p. 67) argue that ‘... [t]here is almost no gender disparity at primary school level in Australia’. Nevertheless, it is certainly a factor in some socio-economically disadvantaged, rural, remote and Australian Indigenous communities.

In establishing the national context for Jha and Kelleher’s (2006) very limited Australian case study (of one government primary school in Queensland), PISA (2000–2006) data were examined on the ability to apply knowledge and skills to reading, mathematics
and science. The data, collected from Australian 15-year-old school students, identified no evidence of boys’ underachievement in the latter, but differences for reading, ‘though the level of difference was lower for Australia than most OECD countries’ (p. 68). As in other countries, what was particularly striking was the way that ‘... socio-economic status compounds the difference between boys and girls in terms of their reading literacy’ (p. 69). In Australia, ‘boys from low socio-economic backgrounds were found to be almost twice as likely to be in the lowest quarter of reading literacy results than girls from similar backgrounds’. Having identified that ‘... [t]he environment outside school appears to play an important role in building reading literacy’, Jha and Kelleher (2006: 69) concluded that in Australia, the overlapping effects of socio-economic status and the different socialisation of boys and girls were the main, explanatory factors in the gender differences in PISA scores. While they concluded that ‘[s]chools can play a role in changing this, ... it is not clear to what extent they can make a difference’ (p. 71).

There is other evidence, from the state of Victoria, Australia, of significantly gendered transitions for post-compulsory 18 year olds in both the Melbourne (capital city) region and each of Victoria’s ten non-metropolitan education regions. The data on tertiary (university and TAFE [technical and further education]) enrolments in Victoria for 2006 (VTAC & ABS 2007) by Australian Bureau of Statistics Statistical Division (SD) show that in the Melbourne SD, 80.4 per cent of girls enrolled in tertiary study in 2006, compared with 62 per cent of boys. In the Wimmera SD (north western Victoria) it was 46.3 per cent for girls and 23.4 per cent for boys; in the Gippsland SD (south eastern Victoria), it was 41 per cent and 21.1 per cent. In summary, the likelihood of students enrolling in tertiary study in rural regions is around one half of that of students in Melbourne. When university-only enrolment outcome data are examined by gender for the same SD’s, the same general trends are evident: male 18-year-olds in rural areas are again approximately one half as likely to enrol at university
as the same female cohort. Even where access to university was less likely to affect enrolment in metropolitan Melbourne, male 18-year-old university enrolment was only 75 per cent of female enrolment.

Responding to these data in relation to young country student enrolments, the Victorian National Party Leader, effectively representing a country political constituency, is quoted in *The Weekly Times* (2007) as saying that ‘the problem reflected the impact of the drought, their desire to help the family and get out into the workforce.’ However location aside, the other, concerning conclusion in all Victorian regions is that the likelihood of 18-year-old boys enrolling in a tertiary course is between three quarters to one half of the likelihood of girls of the same age. Why is there a university and vocational education and training (VET) enrolment ‘drought’ of young men in a nation where there is universal access and high participation rates for both boys and girls in secondary schools? Why are young, rural women in Victoria twice as likely to make the trip to attend a regional or city TAFE or university? Are similar trends in tertiary participation observed elsewhere, and for what reasons?

**The international data on gender**

The international data on post-school transitions are difficult to measure meaningfully and compare, largely because data are collected in somewhat different ways across a wide range of school and post-compulsory sectors in diverse nations, cultures and labour markets. Within this brief paper, the scope for examining all post-compulsory pathways by gender is limited. For this reason, only VET (vocational education and training) outcomes (called TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training programs in the international literature) will be considered, and then, because of brevity and complexity, only superficially. Despite the complexity and measurement issues, it is important to examine (and debunk) some of the myths about the simplicity of numerical gender inequity in
participation by sector, and particularly the idea that there are simple, education-based solutions to addressing it.

The long and complex, statistical argument mounted in UNEVOC (2008) about gender disparity in TVET, summarised below, is presented as a salutary lesson for two reasons. Firstly, even with the best data in the world on the phenomena, there is no simple or general, international relationship between gender parity at school or post-school outcomes, that can be simply extrapolated to Australia. Secondly, it is important to understand that the gender inequity obvious in the Victorian tertiary enrolment data above are more likely to be explained and solved by circumstances and actions in sites beyond schools in Australia. These sites particularly include the family, community and work, where most learning, including about gender roles, arguably occurs informally (Golding, Foley & Brown 2008).

UNEVOC (2008) undertook an analysis by gender of the best available international TVET data from 162 countries. While they grimly concluded that the provision of TVET reaches only a small part of the school age population globally, they observed that the picture ‘is even grimmer for girls’ (p.34). They looked specifically at TVET enrolment by gender at the upper secondary level, by firstly plotting a Gender Parity Index (GPI) for each of these countries. GPI (UNEVOC 2008: 77) is defined as a measure of the ratio of the female-to-male values of a given indicator, against the percentage of the upper secondary enrolment. A GPI of unity would indicate parity between sexes (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2006: 183). A GPI above 1.3 would usually be regarded as an indicator of gender disparity (UNEVOC 2008: 59). The results are shown by nation in Figure 1. In nations where access to secondary education was most limited, the gender equalities in TVET were high, leading UNEVOC to hypothesise that the greater a country’s percentage of TVET at the upper secondary level, the greater would be its GPI.
Figure 1: Percentage of Technical/Vocational Education Enrolment in upper secondary education, by Gender Parity Index, 2002
(from UNEVOC 2008, Figure 14, p.60; Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2005)

Figure 1 revealed some high GPIs (for nations such as Brazil and Burkina Faso, on the right of the graph), with a low percentage of enrolments in TVET that ran counter to their hypothesis. They therefore created and graphed a new measure, Transformed Gender Parity Index (TGPI) by nation, as shown in Figure 2. In their words,
For the Transformed Gender Parity Index, where the Gender Parity Index is higher than 1, the usual female-to-male formula is, in effect, inverted (UNEVOC 2008: 77) to male-to-female (UNESCO 2004b, p. 241). As a result, the upper boundary for TGPI becomes 1, which represents perfect gender parity. A TGPI below 0.97 indicates disparity either in favour of males or females (UNEVOC 2008: 77).

Figure 2: Transformed gender parity index for the Percentage of Technical/Vocational Education Enrolment in upper secondary education, by Gender Parity Index, 2002 (from UNEVOC 2008, Figure 15, p.61; Data Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2005)
On the basis of an analysis of the data in Figure 2, UNEVOC (2008) concluded that *any* gender disparity, regardless of whether it was males or females that were outnumbered, hindered TVET expansion.

UNEVOC’s (2008) final gender analysis in Figure 3 brings us closest to data that might (or might not) inform or help explain the gendered nature of the Australian situation, approximated by Victorian tertiary enrolment data. They plotted the percentage of technical/vocational enrolment against the respective Gender Parity Indices, to provide a visual representation of a possible association between the gendered nature of secondary and TVET participation. UNEVOC, in effect, looked to see whether and how gender disparity in upper secondary levels might (or might not) be related to gender disparity at the same levels in TVET.
Gender equity in both sectors would produce a clustering around the centre of Figure 3. If gender disparities at school were consistently translated into similar gender disparities in TVET, one might expect a direct, approximately linear relationship, with most values plotting in the NE and SW quadrants. Plots away from the centre of the graph in the SE quadrant would indicate more boys at school and less in TVET, with the reverse being the case in the NW quadrant.
Figure 3, with its scattered plots across all four quadrants, identified no general relationship. Relevant to the Australian situation, they found that gender parity in upper secondary education was not necessarily related to gender parity in TVET. They concluded that ‘the relationship between gender and TVET [enrolment] is shown to be complex and likely to vary considerably across regions and countries’ (UVEVOC 2008: 63).

Discussion

UNEVOC’s (2008) complex but systematic numeric analysis of school and TVET participation by gender, outlined above, was unable to identify a general, inter-sectoral, international trend. However, by focusing only on a sub-set of Commonwealth nations including Australia, where boys tended to under-perform in higher levels of school, Jha and Kelleher (2006: 43) concluded that ...

Conformity to ‘masculine’ gender identity that clashes with the demands of so-called feminized ‘education’ emerges as the most important and common reason given to explain underperformance of boys in general ... Despite minor and sometimes major differences in these notions across different societies, certain aspects of what define masculinity and femininity appear to be fairly universal. Men are universally viewed as warriors and protectors and women as care givers. .... ‘Not being feminine’ assumes special importance when one tries to trace the relationship between masculinity and boys’ underachievement in education.

My own conclusion, complemented by my research into men’s learning research in Victoria (Golding & Rogers 2002; Golding, Harvey & Echter 2004), is that the significant gender disparities observed amongst Victorian 18-year-old tertiary student enrolments might also apply to many (but not all) Australian men locked into ‘a dominant form of [hegemonic] masculinity: the measure by which all men are judged, the cultural idealized form of masculine
character that embodies male power’ (Crawford 2002: 5), that include toughness, competitiveness, determination and self-sufficiency. This form of hegemonic masculinity, for many 18-year-old men from lower socio-economic backgrounds, presumably promises more immediate gratification of power and prestige from earning and work (and release from lack of success and prestige at school) rather than gratification from more learning. The nature of men and masculinities, as Hearn, Muller, Oleksy et al. (2003: 95) observe, is now less likely to be taken-for-granted and more likely to be subject to academic and policy debates including in education ‘... in more explicit, more gendered, more varied and sometimes more critical ways’. Until quite recently ‘[g]ender was largely seen as a matter of and by women; men were generally seen as ungendered, natural or naturalized’ (p.95).

Not only are men increasingly recognized as gendered, but they, or rather some men, are increasingly recognized as a gendered social problem to which welfare systems may, or for a variety of reasons may not, respond (Hearn, Muller, Oleksy et al. 2003: 96).

Instead of getting more education, Hearn, Muller, Oleksy et al. (2003: 103) conclude that in many areas of Europe,

... some young men become marginalized from work and family life. Working class men are considered most vulnerable. There is a lack of attention to men engaged in creating and reproducing social exclusion.

As McGivney (2004: 130) concluded in the United Kingdom, increasing male participation and addressing social exclusion goes well beyond the practical and cultural barriers. It is also ‘... a matter of overcoming widespread indifference and lack of interest arising from the perception that learning is of no use or relevance to them’. McGivney suggests that it will take ‘... a lot of convincing that participating will have practical pay-offs and will not stigmatise them
in the eyes of their male peers’ (p. 130). The convincing process faces some significant hurdles, not the least of which are data, from both the United Kingdom and Australia, that confirm that many young men are right: ‘qualifications do not always make a great deal of difference to a person’s earnings’, many jobs require no qualifications and many employees hold qualifications ‘higher than those actually required for their jobs’ (McGivney 2004: 131).

Reverting instead to a taken-for-granted ‘discourse of naturalism’, that ‘boys will be boys’ and that ‘girls are just naturally the more civilized half of humanity’ (Allard 2004: 359), is a slippery and deterministic, but alternative, conceptual slope. It would call ‘... into question the role of agency and choice for teachers and students’ (p. 359). Allard’s alternative proposal is to acknowledge that ‘... boys will be the boys they choose to be on the basis of the discursive positions offered to them’ (p. 359, Allard’s italics).

Attempts have been made in recent decades, in all post-compulsory education sectors in Australia, particularly in adult and community education, to ensure that women have been able to redress educational disadvantage experienced as girls. As Jha and Kelleher (2006: 43) observed:

> Education has been and is seen as a means of attaining other rights for women and education is itself viewed as an achievement. As such, one of the factors that explain the better performance of girls is the sense of accomplishment that is attached to education for women.

Part of that sense of accomplishment has come from women entering traditionally ‘men’s subjects’ or men’s professions’. However, as Jha and Kelleher (2006: 44) observe, the opposite is not the case for boys and men. Since masculinity continues to be associated with ‘not being feminine’, some activities considered ‘feminine’, arguably including learning and education but also including nursing, welfare, aged and
child care, are considered not masculine enough. This explanation is particularly powerful in Australia when the masculinities associated with rurality and lower socio-economic status are factored in.

An in-progress international study of learning in community contexts, that includes twelve sites across four Australian states (Golding, Brown, Foley & Harvey 2009; Golding, Foley, Brown & Harvey 2009) gives us some of the answers. One of the findings in our research is that men tend not to be as involved as adult, enrolled students in education (particularly in adult and community education). However, many men are learning what they need to elsewhere, in sites where learning is less formal and hands-on: particularly where learning, work-like experiences and masculinity can go hand-in-hand. One such site is through paid work and work-related training. The other such site is in social, community and voluntary activities and organisations that are more likely to be construed as masculine. Pedagogies which work for men in Australia include sporting organisations, fire and emergency services organisations, and very recently for some older men, community men’s sheds.

**Conclusion**

The drought of young men undertaking learning post-school in Australia is likely to persist until all post-compulsory education sectors, fields of study and professions recognise and address the extent of the change that might be required. My contention is that there is significant gender segmentation and gender blindness, in pedagogy and practice, in both work and education in Australia. Australia, based on OECD statistics, has one of the most highly gender segmented labour forces in the world: ‘[I]ndustries and occupations in Australia remain highly gender segregated and women’s work is still undervalued’ (HREOC 2008: 69). It may well be that the need for women to learn more than men post-school is related to their need to have a broader range of range of vocational and occupational
skills than men, to take up work ‘... which accommodates their family caring responsibilities’ (HREOC 2008: 69), instead of work ‘which fully rewards their skills and experiences’. Anyone involved in the fields and professions of health, welfare, retail, hospitality and education (particularly pre-school, primary and adult education) knows that there is a drought of men in these tertiary courses and professions, and that hairdressing aside, men are much more likely to go into a hands-on trade.

I also conclude that there is a need for caution against complacency in relation to Australian national educational aspirations and goals on a number of other worrying, and arguably related, educational measurement benchmarks. These benchmarks include, but go beyond, gender inequity in adult and community education. Australia, as a recent OECD (2008) report showed, is one of a handful of nations that has forced tertiary students to take on more of the costs. The neo-liberal message, from state and national governments in Australia, is clear and consistent. Learning that is not work-related, in any post-compulsory sector, is a personal and unnecessary luxury. Learners will either pay or do subsidised, accredited, workplace training. Australian adult and community education (ACE) beyond tertiary institutions and private providers at neighborhood level to 2009 is, with some exceptions, in a weak and fragmented state. It now has little or no coverage in most parts of rural Australia outside of Victoria, and has a highly feminised workforce, catering mainly for women as learners.

The typical explanation of gendered disparities in work generally, including in ACE, is that female-gendered sectors are insecure, poorly paid and part-time compared with male professions and trades. ‘Women in Australia bear primary responsibility for managing family life [that] does not fit easily with the structure of the workplace’ (HREOC 2005: 13), while ‘men typically bear the
greatest responsibility for financially providing for their families’. To the extent that this is true, it may be timely to consider how wage and professional parity might be achieved. There is an argument that a so-called ‘knowledge society’ in Australia, where one third of adults are functionally illiterate and where educational achievement has most to do with where you are born, desperately needs a properly funded, national adult education sector similar to the systems in place in Scandinavia. Aikman and Unterhalter (2007) identify a general national neglect of the adult basic education sector, despite its critical role in addressing gender equality for women and men in diverse countries:

Governments state that they are committed to adult basic education—but in reality they are a low priority for most. Adult basic education has remained under-funded and marginalized within ministries, resulting in poor cohesion and coordination. Current government neglect of the sector needs to be reversed (p. 44).

Australian ACE might then be lifted in parity from a struggling and benevolent charity in a handful of states, to a properly supported and funded sector that promotes lifelong and lifewide learning for all. Beyond that unlikely prospect lies the need for a better understanding and a fundamental reform of gendered service provision for all adults. The task of education cannot all be laid at the feet of schools. The most recent tertiary enrolment data from Victoria suggest an urgent need in Australia to provide pedagogies and learning contexts that match the needs of people with identities (including masculinities) other than those tolerated at school. This particularly applies to those adult male identities associated with rurality and lower socio-economic status.

References


This paper was presented in an earlier version to the Adult Learning Australia Conference in Perth, Western Australia, 30 October–1 November, 2008.

About the author

Dr Barry Golding is an experienced Australian researcher in adult, vocational and community education with a specialisation in learner-centred, field-based research into equity and access.
His growing research interest in men’s learning has led to him facilitating an ongoing, collaborative, international research project investigating men’s learning in community contexts.

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The role of a professional and creative writing degree is to provide resources, structured workshops, professional interactions—and the potential for creative risk. Opportunities for risk, within the structured environment of the university, challenge the individual’s perspectives and judgements, as well as their ability to analyse and to reflect on their writing and creative practices.

From this starting point the authors, both writing industry practitioners and academics, have developed experiential projects with the aim of transforming their teaching practice from a model of narrative hierarchies of knowledge to learning through performativity, social connectedness and immersive workplace learning.

As the case studies illustrate, this transitional approach has enabled our millennial learners more confidently to take risks, accept challenges and transform their understanding of their own knowledge, skills and identities.
Introduction

There is nothing new about internships and experiential learning. According to Stanton (1995), work placement is a form of learning as old as our civilisation, with mediaeval craft guilds teaching learning-by-doing, for example, or orally-based societies informally passing on wisdom, skills and cultural lore as learning. With the advent of the university, distinctions have emerged between learning and doing, between scholarship and work.

Universities are now required to work with a postmodern construct of knowledge, which according to Raschke (2003) focuses on ‘performativity’ rather than ‘narrative’ hierarchies of knowledge. Universities are potentially transforming the stock or store of knowledge (the narrative of information passed on to successive generations) into knowledge operations. Within the ‘narrative hierarchies of knowledge’ paradigm, there is a perceived concern (expressed by Crebert et al. 2004, Commonwealth of Australia 2002, and Lyotard in Raschke 2003: 77–78) that the performative approaches may lead to a checklist of vocational skills, to operational competencies rather than to deeper learning.

There is a risk, too, in working with the twenty-first century learner, the millennial learner born after 1980, within a more traditional hierarchy of narrative learning. These learners see themselves as part of a social collective of learning, prepared to create knowledge from myriad sources. They see experience as more important in a learning sense than the acquisition of information.

As industry practitioners and academics, we have attempted to respond to and use such changes in the university and in learners, to construct internship units that ameliorate negative inherent systemic risks and to encourage risk-taking by our writing students that will foster confidence in their abilities towards participation in
the creative industries within organisations and as sole practitioners, using traditional as well as new media.

Thus the two case studies described below demonstrate the need for students to build on their theoretical knowledge, adding their experience of workplace skills, and to reflect on the transition of their knowledge and skills into workplace contexts. For this purpose, Case study 1 uses an interactive reflective e-journal during the internship, plus an oral presentation to a panel of peers and markers, at the conclusion of the placement, in which students describe and evaluate their learning experiences. Case study 2 uses a major group oral presentation as well as an individual report to the leader/mentor of the unit for the work project. Through establishing such mechanisms for reflection, we endeavour to engage with the students’ experiences. For, as noted by Boud et al. (in Smith, Clebb, Lawrence & Todd 2007):

Learning builds on and flows from experience: no matter what external prompts to learning there might be—teachers, materials, interesting opportunities—learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged (p. 132).

Transformative learning within the context of internships and work projects occurs when learners reflect deeply (Beach 1999, Smith et al. 2007). Our students are encouraged to use their journalling and oral presentations to analyse how they solved problems related to the tasks undertaken, and how they were able to view this new knowledge. Thus, they elicit a greater awareness of themselves as developing new and exciting identities during the process, and perceive their own personal abilities in the context of the theory, which allows them to understand their knowledge as generalised into other situations.

Our study designs for our experiential courses require students to incorporate ongoing reflection within the student journal and evaluative post-program reporting. They also encourage the sharing
of experiences, so that students do not need to recapitulate the entire process—they learn from others and build on the contextual understandings to increase their capacity to ‘produce culture as well as reproduce it’ (Beach 1999: 133). We have been influenced in our approach by experiential learning theorists who link habituated reflective practice with the move from surface to deeper approaches to student learning, and transformative learning which promotes a student ‘learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purposes rather than to uncritically act on those of others’ (Mezirow 1997: 11).

The internship program in Professional and Creative Writing at undergraduate level, as well as in the postgraduate Creative Arts, is working with the transforming power of experiential learning. The students apply the idea of entrepreneurship associated with the freelance artist, writer or editor to the process of job-hunting, and most importantly to the research required to engage themselves emotionally and intellectually with their targeted industry sector. They see the relevance of the skills, they apply the theory and they learn more deeply—the information transforms into a knowledge base they take with them to other organisations, and to their own creative practices.

