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

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FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Perched in the IAL (Institute for Adult Learning) in Singapore, I have the opportunity to reflect on the ‘adult education’ and ‘VET’ sectors here. Comparisons with one’s own familiar environment are sometimes informative and instructive, sometimes inappropriate and inelegant. It is often difficult to discern which is the case. However, fortune favours the brave, and nothing ventured, nothing gained. So I push ahead ... amazed at the remarkable progress that has been made in this city-state in only a very short time. (Singapore is gearing up to celebrate its 45th birthday on 9 August.)

Focusing on education, I’m somewhat perplexed by the very sharp differentiation between what Singaporeans call ‘PET’ (Pre-Employment Training) and ‘CET’ (Continuing Education and Training). The former encompasses all the formal institutions including schools, the Institute for Technical Education, the Polytechnics and the Universities. These traditional establishments are firmly entrenched in the public consciousness (much like, some years ago, I found notions of ‘two-year’ and four-year’ institutions in the USA so ingrained that Americans found it very difficult to comprehend what an Australian ‘three-year’ college of advanced
education would be like)! CET is the new kid on the block, relatively recently established (since 2003) in recognition of the need for continuing education in a modern, knowledge-based society/economy; that is, formal acknowledgement of lifelong learning has arrived late here.

The Institute for Adult Learning was established only in April 2008, by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency, to conduct for the first time train the trainer courses and to gradually build a research culture in the sector. Almost all research is concentrated in the PET sector, and little research exists in CET—somewhat reminiscent of the Australian VET sector at the time of the landmark report, *No small change* (1974). Interestingly, the learners who come to the IAL are all referred to as ‘adult educators’, catching up on qualifications that have for so long been neglected or not thought important in their arena. They work in the CET sector as, or intending to become trainers. Most are in one of the 26 WSQ (Workforce Skills Qualifications) Frameworks covering industry sectors such as Finance, Aerospace, Community and Social Services, Precision Engineering, Tourism—to name a few. The IAL conducts courses such as the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment and the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education (akin to Australia’s Certificate IV and Diploma), and hosts also the Master of Arts in Lifelong learning from the Institute of Education, University of London.

Another interesting development is Employability Skills set up as one of the WSQ Frameworks, accounting for approximately half of all SOAs (Statements of Attainment—yes, Singapore is full of acronyms too) attained each year. They are the foundational skills essential to every individual, portable across all industries, and enabling all to adapt better to new job demands and changing work environments. This area is also the focus of some interesting research work being undertaken at the IAL. It is evidently considered one of the key areas in the continuing education and training effort.
The foregoing observations on the Singaporean system have not necessarily an intimate connection with the subjects of the papers in this journal issue. However, in reflecting on the 50th year of our Association and Journal, one cannot help but be reminded of the significance of post-formal education and training, and how it is and will increasingly be so important in knowledge-based societies/economies. In this light, the issue embraces a bumper ten papers and five book reviews which piggy-back on some of these introductory themes I have mentioned. Four articles relate to community education, three to higher education environments and three to workplace settings. Two of these focus on single individuals—a community arts-based educator in Australia and a higher education lecturer in New Zealand—and interrogate using different research methods their adult education practice.

Tim Pitman, Sue Broomhall, Joanne McEwan and Elzbieta Majocha examines the centrality of adult learning within educational tourism, analyses the kinds of learning that companies promote and the pedagogic processes in such organised recreational tours, and investigates the relationship of this learning to broader lifelong learning agendas. His research suggests three types of learning experiences: study abroad/credit tours; family holidays/backpacking rites of passage; and educational tourism.

Lisa Ehrich analyses the practice of a community arts-based dance instructor working alongside women with and without disabilities. From an interview with her subject and observations of workshop and a dance performance, the author interprets ideas, insights and practices through the lens of ethical leadership theory and empowerment theory. Michelle Eady, Anthony Herrington and Caroline Jones provide insights, experiences and recommendations from adult literacy practitioners working with Indigenous communities. Focus group interviews, using an online synchronous platform, were used to elicit views about the literacy needs of
Indigenous adults and the successes in and barriers to meeting those needs. Their research indicates that these practitioners develop, through their work experiences, very specific and strongly held views on the literacy needs of the Indigenous community in which they are employed.

Bonnie Cord and Mike Clements highlight a learning orientated internship approach as one pathway for providing tertiary students, as adult learners, with opportunities to apply their knowledge and gain new skills in a work context. They furnish insight into learners’ self-reported learning outcomes after undertaking the Commerce Internship Program at the University of Wollongong. Their findings reveal that soft skills—communication, interpersonal skills and personal insights—are common areas of self-development.

David Giles and Susie Kung engage in an Appreciative Inquiry to find deeper meaning in a higher education lecturer’s professional practice in New Zealand. They found that, through this process, the lecturer was rejuvenated as life-centric stories were recalled, provocative propositions were constructed and a personalised action plan evolved. They conclude that the process energised the lecturer to reach for higher ideals in her future professional practice.

The education and training of business coaches at the Masters/graduate level is the subject of the paper by Grace McCarthy. It reviews the knowledge and skills required of business coaches, and educational approaches most appropriately suited to help students acquire knowledge and skills. Using both performance and perception data, the author analyses learner experiences in a new Master of Business Coaching at Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong. In doing so, she discusses the use of e-learning as an on-going support for students, and the benefits of authentic assessment and a varied approach to learning.

Tom Short and Roger Harris interrogate the notion of human resource development through the eyes of a small sample of HRD
professionals in New Zealand, particularly the challenges they face in aligning workplace learning with businesses. Based on focus group discussion, their paper unfurls many insights into the role of these HRD professionals as they grapple with issues of workplace learning and development in their organisations, where bridging the gap between strategic ideals and operational realities was clearly a major challenge. **Intan Mokhtar** employed semi-structured interviews with 18 civil servants from six Asian countries to elicit their experiences regarding lifelong learning policies and professional development opportunities. Although opportunities are available in most government organisations, the conditions for civil servants to take up such opportunities differ across organisations and countries, and expectations of learning and development from such opportunities also vary considerably. The author makes recommendations based on these similarities and differences with the aim of encouraging government organisations to review existing lifelong learning policies and professional development opportunities available to civil servants.

The two short practice papers spotlight study circles and changing concepts in training. **Mary Brennan** and **Mark Brophy** detail the formation of the Australian Study Circles Network which has recently been established and is founded on the 100-year tradition of study circles in Sweden and the last 20 years of development by *Everyday Democracy* in the USA. In particular, they focus on the Dialogue to Change Program, a community-driven process that helps people to explore complex issues, make decisions and begin to take action. Study circles lie at the heart of this process. **Sean O’Toole** engages us in reflecting on ‘education and training in all its forms [which] is now big business and a significant part of the Australian organisational landscape’. He focuses in particular on the intersections and differences between training, learning
and development, organisation development, and human resource development. These four concepts he says are often confused in the ‘shifting landscape’ and it would help their identities if these processes were to be defined more carefully.

Enjoy these papers—and think about the 50th Conference of ALA in Adelaide on 11–13 November!

Roger Harris
Editor
Adult learning in educational tourism

Tim Pitman, Sue Broomhall, Joanne McEwan and Elzbieta Majocha
University of Western Australia

This article explores notions of learning in the niche market sector of educational tourism, with a focus on organised recreational tours that promote a structured learning experience as a key feature. It analyses the qualitative findings of surveys and interviews with a cross-section of educational tourism providers in Australia, their lifelong-learning client markets and Australian academic scholars participating in this sector. The paper examines the differing perceptions of providers, participants and academics to what they expect from such tours, what constitutes learning within them and how particularly adult learning occurs through them.

Introduction

Notions of travel and education are inextricably linked, yet the words “tourism” and “education” seem to be more problematic bedfellows.
While the words “tourism” and “travel” are used by some scholars interchangeably, for many observers, tourists are an inferior type of traveller; a ‘homogenous group of dopey beasts, who take cattle-class flights at 3am, organise stag nights in Prague, and demand egg and chips and a beer whose name we can easily pronounce on a sunny beach in Spain’ (Thomas 2009: 51). Succinctly, Feifer (1985: 2) observes that ‘no-one wants to be called a tourist’.

The term ‘educational tourism’ has been linked to niche tourism, although the extent and spectrum of travel experiences that fall within this category are still being debated. As an ‘information centric’ pursuit (Hecht, Starosielski & Dara-Abrams 2007), most niche tourism markets are populated by clients motivated by a desire or need to learn. Ritchie (2003: 9) has argued, ‘the concept of travel for education and learning is a broad and complicated area, which explains why tourism academics and industry have to date largely ignored this field’. There is value in exploring the type of learning that occurs within a particular form of educational tourism that has existed for some time in the broader sector, but which is still relatively under-valued and under-researched by both the tourism and education sectors alike. We refer specifically to organised recreational tours (usually commercial), aimed at the general public (as distinct from, for example, for-credit study tours for students) which promote an intentional and structured learning experience as a key component. This learning component is explicit, and core, to the delivery of the product. This study examines the centrality of adult learning within this niche market, analyses the kinds of learning that companies promote and the pedagogic processes in such organised recreational tours and investigates the relationship of this learning to broader lifelong learning agendas.
Background: Educational tourism and learning

Research into the role of tourism as a learning experience is relatively scarce. Certainly the 1980s witnessed the appearance of new tourism designs that recognised tourism’s negative impacts and imagined a more positive role for tourism (Zurick 1992). ‘Positive’ has been in many cases conflated with emancipatory aspects of personal development, when referring to its effect on the traveller (for example, Moscardo 1996). Yet these studies generally understand tourism and travel as an unstructured and unmediated experience. Educational tourism, by contrast, involves a deliberate and explicit learning experience. The most significant in-depth studies of this domain stem from research commissioned by companies themselves about their client markets and their learning needs (Elderhostel 2007), or ontological investigations conducted by company personnel (Wood 2008). Yet the perceived nature and organisation of adult learning that occurs within educational tourism remain relatively under-researched, although further knowledge could assist in the development of tourism products that better fulfil adult learners’ needs and illuminate our understanding of forms of incidental learning. As part of a larger research project, this study examines the differing perceptions of providers, participants and academics regarding what they expect from such tours, their perceptions of what constitutes learning within them, and how they perceive pedagogic processes occurring through tours.

Method

Understandings of educational tourism were investigated through an analysis of varied data collected from a cross-section of educational tourism providers in Australia, their client markets and Australian academic scholars participating in this sector. Tour operator literature (such as website material, advertising flyers and brochures, specific tour itineraries, and detailed tour handbooks) was analysed for descriptions and understandings of adult learning. The literature
was analysed for concepts related to educational tourism, language regarding ideas of learning or teaching, and discussions of learning objectives, and the educational qualifications of tour providers, leaders and designers, as expressed by the tour companies when marketing to potential clients. Phrases were analysed for content (content analysis) with a view to identifying recurring concepts, understandings and perceptions.

Two online surveys were then conducted containing a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions. A “participant survey” collected data from individuals who identified themselves as having had previous experience of educational tours or as being interested in doing so in the future. A total of 1,091 participants were directly contacted and asked to complete the survey and 612 responses from travellers/potential travellers (hereafter referred to as learners) were received. Second, scholars were approached primarily from humanities and social science departments of Australian universities, due to the high representation of their disciplines in educational tour itineraries (history, art, languages, built environment, and so on). A total of 228 scholars completed the survey.

Third, five Australian educational tour operators agreed to recorded interviews. These companies were uniquely positioned across the education/tourism divide. Some companies were tour operators who had evolved to concentrate on educational tourism as a niche market. Others emerged from universities, via their institution’s adult education services. Thus, some could be said to be educators turned tourism providers and the others essentially the reverse. Detailed interviews were conducted with company directors, tour program developers, tour leaders, tour managers and trainers, operations managers, and marketing and sales staff.

Finally, ten scholars working in Australian universities agreed to give in-depth interviews from their experience as tour leaders, program designers or course material designers, or as organisers of study
tours and volunteer tourism for university students. Others were interviewed as interested future leaders.

**Adult learning in educational tourism**

The Australian tourism sector that identified itself as providing educational tourism offered many kinds of educational experiences ranging from mature-age study tours and programs to participation in academic research programs such as archaeological digs and ecological fieldwork, for-credit on-site university units, school group tours, and professional development tours. Tour operator literature identified learning or enquiry as a key differentiating point of its niche in the tourism market: from the passive ‘audience interested in travelling to learn’, to the more dynamic ‘enquiring minds’ which focus on ‘stimulating ... the active, inquisitive traveller’. Companies’ advertising material promoted the notion of an in-depth engagement with other cultures through the opportunities they provided to gain contextualised knowledge as well as a deeper (often longer) appreciation of particular sites. One company proposed a quote that summarised its target audience identity in this way: ‘I want to have time to absorb the environment and to learn something about what I’m seeing’.

Learning was unmistakably the dominant principle defined by survey respondents and was explicitly referred to in more than 83% of the definitions of educational tourism. Responses expressed three key ideas about the form of learning in educational tourism. First, it was intentional, such as ‘taking a trip specifically to broaden my horizons or enhance my knowledge’. Second, it was experiential, involving notions of ‘immersion’, ‘hands-on’, ‘vivid’ and ‘evidence’ and described as ‘engaging with ideas in their original context’. Third, it was structured, such as one male academic’s description of ‘the combination of travel with a structured educational program’.
Likewise, the academics and travel providers interviewed also stressed the intentional and experiential learning dimensions to educational tourism. However academics were more likely to define the learning component as a non-leisure pursuit, such as one tour leader who said that educational tourism was ‘for those people who want to take it seriously, rather than those who just want to come along for a holiday’. There was a tendency for academics to identify the more formal, structured elements of educational tourism, for example, stressing the need for it to be ‘structured, with a theme to pursue and requiring some background knowledge of the sites being visited and some attempt to analyse on the spot’. In contrast, tour providers were more likely to focus on the leisure aspect of educational tourism. One director saw his company’s focus as ‘enhancing the travel experience through learning for fun’. Another experienced, non-academic tour leader described how he ‘shuddered when people took their pens out—that’s not what this is about’.

Educational tourism providers emphasised the challenge to provide a learning experience that did not alienate their market since, in the words of one marketing manager, ‘some people think they’re not smart enough’. Experienced tour leaders appeared to recognise that learners wanted different types and quantities of information—as one male tour leader observed, ‘they all want to learn ... but there’s only a certain amount that they want to learn’. This accorded with learners’ own perceptions of learning on such tours, where they tended to approach the educative experience in a more holistic, multi-disciplinary manner. More than 70% surveyed described the learning experiences in non-specific or multi-dimensional ways, such as ‘exploring a country through its history, art, food and culture’ or ‘travelling to other places and learning about them’.

Whilst these conceptualisations of academics and tour providers were not in direct tension, the pedagogical functions of educational tourism were understood in subtly different ways. For learners, educational tourism was more often a means of understanding a location, whereas
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for the academic it was more likely to be a vehicle for transmitting abstract knowledge. Indeed, some academics perceived their role of tour leaders in this domain as a means of sharpening their own specific, disciplinary knowledge and conveying it to the adult learner. One art historian interviewed described the importance of ‘pursuing particular themes’ of learning for the benefit of the learner. As well, many of the academics described using educational tourism as a way of supporting core research, such as funding travel to archaeological sites. Thus, the educational tourism experience performed a second function as a professional tool for many scholars.

Educational tours and personal development

Several companies indicated that their tours could be claimed by learner participants as professional development or used for academic credit. However, the general access educational tours stress the broad, generic nature of their educational component, designed for the satisfaction of individuals rather than to meet professional or scholarly requirements. ‘Experience’, ‘explore’ and ‘discover’ were key descriptors of the learning experience within company literature. ‘Learning’ was not commonly used and was typically replaced by less directed (and less quantifiable) verbs such as ‘enquiring’. In general, the learning described was implicitly about personal development rather than testable information.

Companies emphasised that no specific academic qualifications were necessary to participate in a tour. Rather, participants required a willingness to explore another culture in detail. Attitude rather than qualification was thus a key requirement for learners. The degree of knowledge attainment was determined by the individual, with phrases such as ‘broadening your knowledge’ conveying a sense of learning that was measurable only at the level of each participant. Company personnel saw explicit learning objectives as potentially off-putting to clientele of different educational levels and experience. With educational tours, they insisted, learning must progress in
an enjoyable way. The director of one educational tour company described the learning that they provided as ‘what we’re about is continuing education, lifelong learning. So it’s about learning for fun without examinations attached’. Another tour designer believed that her company’s offerings were transformationally educative in that the learners ‘come away from it having learnt something and having very special experiences that I think helped aid their learning’. These discourses accorded with a humanistic perspective of lifelong learning, whereby learning throughout life and via varied fora is a means by which individuals develop personally and socially (Strain 1998). With these principles and objectives not to alienate potential clients in mind, the following section considers the perceptions and functions of the pedagogic processes that providers put in place to enable participant learning—through the learning community, the expert tour leader and the provision of support materials.

Community learning on tour

For most survey respondents, educational tourism suggested the idea of an intentional, structured, in situ learning experience. Being in situ was seen for many to provide distinct pedagogical insights. The delivery required and the value of being in place was articulated by one academic tour leader: ‘there is a different dynamic and you can draw on that shared experience without having to spell it out’. Another observed that it was unlike classroom lectures because of the immediacy of the content: ‘depending on what we’ve seen that day, they may be more focused perhaps on what they’ve just seen. For instance ... you know what XYZ looked like, you’ve just been down it, therefore you can visualise it. So there’s a difference’. The influence that being in place had on the production of new knowledge could not be understated, according to tour leaders. As one academic observed, ‘doing it in situ, absolutely there are things that you can teach only when you are there. It’s partly indescribable, just the sense of place ...
that you can’t convey in the classroom. There’s also an intensity to the teaching’.

Beyond ‘being in place’, however, academics observed important learning which learners experienced outside of site visits. The importance of *post-facto* reflection has been well-documented by experiential learning theorists and educationalists (Kolb 1984, Mezirow 1991) and is equally valued by the providers and their clients. Scholars and tour leaders alike observed the important learning which participants experienced outside of site visits. Many leaders use informal times on tours to promote reflection, much like a tutorial or workshop. One academic tour leader articulated his technique in this way:

> Everybody on that tour is going to have a different story, from just from the day’s journey. And so over dinner at night I’d go round the table. I mean, I’d still run a constructed sort of workshop, if you like. ... And then that becomes quite interesting because we’ve all seen the same things and yet they’ve all had different experiences of the same things. That’s what leads to the creative discourse.

Other leaders described the advantages of the group-learning environment as an exchange not only of information, but enthusiasm for what had been experienced. One male academic explained that he enjoyed ‘the interaction with other people and it’s really good when you have a group of people who share the same interests. You can sit around the hotel at drinks times and discuss what we’ve seen’. There was thus a consensus amongst those interviewed and surveyed that it was important to seize the moment; that is, to encourage reflective practice whilst still on tour and close—both temporally and spatially—to the actual learning experience.

There was strong agreement among learners that learning was enhanced on tour when the group shared their experiences. Many tour participants surveyed were tertiary educated. Almost two-thirds
of respondents (65%) to the client survey held a university degree. Almost one-quarter (24%) had completed postgraduate coursework studies and a further 13% held a higher degree by research (Masters or PhD). The idea of creating a tour learning community was commonly found in provider literature, through phrasing such as ‘sharing experiences with like-minded travelers’. Learning communities included concepts of ‘belonging’, shared experiences and emotional connections. Three assumptions underlie the support for learning communities—that they will create a group that will work together, increase intellectual interaction, and enhance learning (Huerta 2004). Whilst research has been conducted on learning communities that use tourism to further their goals (Guevara 1996), educational tourism itself as a learning community appears to have been somewhat overlooked. In survey responses for this project, leaders and clients both identified the group experience as a valuable learning resource and rated group learning/travel experiences higher than individual experiences. Learners equally saw the sharing as an enjoyable aspect of the tour, valuing not only its educational but social aspect.

Thus, the structured organisation of the travel experience was in itself perceived to be a stage in the learning process of participants. Travelling with other learners who shared similar motivations, drawing together a learning community—in fact, even the act of defining these tours as educational—all had potential to contribute to the associated pedagogical processes.

The expert educator: facilitating educational tourism

The role of the ‘educator’ was central to most learners’ definitions of educational tourism. Explicit academic connections mattered to educational tour companies, with provider literature making clear the academic qualifications of its personnel. Companies frequently defined their tourism therefore as engaging with academic expertise. Importantly, one marketing manager in an educational tourism
company saw the involvement of academics and experts as crucial in the distinction of their company from other tourism providers: ‘we believe educational tourism is having group leaders who know more about the place and can put it into a sense of its era and the perspective of where it’s come from’. A company director connected expertise to academic qualifications explicitly by stating that he or she ‘must bring with them an educational standard of some level, they have to be a recognised expert, not a self-proclaimed expert’. One experienced, male tour leader reflected that learners used academic qualifications as a proxy for quality, or as he phrased it, ‘they look at me and say okay, this person’s worked there that long, they lecture at this university so we can rely upon what they say’. As tour leaders, therefore, academics imitated their professional function; that is to say that for the adult learner, as for the student, they were a teacher, enabler and facilitator and for the tour operator, as for the university, they were a physical manifestation of ‘quality’ and a marketable commodity. Overwhelmingly, knowledge was identified as the most sought-after quality of a tour leader, included by two out of every three respondents in both the learner and academic surveys.

While academics tended to conceptualise expertise for leading an educational tour in terms of scholarly qualifications, first-hand, experiential knowledge was particularly highly regarded by learners. There was a strong sense that having been there denoted superior knowledge and manifested itself in the ability to speak the language, recall anecdotes and identify sites or events of interest that were ‘off the beaten track’. Additional to the tour leaders, many tour companies provided a suite of other knowledge experts such as ‘local guides’, ‘local lecturers’ or ‘on-site experts’, who were designed to enhance the learning experience. Typically, tour leaders drew distinctions between their role and that of local experts in terms of the material and contexts they provided:
The local guy, if we have one travelling with us, might talk about social, gender, political issues of the current day which are things which he or she would know in more detail than I would. Then I might talk a bit about the sites that we’re visiting and their cultural impact. Certainly the interpretation of that I can bring ... is by putting these things in a much wider cultural, political, historical context which would be beneficial for people.

Furthermore, to cater for the range of skills required in tour leaders, most companies created a division between an organiser/manager role and the accompanying expert. The manager was responsible for administrative tasks such as organising day tours, arranging visa and other documentation and attending to other daily, routine tasks. However, the social aspects of group cohesion and dynamics were very much seen as the role of the academic tour leader and fundamental to the learning process. One academic leader described his input on a photography tour in the following terms: ‘I was there as a kind of creative mentor, I suppose, that is the term that I like to use. And that worked very well’. Thus, the organisational culture of an educational tour in many ways resembled that of a more formal educational institution; with tour leaders as lecturers, local guides as sessional tutors or invited speakers, and tour managers as school managers.

Knowledge was clearly critical in a leader but pacing its delivery was equally emphasised by both learners and tour providers. A good leader, according to one provider, possessed ‘skills in communicating this knowledge to an interested audience’. This signified an important facet of educational tourism as it was marketed by companies: that the learning should be made both accessible and fun. It was not surprising, therefore, that companies highlighted the people-skills of their leaders. They were ‘caring’ and ‘willing to adapt to the pace of the group’. This was reflected in the personal qualities desirous in a tour leader rated in the survey, such as a good sense of humour and empathy to the group’s mood. One director summarised the brief for
the best tour leaders as: ‘Excellent qualifications, be good at their tour leader experience and social co-ordinator’. Leaders’ sensitivity to the diversity of knowledge and experience of tour participants was an important marketing emphasis for educational tourism providers.

Tour leaders too commonly spoke of the need to be sensitive to the different ways and environment in which learning occurred. The importance of gauging the variety of learning styles and levels in a tour group was noted by one female academic leader who observed ‘several of them will be taking notes. And with some of them they will also come up to you later and ask for clarification of certain of the points that you’ve made’. The opportunity to pose questions over the course of the tour was highlighted by many leaders as a common feature of participant learning. This indicates that beyond the formal delivery of lectures, an important aspect of learning takes place in informal, often post facto settings. These might be places where participants felt comfortable and supported, unafraid to ask questions, to verify their learning or to reflect upon the sites visited and their meanings. As one tour leader put it, ‘If they say, “We’d like to learn more about this”, I say, “Okay, let’s get together after dinner”’. As these examples suggest, tour leaders’ skills included not just knowledge expertise but also critical social skills in detecting levels of engagement and responding appropriately to them. However, whilst both academics and learners saw this prior experience as something that enhanced the quality of the educational product, scholars had greater faith in abstract knowledge, seeing ‘prior expertise’ as more valuable than ‘prior experience’. Conversely, learners rated first-hand experience as more desirable than formal expertise.

For providers, academics and learners, therefore, the tour leader and local experts were universally perceived to be critical aspects of the process by which learning occurred on tour. However, the choice of key qualities of such personnel for facilitating learning differed
between respondents. Typically (and unsurprisingly), tour providers and learners were more usually aligned in their notions of a good leader’s requirements for knowledge, accessibility, sensitivity and tour experience, whereas academic respondents tended to prioritise quality and depth of knowledge as a more powerful component of a leader’s facilitation of client learning.

Learning beyond the touristic experience

The influence of tourism paraphernalia on the touristic experience has been well documented; however, discussions have almost exclusively focused on their marketing and promotion potential (Ateljevic & Doorne 2002). Learners as well as educational tour providers, however, saw pre-tour documentation and events as a crucial element of the learning experience. Survey participants were asked to rank in importance a series of statements regarding preparation for tours. The results indicated that prior information, such as handouts, books and other educational aids, was highly valued. Female learners showed a much stronger preference for preparing their learning. Maps were considered to be the most valuable educational aid pre-tour, ranking above handbooks and study notes. Survey participants were also asked to consider what types of educational aids they would find useful for learning on an educational tour. Again, maps were considered to be the most valuable educational aid, consistently ranking highly at all stages of the educational travel experience. A tour leader for one educational tour company described the value of maps as being invaluable for focusing historical discussion points; for example, including individual plans of buildings to help visualise, and direct, a learning experience.

Nonetheless, more formal educational aids, most notably handbooks, were almost as highly valued as maps pre and during tour. Handbooks often included suggested reading containing novels as well as scholarly textbooks. One leader reflected on how his group used their textual resources on tour:
If we’re walking around and we have these available to us, people can jot notes down in that sort of way or above all, when we meet in the evening, we’ve got this shared resource to actually work with. So these take the place fairly obviously of visuals, overheads, things like that which we would use in the teaching classroom setting. So it does enable people, I think, to have a fairly good and comprehensive aid memoir for what’s going on, a bit of resource which can actually be used in the field, in the hotel to enhance their knowledge.

How such material was used varied depending on the teaching style of the tour leader. As one male academic leader observed from his experience, ‘the people who come on these tours don’t want to go overseas for three weeks and study in the way that we would think it. They don’t really want to do much reading in the evening’.

The importance of access to educational aids continued post-tour; again, maps were considered to be the most valuable. Perhaps surprisingly, the web appeared to play little part in post-tour reflection according to respondents, although at least one academic interviewed had extended the educational experience both before and beyond the on-site engagement with his group by creating a website to make accessible the reports from the tours as well as his detailed notes. Generally speaking, female learners expressed a greater interest in continuing the learning experience post-tour than did males. Post-tour, scholars had greater faith in the power of informal meetings to extend and stimulate the quality of the educational experience than did the learners. However, learners preferred the ongoing analysis of maps, handbooks, web research and novels. It appears, therefore, that learners prefer group interaction on tour followed by individual reflection post tour, with scholars effectively inverting the preference.
Discussion

Although academics tend to hold more diverse ideas of what educational tourism could be than did learners, a number of shared understandings were apparent from our survey. Both groups considered the primary outcome of the educational tourism experience to be learning, and furthermore, that the learning was intentional. A series of distinctive features in the design and marketing of such tours contributed to their perception as pedagogical experiences for participants, but these components must cater to a wide range of learning needs, styles and interests and therefore cannot be too prescriptive or rigid. First, their explicit identification as ‘educational’ was an important aspect to what makes such tours learning experiences for their clients. Such terminology drew together like-minded individuals and provided a shared intention and expectations to the activities beyond simply visiting a series of destinations. Second, tour operators in this niche market were perceived to provide particular knowledge, expertise or experience, through the tour leader as well as local lecturers and guides. Social skills, as well as knowledge expertise, were vital because these enabled leaders to identify levels and degrees of capacity and engagement in the clientele and to respond accordingly in a variety of formal and informal contexts on tours. Third, learners, academics and providers agreed that support materials provided before and after the tour added to the opportunities for client learning associated with educational tourism.

Significantly, the learning experience in educational tourism is perceived to extend beyond the actual touristic experience and encompassed pre-travel considerations such as product development, personnel recruitment and learner preparation. Equally, the learning experience had a life after travel, as learning communities were forged to maintain learners’ social links. Educational tourism, therefore, has great potential to offer a meaningful, lifelong learning
experience for both its consumers and practitioners. It supports many
of the distinguishing features of a lifelong learning agenda, such as
those offered by Watson (2003), including the recognition of the
importance of both formal and informal learning, the importance
of self-motivated and self-funded learning, and the universality of
learning.

This research suggests three types of learning experience associated
with travel. On one end of the continuum, study abroad or credit tours
organised as part of a university curriculum infer formal learning,
especially since that learning is invariably credentialled. At the other
end lies travel for reasons such as family holidays or backpacking
rites of passage. These are generally informal learning experiences.
Situated somewhere between these two lies the focus of our study—
educational tourism. It can best be described as non-formal learning,
one which has the potential to provide benefits at both ends. On the
one hand, it is essentially a personal/pleasurable pursuit rather than a
professional/study activity, and thus its power to motivate and engage
the learner is significant. On the other, it is learning that is to a large
degree structured and directed, facilitated by a knowledge expert,
and supported by a range of relevant materials, giving it increased
potential to transform the adult learner.

In many ways, the ‘look’ of the learning experiences on an educational
tour resembled those occurring in more formal settings such as
higher education institutions. Organisational structures, roles,
teaching styles and educational outcomes were all apparent, as
were implicit hierarchies, proxies of quality and learner perceptions
of quality teaching. This raises interesting questions for adult
educators and researchers. Were these structures apparent because
they provided the best environment for learning to occur? Were
the norms, ideologies and beliefs of formal educational institutions
deliberately inculcated in these commercial operations, as a way of
attracting academics as tour leaders and clients familiar with tertiary
institutions? Or was it rather that the academics unintentionally brought these norms with them? Was there an expectation by the learners that this was what education looked like? The effects the organisational structure, knowledge expert and tour documentation formats have upon less formal, experiential learning events deserve to be further explored.

Educational tourism is a topic that could benefit from a wide range of disciplinary and methodological approaches to explore more fully its impact on both participants and local communities. Ethnographic studies—similar to Neumann’s (1993) account of an alternative bus tour through the American Southwest—are one way in which adult educators could shed further light on the social interactions between tour participants and their host communities. Equally, critical educational researchers could further explore the pedagogical relationship between the travel participant and tour leader. This is particularly relevant given the transformative potential of adult education and the way in which knowledge/power is notionally ascribed to the ‘academic’ in an educational tourism framework.

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References


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Community workers are often described as unsung heroes who work for, with and alongside others in order to make qualitative differences to the communities they serve. This paper reports on the story of a community-based arts educator, Morgan Jai-Morincone, winner of the ACT Adult Learners Week Award for an outstanding program in 2007. This program, referred to as The Radiance Dance Project, is an inclusive performance project open to women with and without disabilities that culminates in a yearly performance. Via an interview with Morgan, observations of a workshop she provided for the women in her 2009 program, and a viewing of a DVD of the 2008 dance performance, this case study provides an illustration of the power of arts-based educative processes for breaking down barriers between people with and without disabilities. It draws upon constructs from ethical leadership theory and empowerment theory to interpret her ideas and practices.
Introduction

I would only believe in a God who knew how to dance (Nietzsche).