**Context**

We teach during a time of increasing massification of education, and the attendant ‘corporatisation’ of the university sector (Biggs 2002, Coté *et al.* 2007, Sanderson & Watters 2006), when ‘knowledge [is] treated as a marketable commodity’ (Biggs 2002: 185) and ‘vocational courses, the demand and staffing for which are market driven, are displacing fundamental disciplines’ (Biggs 2002: 195). This, too, is not new information, but increasingly it contextualises the reality of teaching in the tertiary institution and, in particular for us, the teaching of creative and professional writing within a university
context. Within this milieu, our students do not necessarily embrace the idea of scholarship, nor being a writer as their primary identity. Their goals are diverse, strongly influenced by the social context of their time, and are thus different from those of previous generations (Wyn & Dwyer 2000). Some of our students work full-time while completing their degree, most work at least part-time. Many see their degree as a ticket to a job, as distinct, perhaps, from our idealistic vision of a passion for writing driven by curiosity and a thirst for knowledge and understanding within which to contextualise our words. Increasingly, we come under pressure, from students and the university administration alike, to measure teaching successes through destination surveys that confirm the employability of our students.

One response to these pressures has been to import some aspects of the TAFE sector into the university curriculum without sufficient consideration about how this kind of practical education will enhance the university learning experience: the incidental focus on a particular software package that enables typesetting skills, for instance, as opposed to the higher level skills of critical thinking that would enable an editor to critique page layout. Such decisions often follow management demands for ‘experiential learning’ within the curriculum. Wagner, Childs and Houlbrook (2001) warn against the implementation of superficial strategies in response to the education crisis, highlighting the fallacy of succumbing to ‘utilitarian demands’ which seek certain kinds of work outcomes without sufficient thought about how such interventions actually fit into a learning paradigm and a pedagogy.

Where earlier generations used education, and in particular tertiary education, to change their future, today such potential for change is not so apparent to our students. Today’s students do not perceive clear choices, nor models for change. In introducing our internship programs in writing, publishing, editing and creative enterprise
at Deakin University, we endeavoured to widen the educational options of our students by providing ‘real world’ experiences without abrogating our responsibilities as educators to implement a transitional or transformational approach that includes ‘critical and interpretive knowledge’ as well as ‘technical and instrumental outcomes’ (from Habermas in Wagner et al. 2001: 315).

*Higher education in the learning society*, a report (Dearing 1997) on the future of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom, foreshadows the creation of a society committed to learning throughout life. This report predicates a culture of disciplined thinking, which would encourage curiosity, challenge existing ideas and generate new ones, as a key area to target for the future. Dearing envisages the learning society as one that enables individuals to reach their highest potential, allowing them to grow intellectually, become well equipped for work, make a contribution to society and achieve personal fulfilment.

In Australia, the *Employability skills for the future* report (Commonwealth of Australia 2002) takes a strongly vocational and employer/enterprise-based approach, indicating the need for ‘a more highly skilled workforce where the generic and transferable skills are broadly distributed across the organisation [and] the ongoing employability of individuals [requires them to have] a set of relevant skills, as well as a capacity to learn how to learn new things’ (p. 1). The report contextualises skills within an ‘employability’ framework that reveals a new focus on personal attributes such as ‘loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, commonsense, positive self-esteem, sense of humour, balanced attitude to work and home life, ability to deal with pressure, motivation, and adaptability’ (2002: 8), articulating a work-in-progress for lifelong learning. The experiential learning projects described below have led to positive student reflection on the links between personal attributes and employability. The projects
also explore whether those skills are best absorbed from focused learning in writing, publishing and creative enterprise, or are more meaningfully translated through industry contexts.

**Approaches to teaching that encourage deep learning within a workplace situation**

According to Oblinger (2008), today’s learners are connected and experiential. She suggests a breadth of access to social networks: MySpace (3rd most popular site in the United States), Facebook (85 per cent market share among fourth year university students in the United States) and Flickr (46 million visitors per month as of April 2008). Such sites not only provide a social network but also a potential immersive learning environment. This is a participatory culture, with a sense of collective intelligence—everyone has something to contribute. Knowledge is created not possessed, and it is possible to use a community rather than an individual to gain knowledge. The millennial or net generation learner sees experiences as more important than the acquisition of information.

Action learning, which works through group tasks and problem-solving methodologies, provides opportunities to develop strategies and take action, then capture what has been learned in a dynamic and collaborative way (Marquardt 2007). Today’s learner comes from a connected generation which constructs knowledge in a nonlinear way, starting from the known or concrete, then moving informally through more lateral, mosaic-style developments. A virtual world or contextual learning space developed using the principles of connectivity and experiential learning can provide socialisation, exploration and conversations that reflect on the learning. It is reflection on that connectivity, in non-linear ways, which leads to effective experiential learning. As Kolb (1983) has stated in *Experiential learning*, ‘Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’ (p. 41).
According to Silberman (2007), experiential learning incorporates a direct involvement at emotional and intellectual levels, using projects or work-based activities that are very similar to or replicate workplace experiences. This transformative experience potentially requires immersive and imaginative simulations and situations to bring the learning closer to the day-to-day workplace experiences, particularly in aspects such as interpersonal skills and communications. These are culturally productive experiences which are spontaneously absorbed rather than intentionally generalised from a specific skill set or previous problem-solving exercises.

Dede (2005) describes immersion as participating in a comprehensive and realistic experience. This situated learning incorporates a transition of knowledge from one situation to another, leading to improved performance in a real-world setting. Immersion incorporates mediation (an expert guide) to develop reflection, and to identify the importance of transfer. Thus, the case studies that follow explore both the transformation or translation through experiences, and the reflection that has ensured that the learning is deep, engaged and relevant to the individual.

**Work-based learning (WBL)**

Trigwell and Reid (1998) provide a description of work-based learning as:

> ... a range of educational practices which involves students learning in authentic work settings. The curriculum is significantly influenced by issues and challenges which emerge from the exigencies of work rather than predetermined academic content driven requirements (1998: 142).

The work-based activities undertaken by students are neither ‘neutral’ nor ‘simply additive’ to the student experience (Beach 1999: 124). Beach uses the idea of consequential transition, which more accurately focuses on a transformation of the learner due to
‘conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills and identity in ways that are consequential to the individual becoming someone or something new, and in ways that contribute to the creation and metamorphosis of social activity and, ultimately, society’ (1999: 130). Thus the eventual outcome may change the learner’s sense of self, arising from a transition in the learning process which has consequences for both the learner and the particular organisation. This relationship is illustrated by an intern who had undertaken an editorial role with a magazine being encouraged to take responsibility for developing and writing key stories, which in turn expanded the audience for that magazine. The intern reflected on the experience as being life-changing, transforming her goals towards the practice of the freelance writer.

Tennant (quoted in Crebert et al. 2004: 161) usefully formulates a number of principles which, we argue, encourage transformative learning:

- learners are exposed to ‘authentic’ activities, with the opportunity to access the full range of learning resources
- learners are exposed to multiple situations and multiple examples
- attention is drawn to the potential for transfer by highlighting the generic nature of the skill being acquired
- the higher-order skills and principles being acquired are identified and made explicit
- a supportive climate exists in the transfer context (e.g. supervisor support, opportunity to use learning, peer support, supervisor sanctions, positive personal outcomes, encouragement of further learning)
- there is a capacity to ‘learn how to learn from experience’, that is, practice in analysing experience and developing strategies for learning
there exists a community of discourse (i.e. a common way of talking) in which all members are actively engaged in learning through communicating

learners have ‘lifelong learning’ skills and dispositions (the capacity to be self-directed and control and regulate one’s own learning).

These principles have formed the basis of the development and review of our internships at undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as the workplace-based projects focused on experiential learning.

Atkins (in Crebert et al. 2004: 150) suggests research has identified that ‘graduates in the [twenty-first] century are likely to be knowledge workers and symbolic analysts, service providers, members of learning organisations, and managers of their own careers’. The ability to be adaptable, and able to change with the requirements of their careers, is therefore an important graduate attribute for the millennial learner. It is, of course, blended with other attributes as indicated by statements such as the following taken from the Deakin University 2010 Handbook:

All Deakin University programs will encourage students to develop attitudes of intellectual curiosity and motivation for independent thinking, autonomous learning and reflective professional and personal practice, and a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. Appropriate to its level of study and discipline composition, each program will be designed to ensure that students develop their knowledge and understanding as well as a range of generic skills (Deakin University 2010).

The link with Dearing’s (1997) vision of curiosity that challenges ideas and generates new ones within a learning society is inherent in the above statement, and is accepted as a valid outcome for a university graduate.

Work-based learning is an important tool for obtaining the transfer of high-level skills and knowledge to practical applications. Wagner
et al. (2001) introduce the idea of work-based learning by borrowing critical social pedagogy from the social sciences and using it as a framework that:

[positions] WBL not only as an educational technology and method but as a site of struggle, a contested social practice, between contradictory economic, social and political interests and differing views on the role of learning and education in contemporary society (p. 321).

Wagner et al. also acknowledge historical difficulties with the theoretical constructs of work-based learning, wherein WBL has been construed as ‘purely instrumental and ... selling the role of education short’ by merely pandering to the demands of industry for a ‘technically skilled’ workforce (2001: 316–318). They are comfortable, however, to support WBL as an appropriate model for experiential learning, arguing strongly that ‘economic viability and quality education are not mutually exclusive’ and that ‘both outcomes form an integral part of a WBL dialectic’ (2001: 316). Wagner et al. favour a cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary definition of learning, which allows them to theorise ways in which ‘disciplinary knowledge can enrich learning and diversify action possibilities’ allowing for ‘the development of skills and knowledge that is at once technical, interpretative and critical’ (2001: 324).

Although these educational researchers frame their teaching within ‘the relationship between education and the economy’, ‘theory and practice in education processes’, and the ‘dualism of education and training and associated social and institutional divisions’ (2001: 316), these three concerns are equally valid when considering the placement of creative writing, editing and enterprise students within the creative industries workplace, as will be demonstrated in the following case studies.

In a development of Biggs’s concept of ‘constructive alignment’, Walsh (2007) provides encouragement and modelling for our
internship and experiential project experiments. Removing the idea of ‘constructive alignment’ from the formal learning environment of the university for which it was developed, Walsh suggests that it is Biggs’s focus on the connection between active student behaviour and deep learning which makes it a useful framework within which to consider WBL. ‘In order to develop professional skills in students and to create functioning knowledge,’ Walsh (2007) suggests,

Biggs postulates that it is necessary for them to have declarative knowledge (the relevant knowledge base), procedural knowledge (the skills necessary to apply this) and conditional knowledge (an awareness of appropriate circumstances in which to apply the rest). He argues that, traditionally, universities have taught much declarative knowledge and some procedural knowledge, but that the students have had to develop the conditional knowledge which is necessary to achieve fully functioning knowledge on their own after graduation (p. 81).

The workplace, where students actively engage in the pursuits of a professional worker, and where they ‘predict, diagnose, explain and problem solve’, is likely to be more active than the classroom (Biggs in Walsh 2007: 82). Such approaches would encourage an improvement in the student’s motivation for success and the degree of confidence with which students approach their work-based tasks and, Walsh predicts, close the knowledge gap prior to graduation.

**Employing strategies of reflective practice**

Reflective practice is part of the creative skill set of an adaptable new learner. Using Mestre’s (2002) concept (from Smith et al. 2007: 132) in which knowledge learned in one situation is translated into a new context as a definition of the transfer of learning (in a transformative sense), Smith et al. (2007) champion reflection that links theoretical construct to practice as a vehicle for establishing a model for student learning during work-based experience. ‘The pedagogical benefits of work-based experiences’, they suggest, ‘depend largely on the extent
to which students reflect on them and the extent to which they take understandings derived from an academic context and relate these to work’ (Smith et al. 2007: 132).

An imperative of the study design of experiential learning units, then, is to establish avenues of reflective practice in which students contribute to making explicit their otherwise tacit skills and knowledge acquired in a workplace. Such reflective practice, essential both during and after the work-based experience (Beard & Wilson in Smith et al. 2007: 133), encourages students not only to make ‘sense of the experience while it is happening’, but to consider and analyse that experience leading to the production of ‘personal theories’. Such ‘dual reflection encourages deep learning’ (Smith et al. 2007: 133) and, we suggest, the formation of new identities (from Beard 1999).

The challenges of introducing reflective practice into experiential learning and achieving the goal of deep learning are multifaceted. Smith et al. warn that for some students the exercise of reflection risks becoming merely a ‘skills audit’ (2007: 139), useful for a student’s *curriculum vitae* perhaps, but inadequate to the task of transformative learning. In constructing our own experiential learning programs, presented in the case studies that follow, we have endeavoured to establish a reflective practice that encourages deep learning.

**Case study 1: Undergraduate experiential learning during industry work placements**

In 2007, the Professional and Creative Writing discipline at Deakin University introduced an undergraduate internship program. After prerequisite studies, students are placed with an industry employer for a total of 100 hours’ work experience. They are required to research and negotiate their own work placement as well as the particular tasks or project to be undertaken under the guidance of the prospective employer. Concurrent with the on-the-job training,
students complete a series of assessment tasks (written and oral) for credit towards their degree under the auspices of an academic supervisor. The internships were introduced partly in response to student lobbying, but most importantly for us as educators, as a result of our own industry experience that confirmed the significance of networking as a successful strategy in gaining employment and career satisfaction. Internships have also assisted, as revealed by our students’ experiences, the university’s compliance with prescribed measures of success including a Graduate Destination survey that measures ‘success’ according to the employment outcomes of graduating students.

In addition to completing the 100 hours’ work experience with an industry employer, students undertake research (documentary and interview) into their chosen industry and host organisation (employer), producing a written report that demonstrates their understanding of the organisation (which may be as small as an individual operator) within its industry context. This initial research, we believe, prepares and encourages our students to engage with a multidisciplinary approach encompassing the theoretical, economic and social frameworks as envisioned by Wagner et al. (2001: 316). The students are also required to correspond regularly with their academic supervisor during the work placement through the medium of an online journal accessed by both parties via the university’s Blackboard/Vista learning system. This not only fulfils the university’s duty of care to students absent from campus, but allows the academic supervisor to respond to students’ queries, to provide encouragement, to celebrate successes, to impart specific industry knowledge and to guide the student towards problem-solving strategies, thus enabling the role of the mentor or expert guide (Dede 2005, Walsh 2007). The journal also provides a collection point for student reflection that will inform the second assessment task: the production of a reflective essay on the student’s internship—also presented in oral format to their peer group for assessment by our teaching panel.
The undergraduate internship unit has been running for four semesters. Of the 26 third-year students who have completed the placement, eight have secured employment with their host organisation or have found a position with a similar organisation upon graduation. One decided that the chosen industry sector was not for her, and returned to university with the intention of pursuing a career in teaching. One student left the program midway through the internship for personal reasons. While these figures demonstrate the ‘employability’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2002) of our interns and feed the university’s need for successful outcomes, for us, it is seeing our students’ developing confidence, initially displayed in their journal and later during the oral presentation, which confirms the link between the theory and our practice.

Through their workplace experience, the undertaking and completion of tasks, students construct their own learning and meaning (Walsh 2007: 80). In the process of making their employment experience explicit through regular reflection enshrined in the act of journalling, students are enabled to make sense of and record what they have learned, thus moving towards deep learning (Smith et al. 2007). We make links between learning, reflective journalling while in the workplace and the final assignment (written and oral) that concretises students’ understanding of their knowledge and skills acquisition. Through the internship experience the students see themselves differently within the wider world. The confidence instilled by this change in perception allows them to take risks with their future work situation, allowing them, for instance, the ability to move freely between the organisation and freelance work. It is with a particular pleasure that we find, in their journals and final assignment task, our students making links between their academic study, the host mentorship and the work undertaken during the work placement.
Case study 2: Postgraduate experiential learning—building creative teams and *Exposure*

This case study involves a postgraduate coursework unit, with a group comprising 15 to 30 international and local students (depending on demand and interest each year) working in teams constructed for the 13-week unit. The work-based project of supporting Deakin University’s arts showcase season *Exposure* has been the driver of the experiential learning approach since 2006. The unit provides a workplace-oriented context, incorporating the mythical Gibbering Communications Agency, which is responsible for pitching ideas to the client (the coordinator of the *Exposure* season) regarding the promotion and launch of the program. The project teams are established using the following learning styles and project management tools/questionnaires.

- Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire: this questionnaire indicates four learning approaches within which learners (and in this case, team members) operate comfortably—activist, reflector, pragmatist and theorist (see http://www.peterhoney.com for details on the LSQ and interpretations of individual types).
- Belbin Self-Perception Inventory: this questionnaire identifies nine roles and describes how each contributes to a team. Most people operate within three to four team roles, and these can be adapted depending on the situation. (Check the website, http://www.belbin.com, for details on the nine team roles.)

These tools (and a skills audit administered by Sheila Gibbering a.k.a. the mediator/lecturer/project manager in charge of this experiential learning project) provide a basis for establishing the teams. This results in teams with a mix of learning styles, and a mix of team roles such as shaper, team-worker and so on.
Members of the 2008 Gibbering Communications Agency project team ranged in age from 22 to 28 years old, and were comfortable in their new media literacy in technology communication tools. The team members came from countries including Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Norway, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uzbekistan, bringing with them a variety of learning approaches. The students expected to develop skills in working in the proposed teams that would allow them to negotiate with a creative community of performing arts students and staff. A successful end outcome was clearly stipulated for each team including the launch, production of an e-newsletter and promotional website, and the creation of an archive produced as a short film capturing the workplace project. The students were studying in the framework of the Master of Communication, a program which allows a broad selection of studies (and therefore an eclectic mix of skills) within streams—public relations, advertising, journalism, film/video/photography, and professional and creative writing.

The teams were deliberately set up to include a mix of skills and backgrounds, learning styles and management or leadership qualities, including quite divergent English language skills. In fact, the teams—which were guaranteed to have friction to test the students’ abilities to work together—had a very strong risk of failure. The project depended on and explored:

- the use of different media as the communication ‘glue’—initially the Deakin Studies Online platform (using the Blackboard/Vista learning system), eventually the wireless, portable and speedy response media alternatives to which the students turned (mobile phone, text messaging, email)
- the use of an experienced educator/project manager/mentor as the risk mediator—a simulation of the work environment of a project or consultancy agency
• experiential contexts—the live work project and its pressure to commit to the outcomes
• the interpersonal skills which allowed team members to negotiate and problem solve, then reflect and analyse performance and learned skills via major group presentations to the Gibbering Communications Agency and the client
• the mobile technology and the way the millennial learners used it, as opposed to the baby boomers who were designing the program.

These media technologies and experiential contexts became the tools of the students’ learning, rather than (or more accurately in addition to) the educational ‘expert’ or authority.

**Outcomes**

Each of the teams was fluid and self-directed, moving between multiple media, and focused on what they could achieve with the alternatives. During their oral review reports on completion, the students reflected rigorously on the powerful learning achieved by the blending of face-to-face and media-related communications in emergency situations.

Although many team members had come from traditional teacher-directed learning models, they adapted almost instantly to the collective sharing of experiences to pool their information. Whether in skills- or knowledge-based learning areas, they were comfortable using the team as a learning tool. The lecturer/project manager was the ‘boss’ of the agency, not the learning authority (although there was risk minimisation in the lecturer also taking on the role of the mentor and mediating the immersion in the project).

The print materials (useful readings, web links and resources, learning activities) were utilised by the students in exactly the same way as the learning from the team—as one of the sources when events
became difficult and required strategies, rather than as preparation for a task.

The sense of excitement at working with a live project lasted the length of the Exposure launch and its promotion, despite mixed success in achieving the outcomes. The excitement was leavened with realistic reflection. In a classic action learning approach, the teams learned immersively about group dynamics, and team learning models incorporated assessments that were a part of the project outcomes rather than an adjunct tool. Team presentations were captured in a range of media, including written reports and e-portfolios, action plans and scheduling tools, and websites.

There were regular opportunities for reflection, both in individual surveys and in public team and individual presentations. A comparison with the scenario-based team presentations used in this unit in previous years indicates a greatly increased applied learning of the key interpersonal skills; for example, problem solving, negotiating, and mediating between different skill sets. The planning and team-management strategies were also used on a needs basis with the live work project, so discussion of their validity was infused with applied knowledge and enriched reflection on the situated learning.

Comments and presentations from students have indicated that their learning was exponentially rapid and applied. The action learning approach, which enabled reflection during the project, resulted in amendments to achieve better outcomes. The combination of outcomes-based learning and reflection/communication through a range of social technologies demonstrated the students’ satisfaction with the transformation of theory into applied knowledge.
Experiential learning and the education versus training dichotomy

In moving from the world of the university to the world of work, our students do not merely take a bundle of skills learned in one institution and repurpose these for use in another. Beach sees students in such situations as in transition, which ‘potentially involves the construction of knowledge, identities and skills, or transformation, rather than the application of something that has been acquired elsewhere’ (Beach 1999: 119).