Nietzsche’s provocative words resonate in my head as I observe 23 women with and without disabilities engage in series of creative movement activities during their weekly session facilitated by Morgan Jai-MorinCOME, a community-based arts educator in Canberra. The session is part of The Radiance Dance Project, a 40-week program offered free to women in Canberra. Morgan is assisted by her co-facilitator who has worked with her since the project was founded and a mature-aged university student who joined them at the beginning of the year to conduct a research project on Radiance. In the class, there are varying body shapes, ages and abilities. One woman is in a wheelchair and can move only her head. Many women are at very young developmental ages, and some of these women have come to the session with their support workers who are engaging fully in the activities alongside them. Among the group are a few women with professional dance experience. Most of the participants have had very little experience in or exposure to performing arts. The group in 2009 is made up of about half of the women without any official disability. All bodies can dance.

This paper tells the story of Morgan, the founder of The Radiance Dance Project, and the unique way she has used dance as a means of breaking down the barriers between people with and without disabilities. I felt compelled to write this paper after having had the privilege of attending a workshop she provided at the Adult Learning Australia Conference in 2008 where she spoke of her program and the principles governing its operation. The paper begins by referring to some of the important literature in the field. It considers the potential of the creative arts as a means of mobilising learning and growth for people with disabilities, discusses three central constructs pertaining to ethical leadership theory, and draws upon some insights
from empowerment theory. These theoretical insights are revisited later in the paper as a means of interpreting Morgan’s life and work.

**Creative arts**

For some years now, the value and place of the creative arts has emerged in a variety of professional areas such as health, education and business as a way of enhancing and enriching learning. For instance, health professionals have explored the value of dance and movement as a type of healing and therapy (Leavy 2008). Various types of arts-based education are being used to develop leaders and managers in business, premised on the belief that art can create a different type of space for dealing with problems and connecting to issues on a deeper level (Kerr & Darso 2008a). In the field of disability, creative arts, drama and movement have been used with disabled people to help them develop physically, socially and cognitively. For example, Fuller, Jongsma, Milne, Venuti and Williams (2008) maintain that dance and physical movement allow people with impairments to develop a heightened awareness of their body’s structure and their strengths. Dance and movement have also been seen as a way of promoting growth and change (James 1996) as well as increasing self-esteem and improved skills in socialisation and communication (Lynch & Chosa 1996, cited in Fuller et al. 2008).

Traditionally, performance-based dance such as ballet and other classical dance styles was pursued by persons with ‘perfect bodies’ (Freire 2001: 74). However, in more recent times, a spate of professional dance and theatre companies in Australia and overseas has emerged that use performers with and without physical disabilities. Some of these better known companies include Dancing Wheels, Axis, Joint Forces and CandoCo (Male 2005). Many of the disabled dancers in these companies were at one time professional dancers or sportspersons but who through accidents or illnesses found themselves disabled. Companies like Axis challenge society’s
beliefs about disability and ‘blur the boundaries’ (Milner 2001) about what constitutes dance and creative movement. Not surprisingly, Axis has been described as a group of artists who ‘challenge notions of normalcy and champion social inclusiveness’ (Felciano 2002: 59). Based on an exploration of four contemporary American artists/companies (of which Axis is one), Davies (2003: Abstract) argues that ‘the actuality of disabled performers in disability dance and theatre forces us to rethink the boundaries of human experience to expand our notions of what is possible on the stage’. Common to these professional dance companies is their desire to reframe the ways in which disabled dance can be understood and construed (Hickey-Moody 2006). In contrast to the professional dance groups mentioned above, there are no criteria regarding who can or cannot participate in The Radiance Dance Project. It is open to any woman, of any ability, who wishes to engage in and be committed to the year-long program. Furthermore, and unlike many of the aforementioned companies, Radiance is inclusive of women living with any disability type. It draws upon principles of community cultural development and social inclusion.

**An ethical framework—care, justice and critique**

An important framework that is used in this paper to understand the values and pedagogical practices of the arts-based community worker whose work and program are its focus was developed by Starratt (1996). The framework comprises three inter-related ethics: an ethic of care, justice and critique. Although his work was developed for school leadership, it has applicability to community leadership and community development and has been used to interpret the work of community leaders (see Creyton & Ehrich 2009, Ehrich & Creyton 2008). Each is now discussed.

An ethic of care refers to ‘a standpoint of absolute regard’ (Starratt 1996) for the dignity and worth of individuals. Thus, it prizes relationships with others and these become pivotal to the functioning
of people. According to Fromm (1957: 25), care is the ‘active concern for life and the growth of that which we love’. Whether we wish to use the word love or care, Starratt and like-minded writers maintain that leaders who operate within an ethical framework are genuinely concerned for and care for others.

An ethic of justice, according to Starratt (1996), involves being fair and equitable in dealing with people. For leaders, it is about creating the conditions of a socially just work environment. Building a sense of community lies at the heart of this ethic. A community is described as a collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and bound to a set of values and ideals (Sergiovanni 1994). A community exists when people feel a sense of belonging and interconnectedness with others. Shared and democratic leadership where everyone can make a contribution constitute the operations of this type of community. Shared leadership, following Pearce and Conger’s (2003) definition, is viewed as an interactive process among individuals in groups that achieve particular goals. Their definition implies that leadership is dynamic, relational and utilised for the purposes of the achievement of goals. It also assumes that leadership is multi-directional and may come from any individual.

Related to the ethic of justice is a concern for a greater goal or mission. Starratt (1996) uses the term, ‘transcendence’ to explain ‘turn[ing] our life toward someone or toward something greater than or beyond ourselves’ (p.158). He gives the example of people who have a strong belief in improving the environment or political freedom and this ideal leads them to collective action.

According to Starratt (1996), the third ethic, an ethic of critique, has been influenced by critical theory, a neo-marxist perspective that emerged initially in the 1920s by the Frankfurt school of philosophers and other philosophers sympathetic to a Marxist perspective. An ethic of critique is one that maintains that inequality and injustice exist in social life (that is, in social relationships, laws, institutions, social
practices) and critical analysts ask questions such as ‘whose interests are being served’? in an attempt to redress such injustices. Starratt (1996) argues that the ethical challenge is to

make these social arrangements more responsive to the human and social rights of all citizens, to enable those affected by social arrangements to have a voice in evaluating the consequences and in altering them in the interests of the common good and of fuller participation and justice for individuals. (p.161)

As indicated above, central to an ethic of critique is also the need for democratic and participatory forms of leadership that encourage citizens to question the underlying bases of power, hegemony and control within society. It is argued here that these three ethics are interconnected since each requires the other to form an ethical framework. Following Starratt’s (1996) lead, ethical leaders are those persons who connect with others, care for and work closely with them and build more equitable structures.

**Empowerment as a key construct**

Related to an ethic of care, justice and critique is the notion of empowerment. It is a concept that has been used widely in a variety of disciplines such as education, feminist studies and disability. Its origins have been traced to Paulo Freire (1971) and his seminal work promoting the emancipation of the oppressed (Mann Hyung Hur 2006). Empowerment can be seen as both a process and a product that is expressed in attitudes, behaviour and knowledge (Dempsey & Foreman 1997). It has been described also as occurring at an individual, group and community level, and described as a ‘social process’ (Mann Hyung Hur 2006) because it occurs in relation to others. Feminist theories have conceptualized empowerment as ‘power to’ where the individual is able to influence his or her environment and ‘power with’ where people work together in equal partnership (Neath & Schriner 1998, in Block, Balcazar &
‘Power with’ has also been described as ‘power in connection, relational power and mutual power’ (Fennell 1999: 27).

In the disability literature, empowerment has been identified as a necessity for persons with disabilities to help become self-determining (Sprague & Hayes 2000) and able to regain control over their lives (Rappaport, in Sprague & Hayes 2000: 679). Indeed empowerment has been put forward as a theory of change for people not only with disabilities but also from a variety of marginalised groups (Block et al. 2001).

Sprague and Hayes (2000) support what they describe as a feminist standpoint analysis of empowerment as ‘a characteristic of a social relationship, one that facilitates the development of someone’s self’ (p.671). They identify particular types of relationships that are empowering for disabled people as those drawing on support groups, consciousness raising groups, and self-advocacy groups. Regarding the latter, the authors state that people need the opportunity to experience achievement and reflect on their skills and experiences. This sort of relationship is reciprocal as it enables disabled people to contribute to as well as benefit from relationships. They maintain that empowering relationships can also be created when there are differences in ability between the various parties. Here they are referring to the relationship between care-takers and persons with disability. The term used to explain this is ‘co-empowerment’ (Bond & Keys, in Sprague & Hayes 2000: 685).

Sprague and Hayes’ (2000) view of empowerment has connections to the notion of ‘collective empowerment’ (Mann Hyung Hur 2006) since this refers to individuals who join together to learn and develop skills for collective action. Synthesising writing in the field of collective empowerment, Mann Hyung Hur (2006) refers to its key components as ‘community building’—which refers to creating a sense of community among people; ‘community belonging’ where people are able to identify with similar others; ‘involvement in the
community’ where people participate in community activities and events that could lead to social change; and ‘control over organization’ that refers to group support and advocacy.

In summary, empowerment as a construct is connected to an ethic of care since it values relationships with others and sees individuals as unique persons who can give and receive. It is connected to an ethic of justice as it maintains that people can work together in equal partnership and be members of a community where they contribute fully and belong. Moreover, within this community there is a space to have a voice. Finally, it is connected to an ethic of critique as it refers to ‘power with’ where people can act together to bring about change.

**Methodology**

A qualitative, interpretive case study was used to capture the arts-based community worker’s story. A case study was chosen because it is an effective way of presenting rich narratives on individual cases (Maykut & Morehouse 1994). It is also useful as it enables the use of multiple sources of data (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran 2001). Three main data sources were used in this study. These included an in-depth semi-structured interview, a series of unstructured observations, and two documents written by the community educator about the program. Firstly, an interview was used as it enables a participant to reflect upon and make sense of his or her experience (Siedman 1991). A set of key questions outlined in an interview guide was made available to the participant prior to the interview process (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 1990). The participant granted the researcher permission to tape record the interview. The questions focused on her background, the dance program she introduced and facilitates, the central values underpinning her work as a community-based arts educator, her leadership approach and strategies and the challenges facing people in her field of work.
Secondly, an observation of the participant facilitating a two-hour session with the women in the program was the second data source. This observation was of an ‘unstructured’ variety (Cavana et al. 2001) and the researcher observed and took notes on all aspects of the session. This was followed by the researcher listening to a one-hour debriefing session facilitated by the participant with her co-facilitator and student regarding the workshop that day. The final observation included the watching of a DVD that captured the performance of the cohort from 2008. Thirdly, document analysis was used (Maykut & Morehouse 1994) where the participant made available to the researcher two documents pertaining to The Radiance Dance Project. Both of these were information handouts about the program.

After the interview was completed, a transcript was sent to the participant for checking and endorsement. The analysis of the transcript, in large part, was guided by the procedures outlined by Marton (1988). For example, comments were brought together into categories on the basis of their similarities and categories being differentiated from one another in terms of their variances. Data from the observations and documents were integrated with the themes. Theoretical constructs alluded to earlier in the discussion were used to assist in the interpretation of the themes that emerged from the analysis. A draft of this paper was given to the community arts worker for her comments and endorsement that it presented an authentic account of her work and ideas. The next part of the discussion is based around three main themes: the person, the program, and the interpretation.

**The person**

Morgan was born in 1972, the first of two children. She attended an alternative high school that had a child-centred curriculum and philosophy. The school was ideal as it enabled her to pursue her ‘*love of performing arts and the creative process in general*’. Because of
her great interest in the arts she completed a degree in educational theatre at university followed by a graduate diploma in education. Between 1998–2000 she worked as an education officer for Oxfam Community Aid Abroad on The World Neighbours Education Project. It involved raising awareness of social justice issues through the performing arts for youth in schools. The job involved managing and administering presenters and creating new works. During this time Morgan secured funding (for Oxfam) to devise and develop a role play based on refugees. She and her husband (who had experience working as a recreation officer with children) performed this particular piece for schools in the ACT for a year. She said working at Oxfam was a ‘turning point’ as it gave her a deeper understanding of social justice issues related to people experiencing disadvantage and enabled her to integrate her love of the arts with her strong commitment to social justice.

Morgan decided to leave Oxfam once she fell pregnant with her first child. Since leaving Oxfam she has been self-employed as a community arts worker where she has worked for a range of community organisations and with people of all ages and abilities. Over the next couple of years she completed a masters of arts in communication (cultural performance), had another child, and worked part-time as a belly dancing teacher, skills she learned whilst at university. Through a friend, she was asked to take a belly dancing class for a group of women with disabilities and she realized how much she enjoyed working with people with diverse abilities. At this time she decided if she wanted to continue with this type of work and to be able to offer a program that was affordable for women with disabilities, she would need to seek funding. Using skills gained while at Oxfam, she was successful in securing an innovations grant through the ACT government. The first program was offered in 2005 and run by Morgan and her friend who has worked with her as co-facilitator since that time. Morgan promoted the program through the community sector and it grew from seven people (on the
first day of the first program) to 25 by the end of the year. Of the 25 participants, 23 had some connection with disabilities. The program is now in its fifth year. Morgan stated that of the 27 women enrolled in this year’s program, about half have disabilities, while the other half have no connection with disability. She reflected that, ‘to me [that] marks a big part of the evolution of the group in terms of how willing people are to get involved with something that’s inclusive in the broader community’. Like so many community programs that rely on securing funding for their ongoing operation, Morgan has had to apply for funding every year to pay for the direct costs involved in running a community-based arts program.

The program: The Radiance Dance Project

*Radiance has grown out of the lack of opportunities for people with disabilities to access and participate in ongoing dance/movement classes, programs or projects and a need for opportunities for people with and without disabilities to dance, create, explore, collaborate and perform together. It has grown into a project that sees all humans as having diverse abilities and offering a space where individuals can express their unique selves in connection and collaboration with others.* (Jai-Morincome 2009)

As indicated by the quote, the program is based on a number of assumptions and many of these relate to the importance of valuing difference and diversity, integrating learning and creative opportunities for people with and without disabilities, and the ability that everyone has to express themselves. As an integrated program, Radiance is ‘open to and actively promotes dance that involves people with and without disabilities’ (Jai-Morincome 2009). In this way, it provides opportunities for people to experience and to appreciate each other’s diverse ability. All bodies are seen as being able to dance and everyone has the ability to express themselves creatively and artistically through performance. Thus, Radiance is based on the assumption that there are no right or wrong ways in
moving. For this reason, participants are encouraged to move safely yet extend their range of movement vocabulary and explore new ways of communicating and moving. Hence, the degree of physicality is dependent on what each person is able to do and contribute. Active participation is promoted where each person is encouraged and supported to participate as best they can. In fact, support workers/carers (either paid or unpaid) are expected to be active participants in the program and to contribute in the same way as other participants. Co-active assistance is encouraged where participants express themselves in their own way and the facilitators avoid offering moves or examples unless these are part of the activity. The final assumption underpinning the program is the importance of a culture of kindness to operate so that participants can work together in a supported and supportive environment. As stated by Jai-Morin (2009), ‘we approach each other with openness and kindness [in] a loving, supportive and respectful environment’. It is this culture of support and inclusivity that enables the participants to feel at ease and to immerse themselves in the creative experience.

A unique feature of Radiance is it is offered to women only and the main reason for this is historical. As Morgan indicated, what is now known as The Radiance Dance Project grew out of a pilot project with an existing women’s group run by a local service provider. As the project evolved, it remained a women’s only group due in large part to the positive responses of the participants who appreciated its single gender focus and its ability to enable them to feel safe, supported and free to be themselves. Radiance is the only single gender program that Morgan provides; her other programs cater for mixed genders.

Radiance spans 40 weeks in the year commencing in February and ending in December. Once a week, participants meet for over two hours, including a break for morning tea. Each week builds on from the previous week so participants are encouraged to attend weekly and make a firm commitment to remain in the program until the end
of the year. The first 10 weeks of the year are devoted to exploratory work. Morgan explained that much of her ideas about movement and improvisation have come from the seminal work of Rudolf Laban (1988), teacher and choreographer, whose influence has been felt in fields such as education, dance and the arts.

The next 10 weeks of the program are devoted to furthering skill development in movement and dance making as well as generating potential performance material. By the end of term 2, ideas begin to be workshopped to see which ones have the potential to be used in the performance. Participants are encouraged to contribute and explore their ideas by engaging in improvised activities in small and large groups in class. As a way of ensuring that participants’ ideas and ‘voice’ are accurately recorded and therefore able to be built upon, Morgan and/or her co-facilitator take photographs and video as many sessions as they can. These ideas are then explored in follow-up classes. During their debriefing session following the class, Morgan and her co-facilitator discuss what issues emerged, what worked well, and what to do in the next session. Another important source of feedback is the twice-yearly evaluation (conducted in the middle and end of the year), when participants are asked to share their perceptions and reflections about the program. Those participants who can write are asked to record their responses, while photographs, video material and art materials are used for those people who are unable to speak to capture their reactions. Support workers who accompany the women with disabilities are also asked to articulate their perceptions of how the project is going for themselves and for the woman they are supporting.

In terms 3 and 4, participants workshop and rehearse the various pieces to which they are committed and wish to perform. Performance pieces are usually semi-improvised (mostly un-choreographed). As Morgan stated, it is a participant’s ‘way of moving [that] inspires what direction the pieces take’. For each performance, there are several pieces that are performed and some of these involve a small
number of participants, while other pieces involve all participants. Both Morgan and her co-facilitator perform in many of the pieces. Morgan explained the performance is not a variety show but a series of segments that are connected loosely to a theme and that the theme usually emerges as each piece develops. The cumulative effect of the 40-week sessions is a performance offered to the public on two days in December each year. In 2008, over 200 people in the local community in Canberra attended the performances.

**The interpretation**

Dance as a vehicle of empowerment

Dance has been described as the most ‘ephemeral’ of the arts since it cannot be captured in written or recorded form (Borstel 2006: 66). It is a visual spectacle that involves creative movement and expression. Movement and theatre, for Morgan, are the creative vehicles through which she enacts her work as an independent community arts worker. At the heart of The Radiance Dance Project is the invitational space she gives participants to become empowered individually and collectively. Individual empowerment is demonstrated by participants’ emerging and growing awareness of their bodies and the development and expansion of their skills of movement (James 1996). Collective empowerment is visible via the way participants are encouraged to improve their communicative and relational skills with others in the group (Fuller *et al*. 2008). It is through participants’ relationships and interactions that they learn, develop and create (Sprague & Hayes 2000).

The notions of ‘power to’ and ‘power with’, both relevant to feminist theories of power and disability (Block *et al*. 2001, Fennell 1999), were apparent in the actions of participants during the class that was observed. ‘Power to’ was evident where participants were engaged in activities, interacting with the environment and participating in a way that suited them at that moment. ‘Power with’ was evident not only in
how Morgan described her way of working with participants, but also demonstrated through the opportunities she provided for participants in session when they took ownership of the various activities, shared their ideas with others and responded individually and collectively.

**Ethic of care**

An important operating principle of The Radiance Dance Project is a climate of openness and kindness in a loving, supportive and respectful environment. Caring for individuals as unique persons and acceptance of their unique gifts and abilities (Fromm 1957, Starratt 1996) are central to Morgan’s values as a community arts worker and evident in her practices and relationships with participants and her co-facilitators.

An important feature of Radiance, as distinct from other programs designed to support groups of people who have different types of disability, is its integrated and inclusive focus. Morgan said that, through the approach that she and her co-facilitator take, the exercises they use, and the principles that guide the program, she believes she has been successful in creating a caring environment where barriers between groups of people are not an issue. As she says, the

> group becomes very close very quickly because [of] ... working together through movement, not reliant on words, when you’re actually moving together, is a very intimate act. So we are close with each other, we’re close physically and that really develops a bond between people.

Kerr and Darso (2008b) concur when they state that ‘[a]rt can educate us ... that we are able to enter into conversation on a deeper level than we normally do, and the artistic experience creates strong relationships and a feeling of connectedness’ (p. 591). Sprague and Hayes (2000: 687–688) maintain that people, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, seek to be in relationships that are
empowering yet the reality for many people with disabilities is that they are ‘severely constrained by interpersonal and social structural relationships that in one way or another define them as “other”, as object rather than subject’. It is these constraints and the notion of ‘the other’ that Morgan and her co-facilitator have worked hard to diminish.

Ethic of justice

According to Starratt (1996) an ethic of justice is concerned with fair and equitable treatment of others in an inclusive climate. Morgan stated that she is acutely aware of the difficulties that persons with disabilities face regarding access to arts-based programs. For example, many people with disabilities are unemployed or on low fixed incomes. In recognition of this issue, the project is fully subsidised and participants do not pay to attend.

Another illustration of just practice is the inclusive climate that is created that enables democratic/shared leadership approaches to operate. A good example to highlight this is the important expectation that carers or support workers who accompany people with disabilities to the program are expected to be actively involved in the dance sessions and performances. As it states in the information sheet, ‘[s]upport workers/carers are considered full, active and equal participants in the program’ (Morincome 2008: 1). The rationale underpinning this expectation can be explained by referring to the concepts of ‘co-empowerment’ (Bond & Keys, in Sprague & Hayes 2000) and ‘collective empowerment’ through community building (Mann Hyung Hur 2006). Co-empowerment is a notion stemming from a feminist standpoint analysis that maintains relationships developed between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities can be empowering as both can learn and develop from the connection and interaction with others (Sprague & Hayes 2000). By having support workers involved in the program, as well as people without official disabilities, Morgan and her co-facilitator
are endeavouring to create opportunities for mutually respectful and interdependent relationships to be forged and where leadership is multi-directional and can come from any of the participants (Pearce & Conger 2003).

Following Mann Hyung Hur’s (2006) work, collective empowerment is said to refer to building a sense of community among people as well as enabling people to feel as though they belong to a community. There is also the recognition that the road to empowerment is likely to be different for different people (Sprague & Hayes 2000). For this reason, Morgan encourages all participants to express themselves individually and collectively within a community of like-minded others. It is the building of the community that provides a space for expression, new ways of relating to people, and the promotion of key values such as sharing and trust (Jazzar & Algozzine 2006).

Ethic of critique

An ethic of critique is one that supports human rights of all citizens and provides them with a voice. It questions how power is used in society and aims to redress injustices and inequalities (Starratt 1996). Morgan’s strong beliefs about social inclusion reveal how she subscribes to this ethic. She says: ‘I have a commitment to social inclusion and I have a belief that that is the right way to go and that it’s our society that needs to change in order to accommodate difference, not people who are perceived as different’. Morgan described Radiance as a ‘statement against segregation; it’s a statement for inclusion’. The work of Radiance is ‘a form of activism and we do that through performance. We do it through the weekly sessions; ... it’s a political act just for the fact that adults with and without disabilities are coming together when in most areas of life we are separate’. It is through dance that Morgan is able to provide an arena for participants to be collectively empowered (Mann Hyung Hur 2006) by belonging to a community, by identifying with others in the community, and by participating in activities that can lead to
social change (Mann Hyung Hur 2006). As Clover (2007) argues, creativity is an integral part of social activism.

In describing integrated dance, Hickey-Moody (2006) says that it ‘possess[es] a capacity to reframe the ways in which bodies with intellectual disability [or other disability for that matter] can be thought’ (p.89) since ‘different bodies and abilities map out new possibilities’ (Davies 2003: Abstract). As Davies (2003) indicates, watching different bodies dance helps us to reconsider and reframe what is possible on stage and what is possible in life. Morgan has similar sentiments when she says, ‘I see how it could be and I want to take people on that journey to how it could be, how it could be different, how it could be more empowering, more connective for communities’.

**Conclusion**

This case study has endeavoured to capture some of the valuable insights and practices of a community arts-based educator in Australia. Her story was told because it is an inspirational one. It is inspirational for its creativity, its vision and enactment of social inclusion, its responsiveness to difference, and its political content and intent. It is inspirational for its ‘hope, celebration and optimism for the future’—three key notions that are central to feminist community based projects (Clover 2007: 520). It is inspirational for the space it provides for people to use whatever language they have available to them to share their ideas and creative responses. It is inspirational because it exists in a sector that has been marginalised by instrumentalist thinking and increasing funding cuts.

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References


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Literacy practitioners’ perspectives on adult learning needs and technology approaches in Indigenous communities

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Current reports of literacy rates in Australia indicate an ongoing gap in literacy skills between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian adults, at a time when the literacy demands of work and life are increasing. There are many perspectives on what are the literacy needs of Indigenous adults, from the perspectives of community members themselves to the relatively under-researched perspective of literacy practitioners. This paper provides the insights, experiences and recommendations from adult literacy practitioners who work with adult Indigenous learners in communities across Australia. Focus group interviews, using an
online synchronous platform, were used to elicit views about the literacy needs of Indigenous adults in communities and the successes in and barriers to meeting those needs. The practitioners also shared their views on the use of technology in literacy learning. Together, these views can inform future directions in curriculum design and teaching approaches for community-based Indigenous adult literacy education.

Introduction

In 2006, the Australian Census indicated that 19.4% of Indigenous adults had completed high school (Year 12) compared with 44.9% of non-Indigenous adults (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). For this statistic, adults are defined as people aged 15 years or over in 2006. Since Year 12 attainment is now considerably more common among young Australian adults than a decade or two ago, and since Australia’s non-Indigenous population is aging much faster than the Indigenous population, data on younger adults are also relevant. The results of recent rounds of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) highlight the continuing over-representation of Indigenous 15 year olds among Australian 15 year olds with the lowest literacy levels. The PISA data also point to the importance of taking into account socio-economic status and home location in understanding educational attainment among young Indigenous adults in Australia. As noted by Masters (2007) in his analysis of the 2006 PISA results, ‘approximately 40 per cent of Indigenous students, 26 per cent of students living in remote parts of Australia and 23 per cent of students from the lowest socio-economic quartile are considered by the OECD to be “at risk”’.

Disparities between educational outcomes for Indigenous compared with non-Indigenous people are not confined to Australia. In international data, there is a greater disparity in educational
attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people than between males and females, or between locations of residence (UNESCO-OREALC 2007, cited in UNESCO 2008: 62). To sharpen awareness of the need for increased adult literacy, UNESCO called in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar for a 50% increase in adult literacy levels by 2015, particularly to improve the position of women and to allow access to basic and continuing education for adults. This goal may now not be met following the impacts of the current global recession on developing countries (UNESCO 2010).

The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults in Australia, in educational attainment and in literacy, is lived out within contexts that lack appropriate employment and training opportunities for many Indigenous people. This employment and training issue has been discussed by Kral and Schwab (2003), Eady (2004) and Greenall (2005), and has prompted government officials and agencies to seek solutions or improvements. In the literature, however, the views of a key partner in the literacy movement, the literacy practitioner, have not generally been a focus of research.

**Indigenous literacy**

The view of many Indigenous groups is that they should be included at the onset of any discussions around literacy concerns and should be asked what literacy means to their community and what aspects of literacy are important to their language group. Indigenous communities tend to place an intrinsic and collective value on education which is woven into the present and future needs of their people. Battiste (2008: 176) writes:

> Aboriginal scholars and writers have recognized that education is the key matrix of all disciplinary and professional knowledge and central to alleviating poverty in Aboriginal communities.

Congruent with Indigenous learning perspectives, literacy in Indigenous communities tends to be viewed as a process and not as
a final outcome. Incorporating various learning styles, Indigenous literacy is viewed as a multi-faceted progression which develops throughout an individual’s lifespan (Antone et al. 2002, Donovan 2007, George 1997, McMullen & Rohrbach 2003, NADC 2002). In Indigenous communities, increasing one’s literacy skills tends to be recognised as more than a means to increasing one’s education and obtaining viable employment. Indigenous perspectives on literacy encompass a broader perspective which includes the objective of striving to maintain cultural identity, preserving language and achieving self-determination (Antone et al. 2002, Battiste 2008, Kral & Schawb 2004, NADC 2002, Paulsen 2003). For many Indigenous people, ‘your embodiment in time and place, and your language—your stories, place names and species names, songs, designs, dances, gestures etc.—together produce your identity’ (Christie 2005: 2). All these aspects referred to by Christie (2005) reflect a wholistic interpretation of literacy.

Well respected and recognised Indigenous Elders and teachers have attempted to define Indigenous literacy. Seen as more than acquiring skills to get a better job or to obtain higher education, literacy is recognised by some in Indigenous communities as a multi-faceted process, essential to maintaining culture and language (Antone et al. 2002). Priscilla George/Ningwakwe describes Indigenous literacy:

> Indigenous literacy is a tool, which empowers the spirit of Indigenous people. Indigenous literacy services recognize and affirm the unique cultures of Indigenous Peoples and the interconnectedness of all aspects of creation. As part of a life-long path of learning, Indigenous literacy contributes to the development of self-knowledge and critical thinking. It is a continuum of skills that encompasses reading, writing, numeracy, speaking, good study habits and communication in other forms of language as needed. Based on the experience, abilities and goals of learners, Indigenous literacy fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination (George 1997: 6).
Similarly, ways in which Indigenous literacy has been supported, reflect culturally influenced assumptions. For example, current models of distance education being implemented for Indigenous learners are largely representative of the technology, heritage and scholastic traditions of the developed Western nations, and lack culturally appropriate learning components which have been proven a factor to the success of adult learning (AISR 2006, Ramanujam 2002, Sawyer 2004, Young et al. 2005). Ramanujam (2002: 37) cautions against blindly copying Western models of distance education rather than recreating Indigenous models, which ‘will have greater relevance and strength than the copied or adopted models’. Prototypes based on Western middle-class ideals and standards where the curriculum and learning objectives emphasise the acquisition of workplace skills and appropriate literacy levels related to personal success and status in mainstream society are often rejected in Indigenous communities (Taylor 1997).

While community views of Indigenous literacy are in evidence in the research literature, representation of the views of adult literacy practitioners is scant (George 1997). As part of a wider study into the use of synchronous learning technologies to support literacy needs of adult Indigenous learners (Eady, Herrington & Jones 2009), the researchers sought to determine this perspective—that is, to answer the questions: What do literacy practitioners perceive to be the literacy needs in Indigenous communities? How might the use of computer and information technology assist in meeting these needs?

**Methodology**

In addressing the problem of the under-representation of the perspective of literacy practitioners who work with Indigenous communities, the researchers thought it important to consult with literacy practitioners who have a common thread of working with
Indigenous adult literacy learners and who work in various locations around Australia. The questions to participants were:

1. Questions related to your career:
   a. What is your job title?
   b. How many years have you been in this capacity?
   c. What are your qualifications?
   d. What are your main interests in working with Indigenous communities?

2. What do you perceive to be some of the literacy needs in Indigenous communities?

3. What are some of the ways that you have been able to work with community members to meet these needs?

4. Have you ever used computer technology to work with your learners?
   a. If so, what technology, how successful was it and would you use it again?

5. How do you feel that computer technology can change the way we support Indigenous learners?

An online focus group methodology was selected for initial consultation as it suits the involvement of individuals from many different geographical areas (Anderson & Kanuka 2003). The internet also enables such research to be done in a cost-effective manner. Asynchronous and synchronous tools are available and because of the variability of the tools themselves, it is difficult to make generalisations about them (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003).

The predominant forms of focus groups have been text-based (Anderson & Kanuka 2003), meaning that discussion takes place by means of entering text. This happens over time, where one participant posts an entry and hours or days later other participants will respond (asynchronously) or in a forum where live time discussion through text-based means takes place with immediate feedback and real time exchange (synchronously).
However, now with the ever-growing internet and capacity for high speed broadband, there are increasing opportunities for natural forms of communication over the internet (Anderson & Kanuka 2003). Programs that can be used in these situations allow for audio-and video-based opportunities that can be accessed by the participant in the form of down-streamed past events that have been recorded and can be replayed (asynchronous), or interactive sessions, where participants can converse with one another, receive immediate feedback and also see each other in real time during the online sessions (synchronous).