Transformation in learning is also potentially about transforming the learning space, or the knowledge space as an academic framework. Raschke (2003) writes of the postmodern university, or hyperuniversity, in the postmodern age. The fluid definitions of personal identity, nationhood, culture and knowledge are challenging the non-fluid models of instruction and enquiry, which are potentially mediaeval rather than modern, that is, prior to postmodern. The knowledge space of the university provided a received learning rather than one that was initiated from learner needs. Raché anticipates a stressful transformation that involves moving the current learning space from a history of hierarchy. Lyotard (cited in Raschke 2003: 77) understands postmodern knowledge as encompassing ‘competency’ or ‘performativity’, as opposed to ‘narrative’. Narrativity has been the model that has thinkers and practitioners providing iterations of knowledge for successive generations. The university, utilising the ‘performance’ indicators, needs to work from the functioning of the knowledge operations rather than a stock of knowledge itself. Thus there is an emphasis on graduate attributes that encompass this sense of performance, or outcomes. Lyotard argues that, in the postmodern learning society, students (‘young people’) will not acquire a package of knowledge as a prelude to entering the workforce; instead, knowledge will be:

... served ‘a la carte’ to adults who are either working or expect to be, for the purpose of improving their skills and chances
of promotion, but also to help them acquire information, languages, and language games allowing them both to widen their occupational horizons and to articulate their technical and ethical experience (Lyotard, cited in Raschke 2003: 77).

Within the context of the new learner and the postmodern university, it is interesting to note that a number of our students come to the BA (Professional and Creative Writing) having completed a writing and editing diploma at a TAFE college. A brief survey of such students provides a perspective on the university’s learning space and educational role. The TAFE course, they suggest, is stronger on the mechanics: learning the rules of grammar and usage, and the practice of writing techniques. The degree offers opportunities to learn about theory, and the importance of research in a writing career. It encourages students to undertake majors in the more traditional academic disciplines alongside their writing degree. Many students move from TAFE to university for career change, some having spent time ‘shopping’ through other degree courses: the credit against their TAFE studies allows them to achieve a quicker (and thus cheaper) degree. Most are career orientated. The TAFE cohort expresses surprise about the lack of maturity exhibited by students in the university sector, missing the typical mature-age confidence that has allowed meaningful interactions during discussion and workshops in the TAFE classroom. They are disappointed, too, with what they describe as a lack of community feeling on the university campus. This group sees evening classes, which allow students to work during the day and study part-time at night, as an advantage of TAFE.

Rather than merely pointing to differences between two learning spaces—TAFE versus university/training versus education—it is interesting to note how neatly the perceptions of these students match Lyotard’s predictions of the postmodern search for knowledge, and the widening of occupational horizons (cited in Raschke 2003: 77–78). These students are relatively self-directed learners who are engaged imaginatively with problem solving and seek authentic
learning situations. They are excited by the prospect of adding theoretical studies to their practical knowledge. They participate in extracurricular events and are strong collaborators. The new learner’s needs are not narrative, but require a context that provides an imaginative community of learning.

**Conclusion**

The risks for tutors and mentors have been carefully calculated: the performative set of graduate attributes across universities is taking many paces towards acknowledgement of the policy directions of the learning society of the twenty-first century. The immersive workplace-based experiences outlined in the case studies provide millennial learners with opportunities for the transformation of theory into applied situations. Whether working as individuals within an organisation, as freelance contractors or as part of a creative team, students demonstrate an ability to adjust their perceptions and praxis around the projects in which they become involved. This is achieved through the immersive nature of the projects, the availability of the tools for the twenty-first century learner, our ‘inbuilt’ requirement for conscious reflection during and after completion of the work experience, and the facilitation provided by the (‘expert guide’) mediator.

Three major aspects of risk are investigated through these case studies. The first is that the placement or project will not engage the student in the learning experience. The strategy to minimise this risk involves experienced mediators, clear industry briefings and open channels of communication. The second risk, that immersive learning is potentially in tension with the traditional higher education paradigm, is ameliorated by the blending of academic and industry practitioner expertise. The ultimate concern is that deeper learning would not be achieved when the immersive project did not fulfil its projected outcomes. However, reflection directed through the
Taking risks—Experiential learning and the writing student

assessment strategies has resulted in developing a transformational learning space for our millennial learners.

References


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Recognition of prior learning—Normative assessment or co-construction of preferred identities?

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Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been an important element of Australia’s Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy since it was officially adopted as a key national principle in 1991 (VEETAC 1991, cited in Wilson and Lilly 1996:2). The aim of RPL is to formally assess a person’s skills gained through life and work experience, in order to award credit towards nationally recognised qualifications. It is an integral part of access and equity strategies, which are designed to ‘improve access to and outcomes from vocational education and training for disadvantaged groups’ (Smith & Keating 1997: 38). However, limited attention has been paid to the operations of power within the assessor-candidate relationship. This paper raises questions about the perspective of RPL as a self-evidently benign activity and describes concerns regarding its
application. It uses postmodern theories of identity and a philosophy of recognition to propose an understanding of the potential impacts of RPL and invite new assessment practices to advance its emancipatory goals.

Introduction

Many Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers are interested to make formal skills recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL) accessible to workforces where expertise has commonly been discounted due to the taboo nature of the work and/or the lack of academic background of its workers. At the Australian Institute of Social Relations (AISR³), RPL candidates have included peer educators from sex work organisations, youth workers, Aboriginal workers, newly arrived migrants and other non-traditional learners. It appears that the very life experience that is crucial to the participants’ job roles and maximising the impact of their work, has often operated to encourage negative self-descriptions and exclude them from formal education or professional acknowledgment. RPL can be a powerful vehicle for noticing and accrediting these workers’ existing practice wisdom, learnt over many years in non-formal contexts. This then opens up opportunities for individuals to engage with further formal learning, establish career paths or in some cases transfer to other sectors.

Equity and access issues such as these have been strong drivers in VET policy during the past two decades. Considerable attention has therefore been given to strengthening the capacity of registered training organisations (RTOs) to implement recognition processes effectively. It has been said that RPL can be “a powerful tool for bringing people into the learning system” (Hargreaves 2006:2) who have otherwise been excluded from formal education and thereby failed to gain access to the benefits of academic credentials,
social status and subsequent employment. Many researchers and commentators have noted how RPL has been seen as having the potential to act as a vehicle for social inclusion and even as a form of redress for past exclusions (Wheelahan, Dennis, Firth et al. 2003, Harris 1999, Castle & Attwood 2001).

From this perspective, RPL can be understood as an empowering and emancipatory activity that opens doors and increases the cultural and social capital of those who access it. It recognises skills and knowledges learnt outside academic institutions through life and work experience, validates and articulates these within formal education, and contributes to the awarding of relevant qualifications that hold status within the community. Researchers have observed that learners not only accomplish accelerated pathways to final qualifications, but suggest that increased confidence and self-esteem can also result from the process (Smith 2004, Cleary et al. 2002). As such, RPL is a benevolent practice that addresses equity issues, challenges the academic stranglehold on what counts as ‘credentialled’ knowledge and increases individual learner’s belief in their own abilities. Further, it allows educators and assessors to live out the politics of social justice and empowerment pedagogy, in the traditions of Paolo Freire (1972), Patti Lather (1991) or bell hooks (1994).

**Disappointments and hazards within RPL**

As a result of this overwhelmingly positive perspective, great attention has been paid to improving access to RPL in order to advance social inclusion goals. However, many VET practitioners are frustrated to learn it is still mostly accessed by those who are already familiar with and acculturated into the formal education system. Within the university, adult education and vocational education sectors, those who successfully access RPL are typically literate, familiar with formal educational language and concepts, and have significant skills in negotiating the complexities of the assessment
process (Harris 1999, Cleary et al. 2002, Wheelahan et al. 2003). There is acknowledgement in the literature that, for an individual to present their skills and knowledge, they must be aware of what they know and have additional ability to ‘translate their professional or vocational practice discourse into the academic’ (Wheelahan, Miller & Newton 2002: 13). Cameron (2005) has found that undertaking RPL ‘demands high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, a well developed ability to engage in self-recognition activities and the recording of these in print based media ... along with a knowledge and familiarity of formal learning systems’ (Cameron 2005: 13). Explicitly knowing what one knows, and being able to present this in competency-based language with confidence, are likely to be significant prerequisites for successful recognition. These prerequisites then exclude the very individuals targeted by access and equity policies.

It seems that RPL is largely benefitting those who are already formally trained to a particular level and engaged with educational systems and processes. With a few exceptions it fails to reach traditionally marginalised groups such as Indigenous populations or culturally diverse migrants, and there appears to be a substantial gap between the aspirations or acclaimed benefits and the reality of implementation (Pithers 1999, Bateman 2003, Wheelahan et al. 2003, Smith 2004, Bowman 2004). With these limitations now clearly understood from national and international experience, there nonetheless remains a level of optimism for the potential of RPL to enhance social inclusion, providing the process can be appropriately refined and certain populations targeted more effectively.

However, in some cases RPL is not only proving difficult to access but also perhaps harmful. Some commentators have drawn attention to hazards within competency-based assessment generally and RPL in particular (Harris 2000, Andersson & Harris 2006, Usher & Edwards 1994, Usher, Bryant & Johnston 1997, Castle & Attwood 2001). These hazards relate to the effects of power within the
learner/assessor relationship and how RPL is socially and culturally understood. Such thinking invites a re-theorising of the purpose and effects of RPL, problematising its implementation and positioning it in a less beneficial light than is generally asserted.

This more critical way of thinking suggests that in the process of skills recognition the learner’s experience is ascribed certain meanings by the assessor who then holds the power to translate them into competencies that can be credentialled. It is argued that, rather than validating alternative knowledge learnt through life and work, RPL is a process of assessing the individual against norms (competencies) set by the dominant culture. ‘Success’ therefore becomes a question of how close to the norm the learner can represent their experience. The less familiar or comfortable with the dominant culture learners are, the less likely they are to negotiate the language and meanings that are necessary to be awarded competence. Further, Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997: 105) have warned that RPL will ‘always end up being oppressive’ (my italics) because it attempts to attribute finite meanings to an individual’s experience and thus totalises that person, closing down possibilities for preferred identities to emerge. A question might thus arise as to whether RPL assessment is mostly, in every day practice, the application of a normative judgement which actively discounts certain types of knowledge and limits the individual’s potential—becoming a vehicle for oppression rather than liberation.

In the South African context, Harris (1999) has previously taken up this theme, urging a re-conceptualisation of RPL as a ‘social practice’ functioning largely to perpetuate dominant discourses and mainstream interests. From this position, instead of viewing RPL as a set of procedures to increase access to training courses and qualifications, we are invited to critically examine power relations within it. In current practice in Australia, RPL assessment is, arguably, most often presented as an objective measurement of skills against universal criteria, effectively masking normative
judgements that perpetuate the dominant discourse on what is skilful, professional practice. Instead of empowering the candidate, this could conceivably undermine a person’s sense of self-worth and preferred identities by constructing, for those who do not match the criteria, an inadequate, unprofessional, invalid self. In this sense, it is a ‘gatekeeper’ for mainstream approaches functioning as a mechanism for exclusion of those who do not conform (Barker 2001, cited in Wheelahan et al. 2003) and denying skills that are rendered invisible through rigid application of a normative gaze. In addition, the process of reflection required to articulate experience and its concomitant learning has been found to ‘provoke feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness’ in some, and even ‘entrench existing forms of discrimination’ (Castle & Attwood 2001: 68, referring to black South African learners who are a key population for RPL as social inclusion). Other evidence from enterprise-based RPL research in Australia points out that some workers have found the process actually humiliating (Blom et al. 2004).

A further concern surrounding the equity goals of RPL can be drawn from wider educational research which suggests that the achievement of formal recognition and credentialled knowledge for traditionally marginalised groups can fragment a person’s sense of identity and distance them from their communities (Reay 2004). From this perspective, the gaining of a qualification symbolises a transgression or rejection of community values and as such alienates the individual from their known social context, creating a potential dissonance in relation to the ‘self’. A person may be brought into conflict with their preferred descriptions of self and with significant others’ sense of ‘who they are’ or where they ‘belong’. In this manner, educational achievement can be ‘a delicate balance between realising potential and maintaining a sense of an authentic self’ (Reay 2004: 34). This is a type of transformation could be said that may generate dislocation, self-doubt and confusion.
Regarded in this light, recognition of prior learning is not an entirely benign practice but can perhaps, under certain conditions, become a powerful tool for the re-imposition of normative judgements. These judgements (already so familiar to many non-traditional learners) can generate negative effects and potentially compound disengagement. An examination of this potential may prove to be a fruitful area for consideration in the struggle to engage marginalised populations and unlock the longed-for emancipatory effects.

**The discursive production of identity and ‘therapeutic’ assessment skills**

One strategy to investigate how RPL may position and influence learners and respond to these concerns is to use a postmodern framework to examine how it contributes to identity construction. From a postmodern perspective, the ‘self’ is a cultural construct constituted through particular discourses and uses of language, continuously being inscribed and re-inscribed upon experience (Chappell *et al.* 2003). Language and stories of self do not merely describe who we are but actually create who we become. Further, we draw language and themes for these stories from those available to us in our social and cultural context. Writing about the emergence of collective and individual identities, Seyla Benhabib (2002) argues that “We are all born into webs of interlocution or narrative, from familial and gender narratives ... to the macro narratives of collective identity... We become aware of who we are by learning to become conversation partners in these narratives” (p. 15).

Educational institutions (such as RTOs) have been granted significant power by the community to confer meaning within relationships of learning and assessment and through this can be a factor in shaping potential and actual identity claims. The RPL process is implicated in this to no less a degree than any other educational practice. Arguably, learners have some agency in shaping or resisting these meanings, and in this sense RPL assessment can be viewed as a site of negotiated
meaning. The assessor and learner negotiate, contest and construct together the meaning of the learner’s experiential knowledge. The necessary investigating, naming, analysing and summing up of what the learner knows and has done, generate a degree of personal reflection. It is through this process that the learner’s self-descriptions and identity claims may be de-stabilised and opened up for re-examination.

RPL can thus be seen as providing an opportunity for people to re-construct themselves through particular stories of their experience, which become re-inscribed with new meanings (for example, academic recognition, professional competence and so on). Their re-inscriptions of self can be valued by the dominant discourse of professionalism and ‘credentialled’ in the form of a qualification or statements of attainment. In this manner, positive transformation and increased self-esteem may become possible for learners as they relate to new identity claims which provide further opportunities for self-reflection. Sensitivity to the candidate’s social and cultural context is required to support an integration of those new identity claims into existing relationships and expectations. Harris has remarked that some RPL processes may invite a ‘therapeutic pedagogy’ (2000a: 30) and such an approach would arguably require assessors to have particular interpersonal skills and a strongly student-centred approach ‘bordering on the therapeutic’ (2000b: 7).

From this analysis, we see that the processes of recognition assessment can be viewed as a conversation that occurs within the identity project of life and an interaction between people with differing experience and knowledges. In this interaction, interpretations are adopted or resisted, asserted or rejected, and the conversation thus gives birth to new ways of perceiving oneself and acting in the world. Chappell et al. (2003: 54) have described formal education as an ‘identity resource’ that provides certain types of material for this conversation. They contend that both learners and teachers (or in this case assessors) are ‘doing identity work’
throughout the pedagogical process. Within this approach, education can be seen as a ‘technology for constructing particular kinds of people’ (ibid: 10), sometimes viewed as a way to control behaviour, but also offering opportunities for increased agency and mutual influence. The manner in which we assess and how we engage in the assessor-candidate relationship is critical to the outcomes from this process. The educator and learner are thus ‘conversation partners’ and power operates within this relationship to confer greater status for certain meanings and values. How we approach our relationship to the power that is in play in this conversation can make a difference to the kinds of identities we construct together.

In this manner, assessment becomes a vehicle through which to research, describe, debate, confer meaning and extend stories of experience. As Chappell et al. (2003: 15) explain, the individual is an effect of this discursive process, drawing on readily available ontological narratives in order to construct themselves (in this case, narratives of the ‘qualified’ and ‘competent’ professional). The assessor engages in this story to write the applicant into that narrative and also to write themselves in as qualified and appropriate judges of professional standards. The assessment process thus brings the learner and assessor together to seek an exchange of stories regarding skilled, professional, competent and ultimately, qualified practice. They each identify with aspects and characters within these stories and finally agree their respective positions.

The philosophy of recognition

RPL viewed through this lens could be said to embody a much broader and fundamental human need for recognition of the self and for the co-construction of one another as valid beings. Recognition theory offers us a useful means of pursuing this consideration. Drawing from Hegelian philosophy, recognition theory, as described by contemporary philosopher Axel Honneth (1995), argues that we are all in a ‘struggle for recognition’ that is fundamental to individual
and social identity. We become agents in our own lives through the experience of being recognised as having validity and the capacity to act. Honneth (1995) suggests that humans are driven by an instinct towards mutual recognition, in the journey towards individual achievement and positive engagement in the social sphere. This includes recognition through personal relations, but also institutional relations and frameworks of social value, such as those embedded in the RPL process. Applying these understandings in a psychoanalytic framework, Benjamin (1988) explains that ‘in order to exist for oneself one has to exist for an “other”’ (p.53).

Such theories have significant relevance to the exchanges occurring within a recognition assessment interview, which can be seen as a microcosm of this developmental struggle. When our ideas, feelings and acts are validated by others, we learn to inhabit the world effectively and self-esteem can be developed and sustained. As assessors we are engaged in this enquiry of the ‘other’ that is fundamental to our own and the candidate’s identity and belonging in the world. It is the work of establishing this relationship of mutual recognition that I suggest is vital to the skills recognition experience and the efficacy of this for the candidate. Certain skills and approaches underpin this identity work and we must encourage an examination of these skills in order to fully realise the benefits of RPL.

Recent research by Smith and Clayton (2009) reiterates common themes from over a decade of VET recognition research—namely, that RPL is not well promoted; that in order to access it, learners need high levels of literacy and communication; and that evidence requirements can be overly bureaucratic and burdensome. What they found to be significant in enabling success within RPL included overt workplace support, high credibility of the assessor, and peer encouragement. Further, the relationship with a workplace mentor assisting them to navigate the process appeared ‘critical’ to many candidates. These notions align to Spencer’s (2006) ‘community development’ approach to RPL and might suggest relationships not
simply characterised by the mentor showing the candidate what to do, but perhaps as relationships of mutual recognition.

In my own current doctoral research, I have been interviewing participants at key stages throughout their RPL experience. Emerging data indicate the enormous importance of the relationship with the assessor in the candidate’s perceptions of success. ‘Success’ for these participants has meant achieving a qualification or partial credit, or being able to examine skills and plan a learning program and career goals without necessarily achieving competencies. This suggests that, at the heart of each person’s evaluation of their RPL experience, is the way in which they were treated and supported by the assessor. Factors affecting this included their trust in the assessor’s interpretation of their skills into the qualification framework, their sense of being understood and valued, and their perception of having influence upon the assessor. It was important for them to feel they had shared their practice wisdom rather than simply been measured by an expert against a standard. RPL candidates thus need to be ‘seen’ and valued for their uniqueness through specific assessor practices applied within the assessment interview, which for many may then enable them to engage more fully in the assessment process.

**Assessor skills**

In the light of the above theories, others’ research findings and my own emerging data (to be more fully reported in a later paper), the assessor’s skills and particular disposition become a major factor for further consideration. This takes us beyond simply improving the process or promotion of recognition in order to increase access by marginalised groups. If we view the purpose of recognition in a more philosophical light and understand that we are in a mutual engagement of identity construction, we can, I believe, apply it more successfully to marginalised groups and engage them in a meaningful process. In this manner, assessment requires the application of a highly complex and sophisticated skill set, balancing assessment
rigour with effective personal engagement and support. The assessor-candidate relationship is the site of negotiated meaning and a location where possibilities and promise are played out. In addition to understanding the job role and the formal competencies in question, assessors may need a perspective of ‘appreciative enquiry’ (as called for by Mitchell & McKenna 2006) in order to investigate positively the practices, knowledges and beliefs of the candidate, to invite reflection and inspire confidence. To do this they need engagement skills and a willingness to be taught new interpretations of experience, so that their own understandings are influenced by the interaction. The interaction then becomes a mutual engagement, rather than the application of judgement that masquerades as an objective process.

With this in mind, at the Australian Institute of Social Relations we position the skills recognition process as a co-research project in the creation of knowledge. In common with other RTOs, we strive to avoid characterising the assessment task as a checklist of criteria to be met, but rather a vital enquiry into the individual practices and underpinning knowledge and beliefs that shape the candidate’s work. In much of the RPL conducted at AISR, the assessor is mentor and guide throughout the process, so they engage in a relationship of support and advice that is integral to assessment. We have discovered that the skills our educators are coincidentally trained in for their community development and community support work are significant in implementing good recognition assessment. Thus, narrative therapy and cross-cultural communication techniques have become core skill sets. These approaches require the suspension of expert knowledge, openness to difference, critical and appreciative enquiry, and genuine curiosity about alternative practices. Part of the essential toolkit for advanced assessors includes circular questions, outsider witness, unpacking meanings, ‘storying’ experience, questions about the learner’s landscape of meaning, action and identity, culture-centred skills and similar approaches (White 2007, Morgan 2000,
Pedersen 1997). These techniques are to be found in counselling and therapy texts and generally not in the adult education literature.

**Conclusion**

This paper contends that in order to generate increased access to the positive benefits of RPL, critical underpinning issues related to the candidate/assessor relationship require attention. Widely promoting RPL and making it easy for the candidate to provide evidence and navigate the process are important aims. Coupled with more incentives for RTOs through re-structured funding systems, these strategies could significantly impact RPL uptake, but not necessarily address RPL’s emancipatory goals by reaching disenfranchised groups. Simplifying RPL processes should not mean simplistic assessment or the reliance on process without engagement. Skills recognition requires sophisticated and complex assessment practices based on a philosophy of recognition that acknowledges the operations of power and the discursive production of identity. As frequently cited in documents outlining good assessment practice, assessors need to know the job role and have experience of the field in which they are assessing. They also need to be very familiar with the competencies to the point they can put aside the performance criteria and make professional judgments based on a holistic view of a candidate’s abilities. In addition, it is critical they attend to the relationship between themselves and the candidate, the operations of power moving within that relationship and the practices and identities that are discursively produced through the engagement. If we are able to understand RPL in this context, we will practise it with caution and focus more on the relational aspects of the work, providing assessors with narrative and appreciative enquiry skills and the ability to understand cross-cultural perspectives. This approach has the capacity to transform RPL from an under-utilised social resource, to an even more highly effective element of the overall National VET Strategy.
Endnote

1 AISR is the training and education division of Relationships Australia (SA). As an RTO since 1999, the organisation delivers VET qualifications to professional groups and community participants, within a philosophy and practical framework of community development, frequently integrating RPL into broader community work projects.

References


About the author

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Training and development for transitional employment in mature-aged manual workers

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Objectives: The purpose of the current article was to explore perceptions of transitional employment and training and development amongst blue collar workers employed in technical, trade, operations or physical and labour-intensive occupations within the local government system.

Methods: The responses of manual workers to two national surveys conducted by the local government association, namely, the Transitional Employment Survey (TES) and the New Initiative Survey (NIS) were analysed for occupational level differences using Chi square tests.

Results: Three quarters of blue collar workers were interested in phased retirement options. Technicians and operators were content
to retain their current jobs, although technicians seemed to display a more self-directed attitude towards training and development. Tradespersons and labourers were interested in changing jobs, and appeared willing to pursue some training and development. A significant proportion of workers were interested in mentoring.

Conclusion: Blue collar workers were interested in contributing to the future of the organisation via transitional employment. However, they may require support for their health and training needs.

Keywords: transitional employment, blue collar workers, manual workers, training and development.

In Australia, better retention of the ageing workforce is required to avoid skill and labour shortages in the future, and a potentially unsustainable dependency ratio (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2005). The average retirement age for Australian men is 63 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2007). However, mature-aged workers in physically demanding occupations tend to seek early retirement between 55 and 58 years of age, due to retrenchment and lack of suitable alternate employment (ABS 2007). As such, retention of the ageing workforce is more challenging in physically demanding occupations compared with roles where physical demands are lower.

This current study focuses on training and development to extend the working lives of mature-aged blue collar and manual workers within Australian Local Government Association organisations. Previous research (Millward & Brooke 2007, Pillay, Kelly & Tones 2006, Pillay, Kelly & Tones 2008, Wooden, VandenHeuval, Cully & Curtain 2001, Yrjanainen 2008) has identified two main issues for blue collar workers in training and development which affect their likelihood of continuing to working beyond retirement from their career jobs. The first is a lower level of interest or opportunity to participate in transitional employment compared with white collar workers (Pillay
et al. 2008); and the second is the limited formal education or lack of recognition of their education, which precludes job mobility out of roles that pose a health risk (Wooden et al. 2001). For the purpose of this study, transitional employment is defined as paid employment beyond official retirement and may be part-time or full-time (Pillay, Kelly & Tones 2010).

Ilmarinen (2006) states that work conditions faced by low skilled workers often contribute to injury or disease, which in turn force workers into premature retirement. This is evidenced by the large proportions of older males who retire early due to disability in the European Union (Seitsamo 2007) and Australia (OECD 2005). Australian research has shown that white collar workers with a university level of education are more likely to participate in transitional employment than workers with lower levels of formal education (Drew & Drew 2005). A survey of 2,026 mature-age Australian workers from the healthcare, construction and finance industries reported on by Lundberg and Marshallsay (2007) revealed that at least 80% of participants were interested in transitional employment. So, although mature-aged Australians seem committed to transitional employment, working conditions in different industries may differentially affect workers’ opportunities to take advantage of it.

According to Mirowsky and Ross (2005), a higher level of formal qualification accrues cumulative benefits across the lifespan. For instance, access to higher status occupations as a result of a university level of education has the potential to benefit workers via increased training and development opportunities, and decreased likelihood of exposure to physically demanding work conditions or unemployment (Yrjanainen 2008). According to an OECD (2005) report for Australia, employment participation rates are 65% for men aged over 50 years who did not complete secondary school, compared with 85% for those who possess tertiary levels of education. Similarly, Wooden
et al. (2001) notes that prior educational attainment is the most important factor in determining access to training and development, and that blue collar workers are less likely to receive formal training than professionals and managers due to an underlying disparity in education levels.

Training and development has the potential to improve blue collar workers’ ability to continue in employment for several reasons: increased likelihood of further participation in training, preparation for alternate jobs, and learning to use equipment and tools to make their jobs less physically demanding (Ilmarinen 2006, Stuart & Perrett 2006). Research conducted within the Local Government Association of Queensland by Pillay et al. (2006) indicated that blue collar workers perceive fewer learning needs on their current jobs than white collar workers. However, more recent research within the Australian Local Government Association (Pillay et al. 2008, Pillay et al. 2010) has revealed that equal proportions of blue and white collar workers who were interested in transitional employment perceived the need for further training and were willing to engage in learning and development.

Similar findings were reflected in Lundberg and Marshallsay’s (2007) survey which indicated that mature-aged workers from physically demanding occupations were prepared to undergo training and development for transitional employment, particularly to less physically stressful jobs. The study found that over a quarter of the respondents indicated a need for training and development in transitional employment, although construction workers were less likely to report that training would increase their productivity in transitional employment than participants from other sectors. Nevertheless, construction workers’ responses were more positive for training in computer skills and technology compared with other forms of training such as manual handling or communication skills, as they considered that this would improve their employment prospects into
less physically demanding jobs beyond retirement. About 80% of all respondents indicated that training to improve their ability to mentor other workers in learning would be most beneficial. These results suggested that construction workers, while not representative of all blue collar workers, perceived training and development as a path to alternate jobs.

Despite the potential for training and development to improve the employability of older blue collar workers, there are several obstacles to implementation. For instance, findings from the Australian Social Attitudes survey (Martin 2007) indicated that managers, professional and paraprofessionals have improved learning opportunities, presumably since employers believe there is greater need for development on the job for these employees than for workers in sales, service, trades and labour sectors. Only 18% of low status employees indicated seeking opportunities for advancement compared with 32% of high status employees. Similarly, Martin and Pixley (2005) indicate that 30% of low status employees do not get a chance to use their abilities and qualifications at work, compared with 14% of higher status workers. These findings concur with Lundberg and Marshallsay (2007), who report that approximately one-half of low status respondents indicated that suitable training was not available to them, while three-quarters of respondents indicated that training to counter age bias was warranted in their organisation.

Current study

The impetus for the retention of blue collar workers was an increased difficulty in the recruitment of younger employees in the Australian Local Government Association, which was not a preferred employer for younger workers (Pillay et al. 2006). As reported in the literature above, mature-aged workers from blue collar occupations in this Association have limited formal education and transferable skills, and rarely participate in training and development for alternate
employments. However, previous research within local government only served to compare blue and white collar workers’ aspirations for transitional employment and training and development. The current study addressed this issue as it focused on four blue collar occupations which faced the most difficulty in attracting workers—namely, technical, trade, operations and labour. Data reported were obtained from the Transitional Employment Survey (TES; Pillay et al. 2008) and the New Initiative Survey (NIS; Pillay et al. 2010) conducted as part of an Australian Research Council project. The purpose of the project was to identify the aspirations of mature-aged blue collar workers to enable them to remain active and productive in local government following retirement from their careers. The analysis reported in this paper focused on questions related to perceptions of engagement in transitional employment and preparatory training and development.

Method

Procedure

The TES and NIS surveys were developed and trialled with a group of Local Government Association of Queensland employees to ensure the questions addressed the issues under investigation. While the TES asked questions primarily about proposed work arrangements, training and development and employee local government roles and responsibilities in transitional employment, the NIS had an additional focus on employees’ perceptions of their current work environment and prior training and development experiences in local government. Although the TES and NIS surveys were developed to address different overall objectives, both surveys included a section on transitional employment aspirations and associated learning and development needs. It was these questions that were analysed separately and presented in the paper. The first question on the TES and NIS, ‘Are you interested in transitional employment following your official retirement date?’, served as a screening tool. Participants
who did not indicate an interest in transitional employment were omitted from the remainder of the analysis.

Both surveys were uploaded to the Local Government Association of Queensland website and access was given to all sister associations nationally. Employees from the Australian Local Government Association were invited to volunteer to complete the survey over a period of six weeks. To encourage participation, reminders were sent via email, and followed up by training officers.

Sample
A total of 403 manual workers responded to the two online surveys. This group comprised 241 workers over 50 years of age in the TES (41% technical, 12% trade, 24% operations, 23% labour), and 162 workers over the age of 45 years in the NIS (34% technical; 15% trade; 30% operations; 21% labour). The ages of 50 and 45 were selected for the TES and NIS surveys respectively as they correspond to definitions of older workers used by the OECD (2005) and ABS (2007).

Table 1: Education level by occupation level for the TES and NIS samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>University</th>
<th>TAFE</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TES</td>
<td>NIS</td>
<td>TES</td>
<td>NIS</td>
<td>TES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the education level by occupation for the TES and NIS samples. According to the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO), the majority of roles classed as blue collar within local government tend to be lower skilled (ABS 1997). A two way sample by occupation ANOVA revealed a main effect for
occupation ($F = 10.876, p < .01$), and Scheffe tests indicated that technicians possessed a higher level of education than all other blue collar workers. This finding is consistent with ASCO standards, as technicians are classified at the paraprofessional level which requires an Australian Qualifications Framework Diploma or higher level qualification or three years’ experience (ABS 1997). The most common level of education for technicians was a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) qualification, although a significant minority in each sample held a university level qualification. Tradespersons were most likely to hold trade qualifications, although approximately one fifth of TES and NIS respondents held a TAFE qualification. According to the ASCO, tradespersons require a Certificate III or higher, and possibly additional practical experience (ABS 1997), so the educational background of tradespersons in the current study matches this definition. The majority of operators were evenly distributed between TAFE and secondary school qualifications, which match the ASCO standards. Operators within the local government are classified as intermediate production and transport workers, which require either a Certificate II or higher or one year experience (ABS 1997). Although the majority of labourers possessed a secondary level education only, over one-quarter of labourers who responded to the NIS reported having some exposure to university level courses.

**Results**

Seventy eight percent (N=186) of respondents from the TES and 77% (N=126) of respondents from the NIS indicated an interest in transitional employment as they gave a positive response to the first question. Interest in transitional employment did not vary by education or occupation level amongst blue collar workers for the NIS sample. However, for the TES, the more highly educated blue collar workers including technicians (91%), operators (90%) and tradespersons (79%) were more likely to indicate a preference for
transitional employment than labourers (41%), who tended to possess secondary school education only ($\chi^2_{\text{education}} = 55.854, p<.01$, $\chi^2_{\text{occupation}} = 57.994, p<.01$, as evidenced by a Chi-square test).

The responses of blue collar workers who indicated an interest in transitional employment were retained for further analysis (via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences—SPSS). Occupation level differences were evaluated for each survey via a series of Chi-square ($\chi^2$) tests. In instances where occupational groups appeared significantly different, follow-up Chi-square tests were conducted to clarify which occupation levels were responsible for the significant finding. The findings from the Chi-square test analyses for the TES and NIS cohorts are presented separately in the next two sections. For each cohort, significant findings are presented in a table accompanied by a description of the analysis.

Findings from the Transitional Employment Survey

Work conditions in transitional employment: Responses to preferred type of work in transitional employment differed for occupation level (see Table 2). Operators were significantly more likely than labourers to want to remain in their current jobs, while tradespersons were significantly more likely than all other blue collar workers to request slightly different employment for transitional employment. Labourers reported no preference for work type significantly more often than all other occupational categories of blue collar workers. The majority of technicians preferred work that matched their current role, while a significant minority reported no preference. Supervision of transitional employment tended to reflect preferred work types, in that requests for greater deviations from current work type were associated with a preference for increased supervisory presence. Technicians were significantly more likely than operators to request partial supervision, while operators requested no supervision more often than labourers. Supervision as required was
significantly more likely to be preferred by labourers compared with other categories of blue collar workers.

*Training and development for transitional employment:* Several items enquired about preferences for training and development for transitional employment. As shown in Table 2, there was a trend for technicians and operators to attach a very high value to their work related learning and life skills, while labourers were less likely to value to these skills. Laborers revealed a unique profile for training and development, perhaps due to their lower levels of education, or the trend for labourers to request training in new skills or another line of work as evidenced by their responses to questions on work conditions above. Compared with other categories of blue collar workers, they were significantly more likely to request sufficient training for transitional employment which may be due to their uncertainty in alternative employments. In addition, labourers were more likely than other categories of blue collar workers to select the option to undertake training as it was required.
Table 2: Responses to the Transitional Employment Survey by occupation level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Trad.</th>
<th>Oper.</th>
<th>Lab.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions in transitional employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do same work as current job in transitional employment</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.335, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do slightly different work in transitional employment</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=16.085, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference for work type in transitional employment</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=18.028, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial supervision in transitional employment</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=10.280, p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No supervision in transitional employment</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=12.234, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision as required in transitional employment</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=12.793, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and development for transitional employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high value on work related learning/ life skills</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.856, p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium value on work related learning/ life skills</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.856, p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;D for new skills/ another line of work preferred</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=8.553, p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient level of training/ development needed</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=14.339, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to undertake T&amp;D as required</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=13.286, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual roles and responsibilities in transitional employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to commit to greater awareness of the needs of younger workers in transitional employment</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=8.828, p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to commit to learning new skills, where possible in transitional employment</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.388, p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training and development for transitional employment in mature aged manual workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Trad.</th>
<th>Oper.</th>
<th>Lab.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to commit to learning new skills from my colleagues in...</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.971$, $p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personally undertake to assist other staff to learn new skills in...</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=8.153$, $p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* small effect;  b medium effect;  AB significant difference between occupational groups
NB: Tech.—Technician;  Oper.—Operator;  Trad.—Tradesperson;  Lab.—Labourer

**Mutual roles and responsibilities in transitional employment:** The final set of questions related to mutual roles and responsibilities between employees and local government in transitional employment. The majority of items which revealed significant differences for occupation levels related to learning. Technicians and labourers were significantly more likely than tradespersons to indicate that they would learn new skills where possible, while a greater proportion of labourers compared with operators reported that they would learn new skills from colleagues. Operators indicated that they were prepared to be more aware of the needs of younger workers more often than technicians. However, labourers were the most likely to report that they would assist other employees to learn new skills, although a significant difference was only detected between labourers and tradespersons.

**Findings from the New Initiative Survey**

Unlike the responses to the TES, the NIS did not reveal a varying interest in transitional employment according to blue collar occupation level. However, there was a tendency for labourers who responded to the NIS to have a higher level of education than the labourers who participated in the TES. This may explain why the NIS found a greater proportion of labourers interested in transitional employment.
Table 3: Responses to the New Initiative Survey by occupation level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Trad.</th>
<th>Oper.</th>
<th>Lab.</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Conditions for Transitional Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in part-time transitional employment</td>
<td>51%A</td>
<td>13%B</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.353$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like same career in transitional employment</td>
<td>61%A</td>
<td>21%B</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=9.948$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training and Development for Transitional Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like training and development for transitional employment immediately</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%A</td>
<td>2%B</td>
<td>0%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=8.433$,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like training and development for transitional employment when I am ready</td>
<td>63%A</td>
<td>13%B</td>
<td>22%B</td>
<td>21%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=14.442$,</td>
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<td>$p&lt;.01^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal qualifications/ recognition for training and development should be optional</td>
<td>56%A</td>
<td>17%B</td>
<td>16%B</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.545$,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in technical training and development</td>
<td>50%A</td>
<td>13%B</td>
<td>12%C</td>
<td>0%C</td>
<td>$\chi^2=23.173$,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in trade training and development</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%A</td>
<td>4%B</td>
<td>6%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=11.866$,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in professional training and development</td>
<td>38%A</td>
<td>4%B</td>
<td>8%B</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=12.783$,</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to develop skills face to face and online</td>
<td>44%A</td>
<td>0%B</td>
<td>27%C</td>
<td>15%D</td>
<td>$\chi^2=13.372$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer to develop skills on the job</td>
<td>50%A</td>
<td>13%B</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>$\chi^2=7.893$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.05^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and development should be available in working hours and own time</td>
<td>44%A</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%B</td>
<td>9%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=12.014$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to assist in the training and development of other workers</td>
<td>88%A</td>
<td>54%B</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=10.409$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.05^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to train other workers in my field</td>
<td>97%A</td>
<td>50%B</td>
<td>65%C</td>
<td>62%B</td>
<td>$\chi^2=19.861$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$p&lt;.01^b$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a small effect; b medium effect; ABCD significant difference between occupational groups
NB: Tech.—Technician; Oper.—Operator; Trad.—Tradesperson; Lab.—Labourer
Work conditions in transitional employment: When asked about potential work arrangements in transitional employment, significant differences emerged between technicians and tradespersons, while the responses of operators and labourers fell between the two extremes (see Table 3). Specifically, technicians were more likely than tradespersons to be interested in part-time transitional employment within their current careers.

Training and development for transitional employment: Blue collar workers in the NIS did not vary by categories of occupation in their reported training needs. Consistent with a lower proportion of interest in maintaining the same career in transitional employment, tradespersons who reported a need for training and development requested to participate immediately to build additional capacities. However, they also requested more technical ‘trade content’ in training more often than other blue collar workers. For both the above items, significant differences were observed between tradespersons, and operators and labourers.

Technicians exhibited a unique pattern in preferences for the training and development items. They were more likely than other categories of blue collar workers to indicate that they would commence training when they were ready. The other significant differences between technicians, tradespersons and operators suggested that technicians preferred formal qualifications and recognition to be optional rather than compulsory. With regards to training content, the findings revealed that a greater proportion of technicians were interested in technical and professional training content compared with other categories of blue collar workers.

Participants were asked which training modalities they preferred including face-to-face, online learning and on-the-job training. Technicians were more likely to endorse all of these modes compared with tradespersons, while operators and labourers were also less likely to respond to face-to-face and online learning. Compared with
operators and labourers, technicians reported that they were more likely to commit to training and development during both work hours and their own time. Together, these findings for technicians may be consistent with an interest in pursuing alternative employment within a professional role or updating technical skills. Significantly fewer technicians than all other categories of blue collar workers indicated an interest in training other workers within their own work area.

**Discussion**

The findings show that blue collar mature-aged workers in the current study are a heterogeneous group in terms of prior education level, interest in transitional employment and perceived training and development needs. Despite these differences, the findings indicate that almost 80% of blue collar workers value transitional employment opportunities, which was a comparable proportion for white collar workers as reported by Lundberg and Marshallsay (2007). In addition, blue collar workers did not vary by occupation category in their reported need for training and development to participate in transitional employment. The blue collar workers’ apparent commitment to training and development was supported by an earlier analysis of NIS data (Pillay et al. 2010), which found no difference in blue and white collar workers’ reported need for training and development provided that they were interested in transitional employment.

*Technicians:* The technician category presented a unique group amongst the blue collar workers, as they reported the highest level of education, and their work environment was more likely to be indoors and less physically demanding than for other categories of blue collar workers. The TES findings indicated that technicians valued their work-related learning and life skills very highly, and were interested in furthering their skills under appropriate supervision to seek transitional employment. Support for this self-directed learning
by the technicians was also evident in the NIS findings. Perhaps
the higher level of education enables the confidence to undertake
self-directed training and development. The findings of an interest
in upgrading skills in their current field or pursuing professional
opportunities suggest that technicians may intend to upgrade from
technical to professional occupations. As such, the majority of
technicians may be confident and motivated to learn for transitional
employment. The potential to progress to more advanced technical
or professional roles may account for the surveyed technicians
envisaging staying within their current careers as part-time
employees when they progress to transitional employment. Sharing
knowledge and skills with co-workers and acting as mentors were
also valued by mature-aged technicians as a possible role for them in
transitional employment.