For the purpose of the online collaboration with literacy practitioners, the researchers opted to use iVocalize. iVocalize was used as a synchronous platform tool, however, sessions can be recorded for asynchronous use as well. The online focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. The participants were asked a variety of questions and took turns responding to each other’s comments. These questions were presented on PowerPoint slides for the participants, within the online session. The online focus group was recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were then read through and a research journal created, using coding to identify common categories between and amongst the participant responses and observations (Marlow 2005, Ryan & Bernard 2000, Stake 2000). The relationships between the identified categories resulted in the formation of themes, which, when combined and placed in order of predominance, lead to categories. These categories were reflected upon in combination with the reviewed literature, and Indigenous community members’ views (see Eady, in prep.), which together provided the guiding principles of the research.
The primary goal in the analysis was to make sense of the data and find commonalities of meaning behind the data collected as a thorough and organized system of analysing the data is important to ensure validity of the study (Marlow 2005, Ryan & Bernard 2000, Stake 2000). The transcription of data collected was shared with participants to ensure accuracy, and reviews of the analysis ensured minimal researcher bias.

**Results and discussion**

The results for each focus group question are discussed below each question and transcribed interview data are provided where relevant to highlight particular aspects. The interview data have been coded. Each of the participants was given a pseudonym and the online group was coded OPFG (Online Practitioner Focus Group). The date was also recorded behind each entry in a day/month format.

1. **Career-related questions (job title, years in this capacity, qualifications, and main interests in working with Indigenous communities?)**

In discussing career-related issues, practitioners held various positions in literacy-based areas. The average number of years working in the field was 11 years and 6 months, varying from two years' experience to a 25-year veteran. The volunteer practitioner focus group was located across various areas of Australia as depicted on the map below:
The practitioners involved in the online focus group came with a variety of backgrounds and skill sets. As a group, the practitioners’ qualifications included, among others:

- Advance Diploma in Fine Arts, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, Master of Education
- Bachelor of Arts, Dip Ed Secondary, CELTA
- Bachelor of Science, Grad Dip Ed,, Adv Dip LLN in Vocational Education
- Grad Dip Adult Education, Grad Dip Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies
- Bachelor of Education
Participants’ main interests in Indigenous communities varied. Some (like Amy, below) expressed a main interest in helping community members prepare for the future while keeping culture strong today. Others (like Ruby, below) expressed a main interest in improving vocational education and employment outcomes:

I love working with the community. I want to assist in self-dependence and empowerment for the next generation—whilst working with community members now to keep the Aboriginal culture healthy and strong for the next generation to inherit and have the skills to keep their country healthy. (Amy_OPFG_24/09, pseudonyms used throughout)

My main interests are about developing and implementing better approaches in vocational education and linking them to workforce outcomes. My current interest is about enterprise development and approaches that engage Indigenous peoples in being trainers, leading Indigenous content and informing future developments of vocational training. (Ruby_OPFG_24/09)

These differences in main interests are perhaps not surprising, given the practitioners’ varied backgrounds and skill-sets, and the geographical, economic and cultural diversity of the communities in which they work.

2. Literacy needs in Indigenous communities as perceived by the practitioners

The practitioners’ perceived literacy needs in Indigenous communities centred on four main needs:
(i) for a better understanding of the complexities of the
Indigenous learner from both a language and a personal
perspective
(ii) for improvement of all literacy skills
(iii) to help to better support the children in the community
(iv) for literacy to provide a voice for the community.

Each of these is discussed in more detail below:

Need for a better understanding of the complexities of the Indigenous learner
from both a language and a personal perspective

Many of the practitioners agreed that, before literacy needs can
even start to be addressed in Indigenous communities, one must
understand the complex nature of the language and underlying layers
of personal experiences and barriers that are faced by Indigenous
learners in communities. In most cases, literacy practitioners are
teaching literacy in a Western literacy framework, from a Eurocentric
perspective, using the English language. For many Indigenous people
in Australia, there are many different dialects of their first language
to master (including traditional languages, creoles, mixed languages,
and/or non-standard English) before standard English is even
introduced:

For some of the communities, we need to recognize that English
is their fifth language and to realize the sophistication of their
knowledge for knowing and for being so bilingual speaks to
many different Aboriginal languages, so I think that that’s
something that a lot of practitioners face.
(OPFG_Kelvin_24/09)

This is not to say, however, that Indigenous learners are not able to
function in their own language. The practitioners agree that it is not a
matter of learners not having the capabilities to embrace the expected
literacy tasks and all they entail. For example, one respondent
pointed out that it is still all too easy for Indigenous people whose
first language is not standard English to be misjudged and under-
estimated for their ideas and views:

There’s no doubt that people can communicate and
communicate successfully and they can negotiate and they can
do all of those high-level thinking things in their own language
and then, when it gets transferred to English, it makes people
look like, you know ... they don’t know what they’re doing or that
they’re not intelligent, which I think is quite deceiving.
(OPFG_Amy_24/09)

A concern of the practitioners is that there is not a strong link
between the Indigenous literacies, with second language issues
and standard Australian English coupled with Western literacy
expectations. Another component of this category was an
understanding of personal experiences and barriers that Indigenous
learners have faced that have impeded and will continue to impact
their literacy skills. Many of these learners have started out with
negative early schooling experiences which have led them to leave
school without graduating or completing their education. For some
Indigenous learners, there seems to be a lack of motivation and a
lack of confidence when resuming their education. One practitioner
explained:

It’s a lot to do with inter-cultural confidence for understanding
how to relate to the mainstream white system.
(OPFG_Jette_24/09)

Many practitioners also agree that Indigenous learners do not see
enough reason for continuing with their education through literacy
upgrading or employment up-skilling. Acknowledging the linguistic
complexities and incorporating a level of empathy and understanding
of a learner’s personal history is not to be overlooked when working
with Indigenous learners. The practitioners agreed that these factors
combined should be carefully considered by a practitioner when
proceeding with a literacy program in an Indigenous community.
Need for improvement of all literacy skills

The next category of results that emerged from the data was an overall need to improve literacy skills in Indigenous communities. The literacy skills of these learners are often very low and insufficient to be successful at current learning tasks such as completing Year 11 or a Year 12 certificate. These skills are required for success on everyday tasks such as learning how to fill out forms and negotiating with service providers or corporations from outside the community. There is also a need for digital literacies, that is, learning how to use computers and becoming proficient with the language of technology and the tasks associated with such technology.

For many of the learners that these practitioners work alongside, it is a combination of the linguistic complexities, personal schooling experiences and a lack of early literacy strategies that has resulted in these low literacy skills. These practitioners would like their learners to have the ability to access any learning program, any employment opportunity and fulfil any personal learning goals with confidence and strong literacy skills.

Need to help to better support the children in the community

The third category that emerged focused on the children of the learners in Indigenous communities. The practitioners have identified a direct connection between the adult’s learning experiences and strengthening interactions with children in communities. For many of the adults who attend literacy classes and up-skilling programs, a large part of their participation directly relates to their desire to increase their parenting skills and help their children with schoolwork.

This emerging theme is linked to the data presented earlier that relate to adult learners’ own past experiences and poor early literacy strategies. Perhaps strengthening the skills of adult learners in
Indigenous communities will have a flow-on effect, preventing the same deficit in skills for the children of these learners. As one practitioner stated: ‘Many programs work in a positive way from adults to kids’ (OPFG_Ruby_24/09).

**Need for literacy to provide a voice for the community**

In the final category, the literacy practitioners considered that a literacy need for Indigenous communities today was a need for literacy skills to be able to provide a voice for the community. The communities in question face a need for English language and Westernised terminology so that the community and its members are able to negotiate for their community and represent the community’s stance on issues that they feel important to the well-being of their people and society:

> It’s about inter-cultural confidence for understanding how to relate to the mainstream white system for which you need language skills basically and an understanding of how that system functions, and that’s what literacy is actually in that context. (OPFG_Jette_24/09)

3. **Ways in which practitioners have worked with community members to meet their needs**

While the previous question focused on the literacy needs in Indigenous communities and resulted in four categories of needs as seen by the literacy practitioners, the next question asked the practitioners to share some of the ways that they have been able to help learners meet these identified needs. The practitioners identified three categories of approaches that they have taken:

- Using culturally relevant approaches and materials
- Community/learner ownership and community development focus
- Facilitating a mentorship program.
Using culturally relevant approaches and materials

The practitioners suggested that the best approach to take when working with Indigenous learners is to use culturally relevant approaches and culturally relevant materials when facilitating literacy programs for Indigenous communities. Some of these approaches include: oral language, talking, read-alouds and storytelling, music and song, learning through nature, using visual language and seeking Elders’ advice.

One practitioner in particular noted that an important aspect of literacy learning in the communities is involving the respected Elders. The programs that are negotiated include the Elders who offer advice about how the programs should evolve and how those involved in the program; practitioner and learner, should work together. No matter what approach a practitioner decides to take, it was agreed that it is very important to use culturally relevant material with Indigenous learners. One practitioner described the process best in saying:

… the other thing is keeping the material really relevant to the culture so that you may be using English but about subject and content that is to do with caring for country things that are of great interest to those Aboriginal people. (OPFG_Kelvin_24/09)

Community/learner ownership and community development focus

The second category that arose was community/learner ownership and community development. One practitioner, who runs several different programs in many regions of Australia, described one starting point, an assessment tool for learners and communities:

We have developed a literacy assessment tool that gets people thinking about what they need and want and negotiate the program. This gets more buy-in and connection than just the idea that you will lose your dole (if you don’t participate in the literacy lessons). (OPFG_Ruby_24/09)
Focusing on the topics that are relevant to the needs and interests of the learners and the community is important for the success of the learner. It is important to help a learner or a community figure out what they are trying to achieve with their literacy learning, and then help people go in the direction that they have identified. By embedding the literacy and numeracy skills into content that is of interest and relevance to the learner and or community, the results are more encouraging than when forcing material that has no relevance to the learners.

Literacy learning can also focus on community development and representation of community views. The practitioners offered several pertinent examples of how literacy learning can be designed to support community enterprise:

> We have identified programs in the communities for literacy that are a local priority. For example, in a community there was a catering program, in another a shop, in another an elders’ care program, and we get people to actually work in these programs and then all literacy support is about these activities and therefore is place and context specific/situated. (OPFG_Rownea_24/09)

The practitioners interviewed agreed that using curricula or programs that are learner focused, where there is a sense of ownership in a context in which the community benefits and develops as a result, is far superior to other learning approaches.

*Facilitating a mentorship program*

The third approach suggested was facilitating a mentorship program, not just for learners but for practitioners as well. For practitioners, it is important to be mentored when first arriving to work with Indigenous learners and equally important is a mentoring program for learners. A mentoring program enables a monitoring of learners as they go through their learning process:
Community members are in that program and they’re getting mentored while they’re in that so they’re learning (course material) but they’re also learning...to address kind of life issues really while they’re doing that. So it is sort of employment, service delivery learning and what we call case work, you know, but in an integrated way. This provides platforms for people rather than feeling like they’re a receiver of literacy teaching, they’re actually part of a core service delivery and alongside that by the way they’re getting literacy teaching, they’re getting support with family relationship issues, they’re getting whatever but they don’t have to be seen as a client of a service. (OPFG_Jette_24/09)

4. Practitioners’ previous use of computer technology with learners (what technology, how successful was it, and would they use it again?):

This question involved computer technology experiences with the communities and learners in those communities. Ten of the 11 practitioners reported using technology with learners in some form. Some practitioners brought their own computer to share with learners, explaining:

In my present job most of the communities I work with, the training rooms didn’t have ability to put in any computers even if I had computers but I used to take my own computer. (OPFG_Robert_24/09)

Some other hardware accessories that were mentioned were data projectors and digital cameras. In the case of software applications, however, the practitioners have employed several different types of software for various purposes. For example, blogging, Facebook, email, Skype and Elluminate were used for social networking, Powerpoint and Publisher for presentations, Online pinball machine for playing games, and Photo Story and Movie Maker for digital storytelling.
The practitioners also reported that these computer applications incorporated literacy skill-building opportunities such as:

- language skills
- word processing
- driver’s licence preparation
- reading
- researching
- writing
- oral presentation
- communication skills
- mentoring opportunities
- tax filing skills
- digital photography
- job searching
- banking
- opportunity for higher education courses

Some of the skills listed are very practically based, and when the technology was seen by the learner and community as ‘useful’, the learners readily became proficient in the use of that application. One practitioner described the women in one particular community learning online banking skills:

... I didn’t teach them this, but it was so successful because they could pay their bills and all sorts of stuff and not have any cash in their hands. They are amongst the best internet bankers that I’ve seen anywhere. So I was really impressed with, when the technology is useful, how quickly it was grabbed on in the communities. (OPFG_Robert_24/09)

While there were clear indications that the learners enjoyed using the technology, the practitioners also shared some frustrations when using technology with learners in Indigenous communities. The recurring themes in the discussion included the lack of computers
and the absence of internet services in many of the communities where the practitioners work. Despite some of the barriers to using computer technology in Indigenous communities, there is much evidence to suggest that computers are being incorporated in many aspects of literacy learning in these communities.

5. How practitioners felt computer technologies could change the way they support Indigenous learners

Computer technologies have afforded flexible communication and learning applications. While many mainstream and urban city centres have enjoyed these privileges for many years, some more remote and isolated communities in Australia have yet to experience easy access to computers, the internet and other computer applications. The practitioners were asked how they felt that computer technology could change the way they support their Indigenous learners.

The most prominent answers revealed how practitioners felt that, through computer technologies, they could better meet the needs of their learners while implementing learning activities that build on both cultural and learner strengths. Computer technologies mean that visual literacies, oral memory and spatial relations can be brought to the forefront and used to advantage. In working with technology, people can also work in culturally appropriate and supportive transgenerational groups and focus on sharing their knowledge.

Computer technology could also help to provide literacy and learning services in a learner’s own environment and lessen the isolation that many learners feel:

It would be great if they could access that sitting in their own, familiar, comfortable space where they feel confident and powerful, they can have their kids around their legs or whatever needs to happen but they can still be part of that. I would really, really love that to happen. I think that would be hugely beneficial. (OPFG_Kandy_24/09)
A second focus the practitioners identified was that computer technology can provide more accessibility to higher education opportunities and job/work readiness training programs for learners. The easy access that computers can provide to courses, lectures and workshops opens so many doors for isolated Indigenous learners. This does not take away from the face-to-face support and the physical community learning space; in fact, the technology can strengthen these programs by drawing in more learners but with less demand on the practitioner. Computer technology can also provide a platform for learners to receive individual support, perhaps one-to-one tutoring to assist with the literacy and numeracy aspects of their vocational training. A strength in this area is the availability of job/work readiness training programs. Using computers as a means to train for positions where there are jobs but under-skilled potential employees is another strong argument for better services and more access to computers for these communities.

The third benefit was the improved social networking and communication opportunities that will arise from using computer technology. A practitioner gave an example where family members who had moved away from close knit communities now would have a way of keeping in better touch with friends and family members and ‘stay connected’ to their home community.

A final topic of interest for the focus group around how computer technology could change the way we support learners was a discussion of the opportunities for professional development of practitioners who work in similar fields but are separated by distance. Professional development opportunities for remote practitioners are often few and far between, however, with computer technologies, the practitioners could have access to workshops, conferences and online sharing circles.

These four ways in which practitioners can potentially better support learners through technology are both promising and exciting.
Practitioners realise, however, the realities of working with computer technology and highlighted some concerns. A major consideration when attempting to use computers in Indigenous communities is access and, for the majority of these communities, there are logistic challenges in finding a workspace, purchasing equipment, connecting to the internet, and that is just the beginning. The cost factor is always an issue, especially when it comes to literacy projects, so access becomes a barrier to the computer technology. Second is the need for technical support once the problem of gaining access has been solved. The third potential barrier to using computers to effectively support learners that was identified by the practitioners was effective training opportunities. Training opportunities would be needed for the practitioners who would be using the technology with learners. Competent and confident online instructors lead to students with similar attributes. The topic of effective training also includes the training that would be provided to the learners:

The next thing we have to do is to make it effective training, so we have to find a way of making the training work in the communities. If we are giving training to six or seven different communities using online training at the same time, which is what one assumes that we’ll be doing, we also have to make sure that what we’re saying has relevance to each community. And I reckon that would take a whole lot of relevant research in that area. (OPFG_Robert_24/09)

Although the practitioners identified these three potential barriers, they also shared hope for future applications as well. Despite the obvious concerns of implementation, costs, maintenance and training, the positive implications for effectively supporting technology use by Indigenous learners was summarised beautifully by one respondent:

I feel as though the experience that you can have through computers is that there is incredible mediacy (active and
creative products of media) ... and that it’s a little bit like drawing, that you have that sort of impact ... and even though it never ... it won’t replace being in front of a person and hearing the vibrations and the sound of their voice and looking into someone’s eyes, it enables to cut through a lot of layers that, you know... through books or through distance can isolate people. So using computers and technology can spark creativity and a sense of hope that starts a little kindling of fire within people that they want to go and meet those people, that they want to go to those places and actually move towards exposing themselves to something new. So I think, you know, this is what the technology can do. (OPFG_Kelvin_24/09)

Conclusion

There is a wealth of knowledge, expertise and opinions to be gained from providing a forum for literacy practitioners to come together and share their experiences. Fahy and Twiss (2010) accessed these valuable insights through a study which looked at how Canadian literacy practitioners view the use of online technology for their own professional development. The findings of their study suggest that many of these practitioners recognise the potential of using online technologies, particularly because it saved time and money and increased access to opportunities for training and interaction.

While reflecting on the training issues for literacy practitioners is important, too often the adult literacy practitioner, the front-line worker, has been overlooked in research and policy designed to improve the generally low literacy levels among many Indigenous people in Australia. This study has shown that literacy practitioners develop, through their work experiences, very specific and strongly held views on the literacy needs of the Indigenous community in which they are employed. These views of practitioners are very likely shaped by their own backgrounds and the specific geographical, economic and cultural situation in the communities with which they are familiar. Practitioners’ views are not necessarily ‘correct’
in any sense, and may differ somewhat from community members’ views (Eady, in prep.), but they tend to be held passionately, as seen here and in the study by Batell et al. (2004). It is practitioners’ views about what the needs are that lead them to try out specific educational strategies. A number of such teaching approaches were described by practitioners in this study, including using culturally relevant approaches, working towards community development and developing mentoring arrangements. Computer technology had been used with Indigenous learners by all but one of the practitioners, often to support real-life literacy skills. Despite typical current inadequacies in hardware, software and technical support in communities, practitioners were generally optimistic and open-minded about the potential for computer technology, including synchronous technology, to improve literacy skills, access to training and social cohesion. It is worth remembering that this last finding may or may not be generally true of literacy practitioners working in Indigenous communities, since the focus group participants in this study were volunteers willing and interested to take part in an online focus group.

In this study, and in a recent Canadian project (Getting Online Project 2008), many literacy practitioners have identified a place for online learning in their future work in the literacy field. Literacy practitioners have a voice that needs to be heard in the negotiations and decision-making around curricula and approaches to literacy learning and technology in their own field. The shared knowledge of these practitioners has the influence to allow us to move towards lessening the literacy gap in positive, constructive and meaningful ways.
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**Acknowledgements**

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Pathway for student self-development: A learning orientated internship approach

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Higher education is facing new challenges in preparing students for the workforce. As demands increase for students to differentiate themselves when seeking employment, it becomes necessary for higher education and vocational providers not only to understand these challenges, but also to provide a pathway for students to develop the skills necessary to become sought-after employees.

This paper presents a learning orientated internship approach as one such pathway that aims to provide students, as adult learners, with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and gain new skills in a work context. The paper provides insight into students self-reported learning outcomes after undertaking the learning orientated internship program. Preliminary findings reveal that communication, interpersonal skills and personal insights are common areas of self-development through this program.
Introduction

Preparing students for the challenges of industry is a central role for higher education. Industry, however, is seeking a new breed of student (Nicholas 2009), one that can differentiate themselves from peers by being able to engage with the organisation, the community and the world. Higher education must understand these challenges and provide a supportive transition into the workforce by fostering the necessary learning to compete in the marketplace.

As the workplace evolves, there are significant influences which govern and shape the need to provide a pathway for our students. With globalization and increasing international competition (Carnoy 2002), there is pressure on organisations to innovate for differentiation and manage the adaptation to change effectively. Greater emphasis is being placed on knowledge creation (Gow & McDonald 2000) and technological innovation (Castells 2000) for organisational competitiveness. There is more demand now on individuals and their social and economic lives (Moreland 2005). As many organisations become aware of their social and ethical responsibilities, pressure is being placed on graduates to not only have job-related skills but an awareness of the environment, ethics and the community (Jackson 2009a). Employers are also placing greater emphasis on graduates who are ‘work ready’. Soft skills are becoming highly sought after qualities, moving away from competency-based recruitment decisions towards the ability to effectively communicate, interact and empathise with client needs (Hodges & Burchell 2003).

In presenting our case for a pathway for transitioning students into the workplace, we begin by discussing workplace learning through soft skills and learning frameworks. A work-related learning program is then presented, as one such pathway for preparing students for industry. We then present our findings from analysing students’ self-reported soft skills through the program and offer support for
higher education to engage with industry in a dual effort to prepare graduates who are ready for the workplace.

**Learning in the workplace**

Learning soft skills is important for professional and organisational success. Soft skills are often interchanged with the term ‘generic skills’, or contrasted with hard, technical skills and discipline-specific skills. The definition of ‘soft skills’ includes communication skills (Stovall & Stovall 2009), interpersonal skills and elements of personal characteristics such as emotions and values (Kohler 2004). Soft skills have been linked to employability (Stovall & Stovall 2004), expectations of industry and professional bodies (Jackson 2009b, Murphy & Calway 2008) and according to Goleman (1995) soft skills can be attributed to an individual’s success or failure more so than technical skills or intelligence. The development of these skills prior to graduation can therefore be critical in the preparation of students for the workforce.

Learning frameworks such as work-based learning (WBL), work-integrated learning (WIL) and work-related learning (WRL) are becoming leading mechanisms for student learning in a work context. WBL is learning through paid or unpaid work by applying knowledge while at a higher education level (Gray 2001) but specifically focused on the academic-prescribed learning outcomes (Moreland 2005). Soft skills may be learnt through WBL; however, the primary focus is not on personal development or workplace learning techniques.

WIL encompasses all vocational and higher education activities which are directly linked to an enrolled program and centres on integrating learning and practice (Boholoko & Mahlomaholo 2008). WIL is similar to WRL in that it allows students to develop essential skills such as communication and problem-solving, while applying classroom learnt knowledge. However, while soft skills may also be developed through
WIL initiatives, what differentiates WRL practices is reflective practice and lifelong learning.

Reflection is critical to professional development and learning from experiences. Used in higher education, reflective assessments in the written form (such as a journal) can be used to reinforce learning (Beck & Halim 2008) and meet academic requirements. Reflection allows students to identify links between theory and practice, as well as uncover other issues that concern or puzzle them (Gray 2007). Reflective assignments provide students an avenue to support their learning by transforming tacit knowledge into explicit, codified knowledge to be shared with others and to inform future decisions. WRL fosters student learning through reflective techniques (Bockbank, McGill & Beech 2002) and promotes higher order metacognitive skills, such as judgment (Hager 2000) for self-managed learning.

WRL is intended to enhance the student’s ability to engage in working life and employability, including learning through the experience of work (Quality and Curriculum Authority 2003). While traditional, work-oriented frameworks seem to focus on the person-job fit, WRL activities place emphasis on the development of the graduate to better fit the changing economic situation, societal developments and the evolving job market (Moreland 2005). Successful WRL promotes learning across the life span (Moreland 2005), and therefore encouraging students in higher education to adopt the principles of lifelong learning is increasingly important in order to capture these learning skills throughout their adult lives.

WRL programs engage students at the early stages of their adult learning lives. Due to the changing higher education population, students are increasingly being considered as adult learners because they are either adults ‘biologically, legally, socially or psychologically’ (Benson 2006: 339). The degree of autonomy and self-direction experienced in higher education also reflects qualities of an adult
learner (Benson 2006). A WRL program that promotes lifelong learning and addresses the need to better transition students into industry is presented here.

**Learning orientated internship approach**

The Commerce Internship Program (CIP) at the University of Wollongong is an undergraduate program that provides a pathway for students to engage with industry. Aligned with the perspectives of WRL, this program adopts a learning-orientated, pedagogical approach in that it has a core focus on student learning. Boud and Falchikov (2007) argue that foregrounding learning and promoting the importance of learning beyond university is missing in the discourse of higher education.

Student learning is supported and enhanced through several key features of the CIP program. Firstly, the program offers an industry environment suited to practice. This means ensuring that the environment meets the needs of all parties involved, to best allow students to practise their skills and knowledge. Secondly, as the program is embedded in a subject, the program promotes an assessment framework focused on learning. The assessment draws students’ attention to generic workplace areas such as team work, culture and different ways of thinking, through reflection. Details on the assessment are presented further in this section. Lastly, the CIP program affords a supportive transition into the workplace. All students are provided support from the program in the form of regular contact, including workplace visits. Students are also allocated a mentor within the workplace to nurture their development.

With student learning at the heart of our pedagogical approach, the CIP framework (Clements 2009) was further built on meeting the needs of its stakeholders; the host organisation, the faculty and the student. According to Jackson (2009a), higher education must play a more active role in understanding the interests of our stakeholders.
Subsequently, this program was designed in conjunction with discussions from industry which identified a need for a flexible and resource-effective program that made a real business contribution. For this reason, CIP is a short, 16-day placement, conducted during session. The placement description is based on the needs of the host organisation, as is the selection of the student. One semester before the placement, host organisations submit a description of the role while students apply for the program through an online application system with a cover letter and resume directly to the faculty. After a short-listing process with faculty academics, the host organisation is invited to interview three students from whom they make their selection. The placement can be conducted anytime during the following semester.

The faculty’s needs are met through fostering community partnerships and contributing to graduate development. The faculty engages with organisations by providing knowledge-filled graduates as well as potential collaboration for future research opportunities. Quality, flexibility and sustainability are key attributes driving the program. Students are provided with a supportive transition into industry through an initial pre-placement meeting at the host organisation’s premises with the coordinator and workplace mentor. This meeting orients the student with the organisation and discusses their role in further depth. At this time, formal agreements are signed by the organisation and by the student, outlining legal obligations, such as IP, insurance and confidentiality. Throughout the placement, students and coordinator remain in contact through emails, text messages and placement visitations.

The needs of students are also met through this three tiered stakeholder model. The internship fits into the university semester, qualifies for six credit points and exposes them to real-life business challenges and operations through participating in organised and independent learning activities. As entry into the program is based on
industry selection, the program is open to all second and third year students studying an undergraduate Bachelor of Commerce degree. This is different from the traditional apprentice scheme or work experience model, due to the focus being drawn away from developing job-related competencies to a WRL perspective of developing the graduate for the workplace.

CIP is designed to prepare students for the workplace by enabling them to develop reflective skills to encourage lifelong learning. To be prepared for the workforce, ‘students need to develop their own repertoire of assessment-related practices that they will be able to use when confronted with learning challenges throughout their working lives’ (Boud & Falchikov 2007: 5). Therefore, in addition to the practical component, the program is embedded in a third year elective subject and utilises a combination of face-to-face and online mediums to assess and prepare students. All assessments are submitted online through an e-learning forum. Assessments include a daily e-log, four modules: workplace environment, team work, creative and critical thinking, and a reflective journal. E-logs are due the Monday after an internship day, this being a timely and flexible assessment method to monitor students’ activities, provide support and offer feedback on their reflective techniques.

The aim of this research was to explore students’ self-reported learning outcomes and development through reflection at the completion of CIP. It was assumed that students would have developed skills relating to their discipline-specific knowledge as their placement role was selected to be that of their discipline. Given that experiences and the level of learning will differ between students, the goal of this study was to investigate and identify the common themes amongst student perceptions pertaining to their softer skills, which are those not concerned with their discipline in practice. In summary, this paper therefore investigates the softer skills developed through
a program that has a key focus on stakeholder needs, flexibility and reflective learning.

**Method**

*Data Collection.* Students’ reflections from CIP were examined and selected due to their usefulness in gathering rich insights into the underlying dimensions of work practice (Clegg 2000). Data were gathered in two stages: first, reflective journals were analysed, and second, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The reflective journal is a culmination of the e-logs submitted at the completion of their placement and allows the student to take a step back and reflect on their internship as a whole. The reflective journal requires students to respond to six open-ended questions or statements. Students were asked to ‘draw on what you have experienced during your time on work placement to reflect on your learning’. Three questions were eliminated from this analysis as they were descriptive in nature, outlining the student’s role and organisational structure, or specific to the transfer of discipline knowledge. The statements analysed in this case included:

1. Identify specific skills you developed during your placement.
2. Identify what you have learnt from a personal perspective, during your internship placement, including the possible identification of strengths and areas in need of improvement.
3. Reflect on your overall experience and discuss how this might inform your future university studies or progression into your chosen career.

Students were also invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to probe and clarify responses (Aaker et al. 2005), to allow students to further elaborate on the key themes and to validate the analysis from the reflective journals. During the interviews, the same three statements were used as guides;
however, the authors sought clarification and the opportunity to reveal further insights into the themes uncovered from the journals.

**Sample.** A convenience sample of 28 students enrolled in the Commerce Internship Program at the University of Wollongong was invited to participate in the research. Of the 28 students, 17 were female and 11 male, two of these were international students and only one identified themselves as a mature-aged student. These students were all undertaking Commerce majors, with 12 students in marketing roles, six students in management positions, four students in accounting, three students in finance and three students in economics. The roles undertaken by the students were diverse and based on the requirement of the organization, however may be identified as roles that a graduate or entry level professional would undertake. The placements also varied given the organisational type: 10 placements were at local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), seven were in national or international businesses, six were at local governments, and five were in not-for-profit organisations. In total, all 28 students provided their reflective journal to be analysed and agreed to participate in an interview.

**Analysis.** Reflective journals were the focus for data analysis as these provided rich, self-reported insights into their practical learning experience (Smith et al. 2007). Results from the semi-structured interviews were used to further reveal and clarify key themes which emerged from the analysis. Reflective journals were coded individually for key terms, expressions or phrases. This technique is known as ‘open coding’ (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 32) and has been employed in the analysis of open-ended questionnaires to reveal common themes (Yanamandram & Noble 2005). An external third party also coded the data, to minimise the risk of overlooking important concepts (Walter 2006). The two authors and the independent researcher followed the process of inter-rater reliability in qualitative research whereby the dataset was independently
coded, then collectively compared for agreement to uncover common themes (Armstrong et al. 1997). Firstly, reappearing analogous categories or key terms were placed into sub-themes as identified by the researchers, then secondly, these sub-themes were grouped into larger key themes based on their commonalities and judgment by the researchers. The authors discussed and resolved any concerning expressions by considering the meaning in the given context, to reach agreement on the themes that had emerged in the data.