*Tradespersons:* Similar to the findings for technicians,
tradespersons saw transitional employment as an opportunity
for change. Their responses suggested lower confidence and self-
directedness than technicians, possibly due to differences in
educational backgrounds. Findings from both the TES and NIS
studies suggested that tradespersons were interested in transitional
employment that differed from their current work environment,
that is, they were seeking a change. Furthermore, both surveys
indicated that tradespersons were the least willing of any blue collar
category to value on-the-job learning, and training or mentoring
other workers. This is an interesting finding that requires further
investigation because most training for trade occupations has a
significant component of on-the-job training. Often lack of support
for on-the-job-training and other resource and time deficiencies
compromises workers’ capacity to do additional formal learning
and such experience during transitional employment could devalue
the benefits of informal learning and knowledge sharing. However,
tradespersons were less likely to request training and development in
their responses to the NIS compared with other blue collar workers.
The tradespersons who did indicate a need for training emphasised the provision of training as and when necessary.

Unfortunately, both the TES and NIS respondents provided limited information with respect to the forms of work and training and development that may be appropriate to mature-aged tradespersons and what forms of human resource development, support and incentive may be necessary. The majority of tradespersons specified their education level as “trade”, which suggests that their formal training is aligned to their occupation and therefore highly specialised. As such, because of the specificity of trade qualifications, they may be less transferable than other TAFE or university qualifications and perhaps more difficult to articulate the forms of training and development that may suit ageing tradespersons. The other possibility is that, via a strong professional identify nurtured through their education and work experiences, tradespersons have strong and close identity with their work role, and are reluctant to undertake transitions to alternate jobs.

Operators: Despite the lower level of education of operators compared with technicians, operators were similarly willing to participate in transitional employment, as observed in both the TES and NIS findings. Operators’ strongest preference for transitional employment was to remain in one’s current job as a mentor, and this was a finding common to both survey groups. There seemed to be interest in a nurturing and training role to younger workers in their area. Operators according to OHS studies are more likely to suffer from financial and health issues in mature age because of their long hours of sitting, exposure to whole body vibration, and working in difficult postures (Yrjanainen 2008), and were more likely to endorse gym membership and savings advice options in the human resource development, support and incentives question.

Findings from the TES indicated that a significant minority of operators were interested in learning new skills and sharing skills
with other workers for transitional employment; however, they were least likely to report colleagues as a source for learning. It is possible that the work environment of operators reduces opportunities for contact with colleagues and skill sharing. The work tasks of operators may be perceived as less physically demanding than labourers. Although operators were keen to learn and develop to seek transitional employment, like the tradespersons, their aspirations for training and development were not clearly defined.

Labourers: Results from the TES indicate a need to motivate an interest in transitional employment amongst labourers who in general lacked motivation to engage with work beyond retirement. By contrast, labourers who participated in the NIS were more willing to participate in transitional employment. However, the discrepancy in interest in transitional employment between the TES and NIS groups reported by labourers suggests that the underlying issue was a lack of formal education amongst the labourers who completed the TES. As a result of their limited education, labourers from the TES sample appeared less confident in their ability to develop work-related learning and life skills, and were less directed in their career options for transitional employment. This is consistent with other research on manual workers with limited formal education (Stuart & Perrett 2006). The responses of labourers interested in transitional employment suggested a strong commitment to training and development, as well as assisting others to learn. This was reflected in both the TES and NIS data sets. However, unlike tradespersons and operators, the work environment for labourers appeared to be more conducive for skill sharing, as a higher proportion of labourers from the TES reported that they would both learn from and assist the learning of colleagues through a learning community type of approach.

A less distinctive pattern for labourers’ training and development preferences was observed in the NIS data, possibly due to the possession of an education level comparable with tradespersons.
and operators in the NIS sample. In general, response patterns of operators and labourers were comparable for the NIS, and in between the extremes of technicians and labourers. Comparable with the TES, a statistically significant minority of labourers responded to on-the-job training in the NIS.

Limitations

The current study had small numbers in the cohorts of labourers and tradespersons, which was further reduced by excluding respondents not interested in transitional employment. Given that much communication about opportunities for learning and development happens through online communications, limited access to technology may partly explain the small sample size of these groups as the survey was available only online. The sampling technique may have also enabled a bias towards blue collar workers with higher levels of formal education, as was observed amongst the labourers in the NIS data set.

In addition, participants who indicated lack of interest in transitional employment were not required to complete the remainder of the survey. So it was not possible to compare responses of participants who were either interested or not interested in transitional employment on working conditions and training and development issues covered by the TES and NIS. Lastly, the education level classification “TAFE” did not distinguish between certificate and diploma level qualifications, which may have produced greater variation between the higher status technical and trade occupations, and the lower status operator and labour occupations in terms of education level and interest in transitional employment.

Implications for management/human resources and trainers of adult learners

Findings from the current study hold implications for management and human resource personnel generally within the Australian Local
Government Association, but particularly for educators and trainers of mature-aged workers in blue collar settings. The most significant finding from the current study was that for blue collar workers, occupation type influences preferences for work conditions, training and development, as well as other issues related to transitional employment. Second, the underlying education level of blue collar workers appeared to affect their level of interest in transitional employment. Therefore, it would seem logical that interest in transitional employment could be increased amongst blue collar workers if education levels were upgraded.

Labourers who responded to the TES indicated a high preference for training and development to support them engaging in transitional employment. This finding concurs with Gelade, Catts and Gerber (2003) who identified several criteria for good practice in training educationally disadvantaged mature persons. They suggested that the selection of learning content that is relevant to the learner motivates and encourages involvement. Furthermore, small class sizes and practical learning without formal assessment enables the educationally less advantaged mature labourers to build on their achievement through small steps (Gelade et al. 2003). The process of learning is facilitated by tutors who are skilled at reassuring learners and identifying their needs which was recognised by many of the technicians and tradespersons (Gelade et al. 2003).

The informal community learning described by Gelade et al. (2003) can be applied to on-the-job training to initiate mature-aged blue collar workers in learning and development and gradually lead them to participate in formal education. The other option adopted by Local Government in Queensland is to provide opportunities for recognition of prior learning as a stepping-stone to articulation into formal education. However, the potential of informal or on-the-job learning may be limited by job tasks in routinised jobs, or constraints imposed by occupational health and safety regulations, as may be the case for tradespersons, operators and labourers. Thus, informal learning
may not be sufficient to train blue collar workers for alternate jobs, although it has been used in German settings (Rowald & Kauffeld 2009). Given blue collar workers’ interest in mentoring, especially by the operators, informal or formal learning could be incorporated for training trainers, which is also supported by Australian literature (Lundberg & Marshallsay 2007, Pillay et al. 2010).

Blue collar workers’ preference to remain in their current or a similar job for transitional employment can become problematic, as the current study showed for tradespersons and operators. While minimising potentially harmful work conditions has been shown to improve the work ability of mature-aged workers (Ilmarinen 2006), such measures may be too late to retain blue collar workers who are either of advanced age or living with health problems. At present, the Local Government Association of Queensland has adopted several different in-house schemes aimed at improving mature-aged workers’ abilities. These include online self-assessment of prior experience and skills, recognition of prior learning, industry approved courses, mixed age teams and induction programs (Pillay et al. 2005). These strategies could also be targeted to blue collar workers with limited formal education or who are reluctant to commit to retraining, and this approach is more likely to be successful than formal training with external providers.

Previous analysis of the TES has revealed that blue collar employees with a TAFE or university education report greater comfort with external training providers (Pillay et al. 2008). Recommendations to improve training access amongst mature-aged employees from non-professional or non-managerial occupations in Australia proposed by the OECD (2005) include encouraging mature-aged workers to take advantage of current training opportunities and the creating of additional training opportunities, as well as increased employer-funded training, possibly via partnerships with trade unions and governments. Smith and Billett (2004) further suggest
the recognising of organisations that contribute to employee
development, educating employers about the merits of investments
in training, subsidising training, and industry regulation to ensure
consistent access to training and development.

Further research and conclusions

The current study focused on the relationship between occupation
levels of blue collar workers and their aspirations for transitional
employment and its associated training and development. The
findings reveal that occupation level produced differing profiles of
transitional employment aspirations. Further, education level affected
intention to participate in transitional employment. However,
transitional employment aspirations of blue collar workers are
also affected by other factors that influence retirement decisions
such as health and finances. It would be useful to undertake a
more comprehensive study that takes these other factors into
consideration. European research on working conditions and work
ability provide some ideas about possible methods for such studies
(e.g. Ilmarinen 2006). It would also be valuable to plot the impact
of education and training on blue collar workers’ lives which would
necessitate longitudinal research.

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Effective employment-based training models for childcare workers

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Childcare workers play a significant role in the learning and development of children in their care. This has major implications for the training of workers. Under new reforms of the childcare industry, the Australian government now requires all workers to obtain qualifications from a vocational education and training provider (e.g. Technical and Further Education) or university. Effective models of employment-based training are critical to provide training to highly competent workers. This paper presents findings from a study that examined current and emerging models of employment-based training in the childcare sector, particularly at the Diploma level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 16 participants who represented childcare directors, employers and workers located in childcare services in urban, regional and remote locations in the State of Queensland. The study proposes a ‘best-fit’ employment-based training approach that is characterised by a compendium of five models instead of a ‘one size fits all’. Issues with successful implementation of employment-based training models are also discussed.
Introduction

 Demands for early childhood care and education continues to grow rapidly in Australia. Whereas the need for care of children until pre-school by childcare workers remains a key requirement, there is now a higher expectation for their early learning and education as part of that care (Elliot 2004). Better skilled workers are needed to meet this trend in demands for learning and education services. A recent review of literature by Choy, Bowman, Billett, Wignall and Haukka (2008) suggests that new effective employment-based training (EBT) models are now essential not only at the Certificate III level but also at the Advanced Diploma level to meet projected high future growth in employment at the paraprofessional level (Department of Employment and Training 2005, Department of Education and Training 2006, Australian Industry Group 2005). Emerging EBT models need to meet not only the macro-economic needs of Australia but also the operational needs of industry and the personal needs of workers. Therefore, quality EBT is about meeting the needs of three main players to ensure quality skills outcomes that contribute effectively in maintaining and developing further the national economy. Effective models of EBT need to meet the needs of learners to participate in education and training while earning. They must allow employers to support learning and remain competitive within the marketplace. The models also need to enable the vocational education and training providers (or registered training organisations—RTOs) to facilitate (flexibly) the EBT arrangements.

This paper is based on a national research study conducted by Choy et al. (2008) that explored existing models of employment-based training to propose a compendium of five effective models. It begins by briefly describing the context of childcare services in Australia and then explains the concept of EBT. An overview of the research method to collect data for the study is provided before presenting the ‘best-fit’ EBT models. The models are held to: (i) be pedagogically sound, (ii)
lead to quality skill formation, (iii) have positive outcomes for both individuals and the straight enterprises, (iv) be functionally operative, and (iv) be effectively enacted and sustained over time. Hence, they have applications in other industries as well as outside Queensland and Australia. Issues impacting on successful implementation of these models are also discussed.

**Childcare in Australia**

Childcare services in Australia are available through long day care centres, kindergartens, family day care schemes, occasional care, school age care and in-home care. These services and qualification requirements are regulated and set by legislations in each jurisdiction (State/Territory). Hence there are disparities across Australia.

Workers in the childcare services are grouped into three levels of employment: senior (director/coordinator), middle (assistant director/group leader/teacher), and assistant. A director requires an Advanced Diploma or degree, a group leader a Diploma and an assistant a Certificate III qualification. Workers gain qualifications from universities (degree or postgraduate) or vocational education and training (VET) providers comprising Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and private training providers. The VET qualifications sit within the Community Services Training Package and range from Certificate II to IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children’s Services).

There is demand for higher levels of skills above the Certificate III level for workers to professionally provide the learning and developmental needs of children and to meet the emerging needs for special services, especially from those with complex needs and from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Surprisingly, although there was a rise in enrolments for training at the Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) noted a nation-wide shortage of
qualified childcare coordinators and workers who require these qualifications. This was largely due to poor completion rates and inadequacies in current models of EBT that limit the types of skills development required by childcare workers.

Although demands for early childhood education and care continue to increase, there is little consistency in regulations between jurisdictions and a high number of workers with minimum or no qualifications. In Queensland, for instance, enrolment in a course is mandatory, although there is no pressure to complete the qualification within any set period. In South Australia, childcare centres are required to have a minimum number of qualified staff on duty, based on the number of children in care. For example, there must be at least one qualified staff member for every 35 children aged two years and over. An approved qualification is a tertiary qualification in childcare or early childhood education (South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services 2008). In Victoria, workers are required to have at least a Certificate III in Children’s Services or training that is substantially equivalent to or superior to a Certificate III (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Education 2009). Some consistency in qualifications is expected following the Commonwealth Government endorsement for childcare workers with a VET or university qualification. However, this will take time as several key issues (e.g. training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes) need to be addressed.

With greater numbers of parents in employment and increasing demand for longer hours of operations, the expansion of the childcare sector will undoubtedly continue. The search for better EBT models to prepare childcare workers is imperative. Effective EBT models for childcare workers need a sound theoretical basis and must be practical in terms of their operations. Furthermore, current issues
and barriers with EBT for childcare workers need to be addressed for more successful EBT.

Research by Misko (2003) and later by the Community Services Ministers’ Advisory Council (2006) show the main issues and barriers include: low wages, limited opportunities for career progression, low community recognition and status, lack of qualified and experienced workers to supervise trainees, and low levels of formal support for new recruits and graduates. Compared to workers in other sectors with similar levels of responsibilities for care and education of children, childcare workers appear to be short-changed. Other research (e.g. by the Office of Early Childhood Education 2008, COAG 2008, Australian Labour Party 2007) show that 40% of childcare workers in Australia do not have formal qualifications, one in five childcare workers leaves the occupation every year, and two out of three people who enrol in a childcare course do not complete it. These findings are alarming. The childcare workforce will continue to experience shortage and under-rated quality in services unless these issues are addressed.

**Existing employment-based training models**

Employment-based training models in Australia engage learners through contemporary and situated practice in the workplace, and last long enough to provide a repertoire of experiences. While in the workplace, learners have opportunities to engage with experts and complete formal course components. They are assessed and certified while practising their vocation.

Three models of EBT are commonly used by the VET sector: fast track options, higher level VET qualifications through college-based and apprenticeship models, and access programs for young people, immigrants and refugees.
Fast track options

Fast-tracking options, used mainly to address immediate skills shortage, offer accelerated progression by shortening the duration of training. It reflects a truly competency-based approach—intensive up-front training followed by work-based learning to ensure trainees contribute productively when in the workplace. Even though workers/apprentices in the sector have the opportunity to fast track the completion of their qualification, this model is not so popular because employers value experiences gained from a number of settings.

Higher level VET qualifications

Higher level VET qualifications, gained through an apprenticeship or by undertaking a vocational course, aim to provide learners with middle-level workforce skills. This model offers blended learning approaches to those enrolled at the Diploma level or above. Childcare workers develop higher level skills through a combination of on-the-job training and off-the-job training that is facilitated in face-to-face and online modes. Apprentices who are in full-time employment are normally permitted varying periods of study time, yet many are expected to complete the formal learning tasks in their own time. While this type of arrangement works for apprentices who are more self-directed and motivated, others prefer time during working hours to complete learning tasks. The model is pedagogically sound in terms of providing experiences of the vocational practice, duration and link to formal education. However, it is limited by a lack of expert support in the workplace, and poor assessment and certification.

Access programs

In Australia, access programs are preparatory, prevocational or bridging courses designed to provide people with extra skills or confidence in order to enter vocational education and training (DET 2009). Many providers offer these programs to help people to improve their study, reading or workforce skills. Under these
programs, school students aged over 17 years can commence a Certificate III qualification through a School-based Traineeship that allows them to work as an assistant one day a week. For young people who are not at school, employment-based apprenticeship provides an alternative to join the industry. However, employers prefer to recruit workers who have experience with children and display ‘maturity’ when dealing with children. The Certificate III in Children’s Services offers learning and employment opportunities for many adult immigrants and refugees interested in joining the sector. However, individuals need to organise assessment of workplace learning to meet the requirements of the syllabus. Regardless of the qualifications, effective employment-based training models are essential for childcare workers.

**Method**

The research adopted the qualitative technique of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 16 participants who represented childcare directors, employers and workers. This was a convenience sample, with the researchers relying on the accessibility and availability of the volunteer participants during the period of data collection. The sample was located in childcare services in urban, regional and remote locations in the State of Queensland. Some services were privately owned and operating state-wide, and others were community and/or church-based. Although the sample size is small and is not representative of all stakeholders, the issues and views expressed by the interviewees are consistent with findings reported in literature.

The interview questions explored experiences with vocational education and training (VET) for Certificate III and higher level qualifications. The study explored the capacity of various models to produce quality outcomes and be practical. The interviews included discussions around:
formal education opportunities to engage with knowledge about the vocation;

- experiences of vocational practice in the workplace, or the enactment of the occupation for which they are preparing;

- opportunities to engage with experts who can guide the learner, monitor their progress and provide direct assistance for things they will not learn through discovery alone;

- duration of the training and whether it was long enough to learn and practise the repertoire of vocational knowledge and skills required; and

- assessment and certification practices.

Other issues that influence functional aspects of the models such as regulations, administrative and licensing arrangements, wage rates, and their links to work situations were also discussed. Data were collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews, and via emails using a set of interview questions. Most of the data was collected via telephone interviews because of difficulties with access due to the geographic spread of the sites. Besides, sites visits required an official Blue Card which the researchers could not obtain within the timelines of the project. The conversations were recorded as handwritten notes which were typed and returned to participants via email for confirmation.

‘Best-fit employment’ based training models

The findings confirmed a need to revisit and revise models of EBT, yet retain and extend the effective features of existing models. For instance:

- The childcare industry must have direct input into the mix of theory and practice in high quality vocational courses for apprenticeships. The theoretical component needs to be integrated on-the-job where apprentices can work with qualified staff at the same time learn and discuss observations/activities with them.
• Learning resources that are less academic in nature tend to assist new apprentices with their learning.
• Sets of skills/competencies grouped for assessment and recognition makes the process a lot more practical.
• Improved processes for recognition of prior learning and experiences with children would reduce the duration of apprenticeships.
• A clear pathway through the Australian Qualifications Framework (commonly known as the AQF) that articulates the roles and responsibilities of qualified staff is also needed. The AQF is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (TAFEs and private providers) and the higher education sector (mainly universities) (DEEWR, 2009). Workers at the Director level, enrolled in a Diploma, need to have staff to supervise them to ensure that they do not contravene the conditions of training.
• Lastly, it is essential that all workplace assessors have up-to-date knowledge of the sector so that they can provide the necessary support to apprentices.

Elements of effective EBT models
Overall, EBT models need to be pedagogically sound, lead to quality skill formation, have positive outcomes for both individuals and enterprises, be functionally operative, and be effectively enacted and sustained over time. The strength of EBT in pedagogical terms lies in its provision of experiential learning in workplaces, which complements experiences in educational institutions. Five main elements of EBT make this an effective approach to developing vocational competence.

• First, the workplace offers experiences of the vocational practice. It provides a context for learners to access and develop the kinds of knowledge (i.e. conceptual, procedural and dispositional) that is available in settings where occupational practice occurs (Brown
1998, Billett & Boud 2001), and which are essential for the exercise of that vocational practice. It is in these settings where learners make meanings by contextualising the content within such environments.

- Second, the duration of EBT provides the possibility of developing, building, refining and honing skills over time.
- Third, learners get opportunities to engage with experts who possess the knowledge to be learnt, who can guide the learner, monitor their progress and provide direct assistance for things they will not learn through discovery alone.
- Fourth, the links to formal education through integration of on- and off-the-job training is a key feature to ensure theoretical aspects are understood and the provision of a broader learning experience than what the enterprise itself might offer.
- Finally, learning during EBT is assessed and certified to permit the learners to practise their vocation in circumstances other than where it was acquired. The competency-based training approach allows assessment of competence when individuals are deemed ready. This means learners could complete their training outcomes quickly and join the workforce as qualified, productive workers.

Five proposed models

Considering the diverse nature of childcare sites, and variations in the learning needs of childcare workers, a compendium of five models, instead of a ‘one size fits all’, is suggested for effective training. (For more details, see Choy et al. 2008).

1. Traditional entry-level training model features sets of learning experiences in both the workplace and educational settings across the duration of the entry-level period of training (i.e. between one and four years). Theoretically, this model is needed in the childcare sector, particularly for the skill and career development of lower-level childcare workers. It requires an effective integration of experiences and support in both educational and workplace settings.
2. *Accelerated entry-level training model* assists selected learners to progress speedily through the process of skill development with more effective and intense experiences in both the workplace and education institution. This model requires participants to be carefully selected on the basis of predicted performance. Their learning experiences in both the workplace and educational settings need to be carefully organised and maximised, and learners’ progress must be closely monitored.

3. *Internship entry-level preparation model* provides for a period of employment related learning beyond the completion of an expedited entry-level training process that would initially lead the worker-learner to be afforded the status of ‘internee’. This model also requires participants to be carefully selected on the basis of predicted performance, their experiences in both the workplace and educational settings carefully organised and maximized, and a clear process of monitoring learners’ progress. This is to be followed by a managed and supported provision of probationary work within the workplace.

4. *Extension model of entry-level preparation* is intended for mature workers or those who are entering the particular occupation after or on the basis of success in another occupation. Learners must have maturity, a level of educational achievement and be located in employment that will permit a conscious focus on blending through work activity, over a period of time, and supported by educational provision which is provided outside of work time.

5. *Extension model for further development* is intended for mature workers or those who already have completed their initial occupational development and have some experience. It is recommended for learners who are able to engage in a program of study which meets their personal and professional needs, yet is aligned also to the interests and activities of
the current employment. It is likely that these learners will be sufficiently mature and possess a level of educational achievement that will permit them to study in a relatively independent way.

For those workers pursuing higher level qualifications at the Diploma level or above, the study found the *extension model for further development* (option 5) to be the ‘best-fit’ model for the childcare sector. It is a fully worked-based apprenticeship providing workers with rich employment-based experiences whilst meeting regulatory requirements, supported by educational provisions that mainly occur outside of work time; and does not require attendance at the educational institution during the working day. To assist the workers/apprentices develop their occupational capacities, employment-based experiences augment an extension kind of further educational provision, such as in the evening, at weekends or by distance. The educational provider, workplace and worker/apprentice share the responsibility of securing a rich integration of experiences. The model also requires and expects learners to be self-directed in their learning.

The proposed models of EBT seek to address the overall goal of providing good preparation for worthwhile jobs and, in doing so, address the kinds of characteristics required of effective EBT models. That is, these models are held to:

- be pedagogically sound
- lead to quality skill formation
- have positive outcomes for both individuals and enterprises
- be functionally operative
- be effectively enacted and sustained over time.

The alignment between these characteristics and the proposed models is briefly mapped in Table 1.

Successful implementation of the five models of EBT in the childcare sector would require adjustments to suit the needs of workers and
their workplaces. It would require attention to a number of complex issues such as training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes which limit the effectiveness of EBT models to be addressed.

**Issues limiting the effectiveness of EBT models**

Issues such as disparities between licensing and training regulations, wages, quality of graduates and assessment processes impact on current models of EBT.

**Training regulations**

Requirements in Queensland’s *Child Care Regulation 2003* around the number of staff required on the floor at any given time places constraints on quality time for supervision or for completing learning activities during operating hours. There is no incentive on the employer’s part to encourage trainees to become qualified because ‘enrolment’ is accepted as ‘qualified’ for all levels of occupation under the Queensland legislation. This legislation allows employers to:

... engage workers without the necessary qualification if the engaged person has the required qualification of the level below, as long as they start a relevant course for the position they are engaged in within six months and complete the course within the prescribed finishing period (Queensland Community Services and Health Industry Training Council 2005: 10).

One employer said that providing the mandatory four hours per week study time to three workers meant that they were not available for 12 hours in the rooms. A couple of employers admitted that at times they had breached the training regulations because they could not remove workers from the floor without breaching the childcare regulations.

The mandatory four hours per week study time for the Cert III trainees is an issue. With three trainees that is 12 hours not available to the rooms and some rostering to make sure that we are consistently meeting the regulations (Employer, community based remote).
### Table 1  Alignment between conceptual premises and proposed models

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>1. Traditional’ entry level training model</th>
<th>2. ‘Accelerated’ entry level training model</th>
<th>3. Internship entry level preparation model</th>
<th>4. Extension model of entry level preparation</th>
<th>5. Extension model for further development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogically sound</td>
<td>Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings.</td>
<td>Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings, but carefully calibrated to assist effective skill development in shorter time span.</td>
<td>Sequenced integration of experiences in work and educational settings, in both earlier accelerated program and through opportunities to hone and extend skills in interns’ final year.</td>
<td>Provision of experiences in work and educational settings. Learners play a key role in the direction and integration of experiences, particularly those in the educational setting.</td>
<td>Provision of experiences in work and educational settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality skill formation</td>
<td>Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings.</td>
<td>Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings, and careful management of experiences and monitoring of accelerated learning.</td>
<td>Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational settings, and careful management of experiences and monitoring of accelerated learning, and internship year.</td>
<td>Skill formation over time and through support in both workplace and educational setting.</td>
<td>Specialising through further skill formation over time and with support in both workplace and educational setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>1. Traditional’ entry level training model</td>
<td>2. ‘Accelerated’ entry level training model</td>
<td>3. Internship entry level preparation model</td>
<td>4. Extension model of entry level preparation</td>
<td>5. Extension model for further development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality outcomes for individuals and enterprises</td>
<td>Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.</td>
<td>Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.</td>
<td>Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes.</td>
<td>Development of industry and enterprise-level skills that provide learners with employability and industry adaptable outcomes, with a particular emphasis on personal and professional development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionally operative</td>
<td>Traditional model well accepted in many industries.</td>
<td>A model that some enterprises have requested to be introduced.</td>
<td>A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.</td>
<td>Traditional model well accepted in many industries, which relies on the maturity of the learners.</td>
<td>Traditional model well accepted in many industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively enacted and sustained</td>
<td>Demonstrated capacity for it to be enacted and sustained.</td>
<td>A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.</td>
<td>A model requiring the commitment of enterprises to secure outcomes, and support the level of competence they are requesting.</td>
<td>Demonstrated capacity for it to be enacted and sustained</td>
<td>Traditional model well accepted in many industries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following a recent review of the qualifications provision in the legislation to develop a new regulatory framework and recognise the link between the qualification levels of staff working in childcare and the quality of the care provided, the Queensland Department of Communities (2007) recommended a reduction in the time that assistants and directors must enrol in a course from six months to three months. The prescribed finishing times are yet to be established. These changes may satisfy some employers who were deterred from employing apprentices because of the lengthy timeframe for completion. The Department of Communities did acknowledge the concerns that employers have in relation to the ‘quality and delivery of training modules, competencies and programs, and to consistency of practice and level of involvement and interaction between Registered Training Organisations and their students’ (p. 49). As these concerns were outside the scope of their review, the Department referred them to the relevant Government department in the State. As a result, it did not review the disparities between the licensing and training regulations.

Wages

Wages in the childcare sector are too low for the kind of work done, particularly when compared with wages in other sectors/industries. The average weekly wage for childcare workers in the current Children Services Award—State 2006 is $807.60—13% lower than the average weekly wage of $912.50 for employees in general (Wageline 2009, ABS 2009). One worker/apprentice stated that the experience needed to be a group leader is equivalent to that of a worker on the Metal Industry award, yet what she receives is a percentage of the trade rate. Because of the lack of clarity about roles, some workers/apprentices were taking on responsibilities above their levels and not being paid for doing so. Poor wages means that employers find it difficult to attract and retain good workers. This situation is well known, as reported by Watson (2006) who noted
that ‘employees in the childcare sector experience lower pay, less recognition, fewer opportunities for professional development, and poorer working condition than their counterparts in schools and pre-schools...’ (p. 14).

Quality of graduates

Some employers were dissatisfied with the quality of graduates and preferred not to employ school-leavers who proceeded as fast as possible through the qualification structure. They criticised the current training arrangements for apprentices for not providing an indication of a person’s ability to work with children:

To gain the skills we need, we do our own training to meet the standards. ... generally speaking, no one is meeting the standard. There is a huge variation in the quality. At all levels, registered training organisations train in the cheap and easy skills sets, such as OHS, but there is little application of knowledge and so although they may know not to have electrical cords hanging over benches, no one will attend to this or see it as being needed to do. They can tell you this as knowledge but that is where it stays; the emphasis on theory and only compliance knowledge, not action to remedy (Employer, large state-wide operator).

Employers found it difficult to recruit experienced workers, so a majority of workers are aged under 25 years with limited experience in the sector. One employer commented on the usefulness of School-based Traineeships as a means of recruiting assistants, explaining that saying one day per week onsite did not provide consistency for children, nor enough time to practise any activity. On the other hand, two employers supported School-based Traineeships, stating that the experiences provide students with an opportunity to decide whether childcare work is for them.

Assessment processes

In one way or another, all directors and employers were critical of assessment processes. They criticised the limited integration of theory
into practice, relevance of workbooks, lack of a tool kit/resource box of activities, and the use of essays and alien language, which particularly affected workers/apprentices with literacy problems and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many directors and employers preferred assessment methods where apprentices can demonstrate a range of integrated competencies through an activity. They called for an improved recognition process for experienced unqualified workers, shifting away from learners having to demonstrate competency in a single instance to a single assessor to groupings of skills sets for recognition. Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of teachers and workplace assessors modelling or demonstrating the necessary interpersonal skills to work with children and colleagues.

Many employers were concerned that assessors from VET institutions have no or little experience in the sector. One employer stated that some TAFE trainers and assessors were unable to keep up to speed with multiple dynamics such as simultaneous reviews of the training package, food standards, childcare benefits and service standards, and qualifications. Some employers avoided graduates from RTOs well known in their circles for lacking in quality. They compared RTOs that oblige with the required two site visits for on-the-job training during the period of an apprenticeship with those RTOs that offer responsive telephone contact and visits every three weeks. As a result, some childcare services are now RTOs, offering apprenticeships to their existing staff and providing training that they consider is high quality. One director held a professional development evening each week to link theory to practice for all workers undertaking study, whether it was within an apprenticeship model or through vocational courses.

**National and State policy initiatives**

National and State policy initiatives are attempting to address some of these issues. For instance, the Council of Australian Governments
(COAG) has committed $1 billion for substantial reforms to early childhood education and care (Australian Government 2008). The Government has already allocated $60.3 million to remove TAFE fees for around 8,000 students enrolling in a Diploma or Advanced Diploma of Children’s Services.

The Queensland Government’s *Children’s Services Skilling Plan 2006–2009* provided existing eligible workers with access to subsided training to gain the qualifications required by the *Child Care Act 2002* (Department of Employment and Training—DET and Department of Communities—DOC 2006). The Health and Community Services Workforce Council, on behalf of the Queensland Government, has developed a *Child Care Skills Formation Strategy* to address causes of skills shortages (i.e. the profile of the sector, systemic barriers, recruitment, retention and working conditions, and quality practice) and to undertake future workforce planning. To date, the Queensland Government has established a career pathway from VET to bachelors or graduate certificates, and developed a professional development course to engage participants in a comprehensive study of theoretical and practical issues involved in establishing, administering and improving programs that cater for children and families (Workforce Council 2007).

**Summary**

The compendium of five EBT models proposed in this paper is based on a recent exploratory study (Choy et al. 2008). The models are: ‘Traditional’ entry level training model; ‘Accelerated’ entry level training model; Internship entry level preparation model; Extension model of entry level preparation; and Extension model for further development. These models are argued to be pedagogically sound, potentially lead to quality skill formation, offer positive outcomes for both individuals and their enterprises, to be functionally operative, and can be effectively enacted and sustained over time.
However, successful implementation of these models requires strong partnerships between workers/apprentices, employers, RTOs, government bodies and other supporting agents. Furthermore, successful implementation of effective EBT models in the childcare sector needs all parties to address ongoing issues of recruitment and retention of staff, unattractive career paths, wages and conditions, course delivery, quality of graduates, and disparities between the licensing and training regulations.

Increasing demand for places and longer hours of operations, shortage of childcare workers, and greater emphasis on quality of care and early education are intensifying pressure on the sector. Although the ‘hands-on’ nature of the work remains unchanged, workers are expected to be qualified, increasingly at the paraprofessional level. Governments in Australia have pledged a commitment to address these complex and persistent issues in the childcare sector.

**Acknowledgement**

_The authors acknowledge the contributions of Prof. Stephen Billett, Dr Kaye Bowman and Ms Louise Wignall to the research that formed the basis of this paper, the support of NCVER and the Commonwealth government. We appreciate very much the advice from employers, employees, and other representatives of the childcare industries, who participated in the research._

**References**


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Becoming an Australian citizen: Some dimensions of assessing a citizenship-type literacy amongst adults

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Adjunct Associate Professor
La Trobe University

This paper evaluates a 20-item assessment of citizenship literacy in an adult sample comprising 179 persons of English-speaking and non-English speaking background. The results indicated that the assessment was internally consistent and that as expected it distinguished English-speaking from non-English speaking participants. The pattern of answers provided an initial, albeit partial, understanding of what might constitute citizenship information but it also highlighted some limitations. The assessment failed to tap the ability levels of those with higher knowledge. Nevertheless, the results also indicated some deficits in adult general knowledge. The potential failure rate even with a cut-off point of 60% correct was quite high. Just over one-in-five failed to pass. The results have implications for the proposed revisions to the Australian Citizenship Test.
In December 2006, the Australian Government announced a controversial intention to introduce a citizenship test. This followed the example of other citizenship testing programs in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Eventually the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007 was introduced into Parliament in May 2007; it was passed by Parliament in September 2007 and the citizenship test was implemented in October 2007.

The Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Act 2007 No. 142, 2007 stated *inter alia* that a person is eligible to become an Australian citizen if the Minister is satisfied that the person:

- (e) possesses a basic knowledge of the English language; and
- (f) has an adequate knowledge of Australia and of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship; and ...

(e) and (f) are taken to be satisfied if and only if the Minister is satisfied that the person has, before making the application:

- (a) sat a test approved in a determination under section 23A; and
- (b) successfully completed that test (worked out in accordance with that determination).

The actual citizenship test is described in official documents as a computer-based, written, multiple-choice test. The Standard Test is limited to 45 minutes in duration. It is stated that the test is designed:

... to assess whether you have a basic knowledge of the English language. It is also used to test your knowledge of Australia and the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. The test consists of 20 questions drawn at random from a pool of 200 questions. To pass the test, you must correctly answer 60 per cent of the questions, including answering three questions on the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship correctly... The test includes questions about: Australia’s history; Australia’s geography; the Australian people; Australian values; the system of government; responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship (Australian Government 2007: 43).
This reflects the longstanding legislative requirement for an applicant to have an ‘adequate knowledge of Australia’ in the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* (see 12(1)(e)). There has also been a requirement for English in the same Act (see 12(1)(d)).

Between 1 October 2007 and 31 March 2009, 111,005 clients sat the Australian citizenship test with 96.7 per cent passing the test on their first or subsequent attempt. On average, there were 1.2 tests administered per client (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009: 4).

An independent review of the Australian citizenship test was undertaken in 2008 ([Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee 2008](https://www.immi.gov.au/immigration/citizenship/test-reviews/)). The Citizenship Test Review Committee recommended a number of changes. The key changes that will be implemented are: (a) the test questions will be rewritten in plain English; (b) the test will not contain any mandatory questions; and (c) the current pass mark will increase from 60 per cent to 75 per cent. The new citizenship test was planned to begin in late September 2009. The intention was that the test will continue to assess whether clients possess a basic level of English, that is, having ‘a sufficient knowledge of English to be able to exist independently in the wider Australian community’ (Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee 2008: 5).

At first glance, the topic of an Australian citizenship test might seem to be parochial, practical, political and hardly of theoretical interest to adult learning. The issue, however, does have importance for the following reasons: (a) a concern about what constitutes citizenship, especially the structure of citizenship information; (b) the role of external factors such as language, years of residence, education, country of origin or general information; and (c) the psychometric properties of such an assessment and the relative difficulty of particular questions. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate some aspects of a citizenship-type assessment that is consistent with the content specified by the Australian Government. While the political
rationale and the practical implications of citizenship testing are well beyond the scope of the paper, the technical aspects of the assessment of this construct are of direct relevance to adult learning.

In the first instance, the Australian Government has made it quite explicit that the test assesses not only citizenship but also ‘literacy skills’. In this sense, the assessment might be expected to distinguish between those persons whose standard of English is adequate to undertake the test and those who are not able to read the questions (for the most part, this would be those persons whose background is a language other than English). Secondly, little is known about the nature of this hypothetical latent characteristic that has been called citizenship. Aside from the proposed content of the assessment, there is no formal understanding of what might constitute a dimension of citizenship. That is, in thinking of citizenship knowledge, it might be helpful to know what aspects are easiest to acquire and which aspects are more difficult. Thirdly, although citizenship has been proposed as a desirable quality, there is absolutely no information about how it is distributed in the general population. Finally, there is no sensible starting point for an individual researcher to come to grips with the dimension of citizenship or its assessment because the details of the assessment are not public. This situation is unlike that of the United States, for instance, where the pool of questions are known in advance and the items are selected from that pool.

In the publicity preceding the Australian Citizenship test the Government, however, made available sample questions to the press to provide an indication of the likely content. These sample questions are the subject of this paper. These were administered to a heterogeneous group and the results analysed using psychometric (Rasch) item analysis. This report provides a detailed description of the citizenship dimension and its constituent parts. The analysis was conducted for an entire group as well as for those of English-speaking background and those of a non-English speaking background.
Methodology

Participants
The sample comprised 179 respondents recruited by adult education students as a sample of convenience from TAFE classes, AMES groups, friends and relatives. No claim is made that the sample is representative. It comprised 81 from an English-speaking background and 98 from a non-English speaking background. No additional demographic details were collected as anonymity and confidentiality were key aspects of the data collection because in some groups (such as small TAFE or language classes) people might be able to be identified if they indicated their age, sex and English or non-English-speaking background.

Instrument
The instrument comprised 20 multiple-choice questions that were publicised as indicative of the types of questions that would be asked. These questions are listed in Appendix A. It is recognised that these questions may or may not form part of the ultimate test, which in any case comprises 20 questions from an intended pool of some 200 questions. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of this specific test was high (.836, N = 140) and indicated that the responses were homogeneous and the assessment was internally consistent. Of course, this is only a partial indicator of the potential reliability of the assessment results.

Procedure
Participants were asked to participate voluntarily in a study of citizenship knowledge and were provided with a sample question and instructions. They were provided with their results. Participation was voluntary and not tied to any course requirement. A few participants declined to participate but no records were maintained.
Analysis

The results were analysed using a traditional item analysis and also using Rasch analysis which allows both the difficulty of the items and the citizenship knowledge of the participants to be plotted on the same dimension.

Results

Overall results

The distribution of results from the combined sample showed that most people would have passed the 60 per cent (12 correct out of 20) required for citizenship (see Figure 1). On closer inspection and when dividing the sample into two groups—English-speaking background and non-English speaking background—there are some major differences in the pattern of scores. This is illustrated in Figure 2. As expected the overwhelming majority of the participants who were of English-speaking background (median score = 17) would have passed but, in the case of the non-English speaking background, participants the pattern of results was entirely different. Despite the fact that the majority of non-English speaking background participants would have passed, the results (median score = 13) were spread across the entire range.

Figure 1: Distribution of total scores on the citizenship assessment
The average score for English-speaking participants was 16.2 \((SD=3.5)\) whereas for non-English-speaking participants the average was 12.8 \((SD=4.0)\). For such an assessment to be valid it would be expected to differentiate between groups. The difference in scores of the two groups in this instance was statistically significant \((t(135)=-5.18, p<0.0001)\) and supports the validity of the assessment, irrespective of one’s views about the propriety of such assessments.

**Figure 2: Distribution of total scores on the citizenship assessment for Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) and English-Speaking Background (ESB) participants**

Analysis of individual questions

There was a wide variation in the range of difficulty of the questions. The most difficult question for the group was: ‘Who is Australia’s head of state?’ (answered correctly by 28%) and the easiest was: ‘Where did the first European settlers to Australia come from?’
(answered correctly by 95%). The item difficulties are shown in column 2 of Table 1 (this indicates the proportion answering the question correctly). The third column indicates the relationship of each question by itself to the overall score. All questions correlated positively with the overall or total score, indicating that the questions were in line with the overall assessment results. The questions with the lowest item-total correlation appeared to be those that tapped the most or least familiar concepts and facts.