Findings

Three key themes emerged as a result of the analysis: communication skills, people skills and personal insights. Further to the discovery of these three key themes, it was revealed that the degree to which students self-reported these themes lends itself to the identification of three dimensions: self-assurance, self-improvement and self-awareness. The first dimension, self-assurance, denotes ownership of the belief or skill to which the student is referring. For example, if the identified skill was listening, the comment observed would be ‘I am a great listener’. The second dimension is self-improvement, which suggests the student recognises the development, improvement or growth of a belief or skill. An example of self-improvement would be ‘I have improved my listening skills’. The final dimension is self-awareness, which implies recognition on the part of the student of the need to improve the belief or skill. In this instance, an example would be ‘I need to work on my listening skills’. These dimensions provide a snapshot of the students’ perceptions of themselves and what they have learnt or developed during the internship placement. Each key theme from the data, as identified by the findings from the analysis and amplified with insights from the semi-structured interviews, is discussed briefly below and presented with examples in the following tables.
Theme 1: Communication skills

The first key theme relates to communication and includes the following categories: general communication, identification of specific communication methods, effectiveness of communication and communication audiences. Table 1 presents a matrix with examples of students’ reflections demonstrating the four sub-themes of communication and the three dimensions. Interviews revealed that, although students felt they had general communication skills prior to the internship placement, it was the opportunity to practise these skills in a work context that was valued. Most students also agreed that they felt more confident overall with how they communicated after the placement. It was further revealed that students who initially felt very nervous with the tasks and the environment, over time felt more comfortable as they got to know their colleagues and the workplace which enabled them to speak up and ask questions. Students elaborated during the interviews that they were surprised in their own capabilities in communicating with CEOs and general managers. They revealed that they thought they would feel intimidated, however learnt that they were ‘people just like us’.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Self-assurance</td>
<td>“I believe I have identified my communication skills as a strength”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-improvement</td>
<td>“I also developed my communication skills”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>“My communication skills are in no way perfected and therefore further active improvement in this area would greatly assist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General communication skills</td>
<td>“I was able to use my written and oral communication skills, which I previously demonstrated with essays and reports as well as class presentations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific communication methods</td>
<td>“I found the internship presentation has improved my presentation skills”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effectiveness of communication</td>
<td>“[A] personal quality that I need to improve [is] confidence when presenting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication audiences</td>
<td>“As I became more confident I began proactively requesting and suggesting work, but given my nature I had to push myself to be more forward and self-promoting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“A weakness that I believe I still need to work on is my assertiveness [after] I had completed a given task and needed something extra to do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The main skill, which has been worthwhile achieving, is building confidence in communicating with senior managers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“A personal area for improvement identified from my role at [sic] is in tailoring of communication skills”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 2: People skills

The second key theme is around people or inter-personal skills and includes: business relationship skills, working with people and workplace friendships. Table 2 illustrates with examples these three sub-themes with the dimensions self-assurance, self-improvement and self-awareness. Students who discussed their networking opportunities during the interviews, revealed that, while this was their first time, most felt quite at ease networking and can now appreciate the value of building relationships. Although many students agreed that they had improved teamwork skills, only a small number of students who worked relatively autonomously felt as though they did not have the opportunity to practise teamwork as they had hoped. Few students also referred to their groupwork in university assignments as setting a precedent for teamwork activities. Through asking students to elaborate on workplace friendships in the interviews, it became apparent that most of the students had developed friendships while on placement, however their reflective journals gauge un-solicited insights and underrepresented this topic. There was no evidence of students reflecting on the need to work on making friends in the workplace, under the self-awareness dimension.
**Table 2: Examples of dimensions in the People Skills theme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People Skills</strong></td>
<td>Business relationship skills</td>
<td>“I feel my networking skills were particularly strong”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“By corresponding with business partners and clients, I have begun to build my professional relationships and contacts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with people</td>
<td>“By being determined in building my relationships with others, I could better understand my position within the organisation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“An important skill which I had developed was human interaction”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workplace friendships</td>
<td>“I formed strong working relationships with my fellow team members and have remained friends outside of work with some of them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I learnt that joining a new social circle can be fun and exciting as well as terrifying”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I should take a more active role in getting to know my lecturers... I guess this all comes down to networking and the ability to build relationships”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I believe I need to speak up more and get people involved so that things can be achieved as a team”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 3: Personal insights

The third key theme that was identified is personal insights, including personal confidence, personal ability, motivation and workplace readiness sub-themes. Table 3 presents these sub-themes with examples to demonstrate the three dimensions of self-assurance, self-improvement and self-awareness. Although there were no examples of students demonstrating self-assurance over their personal confidence levels, during the interviews students contested they felt more confident after the internship and some compared themselves to their peers without practical experience. Interviews also revealed that the content they were learning at university could be applied in a practical setting. Reflective journals in this instance, however, did not represent the findings from the interviews in which most students expressed their enjoyment for the experience, and demonstrated how motivated they now feel for their studies and to begin their professional career. Most students confirmed in the interviews that they felt more prepared to enter the workforce. However, one student stated that although the internship helped minimise anxiety, they still see the ‘real world’ as far away and feel quite intimidated by the prospect.
Table 3: Examples of dimensions in the Personal Insights theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td><strong>Self-assurance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-improvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I developed more confidence in myself and that what I could do would really mean something to somebody and not just be done for the sake of keeping busy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I need to have more confidence overall”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Ability</td>
<td><strong>Self-assurance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-improvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel I really put in my best and have started something of real benefit to the company”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I feel I need to have more faith in the work I am completing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-assurance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-improvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“The internship has actually provided me with increased motivation for my financial studies, so that I can obtain higher marks and thus overall, a better graduate position”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“One thing I might change is my attitude toward life after university which will impact my conscientiousness and attempts at study”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Readiness</td>
<td><strong>Self-assurance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-improvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have also achieved a lot of skills such as confidence in the workplace”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“In many ways, my lack of confidence in raising questions hindered the first parts of my project. This will certainly shape the way I conduct myself within future workplaces and work tasks”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and conclusion

The findings demonstrate that, while these soft skills are being developed, students are also taking personal insights away from the experience. They also suggest that there is a learning spectrum from which students may move, from self-awareness to self-improvement and self-assurance. Although the journey is a very personal process, from university (higher education) to industry (practice), students who are able to reflect on their experience are better informed on what they have learned and how they will apply this learning in their future employment.

This paper has identified a learning-oriented internship program that seeks to meet industry expectations, by means of developing graduates through reflective learning assessments and placing emphasis on stakeholder needs. CIP has seen students better equipped to engage in learning in professional practice. Further to the individual development of the student, the program has also seen students go on to find employment within their host organisation, be successful in graduate positions and gain local job opportunities through networking.

Within this competitive environment, students need to have both discipline-specific knowledge and the soft skills required to demonstrate, communicate and learn in the workplace. As the graduate marketplace becomes more competitive, students who are short of soft skills may discover that seeking employment opportunities becomes more of a challenge (Stovall & Stovall 2009). WRL internships, work experience and learning-orientated programs can therefore be beneficial in shaping students to become highly desirable graduates through increasing their employability skills and professional development.

Encouragement and support of students and provision of learning opportunities will place students on the pathway for self-development
and lifelong learning. It is the responsibility of higher education to provide a pathway for students to gain the necessary expertise both in the application of discipline-specific knowledge and in the development of the softer skills required for students to engage, interact and effectively communicate in the workplace. The authors suggest that one way of doing this is to embed learning-orientated and work-related programs into academic curriculum in partnership with the wider business community and reinstate learning in the foreground of higher education discourse (Boud & Falchikov 2007).

The limitations of this study include the sample selection, which was taken from the South Coast of NSW, Australia, and therefore findings may not be generalised to a metropolitan prospective. The results are also limited to one cohort, however the evaluation continues as this is an ongoing research focus. Future research may include comparing the different schools within the business faculty, for instance marketing and accounting, to further reveal the nature of discipline-specific learning.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that soft skills developed by the students were influenced through a combination of the program design and the CIP model which provided the context and opportunity for encouraging students to explore and engage with their wider workplace environment, ultimately contributing to the development of these soft skills. We also acknowledge the degree to which individuals embraced and connected with these skills was largely dependent on their personal level of engagement. We advocate that if the students can continue to engage in the development of these types of skills, this awareness will aid their lifelong learning.
References


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Using Appreciative Inquiry to explore the professional practice of a lecturer in higher education: Moving towards life-centric practice

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This paper reports on a strategy for exploring the life-centric practice of a lecturer in Higher Education. The initiative for this inquiry arose out of the realisation that there did not appear to be positive, heart-lifting stories in a lecturer’s current teaching experiences. Using an appreciative eye and supported by a critical friend, life-giving experiences were ‘stalked’ from the past. The hope in this endeavour was to find greater meaning in the lecturer’s best professional practice. Using an Appreciative Inquiry approach, this endeavour rejuvenated the lecturer’s professional practice. As life-centric stories were recalled, provocative propositions were constructed that became the basis of a personalised action plan for future professional practice. This paper outlines the nature of the journey and the heartfelt discoveries.
On an educator’s personal journey towards greater congruency and authenticity, the workplace can be challenging and, at times, life-less (Bhindi & Duignan 1997, Brook 2009, Gibbs 2006). In these times, educators can lose their sense of purpose and feel an alienation from colleagues and students. Moreover, this negative, problem-centered way of being can engender deficit-based thinking on the part of the educator. What possibilities exist if the lense shifts from seeing oneself as a problem to be solved to seeing oneself as a complex miracle to be appreciated? How would this influence the nature of an inquiry into an individual’s professional practice and what opportunities might exist for understanding one’s future practice (Giles & Alderson 2008, Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2003)? These thought-provoking questions target particular life-giving moments in an individual’s professional practice as the basis for an alternative way of looking.

English, Fenwick and Parsons (2003) suggest that the use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers a way of effecting a positive vision for professional practice. Cooperrider and others (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987, Hammond 1998, Hammond & Royal 1998, Ryan Soven Smither William & Vanbuskirk 1999, Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2003) maintain that the process of appreciative inquiry itself is intervention, that is, an inquiry into human activity and systems change the inquirers. It is as if, ‘The seeds of change—that is, the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the very first questions we ask’ (Cooperrider Sorenson Whitney & Yaegar 2000: 18). In other words, our way of being and our professional practice is influenced the moment questions are asked and questions are sought. In contrast, problem-centred constructions of reality can lead to a greater sense of hopelessness. Bushe and Coetzer (1995: 5) suggest that ‘the theories
we hold ... have a powerful effect on the nature of social reality. Not only do we see what we believe, but the very act of believing it creates it’. For this reason, AI is targeted at appreciating what it is about the social world that is positive, while exploring the possibilities of making the essence of these experiences happen again in the future.

Underpinning Appreciative Inquiry is the challenge to systematically consider positive stories of professional practice (Hammond & Royal 1998). In this way, ‘every new affirmative projection of the future is a consequence of an appreciative understanding of the past or present’ (Bushe & Coetzer 1995). Hammond (1998) suggests that, if anything is brought from the past, it ought to be the best of the past that is brought forward. It is critically important in the process that actual, grounded and uplifting stories from the past are recalled for deliberation and contemplation. Such stories show moments where practice is in harmony with who we are (Giles & Alderson 2004, 2008).

In the best scenario, AI results in a generative metaphor that calls for and compels new action (Bushe & Kassam 2005). Generative metaphors are seen as ‘sayings or phrases that are themselves provocative, and can create new possibilities for action, that people had not previously considered’ (Bushe & Kassam 2005: 4). Proust (cited in Bushe & Kassam 2005: 4) explains that ‘the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes’. The appreciative process involves practising an appreciative eye over past experiences in the quest to find the beauty in specific events (Hammond 1998). Hammond (1998: 2) goes further to suggest that the excitement generated in looking for best practice ‘energizes both the researcher and participants alike to reach for higher ideals’.

**Methodology: Appreciative Inquiry**

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) have proposed a set of principles to guide Appreciative Inquiry. The purpose of such inquiry is the
creation of generative theory which articulates future possibilities (Bushe & Kassam 2005). Appreciative Inquiry begins with the telling and recording of life-centric stories. Given that our lives are articulated continuously and collectively in the stories we tell each other every day, stories have power to be used as catalysts of change. The seeds of change are embedded in the stories that are told. In this way, change happens the moment we begin to inquire (Bushe & Kassam 2005). The momentum for sustainable change requires positive affect and a relational connection to a colleague or critical friend (Giles 2008, Giles & Alderson 2004, 2008, Mantel & Ludema 2000). A critical friend can be a colleague or associate with whom a trusting relationship exists. In addition, the critical friend must have an understanding of the appreciate process and be skilful in seeking taken-for-granted aspects of an-other’s stories.

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry are incorporated in a four-step framework (Cooperrider et al. 2000, Hammond 1998, Mohr & Watkins 2001, Reed Pearson Douglas Swinburne & Wilding 2002). The first step in the framework is described as the ‘discovery’ step. This step has the intent of describing the best of ‘what has been’ and ‘what is’. The best aspects of an individual’s peak professional practice are identified, appreciated, recalled and told in story form as descriptively as possible. In this way, Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in the actual experiences of an individual (Giles & Alderson 2008). Insights are sought into what made the particular story a peak experience (Bushe 1999). Hammond (1998) describes this as gently investigating the root cause of successful practice.

The second step in the framework is described as the ‘dream’ step. This step considers what our practice could look like if we were fully aligned around our strengths and aspirations. In this way, this second step imagines what might be possible within our professional practice on the basis of our past stories. This step is intentionally generative.
The third step in the framework is described as the ‘design’ step. In this step, the educator and critical friend co-construct ‘possibility propositions’ that are value statements that challenge taken-for-granted *status quo* assumptions in the practice stories (Giles & Alderson 2008, Hammond 1998). In this way, the co-construction involves the drawing together of common themes from across the personal experiences in order to create provocative propositions that act as challenging value statements. These statements are intentionally designed to be stretching and provocative, and capture qualities that are most desired (English *et al.* 2003). The articulation of emergent themes typically requires the support of a facilitator or critical friend.

The final step in the AI framework is described as the ‘destiny’ step. In this step, a set of intentions for practice are developed in the form of an action plan. The action planning process seeks to sustain the opportunities and possibilities drawn and constructed from the original stories. Again, the dialogue with a critical friend is critically important in holding the threads from the stories through into possibilities. It would seem that ‘the process is as important as the end product’ (Goldberg 2001: 57).

The appreciative process is summed up as ‘stalking’ the life-centric flow within an individual’s past experiences which leads to an ‘amplification through fanning’ of the elements that have contributed to the exemplary or peak performance (English *et al.* 2003).

Background to the inquiry

This article reports on such an endeavour into the professional practice of a lecturer in higher education. Susie, the lecturer whose practice was considered in this Appreciative Inquiry, had been involved in a number of educational roles. Her teaching career began as an English teacher in Malaysia with subsequent roles as a research and planning officer in the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, a vice-
principal of a high school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a learning support tutor in a Malaysian university, a language teacher in New Zealand, and presently, as a teacher educator in New Zealand. David, the critical friend in this Appreciative Inquiry, completed his doctoral research on the teacher-student relationship (Giles 2008) and lectures on the use of Appreciative Inquiry in the formation of individuals and organisations.

The first step in this inquiry involved Susie recalling and descriptively writing about specific teaching experiences which she identified as experiences which show her peak professional practice. These experiences related to one-on-one interaction with colleagues in her former roles as a deputy principal, lecturer and tertiary educator. These stories are referred to within the discussion of each theme that follows in the findings and discussion section. Most importantly, Susie’s stories represented actual experiences of professional practice.

These stories were written descriptively and then re-told in story form to Susie’s critical friend, David. David was invited to participate given his research interests in Appreciative Inquiry and Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Giles 2008). The dialogue on the stories and the extrapolation of emergent themes were identified collaboratively.

**Findings and discussion**

After recording and analysing Susie’s stories, the following themes were identified collaboratively as integral to an emergent generative metaphor. It should be noted that the purpose of this paper is to show an alternative discourse on professional practice aided by an AI process rather than a critique of the AI approach itself.

**The first theme**

The first theme that was co-constructed from the stories was the need as a teacher to ‘walk the talk’, consistently modelling one’s deepest values. Susie’s practice is empowered by the firm belief that teachers
are less dispensers of head knowledge than they are ‘sources of life and vision’ (English et al. 2003: 78). As such, students are unique and should be valued. It is this belief that underpins one’s relationships with students across time and place (Giles 2008). Memories were recalled of many respectful relationships with students and a ready desire to go the ‘extra mile’ for students. This desire was embedded in the way Susie’s lessons were planned, the way lessons were conducted and the way resources and activities were selected. Previous teaching modules were recalled where students were given the opportunity to look for answers that are deep within themselves in relation to their emergent understandings of teaching and their professional formation.

The valuing of people appeared to be embodied in the way Susie’s care was offered to students and the lengths taken to create trusting spaces for open in-class discussions. Freire and Macedo (1995), Mezirow and Associates (2000) and Palmer (1999a, 2000, 2004), amongst others, appeal to teachers to intentionally enter, and meaningful promote, engaging dialogue with learners. Teachers are encouraged to structure ‘experiences that invite learners to ask questions of meaning such as Who am I?’ (English et al. 2003: 79). In a similar way, Ayers (2001) advocates for a sincerity of relationship with students, an outcome of authentic friendships that have a deep caring and compassionate concern.

The proposition that was co-constructed from this theme was that teachers, whose values and beliefs align with their practice, role model an authenticity that enables close relational bonds with their students.

The second theme

The second theme that was co-constructed from the stories was the importance of an alignment between one’s personal values and the organisation’s values. As a lecturer, Susie is at her best when her
personal culture, values and beliefs align with the organisation’s culture, values and beliefs. Tensions occur when articulated values do not align with individual or organisational practice; that is, the talk is not walked. At times, the words used to describe our valuing appear similar, yet the meanings that are held are different.

In one particular story, the concept of ‘valuing people’ was viewed differently by different members of the organisation. The teachers’ view was that the valuing of people ought to be made visible in practice and permeate the way they teach, assess and provide feedback. Those who guard the business interests of the organisation may say they share a common vision in valuing people, but students were readily seen in economic terms as money earners for the organisation. Value is thus placed on the economics of the client (student) rather than the person who is the student.

Susie recalled times when her professional practice was in harmony, and in alignment, with the organisational values. Earlier career stories led us to initial teaching experiences in Malaysia. Susie recalled having the privilege of a wonderful mentor who led an exemplary life of service to both the school he served and the community at large. This lecturer said that teachers had to be a good human being first and a good educator second. In this way, he walked the talk; his every step showed a valuing of relationship. He inspired Susie saying that she was a custodian of the students’ souls. This mentor understood the need to bridge the gap between teachers and students, and his genuineness of spirit touched both staff and students. ‘We all know what will transform education is not another theory, or another book, or another formula but educators who are willing to seek a transformed way of being in the world’ (Palmer 1999). Leaders are exhorted to ‘build the credibility of organizational values … by demonstration, not articulation’ (Senge et al. 1999: 200).
The proposition that was co-constructed on this theme was that teachers need to regularly consider the alignment between their own values and practices with the organisation’s values and practices.

The third theme

A third theme that was co-constructed from the stories was the notion that students are holistic beings. Indeed, the holistic nature of students needs to be affirmed and encouraged in practice. Susie was at her best when her teaching reflects this core belief. As Gibbs (2004: 7) suggests, education should be a source of nurturance for the spirit as well as a means of reaching understanding. In a story from her second year of teaching, Susie realised that she was not connecting with one of her students. In frustration, one day he declared, ‘Mengapa selalu berbulu-bulu dengan saya?’ Translated into English, it roughly means, ‘Why are we like porcupines? We are always inflicting pain on each other’. This thought-provoking question opened a soul-searching discussion which culminated in better understanding this student’s perception of the teacher-student relationship. As the teacher, Susie was given a rare opportunity to catch a glimpse of this student’s essential being. When they parted ways at the end of the year, they both knew that something special had happened. Three years later, this young man returned to the school to let Susie know how much he had appreciated the care and concern shown that day. Giles and Sanders (1996: 7) note that a sensitive understanding of the multi-faceted nature of relationships helps teachers to ‘develop trust through encouragement and sensitivity’.

The proposition that was co-constructed from this theme was that teachers need to sensitise themselves to the holistic influence of their interactions with students.
The final theme

The final theme that emerged from the stories related to the teacher’s awareness of their own ‘times and seasons’. Susie is at her best when she is aware of the ‘times and seasons’ in her life personally and professionally. Over a teaching career of more than 26 years, themes and patterns were identified that were loosely described as relating to ‘times and seasons’. The appreciative process enabled a greater awareness of the different seasons in Susie’s personal and professional life. Recollecting stories enables the realisation of how much a teacher can feel alienated from the core of who they are when they work in organisations that do not practise a genuine caring concern for humankind, instead of embracing differences as unique and for celebration.

The provocative proposition co-constructed from this theme was that teachers’ professional development needs to be ongoing and linked to an increased awareness of the twists and turns in their personal and professional lives.

A summary of the propositions is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Propositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teachers, whose values and beliefs align with their practice, role model an authenticity that enables close relational bonds with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teachers need to regularly consider the alignment between their own values and practices with the organisation’s values and practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers need to sensitise themselves to the holistic influence of their interactions with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teachers’ professional development needs to be ongoing and linked to an increased awareness of the twists and turns in their personal and professional lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each provocative proposition has been considered in terms of the action that would be necessary to enable Susie, as the lecturer, to experience further life-giving moments of professional practice. The following table identifies specific action in relation to each proposition. The subsequent action plan is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Related Action</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflect on one’s professional practice with regard to the nature of my teacher-student relationships. Seek ongoing and informal feedback with regard to my teacher-student relationships.</td>
<td>Before each semester and ongoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Articulate a personal philosophy for education and teaching as a living document (for regular review) as an empowering strategy for engaging towards greater authenticity within the wider organisational values and practices. Informally engage with immediate line managers over concernful discrepancies between one’s own practices and that of the organisation.</td>
<td>Articulate a personal philosophy as soon as possible. To be reviewed each semester at least. As practices are noted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Establish a reflective journal for recording moments/experiences which capture attention given to individual students. Phenomenologically reflect on the nature of the influence of such moments by writing interpretive statements about such events.</td>
<td>Set up a journal as soon as possible. Aim for the inclusion of at least one new experience per month with a subsequent interpretive statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>At least twice a year, and preferably monthly, review monthly and annual goals being concerned about the progress, relevance and meaningfulness of such goals.</td>
<td>Twice yearly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The Appreciative Inquiry process exhorts participants to have an appreciation for the mystery of being and a reverence for life (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987). Such a process calls for an exploration of life-giving forces which support an individual’s best practice. This positive, possibility-focused awakening is due to the challenge to look at one’s professional practice with new eyes.

Stories are a powerful tool for regeneration. Telling and re-gathering stories enables greater meaning to be found in everyday life-centric experiences and, in the process, enables the rediscovery of one’s true voice in an educator's professional practice. The seeds of change are planted the moment we inquire. This AI experience energised a lecturer to reach for higher ideals in their professional practice.

References


About the authors

**Dr David L. Giles** completed his doctoral work at Auckland University of Technology and is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Professional Studies, School of Education, University of Waikato. His research interests focus on relational practice/pedagogy in education and the use of hermeneutic phenomenology and appreciative inquiry research methodologies.

**Susie Kung** has an active interest in the characteristics of effective teachers. Such teachers appear to know who they are, and how they are called to the teacher’s role. Susie’s consideration of these matters opens a re-consideration of the nature of teacher education as a holistic endeavour.
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Approaches to the postgraduate education of business coaches

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Sydney Business School
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This paper focuses on the education and training of business coaches, specifically at the Masters/graduate level. The paper first reviews the knowledge and skills required of business coaches, comparing the recommendations of professional associations and the literature. Next the paper reviews the approaches to education which are best suited to help students acquire knowledge and skills, and how these may be assessed. The paper discusses the challenge of developing both knowledge and skills, and the use of e-learning as an on-going support for students. The benefits of authentic assessment and a varied approach to learning are also reviewed. Thirdly, the paper reports on the experiences of a new Master of Business Coaching at Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong, Australia, providing both performance and perception data from the first cohort of students. Possible reasons for the students’ strong performance are suggested.
Introduction

In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in business coaching (Grant 2008, Hawkins 2006). According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in the UK, 82% of respondents to their annual Learning and Development Survey in 2010 use coaches. Business coaching is here defined as the application of coaching skills in a business context, excluding other forms of coaching such as life coaching, or other services such as counselling or mentoring. It can include coaching which is focused on the individual’s development, on team performance, or on business performance issues relating to strategy and goals.

Many commentators, such as Clegg, Rhodes et al. (2005) and Sherman and Freas (2004) have observed that the coaching industry is unregulated, with low/no barriers to entry. Neat (2006: 32) noted ‘an influx of over-hyped, ill-equipped people calling themselves coaches—yet often bereft of business acumen, empathy and analytical skills’. There are calls for accreditation and training, in the hope that this will raise the standards of the profession and give purchasers of coaching services some quality assurance.

This paper focuses on the education and training of business coaches, specifically at the Masters/graduate level. The paper first reviews the knowledge and skills required of business coaches. Next, the paper reviews the approaches to education which are best suited to help students acquire the knowledge and skills, and how they may be assessed. Thirdly, the paper reports on the experiences of a new Master of Business Coaching at Sydney Business School (University of Wollongong, Australia) and suggests reasons for the results obtained.

Prior to the global financial crisis, Bennis and O’Toole (2005) argued that graduate business education is generally not grounded in business practice and hence has become less relevant to practitioners.
They lamented that many academics in business schools have no business experience. Podolny (2009:63) articulates his concern that ‘many academics aren’t curious about what really goes on inside companies’. In their guidelines for Masters of Public Administration courses, Coxhead et al. (2009) advocate teaching and assessment by a team comprising university academics and public services practitioners. The author of this paper is the Coordinator of the Master of Business Coaching course and also lectures on the course. Working with colleagues in industry and other universities has enabled us to rise to the challenge of developing a new course rather than take one side of ‘the old academic versus practitioner dichotomy’ which Grant (2008: 97) argues ‘is spurious, unhelpful at best, and frequently quite destructive’.

**Knowledge**

Many coaches have been trained in atheoretical, proprietary models of coaching with a limited evidence base, according to Rostron (2009: 323) and Grant and Cavanagh (2007: 241). A Masters program, by contrast, aims to help students model their advanced understanding of a specialist body of theoretical and applied topics (Australian Qualifications Framework 2010). Our Master of Business Coaching enables students to develop a body of knowledge including new perspectives relating to coaching, professional coaching practices, cognitive skills enabling them to demonstrate critical analysis and understanding of theory, and reflective skills to enable them to reflect on professional theory and practice. Our students learn about a broad range of coaching models, from the widely used GROW (Goals Reality Options What/Will) model popularised by Whitmore (1996), to more recent models such as ITEA (Impact Thought Emotion Action) (Leimon 2005), and referring to behavioural models and systems models (Barner and Higgins 2007).
The need for coaches to develop a solid understanding of business is underscored by Charlton (2009: 3) who, in his commentary on the likely future scenario for business coaching, suggests that:

Those woolly-minded coaches, wrapped up in air-head 1960s faux philosophy, will find their days are numbered. The ones who will survive with a degree of comfort during the downturn will be those who can ally coaching with sound business and commercial experience and can bring that to the coaching table.

Furthermore, we agree with Podolny (2009) about the need to avoid ‘disciplinary silos’. Instead, we seek to integrate business disciplines with coaching theory and practice. Students learn about theories of leadership and motivation, ethics and diversity, strategy development and implementation, innovation and change, and how coaching skills are relevant to each of these domains, thus avoiding the situation common in business degrees criticised by Bennis and O’Toole (2005) where, the ‘integration of disciplined-based knowledge with the requirements of business practice is left to the student’.

**Coaching skills**

Unlike established professions with clear guidance from relevant accrediting bodies or institutions, we had the freedom and the challenge of first determining what skills we wanted our students to develop. We looked in detail at academic literature and at competency frameworks defined by the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC). While the EMCC competencies are evidence-based, Griffiths and Campbell (2008) suggest that the development of the ICF competencies is eclectic and unscientific. However, their research found empirical support for many of the ICF competencies, although this may have been expected as their survey was of ICF-accredited coaches. A comparison of coaching competencies is shown in Table 1. Fortunately, there is considerable overlap in the competencies
identified in the literature, although exactly how each author defines concepts such as ‘listening’ or ‘presence’ may vary.

From this table, it can be seen that the coaching skills included in the SBS course are supported both by the coaching literature and coaching professional associations (ICF and EMCC). What is novel here is the integration of business skills as advocated by Feldman and Lankau (2005) and Berman and Bradt (2006), and research skills for coaches (Rostron 2009, Passmore & Gibbes 2007). Business skills include the development and implementation of strategy, innovation and change management, leadership and people management. Many of our students are experienced practitioners who have not studied for many years. Workshops include strategies for finding academic and company information, critical analysis and academic writing, reflective writing, and strategies for tackling assignments and exams.

Throughout the program, students are encouraged to self-assess, gain feedback, reflect on their learning and experience, and to set targets for their continued development as coaches. Moon (2004:74) stresses that ‘learning extends beyond formal education and becomes very important in self-managed continuing professional development’. By encouraging the use of reflection through assignments and through the provision of self-assessment resources, we encourage students to take responsibility for their learning both in and outside the classroom. Black and Plowright (2010: 246) define reflection as:
### Table 1: Comparison of coaching competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified in Literature</th>
<th>ICF</th>
<th>EMCC</th>
<th>SBS Coaching Skills Coaches</th>
<th>SBS Business Skills Coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-management</strong></td>
<td>Ahern (2003)</td>
<td>Beliefs Attitudes</td>
<td>Self-assessment and management</td>
<td>Time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td>Ahern (2003)</td>
<td>Meeting ethical guidelines</td>
<td>Ethics of coaching</td>
<td>Developing strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and professional standards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td>Hawkins &amp; Smith (2006)</td>
<td>Establishing the</td>
<td>Internal and external coaching relationships</td>
<td>Implementing strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coaching agreement</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahern (2003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wilson (2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leimon (2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
<td>Establishing trust</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Market research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified in Literature</td>
<td>ICF</td>
<td>EMCC</td>
<td>SBS Coaching Skills</td>
<td>SBS Business Skills Coaches</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Managing partnerships and alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawkins &amp; Smith (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ahern (2003)</td>
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<td>Wilson (2007)</td>
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<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leimon (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning</strong></td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Facilitating use of innovation tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawkins &amp; Smith (2006)</td>
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<td>Ahern (2003)</td>
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<td>Wilson (2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leimon (2005)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Creating awareness</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Self Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
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<td>Hawkins &amp; Smith (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified in Literature</td>
<td>ICF</td>
<td>EMCC</td>
<td>SBS Coaching Skills Coaches</td>
<td>SBS Business Skills Coaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Designing actions</td>
<td>Action planning</td>
<td>Action planning</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawkins &amp; Smith (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Planning and goal setting</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>Prioritisation and decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubrin (2005)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>Managing progress and accountability</td>
<td>Managing the process</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Project management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson (2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson (2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>Team coaching</td>
<td>Manage change</td>
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<td>Zeus &amp; Skiffington (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chutterbuck (2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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<td>Research skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Rostron 2009)</td>
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</table>
... the process of engaging with learning and/or professional practice that provides an opportunity to critically analyse and evaluate that learning or practice. The purpose is to develop professional knowledge, understanding and practice that incorporates a deeper form of learning which is transformational in nature and is empowering, enlightening and ultimately emancipatory.

Reflective skills, although not specific to coaching, are particularly valuable for coaches (Hay 2007). For many, the course provides an opportunity to reflect upon and understand their experience (Mezirow 1991) as well as to develop and enhance their skills and understanding of coaching and business theory. Furthermore, reflection not only forms a bridge between theory and personal experience, according to Cox (2005), but it is also a highly motivating experience.

**Pedagogical choices**

The educational theory basis for this course relates to andragogy (Knowles 2005), constructivism (Kolb 1984, Schön 1983) and transformative learning (Mezirow 1991). Andragogy is appropriate because the students are mature adults who can take responsibility for their own learning and who are keen to learn as this course is relevant to their work. A constructivist approach suits because the course combines both theory and practice, calling for approaches which help students reflect on their experience, relate theory to practice, and to continue to develop their understanding and competence during and after the course. This approach is particularly appropriate here, as coaching is a young discipline with many differing schools of thought. The ability to tease out the subtle distinctions in definition, to highlight where there is empirical evidence of the effectiveness of particular approaches, and to explore ethical and business issues related to coaching, encourage students to engage both in class and in assignments. This can lead to genuine insights and transformation of their understanding of what coaching
is and how it works. As Mezirow (1991: 11) pointed out: ‘Making meaning is central to what learning is all about’. Interestingly, Cox and Bachkirova (2009) argue that regardless of the specific coaching framework coaches use, all coaching is based on adult learning theory, in particular the theories of Knowles et al. (2005), Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1990). Hence there is congruence between the course content and the educational approaches adopted.