*Table 1: Item statistics for the citizenship assessment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Proportion who answered correctly</th>
<th>Item-total point biserial correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Which colours are represented on the Australian flag?</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Indigenous people have lived in Australia for ...</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Australia’s national flower is the ...</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which is a popular sport in Australia?</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Australia’s political system is a ...</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Capital of Australia is...</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Which animals are on the Australian Coat of Arms?</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Where did the first European settlers to Australia come from?</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Who is Australia’s head of state?</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Who was the first Prime Minister of Australia?</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. What song is Australia’s national anthem?</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What do you call the elected head of a state government?</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>Proportion who answered correctly</td>
<td>Item-total point biserial correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Which federal political party or parties are in power?</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Which of the following are Australian values?</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Australia’s values are based on the ...</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What does Anzac Day commemorate?</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. In what year did the first European settlers arrive?</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How many states are there in Australia?</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Australian soldiers fought in ...</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. What is Australia’s biggest river system?</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Item Response Analysis**

A further analysis using the Rasch model was undertaken to describe the link between the construct that was being assessed and how the various items were located along the dimension of that construct. (The detailed statistics and output form the Rasch analysis are available freely from the author upon request. Separate analyses are also available for the English-speaking and non-English speaking samples.)

The item map (Figure 3) represents the ability of the group (that is, citizenship literacy) and the difficulty of the item. The left-hand side of the figure represents a chart of the ability scores of the group. It is similar to Figure 1. Each X on the chart represents around two persons. If the chart were turned on its side, it would be like a histogram of scores. The right-hand of the chart shows the location of each of the 20 items on the scale of citizenship ability. The items are represented in shorthand fashion as I1 for Item 1 and I10 for Item 10 and so on. The scale however might be unfamiliar to some readers. It varies from +5 to -5 with zero being the average level of ability and
also the average level of difficulty. Persons and items closest to +5 have the highest ability and are the most difficult, respectively. Items near -5 are the easiest and persons closest to -5 are those who are least in citizenship literacy. This is an arbitrary scale but one that is well-known. The importance of the scale is that someone who is at a particular ability level can be expected to answer all the items below his/her ability level but have difficulty with the items above his/her ability. So a person at around average or zero on the scale should be able to answer items 13, 14, 20, 7, 11, 5, 1, 4, 6 and 8; but they would have difficulty with items 12, 16, 10, 3, 18, 12, 19, 15, 17 and 9. Consideration of Figure 3 shows immediately that the items in the assessment do not tap the full range of citizenship literacy. Broadly speaking, there are many persons in the sample who were well above the difficulty level of even the hardest questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>HIGH ABILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>XXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>XX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-3.0</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-5.0</td>
<td>LOW ABILITY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each X = 2 Persons

Figure 3: Item-map showing ability and item locations for citizenship
Discussion and conclusions

It is impossible to assert unequivocally that this assessment confirms that someone possesses a basic knowledge of the English language and has an adequate knowledge of Australia and of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship. At best it is a partial indicator.

What can be said, however, is that a substantial proportion of this sample would not have passed the cut-off point of 60 per cent (12 correct out of 20). Around 22 per cent scored 11 or lower, and if this were to be increased to 15, then the failure rate would in all likelihood be double (approximately 44% in this sample scored 14 or lower). The effect is evident in Figure 4 which shows the cumulative proportions at each score level. Theses failure rates are far higher than those reported in the official statistics where 96.7 per cent passed the test on their first or subsequent attempt. The reasons for this difference are not clear.

Figure 4: Cumulative proportion at each score level and cut-off points for passing (60% and 75%)

A key issue is what constitutes citizenship in this assessment. This is shown in the structure or ordering of the items in terms of difficulty in
Figure 3. To some this arrangement may seem a bizarre answer, but it does represent the empirical difficulty of acquiring these concepts in the community. At present it constitutes the best operational definition of citizenship literacy that we have available. We could then say that an adult who had citizenship literacy in all probability knew that the Governor-General was Australia’s head of state, that the first European settlers arrived in 1788, that Australian soldiers fought in World War I and World War II, that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the source of Australia’s values, that there are six states in Australia, that Indigenous people have lived in Australia for at least 40,000 years, that Edmund Barton was the first Prime Minister and that the wattle is Australia’s national flower. Some would argue that this does not represent citizenship at all, whereas others might say that this is only one component of the construct and reflects the expected information acquired through socio-cultural experiences. It is not possible to settle such an issue in this paper.

It is possible, however, to say that many adult Australians have performed poorly on this assessment of socio-cultural knowledge, irrespective of their citizenship status. This is despite the fact that it is a multiple-choice format and only requires recognition and not recall. Paradoxically, there are deficiencies in the assessment, especially in relation to the fact that the upper levels of citizenship literacy are not being assessed. Notwithstanding this limitation, there are psychometric merits in this approach, even with such a blunt 20-item test, but further refinement of the concept of citizenship is required. In addition, the development of an assessment (in whatever form it might ultimately take) will help to give an operational meaning to citizenship literacy. The educational issue now is that a substantial proportion of Australians do not even have the token knowledge that is mandated for citizenship or the linguistic competence to read and decode the questions.

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About the author

Dr Jim Athanasou retired recently from the University of Technology, Sydney and is now an Adjunct Associate Professor at La Trobe University. He has continued in part-time private practice as a psychologist, specialising in adult educational and vocational assessment. He is editor of the texts, Adult education and training (2008) and Adult educational psychology (2008).

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Appendix A

1. Which colours are represented on the Australian flag?
   a. Green and yellow
   b. Red, black and yellow
   c. Blue, red and white
   d. Orange and purple

2. Indigenous people have lived in Australia for ...
   a. At least 40,000 years
   b. About 8000 years
   c. About 800 years
   d. Less that 400 years

3. Australia’s national flower is the ...
   a. Rose
   b. Wattle
   c. Kangaroo paw
   d. Banksia

4. Which is a popular sport in Australia?
   a. Ice hockey
   b. Water polo
   c. Cricket
   d. Table tennis
5. Australia’s political system is a ...
   a. Parliamentary democracy
   b. Monarchy
   c. Dictatorship
   d. Socialist state

6. The Capital of Australia is...
   a. Sydney
   b. Melbourne
   c. Hobart
   d. Canberra

7. Which animals are on the Australian Coat of Arms?
   a. Wombat and echidna
   b. Kangaroo and emu
   c. Kangaroo and dingo
   d. Lion and unicorn

8. Where did the first European settlers to Australia come from?
   a. Spain
   b. France
   c. England
   d. Ireland

9. Who is Australia’s head of state?
   a. Prime Minister John Howard
   b. Queen Elizabeth II
   c. Governor General Michael Jeffery
   d. Premier Steve Bracks

10. Who was the first Prime Minister of Australia?
    a. Sir Edmund Barton
    b. Sir Henry Parkes
    c. John Curtin
    d. Sir Robert Menzies

11. What song is Australia’s national anthem?
    a. God Save the Queen
    b. Star Spangled Banner
    c. Advance Australia Fair
    d. Waltzing Matilda

12. What do you call the elected head of a state government?
    a. Governor
    b. Premier
    c. Mayor
    d. Prime Minister

13. Which federal political party or parties are in power?
    a. Australian Labor Party
    b. Australian Democrats and the Australian Greens
    c. National Party
    d. Liberal Party and National Party
14. Which of the following are Australian values?
a. Men and women are equal  
b. ‘A fair go’  
c. Mateship  
d. All of the above  

15. Australia’s values are based on the ...
   a. Teachings of the Koran  
b. The Judaeo-Christian tradition  
c. Catholicism  
d. Secularism  

16. What does Anzac Day commemorate?
   a. The Gallipoli landing  
b. Armistice Day  
c. The Battle of the Somme  
d. Victory in the Pacific  

17. In what year did the first European settlers arrive?
   a. 1801  
b. 1770  
c. 1788  
d. 1505  

18. How many states are there in Australia?
   a. 5  
b. 6  
c. 7  
d. 8  

19. Australian soldiers fought in ...
   a. World War I and World War II  
b. Korean War  
c. Vietnam War  
d. All of the above  

20. What is Australia’s biggest river system?
   a. The Murray Darling  
b. The Murrumbidgee  
c. The Yarra  
d. The Mississippi  

Answers: 

REFLECTION

The powerful and the powerless:
Unwritten rules

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‘When we need to fast track project approvals, we go directly to senior management to make it happen. This is a well-known unwritten rule within the company that we tell all new staff.’

Kate was speechless. Here she was on the first day of her first fulltime job out of graduate school and already she was confused. Her colleague, Sharon, was quietly coaching her to bypass their supervisor to get project approvals. Although Sharon’s comments offended her ethics, Kate was afraid to ask any questions for fear of looking foolish.

I was astonished when I witnessed this scene during my doctoral research into power, politics and workplace learning. This display made me wonder in what other ways staff use, and mis-use, their influence in the workplace.
Many people giggle when asked to define power. Other people tell me power corresponds with position title. They believe the higher you are on the organisation chart dictates how much—or how little—influence you have, over anything. I’m not convinced this is true. I believe that power is not always indicative of position, and power tactics are not limited to people in more senior positions. Power and politics are all about competing interests and control strategies that ultimately influence workplace relationships.

Each of us is more influential than we think. For example, during my research I mistakenly assumed that staff would talk freely to me about power and political issues. Their resistance was palpable. Participant body language and discomfort demonstrated acute awareness of existing power relations and convinced me there was ‘more than meets the eye’ in our discussions.

I was stunned that not one person explicitly identified power as an issue in the organisation, despite comments such as ‘decisions are made by a select few behind closed doors’. What people were not saying disturbed me. Their collective silences baffled me.

Cues included chuckles and feigned coughing when asked which departments are favoured at budget time and by whom; facial contortions and eyes rolling when asked about the absence of women at the executive level, and outright squirming over using their influence that made me wish I had video-taped, as well as audio-taped, these interviews! Their reactions compelled (influenced?) me to go even deeper into my analyses where I made a stunning discovery—stunning for me—that organisational power and politics influence staff in ways they seldom discuss.

How we choose to use our influence is the theme of this article. Admittedly, this article slants towards the stereotypical mis-use of influence. It’s a way to coax people to think about prickly situations by appealing to what they already know.
Many people do not see themselves as influential at work. We tend to think ‘higher-ups’ have the most influence yet people who think they are powerless actually wield a lot of clout. The key is to separate the ‘powerless’ from self-imposed silences to get them talking about ways to use influence without fear of reprisal.

I feel I can’t bring issues forward for fear of something negative happening as a result.

One comes to meetings with issues and ends up intimidated by peer pressure to shut up so nothing gets solved.

These two comments indicate that staff typically stifle their influence. They actually use their power to preserve, and/or complain about, the status quo.

I suspect their silences are more telling of unseen use of power in the workplace. I assume people shelve their own observations and muzzle their good ideas for fear that challenging the system will be job-limiting or job-eliminating. Fear is the bluntest of management tools. Or so says an author writing on coercive power in organisations (Anonymous 1993). Sadly, this author was, seemingly, too fearful to reveal her/his identity when publishing the article.

Fear is a shield barring employees from expressing what’s on their minds. Silence is the red flag. One frustrated person said: ‘Everybody complains and chews about things yet when they get to staff meetings they don’t say a thing.’

We all know people who use influence in less-than-desirable ways. They hoard or partially share crucial information. They deliberately share the wrong information. They take advantage of people in other departments by promising, not providing, vital information by deadline dates. Or they tell co-workers it’s okay to bypass supervisors to get to the decision-makers. What happens to relationships and performance when, in tough times, decision-makers pull the decision-
making plug on middle managers and ‘power shifts up?’ No wonder influence has a tarnished reputation.

Theorists perpetuate offensive reputations using words like arenas and battlefields to portray relationships in workplaces (French & Bell 1999). None of the words power, politics and influence enjoys a lovable reputation.

Theoretically, power is the capacity to act. It influences who gets what, when and how. Politics (not the elections model variety) are understood as the underhanded pursuit of personal interests (Cohen & Bradford 2005). In everyday practice, however, staff will tell you that politics are all about who is included in and excluded from meetings, planning decisions, internal communications such as the ‘grapevine’ and learning events.

Influence does not mean deceit and manipulation. It’s all about relationships. We all have some influence and we use it to get what we want at particular points in time. If authority demands compliance and obedience, then influence is an exchange that should work through people persuasion rather than position power. Some theorists describe influence as what we have to do to get cooperation rather than imposing our values on other people (Cohen & Bradford 2005: 87). I suspect that individual strategies to get cooperation will mirror existing power relations in work groups, departments and broader company cultures. How other people influence each of us will determine ways we try to shape views and actions of our colleagues.

Let’s revisit the opening scene on unwritten rules. Sharon confides an unwritten rule to Kate. So far, she is using her influence to help Kate work within the culture, right? However, she mis-uses her influence by specifically coaching Kate to detour around their supervisor. Kate doesn’t dare question Sharon’s comment even though it is an affront to her personal and professional ethics. Unwittingly, Kate has already begun to mis-use her influence by remaining silent (as likely would
any new employee). In addition, the first time Kate follows Sharon’s advice, her silence will translate into mis-use of her influence and turn Sharon into a toxic mentor.

Members of senior management perpetuate Sharon’s conspiracy theory every time they directly approve a project request. Kate, Sharon and senior management are all in cahoots when they exploit the unwritten rules in the name of expediency. The strategic impact is bleak.

The highest level of management conditions new and experienced employees to follow unwritten rules. Management’s complicity undermines the credibility of the supervisor and encourages staff to continue to bypass hierarchical channels. Excluding the supervisor puts pressure on working relationships, in this case the inter-relationship amongst the supervisor, Sharon and Kate.

Management can reinforce unwritten rules and undermine relationships in other ways. One middle manager said: “when times get tough, power shifts up.” I take this to mean that executives ‘train’ middle managers not to take action and to view themselves as thinkers and decision-makers only in good times. Middle managers have little choice in relinquishing their decision-making powers as they must comply with directives from above. Top-level management reduces middle managers’ abilities to carry out their position responsibilities yet middle managers, too, usually remain silent.

What are the consequences when power shifts up and managers stay silent? It perpetuates a company-wide mindset that the skills of figuring out what to do are more important than the skills of getting things done. It supports the many employees who are usually waiting for the next instruction from the top and no doubt influences working relationships amongst senior and middle management.
I’m not sure who originates unwritten rules but I do know who endorses them. In theory, senior executives should squash unwritten rules before they are ingrained in company culture. In practice, however, senior management plays these rules (and their influence) up and down like a yo-yo. On the up, they quietly inspire Sharon, and by association Kate, to exert their influence, however deceitfully. On the down, when “power shifts up” the same executive group withdraws—and then restores—the kinds of decisions middle management can make. This type of executive behaviour cultivates—rather than eliminates—unwritten rules as ‘laws’ that everyone ‘just knows’. Eventually management’s mis-use of the unwritten rules will cause relationships to wobble and company growth to wither.

How can staff nurture their working relationships? They can start by talking about the unwritten rules. Two people broke their silences when they disclosed revelations about their influence.

I am too apathetic at work and should be more assertive when things bother me.

And,

... we have the power to change things ourselves.

Dare to imagine! You have more influence than you think.

**References**


**About the author**

**Susan P. Shaver, EdD**, is Principal of Learning by Design. She is a Canadian adult educator who advises senior management.
and workplace educators on strategic program planning and staff development. Recognised for her ability to bring energy, analysis and business relevance to workplace education, Susan holds a Doctorate of Adult & Continuing Education focusing on the influences of organisational power and politics on program planning. She is currently a PhD candidate (Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work, University of South Australia) researching ways part-time employees manage their diverse identities in different workplaces.

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BOOK REVIEW

**Spirituality, mythopoesis and learning**

Peter Willis, Timothy Leonard, Anne Morrison & Steven Hodge (eds.)

Mt Gravatt, Post Pressed, 2009
ISBN: 9781921214578 (pbk.), retail: $45.00

Like its companion volume, *Pedagogies of the imagination: Mythopoetic curriculum in education practice* (Leonard & Willis 2009), this book suggests the value of a mythopoetic perspective for educational theory and practice. A mythopoetic perspective offers theory and practices supporting a more contextualised, more integrative, holistic and transformative approach to learning that includes the heart and imagination as well as reason, and also acknowledges the importance of a spiritual dimension. This book provides twenty perspectives on the interplay between spirituality, mythopoesis and learning by professionals in a range of educational, therapeutic and community contexts.
What do we mean by mythopoesis? For the uninitiated (at least one of the contributors confesses to falling into that category until recently, although she confesses that she had long-held the values and attitudes without knowing the term, and this is likely to be the case with some readers), *mythopoesis* derives from the Greek for myth-making. *Mythos*, meaning narrative, with its association with culture, imagination and feeling, has been traditionally contrasted with *logos*, with its association with the rational and scientific. Although both streams have shaped our cultural heritage, *logos* has been privileged at the expense of *mythos*. The writers represented in this book may be seen to be re-negotiating or re-visioning the relationship between *logos* and *mythos*. What strikes the reader is that this is not just an academic process, but fired by ethical concern and a passion for transformative and emancipatory learning.

In the Introduction, Peter Willis and Anne Morrison describe mythopoesis as ‘a narrative process by which people seek to represent and make sense of life’ (p. 2). Such an approach supports narrative ways of knowing, which include imagination, feeling and reflection on personal experience. This is not to exclude reason (*logos*), but to challenge its domination and the limited way it is often constructed. The majority of the chapters either implicitly or explicitly challenge the adequacy of Descartes’ famous *Cogito ergo sum* as an explanation of what it means to be a human being. In many respects, the mythopoetic way can be seen as a movement to redress Cartesian dualism by advocating a more inclusive, more integrative, more grounded or embodied approach to learning, not to replace, but to complement and integrate the cognitive. In many cases this involves deconstructing the binary between *logos* and *mythos*, opening up a third space for what David Tacey describes as ‘a reason that connects the mind with the intuitions of the heart’ (p. 73).

What might this look like in practice? Peter Willis (Chapter 2) proposes John Heron’s model as a way of utilising *logos* and *mythos*
as complementary ways of knowing and learning. Heron’s approach offers four dimensions of human knowing and learning: embodied/somatic; imaginal/mythopoetic; critical/logos and active/reflective process. We can also see the interplay of these dimensions in the reflective narratives of the different contributors.

The link between spirituality and mythopoesis is explored in various ways and from various perspectives throughout the book. Spirituality, according to Willis, is concerned with the ‘intersection between personal and mythic narratives’ (p. 24). In other words, mythopoesis allows for the paradox of a more personal approach to knowing and learning, at the same time advocating the need to transcend ‘a purely personal self-centred viewpoint’ (Atchley 2009: 147, cited by Willis, p. 17). Others, like Meg Hegarty (Ch. 19) and David Tacey (Ch. 6), acknowledge the loss of traditional myths that once fostered a sense of belonging to a larger story. Hegarty (Ch. 19), writing from a hospice context, says that baby boomers confronting mortality need to draw on a contemporary mythology which is fragmented and must be pieced together from novels, movies, TV programs and soap operas. For Tacey (Ch. 6), writing from a Christian and Jungian perspective, a post-modern context might also be a post-secular context: if modernism led to the death of God, then postmodernism might make God’s resurrection possible through reclaiming symbol and the poetic (mythos) rather than dogma (logos) as valid spiritual pathways.

Spirituality for these writers is not a commodity to be purchased, but is associated with meaning-making, self-transcendence, making connections and being a part of an interconnected universe. It is a way of being and relating that is characterised by participatory, attentive engagement, rather than a subject-object stance, and a capacity for awe. Some find this through organised religion (not of the fundamentalist variety), while others have pieced together their own path.
A number of writers associate mythopoesis with the cultivation of ‘integral consciousness’, a term which Bernie Neville defines as ‘an ironic capacity to transcend our own enculturated way of thinking and to acknowledge the validity of other approaches’ (p. 107). This doesn’t privilege reason (logos) in the service of dualistic thinking, nor does it encourage a nostalgic retreat into ‘archaic unity consciousness’. Rather, through reflection and understanding, a complementary relationship is established. This is akin to what I have described elsewhere as having a metaphoric attitude where one is aware of the metaphoric in any attempt to provide theoretical explanations (no matter how scholarly or apparently empirically-based), seeing them as possible explanatory narratives rather than truth representations to be defended at any cost (MacKay 2009 in Leonard & Willis 2009). Such an attitude or capacity seems to be increasingly important in the face of the increasing diversity and pluralism of contemporary culture.

No discussion of learning in a post-modern context would be complete without addressing the notion of subjectivity. Several writers in this volume challenge the Cartesian assumption of ‘epistemic objectivity’ (Hattam, p. 115). What is interesting is the link that is made between spirituality, subjectivity and learning in Chapter 9 (Foucault 2005:15 in Hattam, p. 120):

Spirituality is the search, practice and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in ‘order to have access to the truth’... There can be no truth without a conversion or transformation of the subject.

Not only does Robert Hattam (citing Foucault) argue that knowing cannot be separated from subjectivity, but he also recommends inclusion of some meditative/contemplative practices in the curriculum. He also suggests (from a Buddhist perspective) that the current western notion of subjectivity needs to be deconstructed.
It has been impossible to do justice to the unique contributions of individual contributors to this volume, especially given the large themes that are being addressed. What I have tried to do is to provide a taste of what is on offer in this smorgasbord of contexts, genres and worldviews. Obviously these chapters will vary in their ability to engage us, and that will say something about the chapters and something about the reader. Some chapters will validate where we are, while others might challenge us out of our comfort zone, thereby enlarging our understanding of these large themes. What is valuable is to be invited into a space where we become part of the dialogue.

Perhaps the value of these narratives is best suggested by the cover which depicts a colourful and diverse array of footwear and feet. Rod Pattenden describes this sculpture as an invitation to viewers to ‘consider the manner in which they touch the earth in their own life journey’, and ‘to consider walking in another’s shoes for a period of time’ (p. 37). The narratives in this book offer a similar invitation to its readers.

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BOOK REVIEW

Qualitative data analysis: An introduction

Carol Grbich

ISBN: 978-1-4129-2142-8; 258 pages

Carol Grbich is a Professor on the Faculty of Health Sciences, Flinders University, Australia.

*Qualitative data analysis* is designed specifically for qualitative researchers interested in understanding and possibly about to pursue the process of analysing data. Here the word ‘data’ is flexibly used to include both text and numbers. Grbich recognises the huge complexities that qualitative researchers face from choosing the research design, to analysing the huge amount of data and to articulating how the findings from the data can best be foregrounded. This book does not burden qualitative researchers with a load of unfamiliar terms; it does, instead, highlight practical issues vital to the design and analysis of carrying out a qualitative research study.
The book seeks to provide a broad but comprehensive guide to clarify the basic, practical issues in qualitative data analysis. It also presents insights into the different approaches with reference from epistemological foundations. Throughout the descriptions of the analytical approaches, detailed examples, a glossary and further reading lists as well as summaries of key points are provided.

The book consists of five parts which in some way does follow a general order of research process. Part One: The state of the art focuses on the theoretical and practical issues which underpin qualitative research. It not only explains the importance of understanding which knowledge tradition (epistemology) and what claim it has to understanding reality (ontology). It also informs the need for qualitative researchers to think about what, why and how a preference for a particular research design has been made. The most interesting inclusion is the discussion on types of inquiry and research design approaches that follow each type of inquiry. The overall focus is on the nature of flexibility in qualitative research. Here, issues related to understanding the different knowledge traditions with different theories underpinning them are essential. In so doing, qualitative researchers are given ways and options to know how to clarify, justify and adapt the choice of research design and data analysis.

Part Two: Specific analytical approaches examines the tools and analytic procedures which have developed within each particular approach. It presents the historical attachment to the design approaches in which they originated. Yet, the emphasis is on the needs of the individual researchers to use, adapt and lift out the tools and procedures that best provide answers to the research question. For example, after a brief definition and overview of the key elements underpinning each qualitative research approach (such as phenomenology), detailed descriptions with examples are provided for each of the varieties of phenomenology (namely, classical
phenomenology; existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology).

Part Three: Analysis of documentation shows how each analytical approach has a particular orientation which identifies it as a separate entity. The crux of understanding how data can be analysed and presented in a particular approach is to provide deeper insights on what shapes and influences the collected observation, conversations or existing documents.

Part Four: Writing up data provides researchers with a broader picture of how collected data can be presented before thinking about writing up. It provides explicit explanations of the types of theories and how different data approaches enable researchers to explore ways of presenting data through their conceptual positions. The main idea is about being flexible with the collected data in order to help develop theories or portray specific findings.

Part Five: Qualitative computing programs presents an overview of some qualitative computing packages that are currently available in the market. For example, Grbich describes the common features that qualitative computing packages have which are useful for retrieving and coding huge amounts of text. These common features include: framing of data through a defined aspect or category by breaking text into word frequencies; and development of content analysis that can be coded directly including content from videos, audio recordings, and pictures. Nevertheless, potential pitfalls and limitations have also been highlighted. They include the possibility of losing connection with the theoretical and methodological reasoning and reconstruction due to the ease of using the computer package in counting word frequencies or creating synthesis. This may lead to researchers interpreting meanings that are fostered by the use of a qualitative data management program rather than the emic (insider, ‘subjective’) approach to drive the research. Thus, readers are forewarned about the limited capacity of using computer packages to segment and
order data. The focus of this overview is to trigger researchers to think critically about the impacts of such packages on the qualitative analytical process.

One of the main features of the book is that it is user friendly. It is easy to read for researchers, students and teachers. Throughout the book, there are good examples on how research approaches look like and how data gathered from different methods need to be analysed. It provides brief but sufficient descriptions that are essential in provoking readers to consider the breadth and depth of doing qualitative data analysis.

For researchers, the book provides a comprehensive and innovative guide to understanding what qualitative data analysis contains. For students, it is a collection of a broad range of theoretical approaches, and clearly describes the way they shape and influence the way data are analysed. For academics, it provides a diversity of topics and a balance of interesting ideas, together with current examples of qualitative data analysis. This book shows the need to understand how qualitative data can be analysed. It is a valuable addition to research courses for students and researchers who are curious and interested about qualitative data analysis. It provides theory and data on a sufficiently diverse range of qualitative approaches, and clearly describes how each approach can influence the way data are analysed. It is worth reading for researchers and students who have just begun to collect qualitative data for their studies.

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BOOK REVIEW

Higher education and the world of work

Ulrich Teichler

Rotterdam, Sense Publishers, 2009
ISBN: 978-90-8790-754-9; 329 pages

This book is one of the latest offerings from Sense Publishers and forms part of an excellent series covering global perspectives on higher education. The author, Ulrich Teichler, is an academic affiliated with the International Centre for Higher Education Research in Kassel, Germany and the text includes a collection of essays, drawn from his long academic career in higher education. The sub-title draws the reader to expect a presentation of conceptual frameworks, comparative perspective and empirical findings. In each of the 21 chapters, a broad range of issues is recalled, discussed and analysed from four decades of experience. The book is segmented into four main parts: (I) overviews, (II) tensions and adaptations, (III) comparative graduate surveys and (IV) the ‘Bologna Process’. Each part is further expanded to provide a detailed account of the key
public debates and developments that have shaped the relationship between higher education and the world of work.

In the first chapter, Teichler sets the scene by explaining his own biography and how he first became aware that choosing a field of study, at a very early age, can influence the choice of subsequent occupation. In part one, three chapters take an overview and explain the relationship between education and employment—in particular, how occupational structures have become linked to higher education. Chapter 4 deals with the changing conditions and challenges associated with contemporary developments in the workplace such as rationalisation, perpetual change, the decline in work opportunities and the increasing shift towards the skill requirements of new technology.

In part two, the author focuses on describing an evolving range of tensions and adaptations in higher education, recognising that research has been influenced by public debate. One such tension is the under-utilisation of graduates in many European countries and the emerging trend towards a condition known as *inappropriate employment* among graduates; in other words, graduates finding employment below their level of knowledge and capability. In Chapter 8 the author questions the assumption that inappropriate employment can be linked to the field for study. For example, inappropriate employment may be more likely for graduates in the social sciences field than for those in the science and engineering fields.

Part three offers a range of six chapters covering comparative graduate surveys from a range of European countries. These surveys relate to graduate employment and work across Europe. In particular, Chapter 13 reports on findings from the Kassel Graduate Survey and discusses the relationship between study programs and later professional success. Finally, part four discusses a range of issues stemming from the Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999. The author
reports that this process arose from concern that a convergent structure of study programs and degrees should be established across all European countries.

Generally, the chapters are well written and reasonably accessible; however, this book will be of particular relevance to academics with an interest the evolution of higher education policy, especially in a European context. The collection of essays will further provide valuable insight for education professionals and postgraduate students wishing to understand the causes and consequences of an imperfect match between higher education and employment. Taken together, the chapters bring together a wide collection of research and debate to provide an impressive body of scholarly work. The tensions between employment and work orientation in higher education are present throughout the text, as is the realisation that different countries have varying ideas about the deployment of graduates in the workplace.

As one would expect from a text covering forty years of experience in the higher education sector, the book is detailed, serious and grounded in historical context; however, this strength may be somewhat less appealing to the casual reader. Occasionally, the author includes an element of critical reflection into his narrative and this approach will almost certainly engage post-graduate students and thoughtful higher education commentators or policy-makers who can easily relate to the arguments and technical insights. In summary, the messages contained within the text will be of particular value to those who have a specific interest in graduate development and work at the interface between higher education and employment.

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I suppose one could say I have faced some challenges in life. I’m 52 years old and so far, have experienced, among a host of other minor ills, breast cancer and a major depressive illness. Both of these have, of course, battered my emotions including how happy I have felt at different times. These experiences have ‘forced’ me to consider happiness at some length and in some depth. But it is not easy to find answers when it comes to happiness—and there are plenty of ‘answers’ on offer including those that come with a pretty steep price tag and no guarantees.
I have been a member of a Christian denomination all my life and, when I was young, I remember singing a bright chorus in church by Ira F Stanphill:

Happiness is to know the Savior
Living a life within His favor
Having a change in my behavior
Happiness is the Lord.

It wasn’t long before I realised that happiness wasn’t quite that simple! When I went through the ten years of major depression, I tried all the standard things any spiritually-oriented person might try: eating better, exercising more, affirming my relationship with God, praying more, doing more Bible study; in short, trying to ‘live a life within His favor, [and h]aving a change in my behavior’. But none of that seemed to increase my happiness.

I’ve been to psychologists and psychiatrists. I’ve ploughed through a myriad of books telling me how to search for happiness, find it, produce it, let it go, and create it for myself. I’ve tried out different models for understanding personality and sought advice from friends. And on and on it went. Most of it was a waste of time although I am sure I learned some things on the journey.

Recently, I was in Singapore on a work-related trip and, as I am wont to do, visited as many bookshops as I could find. As I walked into one of my favourites, I was immediately drawn to a bright yellow book with the ubiquitous smiley piece of clipart you see at the right plastered on its cover. The title: The happiness hypothesis.

Now, I have to say that the smiley face didn’t engender a great deal of trust in the contents of the book. I thought, ‘Ok. Another new-agey feel-good book telling me I can be happy by following some “new” approach.’ But the subtitle intrigued me: Putting ancient wisdom and
philosophy to the test of modern science. Most self-help books seem to romanticise ‘ancient’ wisdom and accept a lot of it unquestioningly. But here was a book that claimed to, at least, question it and test it by whatever the author thought ‘modern science’ was.

I flipped the book over and read a quote from James Flint who wrote in the Guardian that Haidt was going to take me on

... an extraordinary journey. On the way he explains why meditation, cognitive therapy and Prozac are all extremely sensible ways to treat depression, why Buddhism is an over-reaction to the state of things, [and] in what way religion is a canny cultural solution to the problems of group selection in evolution ...

Well, that piqued my interest! Meditation, cognitive therapy and Prozac? Most things I had read had come down heavily against using medication to find happiness. This was a change and heartened me given that the only thing that had helped me with my own depression was a wise psychiatrist who prescribed the right medication for me and which changed my life in a matter of weeks after so many years of deep, distressing suffering.

Another thing that attracted me to the book was the fact that the author, Jonathan Haidt, is a psychologist who teaches at the University of Virginia. He wasn’t some mystical, new-age guru psychic who had channelled the answers from outside the planet or who had discovered the secret to living while perched in solitary confinement on a rock in a rain forest. He was a respected scholar who was awarded the Templeton Prize in Positive Psychology in 2001. I was hooked.

When I started to read the book I became excited at the depth of Haidt’s analysis of happiness. Drawing on research-based evidence, Haidt parts the curtains shrouding happiness and provides some extremely helpful insights into what makes people happy; how
happiness works; and what aspects of human nature and life improve the prospect of experiencing happiness. As the author discusses the evidence, he evaluates ancient wisdom and philosophy to see whether these two sources of wisdom got it right. Unsurprisingly, the answer is sometimes they were right and sometimes they were wrong.

After exploring ‘ten Great Ideas’ about happiness ‘discovered by several of the world’s civilizations’, including Buddhism, Plato, Christianity, Freud, Nietzsche, and the contemporary Dr Phil, it turns out that a Happiness Formula can be constructed:

\[ H(appiness) = (S)etpoint + (C)onditions + (V)oluntary activities \]

The **Setpoint** is the maximum amount of happiness possible for a particular person to experience. It appears that each of us is hardwired with a maximum threshold for experiencing happiness. There is increasing evidence that genetics plays a highly influential role in the boundaries of our emotional lives.

In addition to a setpoint, the **Conditions** of life within which one lives — the environment, finances, weather and so on — have an effect on happiness.

Finally, the **Voluntary activities** we choose to engage in (or not) have an influence on levels of happiness. So happiness is a combination of all these elements.

As it turns out, finding happiness is pretty “easy”: there are limits to how happy you can be; accept the things you can’t change and change the things you can (the sentiments of the famous Serenity Prayer*); get on and do the things you enjoy and that bring meaning to your life—good relationships for one. And it is encouraging to know that

* The Serenity Prayer reads:
  God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
the proven approaches to increasing happiness are as simple as meditation, cognitive behavioural therapy, and some medications.

There is an incredible richness in Haidt’s book. Each chapter has a wealth of ideas to ponder, some of them contentious that will provoke deep thought. I found the chapter entitled *Divinity with or without God* particularly intriguing and challenging given my religious heritage. There are excellent discussions on themes such as the difficulty of bringing about behavioural change (with a wonderful metaphor of people riding elephants to illustrate the structure of the human psyche); the tendency of humans to exaggerate the faults of others while minimising their own; love and attachments; the role of suffering and adversity; the nature of virtue (with a fascinating theory about disgust); and many others.

Haidt provides some absorbing research in support of his Happiness Hypothesis. He weaves an understanding of all of the elements of the happiness hypothesis in a very engaging, easy-to-read, informative style. This book about happiness is hopeful, practical, evidence-based, and ultimately provides the reader with an understanding that is balanced and insightful. It is one of the best books I’ve read on happiness.

**Stephen Parker**

**Flinders University**
BOOK REVIEW

Using biographical methods in social research

Merrill, B. & West, L.

London, Sage, 2009
211 pages, Index

Many current autobiographies of sports stars, entertainers and politicians, portrayed in popular culture as true to life ‘inside stories’, regularly serve to generate for their authors the ongoing publicity that a career in the public eye may require. Many narratives of this kind show the author’s poor self-awareness, little ability to reflect critically on their context, and plain bad taste. As a consequence, the impression that anyone can write their life story cheapens the genre of autobiography, and confirms suspicion among researchers who distrust narrative data as equivalent to anecdote. In contrast, well composed life narratives provide their readers with windows through which to appreciate the author’s skills in weaving a life from the threads of their personality and intelligence, family influences, and life experience within the cultures, contexts and circumstances that
they may or may not have chosen. Experiences of personal and social transformation hold a lot of interest for both the intelligent general reader and for a growing number of researchers in adult learning and social change. A guidebook to help interested learners become researchers competent in using biographical methods is much needed.

This textbook, written by two practitioners seasoned in life history research and teaching, is such a guide. It is a delight to take and read for anyone who wishes to learn about theories and practices in using biographical methods in social research. The authors, Barbara Merrill and Linden West, introduce themselves and quickly generate a friendly tone in communicating with their readers. Throughout the book, they show their enthusiasm for exploring their lifelong and lifewide auto/biographical learning. They draw the reader into the search for ways to understand how people engage in learning within transitions that lead to personal and collective change.

Barbara Merrill, an adult educator at the University of Warwick, entered the field of biographical research through the gate of sociology about 25 years ago. A high school teacher at the time, her interest in discovering the effects of racism on school education in Britain led her to gain an understanding through gathering first person accounts of their school and family experience from some of her black students. From that research and subsequently, she discovered that individual and collective expressions of life history often lead learners and researchers to a deeper understanding of possibilities for social transformation. Like many researchers of others’ stories, she has found value also in exploring her own biography and family history. Her research interests embrace people in work, health and education contexts with the intention of making audible and heard the voices of women, adult learners and people on the edges of social wellbeing.
Linden West, from Canterbury Christ Church University, takes a psychological perspective. He also began using biographical research methods in the mid-1980s. Partly through dissatisfaction with conventional psychological approaches to his research into working class adult learners returning to education, and partly through his developing interest in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, he sought ways to incorporate personal accounts of life experience into his research. Drawn to research his own life history, he became further convinced of the value of some methods of life storying for understanding possibilities for personal and social change.

A great advantage of this text is that it avoids the sometimes wearying academic prose found in introductions to research methods. The language here holds an informative conversation between the authors and the intended reader and practitioner. Its tone holds a promise of enjoyment to be had in following chapters that propose to launch the reader into the practice of various methods of biographical inquiry, having been introduced to theoretical questions about truth, voice, power, gender and context that relate to the validity and worth of this approach to social research.

As an introduction to research methods, this text is user friendly. Each chapter’s format typically shows an Overview, Summary, Discussion Questions, Activities, Extracts from research studies and theoretical perspectives, and Suggested Further Reading. The authors’ regular reference to their learning through their developing practice does not smack of self-promotion. It serves usefully to provide concrete examples of how researchers can learn through a reflective practice. The presence of the two voices allows for each to draw attention to and appraise the other’s work.

In eleven easily read chapters, Merrill and West provide a path to follow for both new researchers and for other researchers who are looking to incorporate biographical methods into their range of approaches. They recount the biographical turn in social sciences
that emerged in Chicago in the 1920s and trace the development of research methods and areas of inquiry into life history. Both authors—Barbara, with her research interests in sociology, feminism and critical theory in fields of health, employment and education, and Linden, from his fields of theory and practice in education, psychology and psychotherapy—are well positioned to provide this comprehensive account and map of international and interdisciplinary fields of biographical research. Both have been instrumental in the founding and fostering of formal and informal groups of European researchers who employ life history methods in inquiries into world changing events that range from the dismantling of both the Berlin Wall and the South African Apartheid system to the introduction of programs in education and therapy that lead to transformation in the lives of people on life’s edges.

Chapters 6–10 lead the beginning researcher through the sequence of getting started, using appropriate methods to interview and record data, examining various approaches to analyse the data, and finally presenting what has been learned from the research. With each of the steps in the process, there is a mixture of common sense advice, cautions and encouragement for the beginning researcher that is based in both the authors’ experience and in the theory and practice of other researchers. In Chapter 7, ‘Interviewing and recording experience’, there are both practical recommendations for interviewing as well as the reminder that to interview is to enter into a professional relationship that has qualities of both distance and closeness appropriate for the context.

The authors represent well the range of research within their British and European perspectives on life history research, as they did in a previous publication (West, Merrill, Alheit and Siig Andersen 2007). I am puzzled that possible references to transformative learning theory and practice, initiated by Jack Mezirow in the USA in the 1980s, which are very obvious me, do not appear within the
authors’ discussion of learning and individual and collective change. It is likewise the case, of course, that many transformative learning practitioners are also unaware of the work of British and European researchers. My research experience (Nelson 1995) convinces me that there can be a fruitful meeting of autobiography and transformative learning.

The approaches to interviewing and gathering data favoured by Merrill and West seem to be based in the styles of therapy and sociological inquiry. There is certainly a strength here for biographical research. Yet, there is also a strength for research in the use of artistic-based approaches to engaging in auto/biography and life history. Drawings, third person accounts and metaphor are useful poetic entry points into auto/biography. The absence of artistic methods from these authors’ approaches and their inclusion in research undertaken in Australia (Nelson 1995, Mulvihill 2007) and reported in USA (Lawrence 2005) may be another example of a lack of awareness of each others’ work that exists between Anglo-European adult learning scholars and those based in North America.

From their experience of research, teaching and supervision, it is clear that Barbara and Linden know that researchers may face disparagement and suspicion from others in the university setting about the quality of their biographical work. This text does well to argue for the validity and effectiveness of biographical research methods. To support this, I would have liked to see the authors devote some space to communicating more explicitly to supervisors of researchers what they have come to understand about academic and experiential learning challenges that biographical learners face.

Reading this textbook reminds me of satisfying experiences of team teaching, of being in a partnership that values each other’s experience and one’s own. By describing and reflecting on several of their significant research projects, Barbara and Linden each tell of their own and each other’s learning in the field of biographical social
research, celebrating strengths and valuing accomplishments. Their text is a warm and convincing invitation to set out on the road of auto/biography and life history to gain understanding of how change is possible even on the edges of personal and social life.

Alex Nelson

References


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

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**Printer:** LG2 design

The Journal is published three times a year in April, July and November. Subscriptions are A$110 which includes GST for Australian subscribers and postage for all. Overseas subscriptions are A$130 which also includes postage.

Subscriptions, orders for back issues, advertisements and business correspondence are handled by the **Membership Services**. Papers for publication, material for review (books, reports, journals, audio-visuals) and editorial correspondence should be sent to the **Editor**.

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**ISSN:** 1443-1394

AJAL is listed in the SCOPUS database.
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