**Mode of delivery**

One of the early decisions was about how best to deliver the course: face-to-face or distance learning, weekly or intensive blocks, one subject at a time or in parallel. While virtual coaching is an important topic, it is our belief that coaching skills development is best achieved face-to-face. Discussing and applying theory collectively ensures that students engage with the material and truly understand it. According to Moon (2004:20), students do not build meaning alone, but rather ‘in conjunction with the collected experiences of others’. Furthermore, the peer support effect is powerful, as noted by Murray (2009) who found that learning groups empower adult learners, encouraging dialogue and reflection on theory and practice, and enhancing professional development. In relation to peer supervision of coaches, Hay (2007) suggests that group sessions help people to see mistakes as learning opportunities, to explore multiple perspectives on the same issue and to feel validated by the reactions of others. This, she argues, enables potent learning which allows people to update their frame of reference.

We find that having two-day blocks of teaching is advantageous as this allows students to explore topics in depth. Between the two-day sessions, students read, research, write assignments, practise their skills and return to discuss their reflections. We noted Grant’s (2007) research which found that coaching students’ emotional intelligence, measured using the Schutte Emotional Intelligence
Scale (Schutte 1998), improved more over a 13-week program than on a two-day program. Grant defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive accurately emotions in oneself and others, to use emotions to facilitate thought, to understand how emotions can change over time, to manage emotions and translate them into constructive action. However, in Grant’s research, participants on the two-day program were only given a condensed version of what was included in the 13-week program, hence differences might be expected. Davies (2006) notes that on a range of measures such as learning outcomes, student commitment and interaction, intensive mode delivery has shown comparable and sometimes better results than traditional delivery. He summarises the advantages of intensive teaching as ‘increased motivation, commitment, and concentration, diversity of teaching methods, stimulation and enthusiasm, stronger relations among students, and flexibility’. However, he also warns that shortening courses may result in student cramming, less active discussion and superficial treatment of content. In our case, we were not shortening an existing course but designing a new course, specifying the number of days we regarded as necessary to achieve the learning outcomes. Our subjects are delivered over a 10-week period, for example, one-day introduction, two days a month later and two days a month later again. We would not expect a five-day block of intensive learning to be as valuable for two reasons, firstly, because concentration can wane as Bambacas et al. (2009) found on a four-day intensive MBA course, and secondly, because the learning between classes adds to the richness of the learning and the quality of in-class discussion (Merriam et al. 2007).

Finally, we chose to deliver the program one subject at a time, so that students can build in later subjects on what they had previously learned. We do not mean an accumulation of knowledge but rather, as in the constructivist approach outlined by Moon (2004), learning is seen as a network, where new ideas are linked by the learner, and if regarded as meaningful, added to what they already understand.
For example, in the subject Innovation, improvement and change management, students apply their coaching skills in eliciting ideas for innovation and setting goals for implementation. To their existing ‘toolbox’ of coaching skills (Megginson 2005), students add innovation tools (Chai 2005). The option of taking one subject at a time is feasible because Sydney Business School operates on four terms a year.

**Teaching theory**

Within the broad framework of a constructivist approach to learning, the next set of choices related to the best ways to put across the theory covered in each subject. The main choices we considered were:

- traditional lectures with case studies and group discussions
- giving students the responsibility to read set texts before class
- video clips of relevant points or of someone else discussing relevant points
- learning sets with students presenting their learning to each other.

We concluded that a mix of approaches would be best, both for the lecturer and the students. We did not at any point consider using traditional lectures without break-out sessions. Delivering a two-day module in this way would be extremely tiring for both lecturer and students, and we did not believe that the students would retain as much of the information or be able to apply it as if they were actively engaged (Killen 2007). The student perceptions reported later in this paper support this choice.

**Developing skills**

To develop skills, it is not enough for students to listen or read about the relevant skills—they have to learn by doing. Kolb (1984) identified a four-stage cycle of learning, where students move from concrete experience to reflection, then to abstract conceptualisation and active
experimentation. We incorporate a number of opportunities for students to develop and reflect on their skills in the safe environment of the classroom. These include:

- demonstration of skills—live and on video
- explanation followed by students coaching each other
- listening, paraphrasing/reflecting, questioning and feedback exercises
- students coaching real clients in the classroom
- students acting as coach supervisors for each other
- video of students coaching, which students can take away, review and reflect upon.

Adopting a constructivist approach to experiential learning, the lecturers in this context take on the role of facilitators of reflection, as highlighted by Merriam et al. (2007), who ‘encourage learners to discuss and reflect on concrete experiences in a trusting, open environment’. However we seek to allow for all four of Kolb’s (1984, 2005) learning styles by devising activities for each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kolb learning styles</th>
<th>Examples of activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diverging</td>
<td>Brainstorming, group discussions of different perspectives, observing others coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilating</td>
<td>Lecture, group discussion of coaching frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating</td>
<td>Listening exercise, group activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converging</td>
<td>Coaching simulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While we have not assessed students’ learning styles, the student feedback reported later in this paper suggest that students value a variety of activities.

A key consideration was how to enable students to build up their confidence, and to work with the doubts which are common in both
new and experienced coaches, according to de Haan (2008). It is important for students to assess themselves fairly and to re-define their development aims on an on-going basis.

A further consideration in setting in-class coaching activities is whether they should relate to real life issues or role plays, which are subtly different as highlighted by Moore (2005). As there are always real issues on which students can coach each other, real life contexts allow students to practise coaching without having to remember details of a role play. The confidences shared in this safe environment strengthen the bonds between students. On the other hand, role plays allow students to experiment with responses to a particular situation and can also be useful.

Balancing theory and skills development in the classroom involves continuous refinement, to ensure the optimum mix in the given timeframe. In reviewing the program, we have increased the number of face-to-face days per year from 16 days to 20, in order to devote adequate time to each topic.

**Assessment**

Boud (2007) advocates an approach to assessment which goes beyond a quality assurance framework to one which will help students improve their own judgement of their performance during and after the course, will foster self-regulation, and recognises the varied contexts in which learning takes place. Understanding of theory and its application can be assessed in traditional academic formats, such as essays or exams. Our written assignments also require a personal, creative contribution on the student’s part and not merely a précis or analysis of previous research. For example, to explore the topic of ethics in coaching, one assignment asks the students to research different types of codes of conduct, to decide which elements are most appropriate for a business coach, and then to devise their own code of conduct for a business coach, justifying each element they include
and giving guidelines for its implementation. An added advantage of such assignments is that students will not find something previously written which exactly answers the question they have been asked.

We include in our assessments action learning reviews, as defined by Zuber-Skerritt (2002:11): ‘learning from experience and critical reflection on that experience—through group discussion, trial and error, discovery, and learning from and with each other’. Students reflect on how they have applied their coaching skills in a particular context and how their experience relates to the concepts covered on the course, which helps to plan for their own development. In Schön’s (1983) terminology, this is reflection-on-action, rather than reflection-in-action. Action learning can be used, according to Bournér and Flowers (1997), to develop students’ ability to generate ideas and evidence, to facilitate the personal development of students, and to develop the capacity of students to plan and manage their own learning. Including a reflective and developmental element enriches assignments, removing them from the purely theoretical domain, to something meaningful for the student. As Hartog (2004: 397) reports, ‘students learn best when they are engaged in live and meaningful learning’. The hook of relevance makes the learning experience stronger and longer lasting, and in line with Boud (2007), develops students’ capacity to continue to learn after they have graduated.

Action learning can also be used, according to Hartog (2004: 400), as ‘a vehicle for developing integrity and ethical practice and introducing them [the students] to a discipline of action and reflection that they would have for the rest of their lives’.

As for examinations, the intention is not to test student memory but their understanding. Examinations are not appropriate in all subjects but they do have a place within a Masters program where students are developing a knowledge base as well as a skills base. In order to demonstrate their understanding, students are expected to select and use concepts appropriately, relate concepts, and demonstrate the
application of theory to real world situations (Boulton-Lewis 1995). According to Carless et al. (2006), summative assessments can have a beneficial effect on the focus of study and how students learn.

In addition to assessing students’ understanding of coaching theory in assignments and exams, students are also assessed on their business coaching skills. Coaching skills cannot be assessed by assessing a student’s writing. Instead, skills assessment involves students undertaking authentic tasks such as coaching sessions, feedback sessions, client presentations, business plans and group facilitation exercises. These are authentic in the sense that they are tasks which a business coach might realistically expect to perform. They conform to Herrington and Herrington’s (1995) criteria for effective authentic assessment, namely, an array of tasks in a realistic context, requiring the student to display judgement and perform effectively, and providing multiple indicators of learning. Being able to take away a video of their coaching session provided a powerful learning stimulus which the students rated very highly, although some found it uncomfortable to watch and listen to themselves. The video allowed them to see themselves as an outsider, to see instances where they could have responded differently or to become aware of certain habits of speech or body language. Some found that they also noticed new things about the person they were coaching and realised that they had not been paying enough attention to visual or auditory cues while coaching. While the end of the actual coaching session left students feeling very positive about how the session had gone, in reviewing the video, they could see many opportunities for improvement. The videos therefore provided a stimulus for reflection, as noted by Orland-Barak and Rachamim (2009), enabling students to improve their self-assessment.

Detailed feedback is provided on each assessment task. Boud and Falchikov (2007) note that feedback from a variety of sources is vital. Many of our students are in senior positions and rarely receive
feedback of any kind. It can be a blow to their self-esteem to receive negative feedback. Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) point out that motivation and self-esteem play a very important role in learning and assessment. When feedback is specific, timely and above all constructive, students react positively and strive for improvement.

Method

Student performance is assessed formally both in exams and assignments. Table 2 shows the student results for the first two core coaching subjects for the first cohort of students.

For the purpose of understanding student perceptions which can be used to inform course design and curriculum development, three types of formal feedback were sought. The first type of feedback is a Subject survey. The focus is the subject itself and how well students are supported in their learning. Table 3 shows the responses for the first two subjects for the first cohort of students.

The second type of survey is a Teacher evaluation survey, which is undertaken at the request of the lecturer. It focuses on how well the lecturer conducts the course. Results are available for the first and sixth subject only shown in Table 4.

Both these surveys are conducted in class without the lecturer present and response rates were 100%. The excellent response rate is attributed to the emphasis on two-way feedback throughout the course and the students’ awareness that their opinions were a valuable input to improving the course for future cohorts. These two surveys are anonymous and analysed externally.

The third set of feedback was a survey distributed by the author to the students by email after the first two subjects had been completed. This survey focused on student reactions to the types of learning activities undertaken, assessments used and support services available. A response rate of 65% was obtained, which was
considered good given that all these students are working full-time as well as studying part-time. Although the responses were identifiable, confidentiality was guaranteed, with no responses included in this or other analysis which could identify a student or their organisation. As feedback is an integral feature of this course, students learn to give and receive feedback from the start of the course. Therefore, the issue of anonymity was not regarded as a deterrent.

Results

Performance

Student performance by this group was very high, as shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: Student results for first two core Coaching subjects (n = 17)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Mean Grade*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Business Coaching</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
<td>5.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Coaching Skills</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Grades: High Distinction = 85–100%, Distinction = 75–84%, Credit = 65–74%, Pass = 50–64%

Six lecturers taught the core subjects (the same lecturer taught the first and sixth subject, while two lecturers taught the second subject together). Student results were consistently higher than our other Masters’ courses, averaging above 70%. This high performance was achieved despite the fact that many of these students had not undertaken any formal study for a long time, and most had had no experience of searching academic databases or writing critical analyses or reflections. The reasons for their excellent performance lie in a combination of factors which will be discussed later in this paper.
Perceptions

For the Subject survey, students were asked to rate a series of statements against the headings: strongly agree (+3), agree (+2), mildly agree (+1), mildly disagree (-1), disagree (-2) and strongly disagree (-3). A mean above zero indicates that student perceptions are more positive about the subject, with a mean of three being the highest; a mean below zero indicates negative perceptions with three being the lowest. Table 3 shows the results for the first two subjects.

Table 3: Subject survey results (n=17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Subj. 1 Mean</th>
<th>Subj. 1 SD</th>
<th>Subj. 2 Mean</th>
<th>Subj. 2 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: In this subject the learning objectives were made clear to me</td>
<td>1.412</td>
<td>1.326</td>
<td>2.133</td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: The assessment criteria were clearly stated at the beginning of the subject</td>
<td>2.353</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>2.067</td>
<td>0.704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: Feedback on my work was provided to me in time to prepare for other assessment tasks</td>
<td>1.867</td>
<td>2.604</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>0.688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: This subject helped me gain a better understanding of an area of study</td>
<td>2.294</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: My learning in this subject was well supported by:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) access to teachers</td>
<td>2.824</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) access to other assistance</td>
<td>2.412</td>
<td>1.064</td>
<td>2.133</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) learning tasks</td>
<td>2.176</td>
<td>1.298</td>
<td>2.067</td>
<td>1.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) learning resources</td>
<td>2.059</td>
<td>1.298</td>
<td>1.933</td>
<td>0.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) e-learning (if used)</td>
<td>1.824</td>
<td>1.139</td>
<td>1.933</td>
<td>1.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this subject.</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>2.273</td>
<td>0.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Mean</td>
<td>2.154</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be seen from Table 3 that students were very satisfied with learning tasks (Q5c) in both subjects. However, in the first subject, the learning objectives were not made sufficiently clear. In the second subject, the students did not receive feedback in time to prepare for other assessment tasks, which is reflected in Q3. Timing of assessments can be difficult in teaching in intensive mode and we have addressed this issue in later instances of the subject. While the majority of the scores are high, the lower responses to some questions give some reassurance that the data reflect students’ actual perceptions of their experience.

There were many positive comments on the survey. Several students commented that the involvement of experienced business coaches added credibility to the course. The difficulty of getting the right balance between theory and practice was reflected in mixed feedback, with some wanting more theory while others wanted more practice. Comments on the first subject praised the acknowledgement and encouragement of diverse opinions and healthy debate, and for the second subject, there were comments on the close bonds the group had formed and the genuine support for each other.

Teacher evaluation survey results are available for the first and last subject and, as shown in Table 4, demonstrated high levels of satisfaction, with ratings varying from 5.1 to 6, where 6 is the maximum.
### Table 4: Teacher evaluation survey results (n=17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Subj. 1 Mean (Max. 6)</th>
<th>Subj. 1 SD</th>
<th>Subj. 6 Mean (Max. 6)</th>
<th>Subj. 6 SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: This teacher is well prepared for the subject</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.437</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: This teacher presents the subject-matter clearly</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: This teacher organises and sequences the subject matter well</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: This teacher presents an appropriate amount of material for the time available</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: This teacher stimulates me to think about the subject</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: This teacher appears to be interested in helping me to learn</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: This teacher is helpful in response to my questions or problems</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.588</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: Because of this teacher, I have felt enthusiastic about studying this subject</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: This teacher encouraged me to interact with other students</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10: This teacher organised class time effectively and efficiently</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11: This teacher encouraged participation in class discussions</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12: Assignments marked by this teacher have been returned within a reasonable timeframe</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.277</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13: Written comments on assignments marked by this teacher have been helpful</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14: This teacher has been available to discuss problems and questions relating to my assignments or examinations</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.8</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Free text comments for the first subject noted that there was an understanding that the students might not initially have strong research or writing skills and that support was put in place to help. The value of working with other motivated students was noted by many. Students commented that the discussions and learning begun in class continued outside the classroom. For the research subject, students welcomed the ability to understand and trial the research process and to choose a topic which was meaningful for them (the ability to choose is a strong motivator in adult learning according to Knowles 2005). However the limited time available put the students under pressure and this subject will be extended over two terms for students commencing in 2011.

The email survey also showed a very positive response to the in-class learning activities of the first two subjects, as shown in Table 5.
Table 5: Student rating of learning activities on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is low and 6 is high (n=17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Subj. 1</th>
<th>Subj. 2</th>
<th>Subj. 1</th>
<th>Subj. 2</th>
<th>Subj. 1</th>
<th>Subj. 2</th>
<th>Subj. 1</th>
<th>Subj. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of coaching</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from fellow students’ facilitation sessions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching practice session</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the mean and mode are very high, the range indicates that a small number of students found some exercises such as observing fellow students’ facilitation sessions, the live coaching demonstration and the video of little use. These students may prefer a more traditional style of learning from lectures and textual material. However, despite their low rating of these exercises, all the students performed well in the assessments, indicating that even where learning activities are not in a student’s preferred style, the learning
outcomes can still be achieved. For the majority of students, all the activities used were beneficial. As students may have different learning styles and preferences (Kolb 1984, Sternberg 1997), it is to be expected that some students will prefer some activities to others. Hayes (1990:32) advises educators to ‘recognize the diversity of adult learning needs, attitudes, and abilities, as well as the varied demands of different educational settings, and draw on a spectrum of instructional strategies’. In their comments, all the students rated the discussions highly, valuing the opportunity to learn from their fellow students as well as the lecturer, and to think through their own position on ethical and other professional aspects of coaching. Comments from students show that they appreciate that their experience is valued and that different perspectives are welcome. As Boud (1993) notes:

> Experience is not a given; it is created by learners in relation to the learning milieu and their own personal foundation of experience. Different learners will have quite different experiences within the context of the same learning event.

Furthermore, all students responded that it was very important to mix learning activities and lectures, as shown in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Student rating of importance of learning activities on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is not very important and 6 is very important (n = 11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to mix learning activities and lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to practise coaching in real situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to practise coaching in role play situations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 6, we can see that students do not want a purely theoretical or purely practical approach, but a mix of the two. They also see the opportunity to have the opportunity to practise coaching in real situations as very important. Thirdly, they regard coaching in role play situations as very important, only slightly lower than for ‘real play’, or practice in real situations.

Students also rated the assessments highly as shown in Table 7.

*Table 7: Student rating of assessment tasks on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is low and 6 is high (n = 11)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject 1:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Subject 1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 and 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject 2:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Subject 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group facilitation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching session</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the mean and the mode were very close, with the mean for all assessments at 5 out of a maximum of 6 marks, and the mode varying between 4 and 6. In the first subject, the distribution was close with marks only varying between 4 and 6. In the second subject, although the mean was 5 and the mode was 6, there was greater variation, with some students rating all three assessment tasks at 2 out of 6. However, in the free text comments in the subject evaluations, some students commented that the assessments were one of the best things
about the subject, getting them to focus in depth on relevant areas, to hone their research and critical thinking skills as well as their coaching skills.

Student comments were interesting, in particular in relation to the examination. Students noted that the examination encouraged them to review material which they might otherwise have skimmed over, had made them organise their learnings into a coherent structure for future reference, and had helped them develop a portfolio of ideas and models for their workplace. They commented positively on the inclusion of reflection and action learning. Interestingly, they also regarded the examination as less confronting than their coaching assignments. This may be because examinations assess knowledge rather than skills or self-awareness. As with the learning activities, a combination of assessment formats seems to work well.

Students were asked to rate the factors that mattered to them in receiving feedback on their assignments. Their responses are shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Student ranking of assignment feedback factors, on a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 is very important (n = 9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific and personalised to your assessment</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely - available within 2 weeks of assignment submission date</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly linked to marking criteria</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer available for discussion of feedback</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for improvement</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No suggestions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student perception of lecturers’ performance against these criteria for the first two subjects was high, with averages of over 5 out of 6 against each.

**Discussion**

The performance data indicate that the students have clearly achieved the learning outcomes for the subjects they had completed at the time of the survey. The perception data indicate that the students enjoy a mix of theory and practice, a variety of learning activities, and a variety of assessment tasks. We believe the students’ enjoyment and their achievement are linked. Braming (2007) points out that student satisfaction and student learning are not always linked, as transformative learning can be a painful process. However, in this case, the students’ performance has been excellent. The positive ratings have been achieved, although it is stressed to the students that we are looking for honest feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The high performance and positive perceptions of the students can be attributed to a variety of factors:

1. The student selection process includes an interview to assess students’ motivation and commitment to the course, and their ability to work well with others. This is in line with recommendations by Yang and Lu (2001) who argued that admission should not purely be on the basis of previous academic records but also other criteria such as career statements and personal interviews.
2. The course is organised on a cohort basis. Choy (2009) notes that adult learning is a social practice. The cohort system leads both to peer support and competition, study groups, revision sessions, and sharing of learning and notes. The cohort effect is fostered by exercises where students share experiences which they may not have shared with anyone previously and by students working
together on some assignments. The students see each other grow and help each other with genuine feedback.

3. A review of the assignments indicates that students experienced ‘AHA’ moments at varying times during the first two subjects, an ‘AHA’ moment being a moment of insight when something in the theory or discussion chimed with their personal experience, a concept become real, something made sense, or in Liljedahl (2005: 220) words, ‘it is the turning on of the light after six months of groping in the dark’. Examples of ‘AHA’ moments on this course included students suddenly connecting their everyday coaching practice with the theory, realising that their listening skills were not as good as they had believed, and students realising that other people thought highly of their coaching skills, even if they themselves still felt inexperienced.

4. The course content is highly relevant to the students, which enhances their initial motivation. As Killen (2007) argues, the more subjects are seen as relevant, the more students are likely to find meaning in them, and hence the more powerful the learning experience.

5. The mode of course delivery allows time both for reflection and for in-depth exploration. The two days at a time format allows students to get into topics in depth. The month back in the workplace allows them to try things out and to bring that experience back to the next face-to-face session and/or to reflect on it in a log. This blending of theory and application enables students to develop a deep understanding, rather than merely learning concepts for an examination (Murphy 2005).

6. The 24 x 7 availability of the e-learning site means that information is available at any time, including lecture slides, self-assessments, notes on models and skills. Students nowadays expect this. As Ellis et al. (2009) note, e-learning is now a
fundamental part of the learning experience in higher education, and no longer the domain solely of those universities engaged in distance learning.

7. The involvement of colleagues in the Library and Learning Development, who tailor workshops to help students develop the skills necessary to meet the academic requirements of the course. This is in line with Meldrum and Tootell (2004) who reported that collaboration of library and academic staff, integration of information literacy in the curriculum and linking with assessment supports successful outcomes.

**Conclusion and further developments**

There are many approaches to coaching education, some rooted in psychology, others arising from adult education, and others in business schools, as noted by Cox *et al.* (2010). As a business school, Sydney Business School has carefully defined its approach to coaching, and considered carefully what the students should learn and what approaches we can use to help them learn. In doing so, we have tried to address the need in the marketplace for business coaches who are well versed in the theory and practice of coaching, who understand the application of coaching in a business context, and who are equipped with the critical, reflective and research skills to continue to develop as coaches on graduation and to contribute to the development of the field through practitioner research. We aim to help students not only to develop practical coaching skills but also to equip them with the critical and reflective skills to choose, modify, develop and evaluate their own coaching approaches. We base our approach on theories of adult learning, particularly andragogy, experiential and transformative learning, theories which also underpin coaching itself (Cox *et al.* 2010).

We continue to get feedback from our students on each subject and we have also planned longitudinal surveys of our graduates one year, two years and five years post-completion. The changes made
to the course so far have been to increase the number of face-to-face
days to allow more time for discussion, for theory to be processed
and more practice to be gained, and to improve the balance between
theory and practice in each subject. We have also allocated more
time for completion of the research project. We are fortunate that
our students, graduates and applicants include business coaches
and employers of business coaches. We gain from their multiple
perspectives, getting ideas from them and testing ideas with them.
Together with benchmarking with other universities and monitoring
of academic literature on coaching, management and educational
theory as well as professional practice, this will allow us to hone both
our approaches and the content, so that our program will constantly
evolve. However, it will evolve within the core parameters we have
established from the start, namely, a rigorous academic degree
combined with real world experience and business understanding.

**Acknowledgements**

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Challenges in aligning workplace learning with business goals: A perspective from HRD professionals in New Zealand

Tom Short
University of South Australia

Roger Harris
University of South Australia

Modern organisations have become more complex, less mechanistic and increasingly sensitive to rapid changes in the external environment than in previous eras. Today, executives lead employees through a maze of complexity and changing contexts. However, another group of dedicated professionals, the human resource managers and practitioners, also play a big part in shaping business success. For human resource managers, learning how to cope with a diverse range of people-centred challenges has generated a succession of workplace development initiatives aimed at aligning education and training with business strategy (Anderson 2009). In the knowledge economy, the value of workplace
education and training has become a mantra for business survival. Simultaneously, in response to a requirement for change, the human resource management (HRM) profession has engaged in frequent and often inward-looking processes to re-define its own contribution, not only to the effectiveness of an enterprise but also to the individual employee and wider community. Within this evolution, in some organisations, the traditional sub-areas of HRM, such as human resource development (HRD), have gradually become detached from mainstream HRM and assumed a role quite different in both purpose and approach to from the more hegemonic notion of resources management. This paper draws insights from a group of senior HRD professionals in New Zealand to review the significance of workplace learning in a strategic context and identify the challenges the profession faces in meeting the demands of complex workplaces. The paper focuses on how HRD professionals go about aligning learning activities with business objectives—often with mixed results.

Introduction and background

In recent years, human resource management (HRM) practices have grown systematically to become firmly embedded within a business mindset (Boxall & Purcell 2003, Elsey 1997), yet by contrast, human resource development (HRD) activities have evolved to perch awkwardly between the more-established disciplines of business, education and social policy (Short 2009). In the academic world, HRD specialists are ‘struggling for their own space and freedom, distinguishing themselves from HRM or vocational education’ (Sambrook 2004: 617). HRD professionals have ‘long searched for credibility’ (Iles, Preece & Chuai 2010: 125) and much has been written about the challenges HRD faces, primarily keeping the field relevant, adopting more strategic approaches, embracing technological changes and measuring its contribution
to organisational performance (McGuire & Cseh 2006). Its gradual evolution has both generated opportunities and created limitations for HRD research. In becoming wedged between mainstream academic disciplines, HRD can be perceived as fertile ground and an attractive place for applied study; on the other hand, this positioning can also be interpreted as being in the disciplinary wilderness, resulting in a lack of interest from purists on all sides and a diluting of the importance of HRD as a strategic area of interest.

Part of this response comes from the recurrent tensions of ideology between the disciplines. The unfortunate result is that HRD offerings become overlooked by top executives or subsumed as a less important activity of HRM, and this situation becomes most evident when an organisation re-aligns its strategy in order to cope with ever-changing market competition and demand. Some organisations have amplified this estrangement by placing HRM in a centralised, corporate service while devolving HRD to line management. There are two key implications here. First, it relegates the identity of HRD towards the operational level of a business; and second, it assumes that line managers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, motivation and time to organise workplace training. Moreover, Sambrook (2004) found that, when line managers were keen to accept autonomy on HRD decisions, a tension developed about the purpose of HRD—that is to say, who would benefit most, the individual or the organisation? As a consequence, many HRD practitioners have become resigned to their relegated status within corporate affairs, but this lack of recognition has impacted adversely on their professional identity as workplace educators and may even have inhibited their career development.

Historically, workplace development projects have been among the first casualties of rationalisation, especially softer skill programs, where evaluations of benefits are harder to source than straightforward, practical, skill-based training. Yet, even before the
widespread uptake of HRD in the mid-1980s, workplace learning and training was seen as a sub-activity of personnel departments (Buckley & Caple 1990). As a result, an organisation’s commitment to training and development was very much dependent on the personnel manager’s enthusiasm. In spite of ever-increasing training budgets, present-day research shows an ongoing and tenuous existence for workplace development, in that only a small percentage of the UK’s FTSE top 100 organisations have a human resources representative at boardroom level (Manocha 2006). Such ever-present dilemmas create many challenges for HRD professionals who believe their contribution to workplace performance is special, not only in terms of enrichment of people but also to the longer-term development of the organisation and wider community.

There are two factors to consider here. First, despite the repeated assertions of HRM advocates that training should be fully integrated into business strategy (Guest 1987, Purcell 1989, Story 1989, Hendry 1995, Tyson 1997, Mueller 1996, Elsey 1997, Boxall & Purcell 2003, Field 2004), the contribution of HRM as a genuine strategic activity continues to dominate studies, though some texts indicate that HRD is a well-established concept within the wider field of HRM (Sambrook 2009, Wang, Hutchins & Garavan 2009). Second, despite global increases in training budgets, there remains ongoing doubt at boardroom level about the positive connection between workplace learning activities (often included in the notion of HRD) and longer-term business success. Some commentators believe that top executives fail to acknowledge, or value, HRD as a strategic imperative and this situation presents an interesting paradox, because training budgets are ever increasing. The estimated forecast for the UK in 2008 was £24 billion and later revised to £36 billion (CIPD 2008).

Commitment from the top is an essential factor in the success of HRD (Pareek & Rao 2008). According to Sambrook (2004: 619), ‘how
senior managers think about HRD can influence how it is practised’ and part of the reason why executives reduce training budgets so easily is poor evaluation practices. HRD professionals recognise the importance of gaining feedback from learning events, but research findings call into question the thoroughness of evaluation processes, claiming they rarely happen to the satisfaction of senior managers. This problem fuels pre-existing scepticism among senior managers who need evidence of the payback (Horwitz 1999, Sloman 2004). Consequently, training and development projects that are unable to demonstrate clear alignment with the firm’s objectives are postponed or cancelled altogether (Tarrant 2009). The uneasy relationship between HRD and strategy, therefore, means that traditional approaches to evaluation may have failed to convince managers—creating a need to discover better ways of expressing the benefits of training, if the strategic value of HRD is to strengthen. Moreover, in recent years, the term ‘alignment’ has grown in use—especially in the pro-HRM literature—as a descriptive term to symbolise a range of management-driven processes based on planning and directing training projects towards strategic goals (Anderson 2009). There is no shortage of advice on how to achieve alignment, but sometimes the offerings seem overplayed and simplistic, and to overlook the increasing complexity of organisational life (Short 2008b). HRD professionals know that achieving alignment is not straightforward. For example, in a culturally rich setting, alignment-based scorecards that set an objectivist tone may fail to recognise the qualitative circumstances in which organisations deploy their learning strategies. Arguably, the notion of alignment (in the context of HRD) takes a managerial perspective (Field 2004, Short 2008a) and overlooks that organisations frequently gain competitive advantage by pursuing several strategies at the same time (Thompson 1995), thus making alignment difficult to quantify and define as a universal entity. Consequently, confusion prevails and alignment degenerates into a management dream, or perception, rather than an achievable reality.
The upshot is that organisations using alignment as a reason for making strategic decisions on HRD find it challenging to articulate accurately what alignment means and how it impacts on business success.

With all this ferment, the traditional sub-areas of HRM, such as HRD, have gradually become detached in some organisations from mainstream HRM and assumed a role quite different in both purpose and approach from the more hegemonic notion of resources management. Sambrook (2010: 121) suggests there are ‘various titles associated with HRD’ and such significant issues are in need of illumination through research on actual practice. This paper, therefore, draws insights from a group of senior HRD practitioners in New Zealand to review the significance of workplace learning and development and to identify the challenges the HRD profession faces in meeting the demands of complex workplaces. The paper examines the perceptions of the HRD practitioners of their role and professional contribution, how they establish an identity and how they influence what managers and employees consider as important for organisations to succeed. In doing so, it reveals a number of occupational tensions for HRD practitioners.

**Research method**

An interpretive approach has been used in this research, since the study was primarily concerned with perceptions and experiences. An interpretive approach is based on the view that people socially and symbolically construct their own organisational realities (Berger & Luckman 1967). It construes knowledge as being gained through social constructions such as language, shared meanings and documents. Thus the individual is cast as ‘a central actor in a drama of personal meaning making’ (Fenwick 2001: 9). In this way, individuals are understood to construct their own knowledge through interaction with environments (constructivism).
The data on which this paper is based were derived from a specially convened focus group of five human resource practitioners in New Zealand during 2007. The group was drawn from a selection of organisations to provide commentary on a range of HRD issues and practices. None of the participants knew each other before the meeting, but one of the researchers knew the individuals through previous connections. The group, comprising two early-career male HRD managers and three senior female practitioners, had all experienced HRD in an international setting. They were drawn from five industry sectors, including manufacturing (MF), automotive retail (AR), local government (LG), commercial banking (CB) and tertiary education (TE). These industry sectors were purposively selected with the intent of obtaining as diverse a spread of views as possible.

The focus group was led by an independent and professional facilitator. Using a facilitator with subject-matter knowledge added much credibility to the discussion, enabled participants to relate quickly to the range of issues and allowed discussion to ‘freewheel’ within the range of questions (see appendix). The discussion was audio-taped to assist with later analysis and each member verified the written transcription. Using desktop analysis, the text data were clustered for the purpose of writing-up the findings. The findings that follow are structured around ten themes. These themes emerged from the interview transcripts, interpreted from notes taken during the focus group and informed by an extensive review of the literature. This strategy was chosen to best capture the essence of how group members not only contributed to their organisation’s success but also reconciled their own professional agenda of educating employees within the wider context of lifelong learning. (The codes used after quotations indicate the question number and the industry sector).
Findings and discussion

Strategic HRD considerations in a global workplace

The high turnover of employees in New Zealand’s mobile labour market, particularly in large cities such as Auckland, raised concern about the challenges of finding, retaining and developing capable people. The group discussed how organisations might fall back on a historic reluctance to invest in training if they thought staff members were going to be poached at a later stage. There was some belief this attitude prevailed despite research to the contrary showing that training and development actually helped in retaining employees (Smith and Hayton 1999). One participant said:

I think there is quite a lot of reluctance out there to develop people sometimes when you think they’re going to be poached if I develop them too much. You know the old sort of model where we’ve just invested a lot in Jim, and now Jim’s going so let’s not invest anymore and not make that mistake again. That kind of attitude still prevails in a lot of areas and you have to try and convince them that in actual fact the research is increasingly showing that development is valued by employees and they’re more likely to stay if they are developed and stimulated in that way and trying to convince people of that. (Q3, LG)

The need for economic survival, growth and increased levels of competitiveness were significant concerns, especially the decline of whole industry infrastructures, as increasing numbers of New Zealand organisations moved offshore. In an atmosphere of survival, people rarely considered that if one company failed it had a knock-on effect on many other parts of the supply chain. The group believed New Zealand, as a nation of small businesses, was particularly vulnerable, and the challenge was for larger organisations to see beyond themselves, consider how they could support the small firms, and create a form of strategic interdependence. Guarantees of partnership would then give small firms the confidence to invest in capital and develop people. Building on this idea, one participant from the
banking sector recognised the need to be creative and different from the competition. In his view, ‘It would be so easy to get sucked in to the rest of the pack and nobody would be able to tell the difference’ (Q3, CB). He believed customers valued a point of difference—so important when attracting new talent. New Zealand has a relatively small pool of talent, limiting the availability of high calibre people. In the trade union sector, important challenges included encouraging people to see learning as part of the bigger picture and becoming multi-skilled. New Zealanders are also notoriously low risk-takers and working people rarely take on a learning challenge for fear of failure or being perceived as a failure. The emergence of the knowledge economy had been a huge wake-up call for many working New Zealanders as economic success increasingly depended less on agriculture and more on advanced technology. The manager concluded: ‘In most cases, the problem was not the technology itself but the manner in which people communicated the difficulties or helped others overcome their difficulties.’ (Q3, CB).

Influences on workplace development decisions
As organisations struggle to survive in the global economy, priorities are ever-changing and HRD practitioners play an important role in shaping the management decisions on training and development. Participants reported a wide range of organisational issues, largely centred on selecting the correct people strategy, overcoming resource constraints and driving the need for performance improvement. Mostly, decisions related to training were based on a primary assessment of the external environment and market. This appraisal was undertaken to determine customer expectations on performance, and then examine how employees could best meet those expectations. One participating manager from the banking sector explained: ‘We look at the big-ticket issues that are presently on the horizon and into the future. Then we look inside the organisation to see what our capabilities are in relation to those things. It is a classic gap
closing activity, starting with the big picture and then working down’. Thompson (1995: 229) refers to this ‘relational’ process as dealing with the strategic ‘architecture’. The manager continued his account of the process as follows:

Cost is secondary to business need over the shorter term and what staff training was needed to move forward. In the longer term, it was about considering what formulas worked in the marketplace - investigating what activities were going well and what appeared like good initiatives to deploy over the medium to long term. Cultural fit was also an important part of this assessment, as experience had shown that training initiatives failed when they did not fit with the organisational culture. (Q2, CB)

The tertiary sector participant emphasised financial factors in recounting that ‘in my organisation, all we hear about is budgets but at the same time you are supposed to keep yourself up to speed with professional development and get on with the next thing ... it is really an issue of rhetoric versus reality’ (Q2, TE). Interestingly, participants’ comments reflected both strategic and operational levels of decision-making on training. Typically, senior executives set three to five priorities per year as strategic items to support the overall business plan, but at the next level, training was determined more by the engagement of operational line-managers and availability of budgets.

There was widespread agreement that decisions on training and development often resulted from a managerial desire for performance improvement, a trend supported by research (Tarrant 2009). However, one feature that emerged frequently was the level of understanding required to bring about performance improvement. Experience had shown that some leaders doggedly stuck to a tried and tested style of curriculum management approach and were not actually focussed on making decisions around what made a difference to performance, yet this was required at a strategic level.
Such experience supports the finding of Rigg and Trehan (2008) who reported how difficult it is to employ critical reflection within the workplace because of the complex power relations between multiple stakeholders in a commercial context. Learning was acknowledged as a key part of an organisation’s development strategy and was not something that featured on its own, or happened to people. Participants reported that sometimes even human resource professionals did not have the depth of understanding required—especially among those appointed into human resources roles from other professional areas. One participant claimed: ‘As a HRD manager, you often have to work for people who don’t have your depth of knowledge and that can be dangerous’ (Q2, LG).

Ways in which HRD practitioners add value in their organisations

Participants placed great importance on the supporting role of HRD in helping people to maintain focus and ensuring alignment with business goals. Furthermore, it was thought the absence of a HRD practitioner might lead to managers becoming distracted by ‘firefighting’ activities and/or dealing with the complexities of routine work. After all, HRD practitioners were there specifically to help managers make the right decisions in terms of development and to identify opportunities to lever improvements in performance:

If you’re a HRD practitioner, then development is part of your game and I think you’re keeping your eye on the ball and focusing on it—you’re supporting management in that role. If you haven’t got HRD practitioners, what happens is that everyone knows it’s really important but they are so busy fighting fires they never get round to it. So I think the main role is to keep things focused on what’s important and to make sure HRD practitioners help managers make the right decisions in terms of developmental opportunities. (Q5, LG)

The group members also acknowledged the vital role of the human resource professional as an internal advisor/consultant to line management. However, they acknowledged the logistical difficulty
of a lone HRD practitioner organising every aspect of learning and development in a large organisation. They believed that coaching line managers to carry out activities, such as task analysis and training needs analysis, helped to raise awareness of the need to identify performance gaps, and ensured a consistent level of learning and development throughout the organisation. However, a strong partnership with line managers was central to making this successful. Above all, the group considered HRD practitioners as people who had a catalysing effect on line managers. According to one respondent, ‘they influenced first and transacted second’ (Q5, AR). The following statement typified the importance of the HRD effort being totally aligned with business goals: ‘You have to be so inextricably linked that you are such a part of the business they don’t see you’ (Q5, AR). The group concluded that this level of integration (that is, working behind the scenes) had to be valued at all levels in the organisation.

Alignment of workforce development with business strategy

Discussion focused on the popular concept of developing human capital (Boxall & Purcell 2002) as the basis for a human resource, service-led model, but they considered this idea as somewhat transactional and fundamentally different from the philosophy of learning and development. Some of the group had worked in human resource departments where training was viewed as someone else’s problem and where work was inappropriately contracted out in the name of efficiency. One respondent proclaimed: ‘I think that learning and development strategies have to be talking about people—not resources, bits of cardboard or a sort of disembodied something. I always say, you manage resources but you lead people’ (Q6, TE).

At an organisational level, there was agreement that learning and development activities should focus on the whole business as well as the component parts. This suggestion reflects the systematic or holistic approach and supports the idea of working in close partnership with those responsible for developing and deploying
the business strategy. Participants considered how human resource functions in larger organisations had become too remote. Some believed learning and development managers were perceived as subservient to the human resources function and examples were given of how human resources departments had initiated training without first consulting the learning and development practitioners, creating much confusion and misalignment:

Quite often, they’re [HR staff] off running courses for Africa [everywhere], but what does it have to do with anything else? You can actually find they are running programs with the best of intention that actually do not align at all. I think the only way you can specifically align is to carry on with a partnership at a high level and always go back to what the business strategy is for the future. If they do not contribute, then do not do them ... it is that straightforward. (Q6, LG)

The notion of learning and development activity being philosophically different from that of personnel-related work is an interesting one and closely associated with the creation of human resource management as we have come to know it. Up to the late 1970s, training and personnel departments were often seen as totally different disciplines, but the advent of HRM in the 1980s sought to meld these two activities together for the betterment of both professions. Over the years, this unitary value of personnel or training has been debated in global studies (Cunningham & Hyman 1999), but in this focus group, it seemed the HRD practitioners were feeling compromised and inhibited from making a full contribution to the wider strategy on human resource management. Simply put, some of the HRD professionals in the focus group felt less valued than their HRM counterparts. However, one participant from the manufacturing sector thought having role separation was advantageous at the operational level and gave an example of how internal human resource consultants and learning and development professionals had worked in partnership on a performance management issue—human
resource staff dealing with the disciplinary aspects and learning and development staff facilitating a learning-centred solution. In this example, the organisational structure influenced role boundaries—with human resources reporting to a central service function and HRD to line management.

What employees value

The HRD practitioners, in their work within organisations, frequently became involved in the implementation of organisational development activities that aimed to promote and sustain a value-driven culture. From this experience, participants commented on what they thought employees valued in their respective organisation. The purpose of this question was to identify how group members understood and reconciled employee values with their own and those of the organisation. A summation of the participants’ views indicated that career progression and fair levels of remuneration featured strongly in employee engagement surveys as valued employment practices. Additionally, formal and informal communications were considered as important processes for providing feedback to employees. Participants highlighted that informal feedback helped to embed communications into the organisation at a natural level. In comparison with the past, new entrants had a much higher expectation from their employer, especially on workplace communication systems, workplace democracy and structured feedback mechanisms. This contrasted sharply with longer serving managers, who may not have experienced the same approach to communications earlier in their careers. Young people entering the workforce today, often referred to as Generation Y, seemed to crave communications and feedback, especially on individual performance and progression (MacLeod 2008). The group believed this level of personal validation was important, as employees were quick to criticise leaders who did not adapt—seeing poor communications as a sign of management incompetence.
Increasingly, people at any level in the organisation structure were thought to value a working life that developed in parallel with their personal identity. For example, they asked, ‘Does this organisation help me feel good and clarify where I am going?’ (Q1, TE and RB). All too frequently, managers were reported to be not good at communicating the vision, values and overall objectives of their organisation. Employees also valued being able to trust their organisation was treating them fairly. One participant commented that ‘managers can get away with almost anything as long as they are perceived as being fair. If it is [considered to be] fair and consistent, then employees are usually willing to do what is asked of them, within reason’ (Q1, CB). This view suggests that perceptions of fairness are an important factor in the level of employee lenience on potentially contentious issues and reinforces the notion of psychological contracting. Issues might include unexpected change, work re-organisation or the imposition of new rules. In other words, when managers demonstrate a belief in their people and are perceived as being fair, employees respond with unobstructed consent on most initiatives, as people are happy to go beyond the limits. However, this lenience is fragile and a revealing example was cited by the participant from the manufacturing sector who said that, when management took a unilateral decision to impose the wearing of safety hats in the factory (after reports of a fatal accident in another organisation), workers did not see the need for this ruling and took exception to the way in which the rule was being enforced. The participant recalled one employee saying:

A blanket rule was made that we should wear hard hats. There was absolutely no discussion and for us it was a bit tough because we were not used to wearing a helmet. We are all into safety, but it was a blanket rule ... even in areas where nothing could fall on your head. They [management] said it was for our own safety, but we believed it was just to cover them and not worry about us. No one cares, I never used to sweat before ... but now my head is dripping and it is causing irritating rashes. (Q1, MF)
Overall, the focus group members agreed that hard-earned goodwill could be eroded very quickly by three factors: manager inconsistency, internal politicking and the presence of a vacuum in communications. In the organisations of these participants, engagement surveys and intranet feedback tested the level of employee commitment by asking individuals a range of questions, including the extent to which they would go the extra mile.

Evaluation of learning

The focus group participants reported a heavy reliance on the use of the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation in their organisations and all of the participants were able to articulate the well-known four levels of evaluation: reaction, learning, behaviour and results (Kirkpatrick 1996, Parry 1997). There was recognition that computer-based technology had made it much easier to collect evaluation data, but the main challenge was finding the time to analyse and interpret them.

The size of the training investment was an important consideration but presented a paradoxical situation. For example, evaluations of training projects that directly affected business performance were considered a much higher priority than smaller training activities, yet these training projects were reported as being the most difficult to evaluate. Furthermore, organisational development programs often ran in parallel with several other projects, making it harder to isolate and evaluate the benefits of any one training intervention in an effective and timely way. Poor initiation of training projects presented another reason why evaluation was difficult. The group suggested that understanding the business drivers first and then building performance measurement into training need analyses might offer a more reliable platform for assessing training outcomes and the corresponding value to the enterprise.

I think it depends on the size of the initiative and what you are trying to prove by it. You can spend an awful lot of energy on evaluating a program. I definitely think on the ‘big ticket’
items it is worth planning for the evaluation and doing some measurement before you start the initiative, so you can show the added value afterwards. We sometimes think we are making an impact but, when you look at the results, we are not. (Q7, LG)

One respondent explained that ‘gaining generic improvements, through collaborative working with managers, often meant that “non-curriculum” training was undertaken spontaneously’, making it more difficult to derive a fixed model of evaluation (Q7, AR). Sometimes, HRD interventions focused on the affective domain of learning (such as securing engagement), so a successful training outcome might be beneficial to a diverse range of performance indicators. For example, one participant acknowledged the difficulty in posing this query: ‘How do you measure that coaching somebody to give feedback is going to improve their ability to give feedback until we get the next [employee] engagement result, which may be a result of something else?’ (Q7, AR). Such comments typify the inherent complexity of aligning HRD, especially when trying to balance the needs and learning outcomes of specific training projects with the longer term goals of the organisation.

Another dimension of evaluation related to the formal versus informal learning environment and the organisation’s culture towards people development. The group considered these issues to be important because they had a direct bearing on how leadership valued employees and how individual learning needs were accommodated in the process of ongoing performance coaching. The group agreed that learning continued irrespective of the organisation’s intent, but this could have a positive or detrimental effect on alignment. This perspective suggests that, in most circumstances, it is helpful to capture and recognise the relevant informal learning, often emanating from tacit experience acquired at work or outside of employment.
Challenges in aligning workplace learning with business goals

Barriers to learning

There was a universal acceptance in the focus group that lean organisational structures and business pressures frequently made it difficult to release employees for formal training courses. Lack of advocacy by and support from line managers made it an easy option for people to withdraw. From the discussion, there appeared to be ample evidence of strong rhetoric by senior managers about people development and performance reviews, but operational requirements frequently got in the way. Even more disturbing was the suggestion that senior managers were among the worst offenders and this reflected poor role modelling. However, the current trend towards flatter organisational structures made it easier to observe whether top management was supporting learning-related projects:

I reckon lack of advocacy is where it counts. If you’re trying to do something where everyone is agreeing—so the rhetoric’s there, you know, yes we do agree that you should have a performance improvement process in place, yes we should have performance reviews ... [however] when you’re driving some kind of initiative that those people that are at very senior level if they’re not right in behind it, if they’re not filtering through the right information to their direct reports, then you’re in deep [trouble]. (Q8, AR)

The focus group thought that those people who put up barriers to learning were often the same individuals who failed to understand the true value of learning. Typically, they sought quick fix solutions and could not see that effective learning takes time. For some, their traditional perception of learning emanated from school and university. They understood the role of training but did not fully appreciate the change of language towards a more distinct notion of adult learning. In this regard, HRD managers frequently struggled to change the mindset of their colleagues and this resistance stemmed from the organisation culture.
Finally, the group discussed an emerging learning barrier more specifically relevant to those older workers who struggled to see any benefit from training. There was general acknowledgement that this group of people had experienced intensive organisation development over the last two decades, often with little or no direct training. Some had experienced loss of employment or made lateral career transitions and carried a resultant low esteem. Conversely, the group discussed how other long-serving employees might be victims of misalignment when their organisations changed strategic direction. Ironically, changes in the demographic mix of society meant the overall age of employees would increase significantly in the years ahead.

Employer recognition of tacit knowledge and experience
One recurring theme within the focus group discussion was the importance of a partnership approach to learning and development and the component parts of this process included a blend of direct training, individual coaching and ongoing professional dialogue with team leaders and human resource practitioners. The focus group believed that identifying and utilising tacit knowledge or extra-mural learning was an important requirement, because understanding the value of tacit knowledge and using performance-based coaching models to maximise this information would encourage staff retention. People would more readily appreciate the alignment between their own objectives and those of their organisation. Furthermore, the focus group members recognised that formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring activities had been successfully used in their organisations as a way of disseminating tacit knowledge to less experienced staff:

I think that performance models work well in terms of the coaching model and you’ve got your individual with their own skill needs and their own objectives and their own mission and purpose and you’ve got the organisation’s; if you’ve got that alignment through good coaching, then they may not leave. If
they’re going to leave in five or 10 years time, then you’ve had the benefit of their services for that time and they may well come back or have fostered other relationships with the organisation. (Q9, MF)

The contradiction between rhetoric and reality often created incongruence between the planning of formal and that of informal learning. In some situations, such as business re-structuring programs, employees continued to learn irrespective of what the organisation wanted them to learn, but such learning did not always align with the business strategy. It was thought the competitive markets of the 1990s had forced organisations selfishly to direct their learning activities towards business goals, but in doing so, had neglected the broader needs of society. It was recognised enterprises existed within a wider community and organisations that valued learning quickly built an external reputation for valuing their people. Overall, the HRD focus group members considered their organisations were weak at recognising and utilising tacit knowledge. Those that did attempt to harness the full extent of tacit knowledge developed a black hole of unmanageable data that was never mined and used. Equally, organisations were reluctant to invest in extra-mural learning that did not offer any direct benefit to the business. Those organisations that paid for extra-mural study rarely utilised the full extent of the learning.

HRD challenges facing New Zealand in the 21st century

The group recognised the changing demographic mix in the global workforce and reflected how this affected issues such as fewer people retiring early and less young people becoming available for employment. As the average age of the workforce increased, a polarity in values was likely to emerge between the different age groups in the workplace:

I want to pick up on this one ... about the change of demographics. I think that probably the greatest problem
we have in New Zealand is recognising the ageing workforce and realising that those people over the age of 50 constitute almost the majority of people in the workforce, and that’s a real challenge. Seeing the needs of an older worker, and what drives them, is very different from what you are getting in a 25 year old, and yet we haven’t even come to grips with this. (Q10, TE)

Earlier in this paper the HRM challenges associated with distinctive demographic groups, such as Generation X employees were raised. Members of the focus group reflected on their own personal experiences and saw this as a significant challenge for human resource practitioners. Examples included emerging values, such as approaches to time-keeping, debt, expectations of working conditions, and attitudes to academic subjects such as maths, sciences and technology. The decline in technical competence, at an elementary level, was harmful to the New Zealand economy—as a small island nation that had historically relied on export, manufacturing and agriculture. Another concern was the size of New Zealand’s economy, its geographic isolation and the lack of ability to source new technology. Members of the group commented that universities were using outdated equipment to train students—putting New Zealand learners at a disadvantage compared with those studying in offshore tertiary institutions. Emerging service-based industries, such as travel and tourism, seemed to be growing, but were generating lower paid employment opportunities, and there was concern over how many service-sector jobs the economy could sustain. The banking sector in particular was continually seeking new ways of doing business, so innovation was the key challenge for that industry in the 21st century—despite the huge progress made in recent years.

In relation to global learning, the issue of consistency came up as a major concern—especially in the deployment of global HRD solutions initiated by an offshore head office. This frequently led to initiatives being re-invented to fit with the indigenous way of doing business or vice versa. The main challenge was developing global values and
consistent policies that allowed the incorporation of local cultures or traditions into these policies. The group recognised how increasing local compliance issues (such as safety and legislative reporting) often made an organisation risk averse and consequentially less willing to be creative. In many New Zealand organisational situations, the pressure to perform did not come from overseas masters but local government agencies that had a responsibility to protect the national infrastructure and environment.

Factors affecting organisational success

The participants reflected on HRD outcomes that would most contribute to making their organisations successful. A key factor the group stressed was the importance of valuing people, in particular recognising what individuals could contribute at all levels. They suggested employees should be able to articulate and defend the business strategy and know where they contributed to it. The strategy needed to be a balance between the needs of the organisation and those of the individual employees. The importance of being able to relate personally to a vision ensured that people remained focused when things became difficult. As one participant expressed it, ‘when things start to get tough, the vision gives you a map to follow and keeps you on track’ (Q12, MF). However, in addition to understanding the vision, it was important to have the ability to be flexible when the situation changed:

> From an employee perspective, they are keen on a more stable vision and strategy because it feels as though they know where they are—but it is making sure you are not stuck with a single vision and single strategy. (Q12, CB)

System integration was also significant. This involved connecting the needs of individuals with the needs of their organisations and embedding the relationship with systems and processes. The group agreed that ‘vision was nothing without the reality of planning and operating systems’ (Short 2008a: 237). Furthermore, the participants
claimed people who were good at developing strategy often neglected the implementation issues. In this regard, a worthwhile HRD outcome would be to align and synthesise the development of all leaders, both strategic and operational. The group re-emphasised that being a leader and visionary was not exclusive to senior managers as people at all levels had a capacity for strategic thinking. They often had a significant contribution to make, reinforcing the need for feedback. Finally, the discussion reverted to a potential polarity between learning and development activities and human resources. On reflection, the group thought such polarity was detrimental to the whole area of performance improvement, due to the strong need for a genuine partnership between all stakeholders in the business.

Conclusions

This paper has reviewed how HRD professionals in a range of organisational settings deal with the challenges of implementing workplace learning projects, and in particular, attempt to align learning activities with business objectives. Through synthesis of these practitioners’ views, it has been possible to gain insight into the major thrust of organisational development issues in the workplace and the role of HRD professionals. Analysis of these professionals’ perspectives of their human resource practices and experiences supports a number of conclusions regarding the significance of workplace learning and development.

First, senior managers were found to develop strategic plans and cascade information through their organisations by means of briefing systems and other communication mechanisms. In many cases, HRD professionals were responsible for the implementation of these communication systems and helped to advocate the downstream benefits to employees as part of an overall change management strategy.
Second, the research supported findings from a Delphi survey of leading HRD academics by McGuire and Cseh (2006) who found that workplace learning, employee development and training and development were the most highly ranked constituent components of HRD, but in this study, the need for a performance-based culture was permeating through management decisions on workplace learning and development and was inextricably linked with the organisational performance management systems. Taking a critical perspective, Sambrook (2004: 613) argues that this characteristic will slowly change as the study of HRD matures, when ‘organisations will need to consider other discourses including the PR role of HRD in promoting corporate social responsibility and its more humanistic role’. Evidence of this trend could be seen at the individual level, where people were motivated to deploy their competencies in an ethical and fair way. That meant working for value-driven teams and organisations that aligned their behaviours with socially appropriate goals. Once again, HRD professionals were placed centre-stage in the implementation of these alignment strategies.

Third, the special leadership role of human resource practitioners and the emerging complexities of this task were evident in the responses. Throughout the research, the atmosphere reflected a mix of occupational passion and personal commitment to the development of people, yet this passion was tempered by a mood of frustration within the role. Major sources of anxiety for them were inconsistency in senior management commitment and continuing resource constraints. Clearly, bridging the gap between strategic ideals and operational reality was a major challenge for these HRD professionals in meeting the demands of their modern, complex workplaces.

Fourth, the failure to evaluate learning events and show positive business results was clearly linked to an undervaluing of training and development investment among senior managers. Historically,
this issue is most evident in the way HRD projects are cut-back when business performance is poor.

Finally, most of the organisations embraced by these HRD professionals were failing to exploit the opportunities that could be available through an improved and systematic recognition of the employees’ tacit knowledge and skills with job requirements. In their study of crisis management, Khatri and Ng (2000) highlighted the value of tacit learning and how organisations can draw on knowledge that has accumulated from years of experience.

References


**Appendix: Focus group questions**

**General**

1. What do you think employees in organisations value?
2. What factors most strongly influence the decisions on training and development?

**Strategy**

3. What would you say is strategically important for organisations at the present time?
4. How does your organisation communicate strategy to its employees?
Human resource development

5. What roles do HRD practitioners fulfil in organisations - how do they add value?
6. In what ways do learning and development activities specifically align with business strategy?

Learning

7. How do you evaluate learning in your organisation and use the information?
8. What would you say are the current barriers to learning in organisations?
9. How can organisations recognise the broader ‘extra-mural’ learning and capture the ‘tacit’ knowledge people have?

Closing questions

10. What do you think are the challenges facing organisations when operating in a 21st Century New Zealand?
11. To what extent is the phenomenon of ‘globalisation’ affecting organisations?
12. If you could recommend just one thing to an organisation to help make it more successful, what would it be (in the context of this study)?

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Lifelong learning and professional development have been the focus of government organisations after the 21st century was declared the ‘learning century’, amidst the impact of globalisation and growth of knowledge-based economies. Although lifelong learning and professional development opportunities are available in most government organisations, the conditions for civil servants to take up such opportunities differ across organisations and, even more so, across countries. In addition, the expectations of learning and development from such opportunities also vary, with some organisations focusing on specific work-based competencies, others on formal education and qualifications. However, lifelong learning and professional development in government organisations seldom include informal learning, which forms a part of daily leisure time yet involves human capital enhancement that
indirectly impacts work performance. Informal learning, which is facilitated by individual information literacy competencies that involve information search, retrieval, evaluation and use in varying contexts, is largely for personal development rather than economic efficiency, but is equally important in developing effective individuals and knowledge workers. In this exploratory study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 civil servants from six Asian countries to elicit their experiences with regard to lifelong learning policies and professional development opportunities in their respective government organisations, expectations of learning and development from such opportunities, as well as provisions for informal learning opportunities. Shared characteristics as well as distinct differences across the interviewees’ organisations and countries are discussed. Finally, recommendations based on these similarities and differences are made specifically to encourage government organisations to review existing lifelong learning policies and professional development opportunities available to civil servants.

Introduction

The impact of globalisation and the increased economic and social importance placed on knowledge have brought about greater emphasis on lifelong learning and adult education. The migration of the agricultural and industrial society into the current information or knowledge or learning society has spawned the creation of sub-disciplines such as knowledge management and information literacy. These emphasise the potential to exploit the spectrum of information, skills and ideas held by members of an organisation, as well as abilities to effectively search, locate, evaluate, and creatively and ethically use information within required contexts to address varying needs. In addition, developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have also lent significant
influence over business processes, and how interpersonal interactions and correspondences are carried out, as well as how entertainment and media information is delivered. These changes have congruently created the need, not for pools of codified and explicit forms of knowledge, but rather for skills that would assist an individual to access, evaluate and use information and knowledge effectively, regardless of where it is stored or located. This, in turn, has deep-rooted implications for workplace learning and professional development, especially in the government sector that has to keep up with mounting public expectations and increasing comparison to and competition from the private sector.

**Literature review**

Rapid developments across many sectors and changing global demands mean that government organisations can no longer continue doing things the way they have, just because those ways have worked in the past. As Osborne and Plastrik (2000: 11–12) suggest, government or public organisations have to do the right things, rather than doing things right. In other words, there is a need to focus on *steering* functions that would help the organisation remain dynamic and achieve set targets, rather than focus on *rowing* functions where they continue doing things the same way as they have always been (Osborne & Plastrik 2000). When clarity of purpose is established, performance can be improved dramatically.

Having clarity of purpose and being able to focus on steering functions require government organisations to have competent and experienced personnel. This implies that professional development and lifelong learning opportunities must be available for personnel to boost continually their knowledge and skills that will improve their work performance and professional aptitude. Such development and learning opportunities may be in the form of mandatory skills training, prescribed courses or workshops,
and seminars, among others, that may result in the attainment of formal qualifications and certifications. Other than obtaining formal qualifications and certifications, it has been recognised that lifelong learning creates opportunities for greater worker participation in self-directed improvement and scholarship (Dohmen 1996, cited in Field 2000: 27). In other words, through lifelong learning opportunities, employees themselves learn to decide which learning processes, focus in specific areas, and available routes of learning would meet their specific needs as required in their job scope and for their personal development.

However, it has also been established that a more multi-dimensional development is preferred over mere skills or work-based training (Chadha 2005: 103). Where skills or work-based training is seen to be more narrow in focus and more discrete (such as workshops, training courses, seminars), multi-dimensional development or learning is more continuous and wide-ranging, and requires more self-directed research and analysis (Swantz, Ndedya & Maisaganah 2001: 387), and address the individual’s need for development in more than just one area (Cheng 2001: 47). Thus, multi-dimensional learning provides opportunities for both professional and personal development related to work performance, as well as the increased capability to assume greater work responsibilities (Chadha 2005: 105).

Although organisations have exercised more flexibility in terms of the focus of staff training and professional development courses, by allowing more multi-dimensional learning contents to be included, it has also been documented that skills or knowledge gained through skills training and professional development courses may not always be directly or immediately applied in the organisational context or work system (Chadha 2005: 338–339). This is especially so in small or highly-specialised organisations. This, in turn, may lead employees to feel demoralised about the training or professional development
courses that they had attended, where they feel that it was a waste of time or be apathetic about future courses.

As a result, informal learning opportunities are recommended by experts (Conner 2004) and preferred by employees (Coetzer 2007), where employees can learn and develop skills independently, outside of prescribed training courses (Smith 2002: 111, cited in Smith et al. 2007). It has been found that informal learning equally contributes to wage growth for employees (Loewenstein & Spletzer 1994) and accounts for some 75% of learning that occurs in the workplace (Grebow 2002). Informal learning opportunities include own-time discovery learning, interactions and exchanges with colleagues, discussions and talks with people across various disciplines and sectors, and any other form of learning that takes place outside a dedicated or prescribed learning environment and which largely stems from the individual’s interests and activities (Smith 1999).

Traditionally, informal learning that results in self-development is commonly for leaders and managers (Sheal 1999: 4–5). However, with flatter, less hierarchical, organisational structures, employee autonomy and self-development are desired because they translate to flexible and quick responses to customer needs. Other than that, informal learning among employees (and hence, self-development) creates better work environment and climate, including positive work attitude and a greater sense of personal satisfaction (Hager 2004). This, in turn, increases an organisation’s internal capability and promotes enhanced knowledge distribution among the employees as well as improved versatility in responding to environmental changes (Sheal 1999: 4–5).

In the public sector, government officers in decision-making positions or administrators need to ‘know, deliberate and decide’ more effectively and efficiently (Porat 1998: 127) due to rapidly changing demands and expectations from the public, largely brought about by globalisation and the omnipresence of the World Wide Web in
people’s lives that have influenced the way people see, think and feel. Such government officers and administrators are likely to find prescribed teaching and learning settings too restrictive for their own comfort (Geertshuis & Fazey 2006), and are thus more inclined to learn independently and informally, which then requires acute information skills and knowledge capabilities. As Cortada (1998: 5) mentioned, ‘information begets more information’, which leads to deeper insight and thus a better ability to formulate effective decisions and execute critical actions. Hence, information literacy skills facilitate informal learning, which is crucial especially for government officers and administrators.

Although it has been found that self-directed learning promulgated through informal learning opportunities is effective and takes place more readily than formal learning, it is also recognised that informal learning opportunities are not well provided in most organisations (Smith et al. 2007). In government organisations especially, there exists the constant dilemma of whether professional development or formal learning (much less informal learning) is an ‘efficient investment of government funds’ (Field 2000: 28). Formal learning, such as skills-based courses and vocational training, have considerable legitimacy and are ‘safe’ in terms of targets (such as the number of people trained and the qualifications obtained) that are set though implemented policies. Hence, it is usually the case that government organisations restrict professional development to formal learning, which is familiar and uncontroversial (Field 2000: 29). Informal learning creates too much ‘uncertainty’ in terms of measurement and applicability.

**Problem statement**

Asia has experienced phenomenal growth in the last couple of decades, due to the opening up of domestic markets and rapid developments and infiltration of information and communication
technologies in the region (Lee & Khatri 2003). It is thus timely to study the provision of both formal and informal learning opportunities in government organisations in Asia, which will facilitate more effective and efficient decision-making and action within the public sector.

It has been found that, in the Asian region, only Japan has been a strong advocate of individual informal learning, where the onus of learning is not on employers and not focused solely on vocational or skills-based training (Field 2000: 30). The emphasis has been on creating a cultural climate where employees take more responsibility and are given more opportunities for personal development. For instance, floral arrangement classes are promoted just as much as technology courses, to ensure a more holistic individual development.

Hence, this exploratory study seeks to (i) find out more about lifelong learning and professional development opportunities; and (ii) determine the existence and extent of informal learning opportunities that are provided in government organisations in Asia.

**Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 civil servants from six Asian nations, namely Bangladesh, (People’s Republic of) China, India, Indonesia, Philippines and Singapore. Convenience sampling was employed, where the 18 respondents were identified and selected. The respondents were participants in a year-long professional development program that was conducted in an Asian country. English was the language used in the interview.

Seven questions were posed to each respondent during the interview, addressing the following issues:

(i) description of respondent’s duties/responsibilities and the government organisation in which the respondent was working;
(ii) opportunities for lifelong learning or professional development in the government organisation;
(iii) expectations placed on employees with regard to lifelong learning/professional development;
(iv) what the respondent understood by informal learning opportunities;
(v) provisions for informal learning opportunities in the government organisation;
(vi) skills needed for informal learning; and
(vii) how these skills can be developed or learnt.

Each interview session with a respondent lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Each interview session was audio-recorded and later transcribed, and field notes were taken during the interview. Similar responses or themes from the respondents’ answers were identified and coded.

**Demographics**

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents who were interviewed.
Table 1: Demographics of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of years as government officer</th>
<th>Government sector</th>
<th>Current post</th>
<th>No. of years in post</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Deputy District Judge</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Deputy Director</td>
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<td>Economics</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Development Officer</td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Defense</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings and Discussion

Respondents’ duties/responsibilities in the government organisation

Through the interviews, it was found that the majority (16 or 88.9%) of the respondents held important decision-making positions in their respective government organisations. These respondents were in the middle to upper management ranks, and had at least five years of work experience. Although the remaining two respondents were in junior positions, they were in graduate-level ranks and would be in Division I of most government organisations’ hierarchies.

Opportunities for lifelong learning/professional development

Generally, there were abundant opportunities available for professional development and lifelong learning in the various government organisations, especially as indicated among respondents from Singapore, China, India and Philippines. As Respondent Q (from Singapore) elaborated,

...we have to go through certain courses ... they are fixed courses that we have to do for professional development ... there are also other courses for lifelong learning that are either conducted by the military, or paid for by the military and conducted by civilians ... like computer literacy, creative thinking, management of the workplace...

Respondent D (from China) claimed that,

... there are a lot of opportunities for training ... once there are new trade or investment policies, specialised training is required ... only graduates are accepted in the service, and only those who do well can further their studies (i.e. undergo professional development).

Respondent G (from India) added,

... we get a variety of jobs, and each job has something new to be learnt. We go for periodic training ... the government encourages any initiative taken to learn ... even [those by] junior officers.
From Philippines, Respondent O said,

... there are a lot of opportunities for such ... 10,000 pesos are provided a year for each staff to use the money for professional development activities for that year.

On the other hand, a respondent from Indonesia (Respondent J) said that opportunities, although existing, are limited, mainly due to financial constraints. As he explained,

... there are too many personnel competing for these opportunities ... formal compulsory courses are subsidised by the government, but other types of courses need to be sponsored by external organisations.

As Respondent K, also from Indonesia, further elucidated,

... the government seldom gives money to send you for training, especially abroad, except for short seminars ... the cost of training is usually borne by cooperating organisations.

Similarly, Respondent A (from Bangladesh) said,

... training opportunities are occasional and usually done internally ... other training opportunities are recognised, but usually not funded (by the government) ...

Hence, it is seen that for some government organisations, professional development training and lifelong learning opportunities are somewhat limited, although they are highly encouraged and prized. This can be attributed to two main factors: firstly, largely a lack of funds for training purposes, since formal training costs a lot of money that is not readily available in some government organisations; secondly, only employees who have attained a certain degree of seniority and expertise or show capability or leadership potential are given professional development or lifelong learning opportunities more readily.
Expectations placed on employees who have undergone lifelong learning/professional development courses

There are varied expectations placed on employees. One common expectation is that employees who have undergone professional development training are considered highly specialised and are expected to contribute more to their jobs. As Respondent J (from Indonesia) alleged,

... those who undergo further training are considered very exclusive and elite ... [they are expected to give] more professional contributions and [have] better job prospects ...

Similarly, Respondent A (from Bangladesh) added that employees who have undergone professional development training are expected to

... increase [their] quality of work ... the expectation is more towards the quality of contribution [towards their job] ...

Respondent P (from Singapore) mentioned that

... it is not a hard and fast rule, but it is an increasing requirement for people to share what they have learnt especially when they have gone for expensive training programs.

However, some organisations do not have such expectations for sharing knowledge or new responsibilities, nor provisions for new competencies to be applied to the current job scope. As Respondent C (from Bangladesh) explained,

... there is no explicit expectation for new duties ... [formal] training does not mean you can always apply it in your job ... it depends on what you know ...

Respondent Q (from Singapore) added,

... more on an optional basis ... only for certain courses where you are expected to share with others (i.e. your colleagues) ...
Respondent H (from India) claimed,

  Frankly, my organisation will not give any value addition to me when I complete [the training] ... I have to do the same routine job again ...

Hence, it is seen that not all formal training opportunities are utilitarian or will make much difference to the job that is already done by employees. Although new responsibilities are sometimes expected to be given, this is not a guarantee. In addition, employees who undergo formal training are not usually expected to share with their colleagues what they have learnt.

**Informal learning**

Respondents were asked what they understood by informal learning opportunities. Respondent D (from China) stated that ‘it involves discussion and sharing with colleagues’. Respondent J (from Indonesia) explained that informal learning opportunities included ‘volunteer work with other agencies to broaden experiences ... [anything] outside of work hours’. Respondent Q (from Singapore) added that informal learning involves ‘learning on the job...learning from peers and superiors’, while Respondent H (from India) felt that informal learning occurs ‘through observing and interacting with people [outside the office], such as on my farm ... the villagers’. Respondent M (from Philippines) elaborated,

  ... informal learning opportunities ... are occasions or activities outside of the Human Resource programs [run] by the organisation, which nevertheless enable staff to exchange experiences and enhance knowledge of job ... and their life ... on top of the vast opportunities to learning provided by the Internet and ... published materials which individuals can do on their own.

It is seen that informal learning is understood to involve any sort of unstructured or non-institutionalised learning that occurs outside formal work hours or boundaries. Respondents also mentioned that a
lot of informal learning takes place through observation, interactions with peers and other people, as well as through online or published information sources. More importantly, informal learning is believed to take place voluntarily and is largely self-directed. In other words, informal learning is not explicitly endorsed by the government organisation.

Provisions for informal learning opportunities

Respondents were also asked to describe opportunities for informal learning in their organisational workplaces. Respondent Q (from Singapore) shared that

... my organisation institutes a system of reflection and debriefing of projects ... so there are plenty of opportunities for informal learning where we discuss with one another what happened and what we learnt.

Respondent I (from India) added that ‘in my organisation, informal learning is through different job postings and job rotation ... people learn on the job and from their colleagues’. Similarly, as Respondent E (from China) asserted,

... opportunities to learn [informally are] through working on inter-departmental projects, where different information can be shared and learnt ... you learn from those who are more specialised and expert.

Respondent L (from Indonesia) explained,

... we have ad hoc sessions where we are from different departments and we share with one another [things such as] books that we have read, our opinions on national issues ... but this involve usually the junior officers only.

Similarly, Respondent B (from Bangladesh) said, 'certainly, especially ... in the initial years of our service [where] we ... must master certain practices in an informal way because we do not have formal training ...'.
However, Respondent F (from China) opined that

... mature employees can learn more from informal than formal learning ... the former is more practical[-based] while the latter is usually [about] theories ... when you are mature, you know how to learn anything in any possible situation.

Although several government organisations have some form of provision or system for informal learning to take place, this is not a common practice. Respondent O (from the Philippines) said that, ‘because [the] organisation [I work in] is democratic, there are a lot of informal learning opportunities ... only that [the provision] is unwritten’. Respondent J (from Indonesia) added, ‘... not really ... it depends on the individual’.

Respondent G (from India) said,

... not really structured ... it depends on your own initiative and interest ... one can decide not to learn or learn as much as possible, but it ultimately makes a difference in your performance and recognition in the organisation.

Thus, it is seen that government organisations, which do provide opportunities for informal learning to take place, would have instituted a certain structure or system for it. Otherwise, informal learning would have to take place at the discretion and out of the personal interest of the employee concerned, even though it is generally recognised that informal learning is effective and utilitarian to the job.

Skills needed for informal learning

Respondents were asked what they thought were certain skills or personal characteristics that are required for informal learning to take place. Several respondents alluded to the use of technologies and various information sources that are especially expedited by the Internet, in addition to the initial recognition of an information need by the individual.
... ability to identify from which sources [you] can get knowledge ... who you can approach to learn from. Also before that, you need to be able to identify what specific knowledge you need to learn (Respondent E, China).

... informal learning needs that hunger for learning ... based on one person’s perceived learning needs as demanded by his or her work. It requires ability and self-cognition to be able to identify the appropriate fit ... (Respondent N, Philippines).

... no particular skills ... it starts with ideas ... to materialise, you need to discuss [these ideas] and see it evolve naturally ... (Respondent L, Indonesia).

... a great personality, discussion skills, and [skills to use] computers and the Internet or other new technologies... (Respondent H, India).

... life skills ... and computer-related skills that would be useful for research ... (Respondent O, Philippines).

Several other respondents mentioned that communication and social networking skills are important: ‘be[ing] active in social networks is an important thing ... [when] you build up the social network, you learn more from different people’ (Respondent F, China), ‘... communication skills and individual initiative required’ (Respondent I, India) and ‘[f]or informal learning to take place effective[ly], social and communication skills are probably key ...’ (Respondent R, Singapore).

There is therefore a range of skills or abilities that need to be developed in order for informal learning to take place. First, there must be the definition of an information need; that is, knowing what it is that you do not know and thereafter, hatching an idea and realising what it is that you want to find out. This alludes to information literacy competencies (American Library Association 1989). Then there are the tools that can be used to obtain that needed information, such as various published information sources, new technologies such as the Internet, and interacting with people who are
rich but tacit sources of information. Here is where communication and social networking skills are important so as to tap in on the knowledge that is held by people.

Means of developing such skills

Respondents were asked to describe how they felt such skills could be developed. A few respondents mentioned the need for wanting to know more: ‘inquisitiveness and based on needs’ (Respondent B, Bangladesh), ‘keep your eyes and ears open and have a probing mind for whatever that is new or different’ (Respondent G, India), and the ‘need to question assumptions ... how things are derived’ (Respondent Q, Singapore).

Several respondents cited the need to be open to learning through different means and from different sources: ‘be open-minded to everything’ (Respondent F, China) and ‘one can also learn this in the community ... opportunities for acquiring knowledge have been expanded with changing pedagogies and technologies’ (Respondent N, Philippines). Others added:

... individuals autonomously seek new knowledge and information. They are motivated and open to learn because they find immediate gratification and application of their learning. What the organisation needs to do to develop this attitude is to provide the opportunity and stimulate motivation for continuous self-improvement (Respondent M, Philippines).

... you need to understand more about the background ... understanding of culture (Respondent J, Indonesia).

... informal relationships with people ... through networking opportunities ... (Respondent L, Indonesia).

... these skills are lifelong skills and [are] developed in the course of life and work where the opportunities for social interactions are ... (Respondent R, Singapore).
It can be seen that, to develop skills to facilitate informal learning, there must firstly be the willingness to learn and question. Next, there must be opportunities for the knowledge that has been learnt to be applied with the help of various tools such as technologies and through provision by organisations. Then, there must be the awareness of various cultures and contexts so that relationships can be forged and social networks can be formed.

**Implications**

There are several implications that can be derived from the findings of this exploratory study. First of all, it is evident that, although opportunities for professional development are abundant in some government organisations, this is not the case in others. In both cases, the availability of funds and the stringent selection of employees, based on seniority or potential, for such opportunities are strong determining factors. As Gorard and Selwyn (1999) claimed, one of the most obvious barriers to formal learning is cost, involving both financial and opportunity aspects. Hence, it can be concluded that formal learning opportunities are rather costly and can be provided only selectively. For governments of wealthier Asian nations, funding formal learning opportunities may not be a problem, but for the governments of less wealthy nations, this funding probably needs to be tapped from elsewhere. For instance, countries such as Bangladesh can look for funding from cooperating private or international organisations to fund their civil servants for training, such as that being done in the Indonesian government which has cooperative ties with one or two organisations in Japan that provide funding and training opportunities for Indonesian civil servants.

Second, the expectations from government organisations vary where employees who have undergone professional development are concerned. To elaborate, some employees are expected to take on more responsibilities upon completion of the training, while
Formal and informal learning opportunities in government organisations

others experience no change to their duties or responsibilities at all. Some employees who return to their job after such training may be expected to share their experience and knowledge with their colleagues, although this is not formally institutionalised or enforced. It is believed that employees who undergo further training hope to take initiative and develop new ideas that can be applied in the workplace (Evans 2003: 59). However, this is not always the case. Hence, formal learning or training may not always be useful for the job or be effectively shared with other colleagues in the organisation due to different job scopes and organisational policies. For instance, what has been learnt through a formal training course such as a certificate program may not be holistically employed in the employee’s current job, although parts of it may be directly applied. In another instance, what has been learnt through a formal training course that is directly relevant to an employee’s current job may not be easily shared with another employee with a different job function because it is too specialised in scope. There is then a need for government organisations in Asia to be clearer regarding the expectations and outcomes of formal learning or professional development for employees. To elaborate, employees who have undergone further training or professional development through formal courses or programs ought to be informed about their next job posting, expectations and responsibilities, even before embarking on those courses or programs. It becomes futile and inefficient when employees are sent for further training or professional development courses or programs only to return to the same routine work where the new knowledge and skills learnt cannot be readily applied.

Next, informal learning is recognised to be largely voluntary and self-directed, occurs outside formal work hours and boundaries, and involves interaction with people and observation or through published information sources. It is also generally felt that informal learning opportunities are not well-provided for by government organisations, even though employees vouch for its value. It has
been claimed that much of adult learning takes place informally (Field 2000: 147) through various means such as interactions, group memberships or engagement in a public sphere. However, most of the time, informal learning is usually not recognised or is taken for granted by governments which prefer formal learning (Evans 2003: 7) as part of employees’ professional development. Hence, government organisations need to and can institute formal provisions for informal learning to take place (Conner 2004), at employees’ convenience and which cater to their interests. Examples of such provisions could be in the form of allocated time weekly for employees to come together to share ideas or knowledge, all within a ‘coffee break’ or alternative relaxed ambience; setting up a learning commons area where employees can share ideas or knowledge with their colleagues, whether in a physical space (e.g. discussion lounges or philosophy cafés) or an online environment (e.g. discussion forums or social networking websites); and the inclusion of staff sharing as a compulsory component in the annual employee performance appraisal.

Finally, other than the provision by government organisations for informal learning opportunities, the employees themselves also need to be equipped with several competencies before informal learning can take place. For example, as determined from the interviews, employees have identified several of these competencies, such as the ability to identify one’s information need, knowing how to access various information sources and how to use technological tools to expedite them, and being acquainted with the right people who may be a rich but tacit source of knowledge and who can help them address their information need. The American Library Association defined information literacy as the ability to recognise the need for information, and effectively access, evaluate and creatively use information (ALA 1989), which in fact mirrors the perceptions of employees with respect to competencies needed for informal learning to occur in the workplace. In addition, information literacy,
which requires access to social and physical sources of information as well as textual or digital sources, contributes to workplace learning (Lloyd & Somerville 2006). It can then be concluded that, essentially, employees need to be equipped with information literacy competencies in order to facilitate them to carry out more efficient and effective informal learning. Thus, a government organisation should provide opportunities for employees to be equipped with information literacy competencies, such as dedicated time or platform for employees to share these competencies that they have obtained or developed with their colleagues through departmental sharing workshops or seminars, or allocated in-house training sessions for information literacy competencies to be taught to employees by information professionals, whether from the organisation’s own learning and development unit or from external agencies.

Limitations

There are obvious limitations to this study. Being exploratory in nature, the study has involved perceptions and data that may be more anecdotal than empirical. Since only three civil servants from each of the six Asian nations involved in the study were interviewed, their inputs may not be representative of the entire civil service of their respective countries. In addition, Asia itself is a very expansive and diverse continent. Data from civil servants from six nations in Asia would really be a mere scratch on the surface in terms of eliciting the exact nature of formal and informal learning opportunities in the civil service in this part of the world. Hence, the generalisability of this study must be approached with a lot of caution.

Conclusion

Lifelong learning or professional development opportunities through formal learning means are usually costly and can only be selectively allocated to employees in Asian government organisations. In addition, the knowledge and skills learnt through formal training may
not always be applied to the job or shared with colleagues effectively. Hence, there is a need to take a closer and more serious look at informal learning opportunities that are less costly, more voluntary and self-directed in nature, and that allow more interactions and exchange of ideas to follow. Employees need to have specific skills or abilities such as information literacy competencies and good communication and networking skills, to help them exploit informal learning opportunities. However, more importantly, these Asian government organisations must be able to provide informal learning opportunities such as allocated time or learning common spaces for employees so as to allow it to occur spontaneously in the workplace. These measures would facilitate greater employee effectiveness and competence, and would most likely contribute to overall organisational efficacy and growth. In turn, these Asian government organisations would be able to play a more significant role in shaping global growth, which is still currently regulated by the more developed western nations.

References


**About the author**

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Study circles and the Dialogue to Change Program

Mary Brennan and Mark Brophy
Australian Study Circles Network

Background

The origins of study circles can be traced back to the Chautauqua movement in the USA in the late nineteenth century. However, interest diminished in the USA and the Swedes discovered and enthusiastically imported the study circle idea as a remedy to their problems of poverty and illiteracy and to educate the broadest possible spectrum of society in the art of democracy.

Over the next 100 years, Sweden developed the process to such an extent that the Government now subsidises this form of education and uses it not only to educate people about government policies, but to receive feedback from the public. The late Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme is often quoted as having said that ‘Sweden is a study circle democracy’.

Today, over three million people participate annually in 350,000 study circles in Sweden. Over 75 per cent of Swedes between 15 to
75 years of age have participated in study circles at some time in their lives. In recent decades, the use of study circles has spread throughout the world from the United States to Bangladesh—and now Australia.

Based upon the Swedish model, study circles re-emerged in the USA in the late 1980s through the work of *Everyday democracy* which has developed and refined the process to address challenging community issues such as racism, multiculturalism, terrorism, educational reform, student achievement, small rural town poverty, the environment, religious and inter-faith tensions and community development, often with hundreds and even thousands of participants.

The Australian Study Circles Network has recently been formed and is founded on the 100-year tradition of study circles in Sweden and the last 20 years of development by *Everyday democracy* in the USA. The Australian Study Circles Network has fine-tuned the US community-wide study circle program process to meet the Australian context.

Historically, study circles have been used in Australia, frequently with great success. For example, the work of Helen Sheil, who researched study circles in Sweden and who now works with rural communities in Victoria, Denise Hagan with remote Indigenous communities in Queensland, Mary Hannan from Adult Learning Australia and Liz Suda who researched Spanish dialogic study circles.

In Australia our sporadic experience and understanding of this unique method has not been pooled. Many different iterations and adaptations have been used over time. We now need to build a systemic capability to make use of such a powerful program. The significant study circle activity in Australia’s past demonstrates, and is testimony to, the need to bring together in an organised manner the experiences of the current and past study circle activity.
The Australian Study Circles Network has developed the necessary local and international study circle links and partnerships, developed a model for Australia and has started to deliver workshops for many organisations and communities across Australia.

In 1995, Len Oliver, who was instrumental in introducing study circles to the United States, asked in his article, ‘Is the United States ready for a study circle movement?’ He suggested that study circles ‘may possibly be the most powerful adult education format for small group democracy ever devised’.

Organising a Dialogue to Change Program

A Dialogue to Change Program is a type of community dialogue process that can help people explore complex issues, make some decisions and begin to take action. At the heart of the Program are study circles, where people come together to have deliberative dialogue on an issue. A Dialogue to Change Program is a community-driven process that recruits from all community sectors. The process begins with ‘community organising’ and is followed by facilitated, small group dialogue that leads to change. The process does not advocate a particular solution. Instead, it welcomes many points of view around a shared concern.

A Dialogue to Change Program is organised by a diverse coalition that reflects the whole community. It includes a number of study circles with participants from all walks of life, uses easy-to-use nonpartisan discussion materials and trained facilitators who reflect that community’s diversity. It results in specific opportunities to move to action when the study circle stage concludes.

A Dialogue to Change Program requires significant organising. Before the round of study circles commences, it is important to organise the logistics, the recruitment of participants, the training of facilitators, a communications strategy, development of a discussion guide and
establishing how the final action ideas—that will emerge from the process—will be addressed. Planning for the action ideas starts at the beginning. This stage can take two to three months.

After the organisational stage, the round of circles begins with an opening session where individual participants tell their own story and offer personal experiences about the issue that concerns them. This gives members the chance to hear, listen to and empathise with authentic stories, real people, real scenarios and real experiences. In further sessions, members then look at how the issue evolved and how others have dealt with the concerns. Subsequently, members examine and discuss alternatives for action, after which, in the final session they work toward common solutions. A Dialogue to Change Program is based upon five separate study circle groups, each operating once a week for four weeks.

Initially, some people are a little hesitant about a Dialogue to Change Program due to the length of time for the process to unfold. However, this is one of the key strengths of the approach. Sessions build on each other, allow participants to work through the issues, and work on finding solutions that they then work to implement. With fewer sessions, the ‘buy in’ and participation in the action outcomes lessen. Shorter formats also face the risk of reactionary ideas coming forward. The more time spent on the dialogue and careful deliberation, the higher the quality of the action ideas that emerge.

Furthermore, even with a round of study circles that runs for four sessions, invariably participants will state that the time passed quickly and they would have preferred more time!

**Study circles—the heart of the Dialogue to Change Program**

A single study circle is a small, diverse group of five to eight participants who meet for about two hours weekly for a ‘round of study circles’ over four weeks where they address a critical public
issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Led by a neutral facilitator, people consider an issue from many points of view. The discussion progresses from personal experiences, to sessions examining many points of view on the issue, and on to a session that considers strategies for action and change.

Study circles are not typical meetings in which members feel unheard and worse still, feel that nothing is resolved or acted upon. On the contrary, a round of study circles is designed to lead to collaborative action. In contrast, when people debate, they often never listen with intent to understand, because they are so busy preparing a counter argument and are eagerly waiting to interject.

Quite often, many contentious community issues are dealt with by either a focus group, which usually consists of only invited, similar thinking or homogenous groups of people, or forums in which a handful of ‘experts’ express their opinions and only a few people are allowed to have a voice. Alternatively, often ‘experts’ are engaged to devise solutions and plans that are then imposed on everyone else.

Study circles are effective due to the small, safe and supportive nature in which the dialogue occurs, allowing members to feel comfortable about expressing their true feelings. Members begin to actively engage, participate and experience connection. One begins to understand that we are all interdependent, and the well-being of each of us affects the well-being of all. The process results in the critical reflection of ideas and the development of new knowledge and insights.

No instructor teaches or controls the circle. They are led by the neutral facilitator trained in group dynamics and study circle concepts; the participants make all the decisions. Due to this inclusive process, individuals benefit in many ways including confidence building and gaining real voice. The group is able to move forward because they know that their contributions are valued and heard, the
decisions are owned by the members and the core fundamentals of a study circle ensure that all participants’ knowledge and experience are given space and used as the basis for initial discussion.

Learning from others is another essential element of the study circle. Understanding and learning is built upon through the contribution from each member’s experience and knowledge. As members study and discuss their issue, they learn from each other and horizons are expanded as everyone’s views are being considered through open and democratic dialogue. The process results in the critical reflection of ideas and the development of new knowledge and insights. Based upon this new knowledge, members are empowered to act in whatever way the group sees as appropriate.

This approach aligns with much of adult and student learning research that demonstrates the need for authentic purpose and ownership of the learning process. In day-to-day work and community settings, much of the process of generating, distributing and applying knowledge actually occurs best in team settings. The more effective the team works together, the more understanding and learning occurs. The educational ideas behind the success of the study circle approach align with many fundamental adult educational principles—that is, adult education is a living, active process that relates knowledge to action, creativity, as well as to collective and personal development.

Study circle principles also align to social objectives that aim to encourage individual participation and ownership of the community. Understanding the fundamental principles of study circles is important for recognising the context and the content that study circles ultimately deal with. A study circle is an environment where:
• It is accepted that people fundamentally have an innate desire to learn.
• Individuals meet and share their experiences.
• People learn in a participatory environment.
• Knowledge is built upon by listening to the experiences of all members.
• Everyone’s views are considered.
• Life and learning belong together.
• The learning is self-directed and experiential.
• Learning is democratised.
• Outcomes can be personalised for each individual member.

With deliberative dialogue, study circle members deliberate, cooperatively investigate, explore and clarify different views, use critical thinking, evaluate ideas and decide on solutions. The dialogue is constructive, all types of discourses are accepted, stereotypes are dispelled, members are honest, and they listen and try to understand each other.

Creating ownership is an important characteristic of study circles. Even though the study circle format is simple in design, it encourages democratic participant-directed, group-directed, experiential learning through open discussion in several sequential sessions, developing tolerance for differing views, equality in participation and collectively arrived at outcomes. Study circles are always voluntary, highly participatory and totally democratic.

More details are available at: http://www.studycircles.net.au/
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This article describes the various aspects of human resources development and highlights the intersections and the differences between what are often mistakenly viewed as interchangeable concepts. It argues that, while it is generally accepted that developing staff is fundamental to good organisational health and business outcomes, a clear understanding of how this should be achieved is often hampered by an identity crisis in the field itself.

The education industry contributes 5.8% of Australia’s national expenditure (ABS 2009). A total of 2.6 million Australians are currently enrolled in formal qualifications and 61% (5.3 million) of the Australian workforce are engaged in some form of training at work each year (ABS 2008). This is up from 30% in 1990 (ABS 2005) and includes increases in all categories of workers and all age groups. Education and training in all its forms is now big business and a
significant part of the Australian organisational landscape. However, the field of adult education is still relatively new and continues to evolve. While attempting to keep pace with the desire to skill, up-skill, re-skill and develop the nation’s workforce, this field of HR has not been able to properly define itself and confusion often surrounds even the basic nomenclature which is used.

This identity crisis has at its core a range of titles which are used interchangeably but remain largely undefined and unaligned to what individual organisations are trying to achieve. The basic terminology assigned to these sections in organisational structures is often confusing to outsiders and includes: training; learning and development; human resource development; workplace learning and performance; organisation development; and professional development. While they are all oriented towards building organisation capacity through individual and team development, all of these things mean something different.

Perhaps the best way to understand this shifting landscape is to examine what is meant by the various ways we have come to define these processes.

**Training**

Adult learning and the concept of work-based training has its origins in the mid-twentieth century with the creation of the American Society for Training Directors in 1944 (later re-named the American Society for Training and Development), the Institute of Personnel Management in the United Kingdom in 1946 (now the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) and the subsequent work of Malcolm Knowles, Paolo Freire, John Dewey and Carl Rogers.

Training is learning provided by employers to employees related to their present job (Smith 1993). It has a job-skills orientation. Training generally aims to improve specific knowledge or skills that
can be achieved in the short term that will show benefits in the short term. Formal instruction in how to do a particular job is regarded as training. Learning outcomes are normally set and action taken to achieve them.

There are three components to good training. The primary component is the actual instruction provided to the person concerned — this is readily accepted and understood. Beyond this, there is a requirement which is not as well understood, to motivate the person who has been trained to want to change his or her ways and adopt new methods. The former is the responsibility of the trainer, while the latter is a shared responsibility between the trainer and the operational management of the business concerned.

After sending a person to a training course, two further activities are necessary to complete the desired behavioural change process — close supervision and relentless follow-up, until the new behaviour becomes normal.

It is no longer a sufficient outcome to report on how many staff members attended training, and instead we must gauge the ‘transfer of learning’ to the work role and the return on investment which requires a skilled and rigorous approach to evaluating the training or development activity.

Training is also quite distinct from education. Education relates more broadly to an individual’s future career and about lifelong and life-wide learning. It is not concerned with the particulars of a training event but rather the experience, application and outcome in a format that makes sense to the individual and can be applied.

**Learning and Development (L&D)**

Individual employee learning and skill development needs, once seen to be solved by training alone, now demand a complex range of development solutions and most of these are based in the workplace
and not the classroom. Development is a more fluid concept than training, and generally has longer-term aims. Development activities harness existing roles and the process of observation and reflection on real world situations. Examples of development activities can include buddying, coaching, mentoring, shadowing, action learning and immersion experiences.

It is not directly related to a job but instead emphasises personal growth and aspirations of individual employees. Development concentrates on general soft skills. Examples of such skills would normally include personality traits, leadership skills, self-awareness, confidence and communication styles. It may also include more advanced exposure to techniques of performance appraisal, goal setting, and policy and procedure development. Development can be process-oriented, to the individual (personal development) or to groups of employees such as developing people to work effectively in teams.

An important distinction must also be made with the concept of professional development, which refers to an organisation’s ethical responsibility to encourage staff to meet their personal, academic and professional needs. This can occur by optimising the quality of working life and promoting excellence by building on existing strengths. It provides a critical link between individual career needs and organisational strategy. Many professions (law, architecture, engineering, medicine) have long-established developmental processes and frameworks which their members follow to maintain registration or professional association.

**Organisation Development (OD)**

OD focuses on organisational behaviour and first emerged conceptually as part of the human relations movement in the 1950s. It was founded on the principle that organisations can be understood and the way they should operate can be measured, adjusted,
influenced and improved. According to Gallos (2006), in the post-
World War II environment of both the UK and the US, separate and
unrelated projects were taking place which shaped the emerging
theory of organisation development. Both projects focused on what
was initially referred to as organisational health. In the US, Kurt
Lewin at MIT had set up what was called sensitivity training using
T-groups, a far-reaching, influential educational vehicle which was
being adopted as a form of education in a range of industrial settings.

At the same time in the UK at the Tavistock Institute, Eric Trost and
Ken Bamforth were working with the British coal mining industry
to move from an employment model that involved productivity pay
based on teams to one which rewarded individual output and efforts.
This work reflected a trend in industry at that time to move away from
group work to recognise the efforts of individuals and the emergence
on the use of technology in the production and manufacturing
process.

Psychologist Rensis Likert was also undertaking influential studies
within organisations for the first time, diagnosing group dynamics,
employee morale and attitudes and, in turn, using these data for
organisational improvements.

From these beginnings, OD evolved to focus on organisational
change, building the capacity of teams, and on organisational
communication channels and processes. It is underpinned by a
concern for organisational effectiveness. OD’s role is to work on a
process of organisational renewal to ensure environments are safe,
efficient and satisfying places to work.

It can be defined as the use of applied behavioural science in a
systems context to effect change and enhance organisational
performance and capacity. The OD operative works with the
organisation to effect change, create systems and help it solve its own
problems. The role of the OD operative is not analysis, design and
delivery (the traditional province of learning & development). The focus of OD is the system or organisation as a whole and working with teams or groups on interdependencies, systems and culture, not on working with individuals.

Effective OD interventions would include improved communication, better decision making, enhanced and defined leadership style and behaviours, conflict resolution mechanisms, evidence of effective, functional teams, and interpersonal and group processes.

Unlike training and development, it focuses on both employees and their work in recognition that both may need to be changed simultaneously to sustain effective changes in individual and organisational performance.

**Human Resource Development (HRD)**

Human Resource Development is the broadest of all of these concepts. Contemporary models of HRD describe it as integrating learning and development, organisation development and career development. According to Sofo (2000), American academic Len Nadler is generally credited with creating the concept of HRD. HRD tailors learning to individuals in various real world settings and promotes social aspects of learning in the context of learning contracts, action plans and performance measures. It ensures people have the competencies to meet their current and future job demands. HRD involves organised learning experiences provided by employers within a specified time with the aim of improving performance and of personal growth.

In this context, it is responsible for building long-term, work-related learning capacity at the individual, group and organisational levels. It encompasses knowledge, skill and values bases. HRD has the capacity to simultaneously build organisational and individual capacity.
HRD shares the desire to build organisational and individual productivity and the principles of adult learning with these other concepts. The notion of ‘development’ includes both change and growth. It is tied to a systems approach and to the model of the learning organisation.

**Conclusion**

The advent of strategic management has re-positioned organisation learning and development to become an enabler for business goals. Leveraging learning and development to influence attitudes, behaviour and organisational culture is also seen as a powerful lever in the change management process. Over the past two decades, most Australian organisations have moved beyond the basic training model and the concept of staff training in organisations has had to contend with a range of fundamental shifts in focus. This aspect of human resources demands a clear identity so we can promote a greater understanding of the intersection of all of these concepts and when they are best applied

**References**


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BOOK REVIEW

The case for God: What religion really means

Karen Armstrong

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There may be argument about whether God is omnipresent, but there can be no argument about Richard Dawkins. *The God delusion* is a runaway best seller and its author is on radio and television and in all sorts of newspapers, magazines and journals, learned and otherwise. So far I have managed to avoid reading the book. I have spent enough time escaping from one kind of fundamentalism so that replacing it with another does not feel like progress. For, as I understand it, Dawkins does not merely advance a hypothesis or offer a suggestion—he *knows*. He is one third of a contemporary trinity that also includes Christopher Hitchens, author of *God is not great*, and Sam Harris, author of *The end of faith*, also best sellers.
But the very popularity of these books shows that their authors have touched a nerve. They are obviously not speaking simply for themselves but to and on behalf of the many thousands of disillusioned, fed-up, bitterly disappointed, betrayed and just plain angry people who have had it up to here with paedophile clergy, creation science, infallible popes, infallible Bibles and all manner of bigoted God-botherers. The person whose nerve has not been touched by one or more of these items should probably be checked for signs of life. The reality and depth of the gripes mean that it is not adequate to respond by labelling Dawkins et al. as ‘undergraduate atheists’, as Mark Johnston has done in Saving God, or to say they should do Philosophy I and have another think. However valid such comments might be—and I suspect they are—they do not get to the deepest issues, which are questions such as: How did religion get itself into such a fix? And is there a way of understanding and practising a faith which, if not beyond criticism, is at least sufficiently truthful to our life experience to survive and respond to such attacks?

These fundamental questions are what Karen Armstrong sets herself to answer in The case for God: What religion really means. She returns to our human beginnings and constructs a history of faith, the different forms it has taken at different times and in different places. For although the focus is mainly the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, she includes Hinduism and Buddhism in her picture, together with the philosophical tradition that emerged very early in the story and has intertwined with religion ever since.

Armstrong’s basic thesis is that in the modern era—roughly 1500 CE onwards—we have come to think and speak about God very differently from earlier civilizations. In language she uses often, our culture has been taken over by logos, which is about pragmatic mastery of the world, and has abandoned mythos, which is about the concern for meaning in life. The result has been ‘two distinctively
modern phenomena: fundamentalism and atheism. The two are related.’ (p. 7) The second main section of the book, ‘The modern God’, shows how these ill-assorted partners came to climb into bed together, mirror images to each other with ‘the violent and intolerant strain that has always been inherent not only in monotheism but also in the modern scientific ethos’ (p. 9).

But this is to anticipate. The first major section of the book is ‘The unknown God’, covering from 30,000 BCE to 1500 CE. In these chapters, her main concern is to show how different societies, with different approaches to religion, preserved a balance of logos and mythos in their encounter with life’s realities and mysteries.

Religion seems to be as old as humankind. From the cave drawings of the hunter-gatherers of Lascaux through the rise of pastoral and agricultural societies in Egypt, India and the Ancient Middle East, she traces the sense of the sacred. In each case the ultimate reality that was revered came to be understood not as a being but as Being itself. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this distinction, and Armstrong returns to it throughout the book. One of her main contentions is that those mismatched partners, fundamentalism and modern atheism, share the view that God or ultimate reality is a being, an assumption that shapes the entire understanding of each party.

To this she adds the second principle of pre-modern religion: ‘Religious discourse was not to be understood literally because it was only possible to speak about a reality that transcended language in symbolic terms.’ (p. 24) This is the role of mythos and at this point logos does better to wait in silence. Of central importance here is that mythos is expressed in ritual as a jointly created reality. To separate one from the other is to render mythos incredible and a ritual alien, an outcome that will sound familiar to many.
Chapter 2, titled simply ‘God’, takes us into the Old Testament world. Some may feel daunted by the discussion of the Old Testament sources, famously labelled J, E, P and D, but Armstrong’s clear thought and evocative writing links the text with its historical and ritual setting and enables us to see a progressive revelation unfold. ‘The Bible traces the long process whereby this confusing deity becomes Israel’s only icon of the sacred.’ (p. 43) The story is taken to the time of Ezra and the emergence of ‘classical Judaism’ with its emphasis on midrash, interpretive discovery as an ongoing process of faith.

‘Reason’ is the title of chapter 3, which picks up the strand of philosophy, beginning with the pre-Socratics of Miletus and concluding with Aristotle’s aim of the contemplative life. On the way Armstrong discusses the Eleusinian Mysteries with their blending of mythos and logos, and introduces the important concepts of ekstasis, stepping out of the self, and kenosis, the process of self-emptying.

In chapter 4, ‘Faith’, Armstrong outlines the parallel changes taking place in Judaism and the emerging Christianity of the first couple of centuries CE. As well as a helpful treatment of the New Testament miracle stories, she discusses the use of such terms as ‘faith’ and ‘belief/believe’. ‘The cry [“I believe”] was more like “I will” in the marriage service.’ (p. 100) She also points out that the Arabic jihad means struggle for insight and commitment, not armed aggression, and brings out the shared emphasis in Judaism and Islam on orthopraxy, true behaviour, at a time when ‘Christianity had begun to move in a slightly different direction and developed a preoccupation with doctrinal correctness that would become its Achilles heel.’ (104)

‘Silence’ tackles the fourth and fifth century arguments about the nature of Christ and the Trinity. Without becoming bogged down in the theological technicalities, she gives an excellent, brief account of how the Eastern Church approached these mysteries. In a manner reminiscent of Zen practice, Armstrong shows that
for ‘the Cappadocian Fathers ... the whole point of the doctrine [of the Trinity] was to stop Christians thinking about God in rational terms ... an image that Christians were supposed to contemplate in a particular way. It was a mythos, because it spoke of a truth that was not accessible to logos, and, like any myth, it only made sense when you translated it into practical action ... it was a meditative device to counter the idolatrous tendency of people like Arius, who had seen God as a mere being.’ (p. 116)

The achievement of the Eastern Church was presented to the Western Church by Augustine. Armstrong points out that his novel view of original sin, and especially its linking with sexuality, was one of the less desirable items he bequeathed to posterity, and it is not shared by the East. But his portrayal of the Trinity in terms of his own mythos of the human person enabled the Eastern and Western Churches to reach common ground. At the same time, through the writing of Denys the Areopagite, Western spirituality kept pace with the theological shifts, so that in East and West the apophatic spirituality, highly conscious of the limits of language and the paradoxical power of silence, became a common habit at all levels of church and society.

‘Faith and Reason’ (chapter 6) is crucial to the story Armstrong is telling, and shows a critical turning point in the development of Western thought. By the end of the eleventh century as Christianity began to re-establish itself as the West climbed out of the Dark Ages, philosophers and theologians placed a new emphasis on rationality. In this they were stimulated by the rediscovery of Aristotle through the Jews and Muslims.

Armstrong points out that Islam, guided by figures such as al-Ghazzali, was well aware of the inadequacy of falsafah (philosophy). Instead their emphasis fell, in a manner strongly reminiscent of recent descriptions of Celtic spirituality, on the awareness of God in everyday life. Sufism, the mystical expression of Islam, was the dominant style of spirituality and remained so until
the nineteenth century. Similarly the Jews, strongly influenced by Moses Maimonides, developed their own apophatic spirituality in the Kabbalah, which became a mass movement.

At this point Armstrong pauses to denounce the spiritual blasphemy, moral evil and material disaster of the Crusades.

The apophatic tradition in the West reached a climax in Thomas Aquinas, but it began to come apart with a cultural and philosophical change expressed most notably by John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Their ‘abstruse speculations ... led to a rift between theology and spirituality that persists to the present day.’ (p. 149) Spirituality increasingly became a matter of psychological states, as Armstrong shows in the instance of the English monk Richard Rolle. Other mystics such as the Dominican Meister Eckhart were uneasy about this development. He was critical of such attachment to emotional experiences, as is the anonymous author of The cloud of unknowing. But the split had gone too far and affected too many to be easily healed.

‘Science and religion’ introduces the beginnings of the modern world: the rise of the nation state, absolute monarchy, the Spanish Inquisition and state persecution of the Jews, who as a result became, in some cases, Europe’s first freethinkers. By contrast with the Spanish model, the Dutch model was much more open and tolerant.

Three sixteenth century movements reduced the church’s influence in society: the renaissance of learning and the arts, the reformation of religion and the rise of science. Armstrong’s approach here is mainly by brief sketches of the main characters in the different movements and their contributions. Thus, the reader is introduced in turn to Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Copernicus, Brahe, Kepler and Galileo. The theologian Robert Bellarmine is the example of the Vatican’s changing approach to theology. The quest in all forms of Christianity followed the example
of science: ‘they ... would seek a rational certainty that Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers had long held to be impossible in matters of faith.’ (p. 183)

‘Scientific religion’ is then the focus of chapter 8. The historical background is the horrific upheaval of Europe in the Thirty Years War, an experience that profoundly influenced the philosopher René Descartes. Armstrong briefly outlines his ideas, including his belief that questions about God and the soul ought to be demonstrated by scientific rather than by theological argument. She adds: ‘And the theologians were all too happy to agree. It was a fateful move. Henceforth, increasingly, theology would be translated into a ‘philosophical’ or ‘scientific’ idiom that was alien to it.’ (p. 193)

Locke, Pascal, Spinoza and Newton are also briefly highlighted. By this time the term ‘belief’ is habitually being used in its modern sense. The theologian Samuel Clarke claimed to have shown that God’s will ‘could be charted, measured and definitively proved in twelve clear and distinct propositions.’ (p. 202) But this certainty would soon be troubled.

Chapter 9, ‘Enlightenment’, moves into the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The political upheavals of the time—the American and French Revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars—form the background to the revolution in thought. Again Armstrong picks out significant individuals to carry the story forward, and we are introduced to Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, as well as Adam Smith and Edward Gibbon. She notes a characteristic of the age: ‘The polarity of natural versus supernatural was just one of the dualisms—mind/matter; church/state; reason/emotion—that would characterise modern consciousness as it struggled to master the paradoxes of reality.’ (p. 207)

The religion of reason had its opponents. ‘Pietists who opted for ‘the religion of the heart’ were not in revolt from reason; they were
simply refusing to reduce faith to merely intellectual conviction.’ (p. 208) John Wesley was a case in point, and although not a pietist, Giambattista Vico was another.

Religion consolidated its place in America but in France was abandoned by the *philosophes*, the ‘enlightened’ leaders of thought. The impact of David Hume and Immanuel Kant is surveyed, then the Romantic movement with particular reference to Blake, Wordsworth and Keats with his concept of ‘negative capability’, seen by Armstrong as a form of *ekstasis*: ‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.’ (p. 223) She looks briefly at the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Speeches on religion to its cultured despisers*, and concludes the chapter with Hegel, who, while approving of science, insisted that ultimate reality was not a being but Being itself.

‘Atheism’ (chapter10) begins with an account of the rise of the Evangelical movement in the United States, showing its appeal to different social classes with an emphasis on freedom and an insistence that God was to be understood and worshipped in rational ways.

Meanwhile, in Europe, a new kind of atheism was taking shape. Instead of being a term of abuse and disapproval of the different beliefs of one’s opponents, it acquired its current meaning of a denial of God’s existence. The main names here are Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Auguste Comte.

The rise of professional science brought doubts in its train. Some found touching expression in Alfred Tennyson’s hugely popular poem *In memoriam*. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of species* contributed further to changing thought, but in England the biggest impact was made by *Essays and reviews*, published the next year. Written by seven Anglican clergy, it sold 22,000 copies in two years, more than *Origin*
in its first 20 years. It stirred huge controversy, especially Benjamin Jowett’s essay on biblical interpretation.

Armstrong sees Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as the main architects of modern atheism, although much of popular atheism was promoted by others. For most popular Christianity, especially in the United States, the main issue was not evolution but the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. As on other issues before, the combatants on either side attacked each other with zeal: no place for Socratic dialogue here. Most of the conflict in modern Christianity has its origins in late nineteenth and early twentieth century arguments.

‘Unknowing’ (chapter 11) is concerned mainly with the changes in scientific thought in the twentieth century. It is an appropriate title, for despite the hubris of the Vienna Circle of philosophers, the emphasis came to fall very heavily on what we do not know. Planck, Einstein and Heisenberg feature, as does the rise of U.S. fundamentalism and the Scopes ‘Monkey Trial’ in Tennessee.

Here Armstrong draws close to contemporary troubles. ‘Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is rooted in profound fear.’ (p. 260) And a little further on: ‘Subsequent history would show that when a fundamentalist movement is attacked, it almost invariably becomes more aggressive, bitter and excessive.’ (p. 263)

She discusses the impact of the Holocaust, including the famous story of the Jews who, in their concentration camp, put God on trial, found Him guilty, and then adjourned for prayers. She sets the current majority view of God in context:

The modern God—conceived as powerful Creator, First Cause, supernatural personality realistically understood and rationally demonstrable—is a recent phenomenon. It was born in a more optimistic era than our own and reflects the firm expectation
that scientific rationality could bring the apparently inexplicable aspects of life under the control of reason. (pp. 266–7)

There are some notable theologians and philosophers who have taken a different view. Armstrong discusses Wittgenstein on language, Heidegger on Being, as well as Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan among others.

The final chapter is ‘Death of God?’. After reviewing the outbursts of the 1960s in The secular city and ‘Death of God’ theology, Armstrong sketches the unforeseen (in the West) revival of religion, especially in the form of fundamentalist religion. ‘In all its forms, fundamentalism is a fiercely reductive faith. In their anxiety and fear, fundamentalists often distort the tradition they are trying to defend.’ (p. 282) She introduces a figure who should be more widely known in the West, Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian Muslim persecuted by the would-be modernist Egyptian president of the time.

Armstrong comments that: ‘Many forms of what we call “fundamentalism” should be seen as essentially political discourse—a religiously articulated form of nationalism or ethnicity.’ (p. 286) Her first example is Zionist fundamentalism, but there are others. She sees Richard Dawkins as a kind of secular fundamentalist and discusses his approach at some length, much more temperately than, apparently, does Dawkins himself.

Other scientists are much less dogmatic, much more ready to recognise that there is a great deal that we simply do not know.

In an epilogue of ten pages, Armstrong pulls together the threads she has followed through the book. Among the most important is that the ‘existence’ of God, understood in terms of scientific rationality, opened the way to contemporary atheism; in the philosophers’ terms, Christianity fell into positivism and lost the via negativa. We have done to religion what Descartes did to philosophy: we have attempted to find a reality beyond all doubt. We have refused the possibility
of launching ourselves into doubt and rediscovering our capacity to wonder. ‘Above all, many of us forgot that religious teaching was what the rabbis called *miqra*. ... You had to *engage* with a symbol imaginatively, become ritually and ethically *involved* with it, and allow it to effect a profound change in you ... If you held aloof, a symbol would remain opaque and implausible.’ (p. 308, emphasis original)

We need to relearn what the ancients and others in our own time have understood. ‘Instead of seeking out exotic raptures, Schleiermacher, Bultmann, Rahner and Lonergan have all suggested that we should explore the normal workings of our mind and notice how frequently these propel us quite naturally into transcendence. Instead of looking for what we call God “outside ourselves” ... in the cosmos, we should, like Augustine, turn within and become aware of the way quite ordinary responses segue into “otherness”.’ (p. 313)

We need to retrain our minds in the difference between *mythos* and *logos*; perhaps, to use current jargon, to reunite the two sides of our brains.

We need to practise our faith, of whatever kind, in order to grow. ‘Above all, the habitual practice of compassion and the Golden Rule ‘all day and every day’ demands perpetual *kenosis*. The constant ‘stepping outside’ of our own preferences, convictions and prejudices is an *ekstasis* that is not a glamorous rapture, but ... is itself the transcendence we seek.’ (p. 314) Such a practice is too grounded in reality to take us astray for long.

Lest people be put off by the repeated use of technical terms, especially in other languages, there is a glossary that I found most helpful both in reading the book and writing this review. Especially I found helpful the historical framework that undergirds the story Armstrong tells. You could read the introduction and the epilogue and get a very good idea of what she has to say, but the power of her
message is greatly amplified by attending to the particular people and events in her narrative.

It is evident that I think this is an outstanding book. I have read most of Karen Armstrong’s books and am inclined to see this as, at present, the pinnacle of her already considerable achievement. I also found it interesting to discover, in an online article, that she finds ekstasis in her work of research and writing, in much the same way as the rabbis who find it in the study of Torah. In sum, I would go so far as to say that this one book, better than any other I know, presents the essence of the quest for spiritual reality, which is to grasp ordinary experience at its full depth.

Don Meadows

Don Meadows formerly worked as an Anglican priest in Sydney and Melbourne before training as a psychotherapist. He is now a semi-retired psychotherapist in Melbourne. He was one of the founders of Eremos, a journal of Australian spirituality (www.eremos.org.au), in which an earlier version of this review appeared.
Liberating praxis—Paulo Freire’s legacy for radical education and politics

Peter Mayo

160 pages, price: $39

Peter Mayo is both a scholar and disciple of Paolo Freire. His academic writings focus primarily on adult education and educational sociology and include over 80 papers published in international refereed journals or as chapters in edited books. He identifies himself as a teacher, citizen and researcher. Each of these aspects of his life is framed and touched, however, through the ideology of Freire. As he relates, Freire taught his colonised mind about the social dimensions of education and gave him a pathway from which to critically analyse reality. His position as head of the Department of Education Studies at the University of Malta gives Mayo opportunity to practise his beliefs and explore the central theme expressed in this book—that
of reconstructing Freire’s concepts in diverse learning settings and further the possibilities of resistance, struggle and change.

The practical intention of the book is both to bring the substantial writings of Freire together into a coherent volume and demonstrate the relevance of his ideas in a specific context—that of the southern Mediterranean region. Beyond this declared purpose, however, lies both a rallying call and an appeal to reconstruct the work of Freire in order to challenge the present issues of our time. As Mayo states, ‘one of the greatest challenges Freire has posed to those of us who subscribe to his pedagogical approach ... is to reinvent him in the contexts in which they are operating’ (p. 95). One senses in the reading of this book that Mayo views Freire’s legacy as an ongoing, organic construct dependent upon the work of present critical scholars to reveal both its depth and its vision.

The book is arranged in six chapters. The initial focus delivers a brief biography of Freire. This is not a rehash of earlier biographical texts but rather a portrait capturing key elements of his life, interspersed with the author’s own experiences and reflections developed through personally questioning those close to Freire. This is borne out in particular by his retake on the writing of Freire in terms of beauty and emotional resonance which stands, according to Mayo, in contrast to past criticisms that Freire is too rational and exclusive of other domains of knowing. I will return to this point below as I feel that this text suffers from the very criticism that Mayo is refuting in the work of Freire.

A systematic and extensive list and review of the major works on Freire follows and reflects both the knowledge and scholarly focus of the author and the sustained interest in Freire himself and his theories as a critical educator. The middle sections of the book (Chapters 3 and 4) focus on the legacy left by Freire, particularly in terms of understanding oppression and counter-hegemonic pathways from which to create the climate for social change. Much
of this material is old ground already covered by others, not to mention Freire himself. Freire’s methodology, for example, has been eloquently presented in *Education for critical consciousness* (Freire 1973). In addition, Iva Shor has adapted Freirean methodology for the western context in an accessible text (1987), while Roberts, whom Mayo also praises, provides an eminently holistic reading (2000) of Freire. What is new in this text is Mayo’s comparisons between the ideology of Freire and those of other social theorists, including Marx, Engles and Fromm and critical educators such as McClaren and Gramsci.

From the perspective of my work as an adult educator in Australia’s tertiary sector, the section on neo-liberalism and education at the end of Chapter Four is a welcome addition. As Mayo mentions, ‘[oppression] takes on different forms and the one it is assuming at present is predicted on neo-liberalism with its concomitant ideology of the marketplace’ (p. 89). I feel that a broader exposition on this topic would have added to the value of this chapter however, given the generalised and pervasive influence of neo-liberalism on current education policy and the stated aims of the book.

The final two chapters in my view are the most interesting. Chapter Five explores the relevance of Freirean pedagogy in multi-ethnic environments contextualised through social class and driven by the forces of globalization. Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, discusses the application and implementation of Freirean ideology in two different projects in which the author was personally involved. I appreciated his description of the ongoing development of Maltese schools as community learning centres and the further consequences that such development have in terms of giving legitimacy to the knowledge of all students. A section on viewing museums as spaces for different and multiple voices, and thereby democratising such spaces, exhibited the adaptability of the Freirean approach to diverse pedagogical spaces.
Overall I found the text to be an authoritative account of the life of Freire and the value of Freirean pedagogy for the diverse pedagogical challenges of our time. For the Freirean scholar, it is an invaluable text covering ground that only a disciple of Freire with a deep understanding of his work and ideology could bring together. For the adult educator looking for insight into ways of meeting the diverse professional challenges of our time, the book is at times difficult to digest and pedantic in terms of answering the key challenges it initially poses. I am reminded by Mayo’s perception, noted above, concerning the fusion between the emotional and the intellectual in Freire’s work. In my opinion the endeavour for intellectual accuracy and insight which characterises this book diminishes its accessibility and gives insufficient regard to the importance of emotional resonance between writer and reader which Mayo himself argues is present in Freire’s work. In an age when we are assailed by the dominant hegemonic discourse of technical rationality and marketability, to use Mayo’s own words (p. 8) this book is certainly thought-provoking but falls short in terms of imagination and creative insight.

References


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BOOK REVIEW

The quest for meaning: Narratives of teaching, learning and the arts

Mary Beattie (ed.)

Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, August 2009
http://www.sensepublishers.com
ISBN: 978-94-6091-035-7
284 pages, pbk A$79.59, hbk: A$198.00

I picked up the book, opened it randomly and I was lost in the story. I could not put it down, at least not until I had finished Michelle Pereira’s story in chapter two of the power of music in her life. She gives an emotional account of a difficult passage to becoming a professional singer. I expected a dry, academic text; instead of which, I found a treat for the reader. The book is a contribution to the collaborative fields of pedagogic and arts-based creation of new knowledge by using qualitative inquiry.

Mary Beattie is the editor of this book that is grounded in her specific brand of interconnectedness of pedagogy and the arts. She is Professor of Education in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching
and Learning at The University of Toronto. She teaches courses in narrative and arts-based research, is winner of a number of teaching awards, and has authored three books. This, her latest, is a product of her lifelong interest in the arts and education. Beattie admits to a passion for books since early childhood that led her to teach others to become committed readers and writers.

In this anthology Beattie collects an eclectic group of twelve authors whose works of self-narrated experience reflect the way they came to teaching and the arts as adult learners, now occupying various roles in professional life. What they have in common is a strong affinity to learning and having The University of Toronto as their alma mater.

Structurally the book’s chapters fit into four distinct sections and deal with personal and collaborative inquiry. The first part is an introduction by Beattie. Here, she reflects on her long involvement with graduate education describing an ongoing quest for meaning while connecting the personal, professional and the scholarly. The sections that follow consist of four chapters each. The individually authored texts in a reflective mood take the reader to the uniqueness of professional experience in learning and teaching.

In Part two—‘Dialogue with the self’—authors ask themselves where it all started, the love of music, passion for stories and sharing it by teaching.

Part three—‘Dialogue with others’—concentrates on new voices that encourage and help form new perspectives and interpretations

Part four—‘Dialogue with the dialogues’—is directed at how new narratives can be created through observing human interaction and integration. Here, Beattie brings together four very different artists who tell of the way music started their life and how they spread their artistic wings into the educational system and loved it.

The book’s collective stories span a wide field of artistic/teaching/learning endeavours, individually energetic and committed to a
craft. Authors write in the first person using styles that project well-developed insight into the importance of knowing yourself to succeed in life.

While individual sections carry headings that refer to a different manner of text presentation, I would like to add that each chapter is firstly a dialogue between the writer’s inner self highlighting the role of personal experience in adult learning. Concepts of ‘connecting past, present and future’, using ‘insight and imagination’ to create new ‘narratives through interpretation, interaction and integration’ are backgrounds to the dialogues (p. xi).

Should you ask me to name an author who leads in eloquence, honesty and writing craft, I would find it difficult to come up with an answer. Why so?

The stories are written from individual perspectives and have a theoretical quality of their own that is valid and valuable. It may not yet be the seminal academic text for qualitative inquiry, but it can hold its head up as a remarkable achievement in bringing the whole being of the writer into play in an interconnected humane storytelling exercise. I say welcome to a collection of pedagogical wisdom written by those who experienced it. As a graduate student, I value the insightfully written chapters that are easy to read and identify with.

However, I am reluctant to suggest the book for private consumption as the price is prohibitive for the individual purse, but university libraries should certainly purchase it where no doubt it would find an enthusiastic readership among students in the faculty of education and the arts.

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Christopher (Kit) Kelen is a prolific and widely published poet and academic. He is an Associate Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Macau, China. His earlier volumes of poetry have been published in the USA and China, while his forthcoming poems will be published in Australia. In addition, he publishes in a range of theoretical areas. *Poetry, consciousness and community* draws upon the author’s rich resources as poet and theoriser of poetic meanings.

Kelen’s book is Volume 23 of the series *Consciousness, literature and the art*, a scholarly collection of monographs supported by an international editorial board. This volume is an erudite essay, a thesis, an argument—about the ongoing interrelationships between poetry,
consciousness and community. The opening ‘Scope of the work’ prepares the reader for a deep and complex examination of spaces between the relationships, and interrelationships, of the three foci. It is presented as an essay, not a poem, with the acknowledgement that it is not really possible to be unpoetic in a work about poetry! Thankfully, Kelen’s writing is wonderfully poetic and creative. The inclusion of acknowledged poems within his own questioning thesis encourages the reader to read and re-read particular passages—there are many levels to this intense writing.

This is a text requiring a slow scrutiny, accompanied by a gentle acceptance of an argument illustrated by poetry sourced across time, geography and culture. It might be wise to keep the text nearby, in order to delve again. The reader is encouraged to make time to absorb and question the argument that unfolds with the references to a host of poets and poems and to dwell on the quoted poems—for example, one written in a concentration camp by Mikos Radnoti, or another by the Sufi poet Rumi, or the many by Australia’s Les Murray, or the haiku by Osaki Hosai.

The detailed bibliography is a most useful endnote to what is essentially a beautifully crafted and erudite essay by an eminent poet, academic and wordsmith. Poetry, consciousness and community will be read by many of us in our arts worlds as we seek to be energised, challenged and reassured by a writer whose poetic compass leads us through our history, daily routines and visions of a future.

The question of ‘what is poetry?’ is posed and revisited, yet remains a path on which the author is content/excited to travel with pleasure. Kelen takes the reader on this interwoven journey, finally encouraging in his own words, to “let us continue the conversation!”

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BOOK REVIEW

Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions

Donald A. Schon

San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1987

Donald A. Schon was Ford Professor of Urban Studies and Education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) at the time of the publication of this book. He had been a researcher and consultant on organisational learning and professional effectiveness and was active in a number of American professional organisations. Earlier publications included The reflective practitioner (1983), Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective (1978, with Chris Argyris), and Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness (1974, with Chris Argyris).

The comment shared when I received this book for review was, ‘I’d forgotten how good this is’, and so in reviewing this book, I
embarked on a journey back to my earliest postgraduate coursework and then employment as a TAFE teacher. Schon had begun his quest in *The reflective practitioner* to answer the question: What kind of professional education would be appropriate to an epistemology of practice based on reflection-in-action? *Educating the reflective practitioner* seeks to answer this question in more detail.

Schon proposes that higher education professional undergraduate and postgraduate programs need to learn from the rich history of (deviant) education for practice in the studios of art and design, conservatories of music, athletics coaching and apprenticeships in the crafts. He argues that the teaching of applied sciences in many disciplines needs to be combined with ‘coaching in the artistry of reflection-in-action’.

Schon illustrates his thesis by studying architectural education via the teaching of architectural design in studios as prototypes of reflection-in-action. He coins the term ‘reflective practicum’ as the framework for students learning by doing with the assistance of professionals as coaches. The design studio is explored as a blueprint for the development of a three-fold model of professional coaching: ‘follow me!’; ‘joint experimentation’ and ‘hall of mirrors’. These are stages of a learning process that creates learning relationships which gradually increase the experiential learning of the learner within a framework of knowledge and skill development.

Schon seeks to reveal the positive nature of reflective practicum by choosing examples where coaching and learning have been implemented as best practice, particularly in coaching in musical performance, psychoanalytic practice, and counselling and consulting skills. Some of these examples may now seem dated but the frameworks of coaching for professional practice are as relevant as ever before.
Part One of the book explores architectural education as a case example for the reflective practicum. Part Two describes the dynamics of design studies, the ritual of instruction and the varied styles of coaching. Part Three explores the three variations of reflective practicum in music, psychoanalytic supervision and seminars on counselling and consulting. Part Four explores the implications of the study examples and the ideas that arise for redesigning professional education in many other disciplines.

The essence of Schon’s study examples is the relationship between coach and student, who coordinate demonstrating and imitating, telling and listening, with each component addressing the gaps inherent in each of the other processes. Learning and coaching then become experiments in the work of professional education and how communication facilitates this education. Experimentation in professional problem-solving can then generate new problems and confusions which become material for reciprocal reflection between the student and coach. This model of communication as learning, challenges the didactic lecture and instructional tutorial as processes that cannot create meaning in professional education. Professionals need to be able to solve real-world problems which can only be explored in the context of higher education through a process of ‘studio’ or reflective practicum.

Schon doesn’t gloss over the problems that can arise in the design and practice of reflective education. The outcomes of a reflective practicum can be as varied as the possible evolutions of any learning process. The practicum or studio can produce high quality learning outcomes via the search for meaning, a convergence of meaning between the student and the coach. If the essential elements of coaching and experimentation are frozen in miscommunication, the reflective practice can then produce counter-learning (giving coaches what they want) or over-learning (there is only one way), which is
often an outcome of more traditional academic and professional education.

The author concludes this study by acknowledging the issues inherent in introducing reflective practicum into complex intellectual, institutional and political contexts of contemporary higher education professional education. Questions are explored, such as: What form does the practicum or projects take? At what points in the curriculum might reflective practicum be introduced? Who should be involved in being a coach? What kind of research and researchers are essential to the development of reflective practicum?

My own experience while reading and reviewing Schon’s seminal publication was of being immersed in a curriculum renewal process based on the various interpretations of Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) at La Trobe University. The philosophical and practical discussions about professional education and training are now being waged and as I reminded one group I was training in adult education principles: ‘we already have the studies and tools to assist us in our endeavours’—Schon’s book on educating the reflective practitioner is one such important study. I would recommend that all higher education practitioners in Australia re-visit or discover this book and devour its study of professional education because it is probably only in recent years that many or most Australian universities have begun engaging in curriculum review and renewal that is based covertly on the principles outlined by Schon.

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NOTES FOR INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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