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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

With this issue, we begin the 51st year of our adult learning journal!

One of the most interesting educational issues of the present time is the presence of international learners in the Australian educational system. Their numbers have expanded over the past several years and they constitute a very significant and valuable component of the learner population. Considerable attention, particularly by the media, has been focused on these learners and on the training providers facilitating their learning. Some of this attention has not been complimentary. Partly as a consequence, migration arrangements have been modified, regulatory machinery has been tightened at Federal and State levels and greater attention paid to auditing and compliance procedures. Arguably, far less attention has been paid to the actual learners themselves. Our first paper focuses in timely fashion on this issue.

Ly Thi Tran and **Chris Hyland** question the labelling of international students as 'PR hunters' in researching international VET students' motives and intentions in studying within 22 VET providers in three Australian States. They argue that four variations that emerge from their data better explain the association between

migration and learning than does the 'international VET students simply want to migrate' perspective. These variations are: (a) to secure permanent residency (PR) and attain skills for a chosen occupation, (b) to have a second-chance opportunity, (c) to obtain PR and (d) no interest in PR. Thus, while migration is a motivator for many students, this study found that it is not as strong as suggested by numerous media commentators and some academics. Their conclusion is that the stereotype of international students as mere 'PR hunters' is unjust and indeed constitutes a threat to the international VET sector.

A second issue in Australian adult and vocational education is the extent to which graduates actually end up working in the occupation for which they have been trained—calculated by NCVER to be only one in three VET graduates. In our second paper, **Sandra Haukka** examines mobility within selected associate professional and trades occupations in the aged care, automotive and civil construction sectors in Queensland. Her study involved 624 responses from a survey, and investigated their future work intentions, reasons for taking work and leaving work, and factors influencing them to leave or remain in their occupations. The study confirmed that workers with lower levels of knowledge and skill experience higher levels of occupational mobility. Those in the aged care sector had the highest level of occupational mobility of those surveyed. Another finding was that 70% of participants were not undertaking any work-related training, and only 19% were undertaking employer-sponsored training at the time of the survey. The study concludes, that despite Government initiatives, the mobility patterns suggest it will take some time for these three sectors to attract, train and retain enough workers to address ongoing skills shortages.

Moving from VET in Australia to vocational training in Turkey, the next paper by **Oktay Akbas** analyses the role of cultural context in continuing vocational training. Through interviews with

33 auto repairmen in micro-enterprises, this study focused on how these workers received ongoing vocational training. The principal means was by consulting their co-workers, with use of computers and the Internet (though generally not for vocational development) as the second most common means. Face to face education and printed materials were the least commonly used, despite all of the participants being literate. Thus, for these workers who have grown up in traditional mentor systems, oral communication for their training and in solving problems they encounter continues to be the prime channel. The study's findings thus support Dokmen's (1977) concept of the 'child-parent society' of which Turkey is an example (as distinct from an 'adult society'). The effects of an oral culture persist in this situation where people learn their profession in a mentor system and have not made much use of educational opportunities.

A third critical issue that this Journal number raises is of that of (re)engagement of learners with formal learning—a very topical, contemporary theme in most countries and especially in Australian education. The next three papers all centre on this issue from various perspectives.

Robyn Broadbent focuses on the visionary project of the Visy Cares Hub in a disadvantaged community of Western Melbourne in which Victoria University was a keen partner. The University located one of its entrances in the multipurpose youth centre with the aim of re-orienting its 'welcome mat' to young people and engaging them in returning to study. The Hub is premised on the notion that 'building the capacity of communities to be active collaborators in the challenges that are faced by community members is required to make fundamental and sustainable change in young people's lives'. It offers a broad range of youth services and programs and represents the development of an integrated service delivery model assisting young people to connect with their community. The University's

commitment to the Hub is a holistic approach to vocational education that recognises the range of needs that young people have that must be addressed to ensure their success in education.

The paper by **Julie Willans** and **Karen Seary** centres on the mature-age learner returning to a formal learning environment. Pre-university enabling programs are designed to provide pathways and support for learners from non-traditional backgrounds who are at risk of being marginalised from university study. Many such programs have sprung up in Australia since the early 1970s as a means of addressing social imbalance in accessing higher education. The authors focus on nine learners in one such program, the STEPs program at CQUniversity, in the light of three theoretical perspectives: transformative learning theory, learning communities and resiliency. Through individual and group interviews, the researchers investigate how these learners perceived themselves as learners while in their program, and the physical, cognitive and emotional challenges they encounter in returning to formal learning.

A similar focus in the paper by **Cassandra MacGregor** and **Thomas Ryan** details the barriers faced by learners aged between 18 and 24 years in returning to formal learning within an adult education centre in Ontario, Canada. It discusses the traits, pressures and semi-autonomy of these learners, and then examines interventions that might help these young adults and minimise the likelihood of them leaving education for a second time. The authors' intention is to shift the centre to 'an "adult friendly" school model … that promotes lifelong learning and helps young adult learners achieve their goals'. Their paper concludes with ten suggestions for enhancing the re-entry of these young Canadian adult learners to educational settings.

The practice paper by **Karin du Plessis**, **Kaarin Anstey** and **Arianne Schlumpp** reviews the literature on older adults' ability to learn. The paper argues that, with the growing numbers of older

adults in society, it is vitally important they maintain healthy and active lifestyles in order to increase their quality of life and to reduce the increasing demand on the public health system. The authors further argue that it is critical for course designers to keep abreast of the latest research in healthy ageing. Following a useful summary of relevant literature on older adults' cognitive and sensory abilities, the paper concludes with some suggestions for course design and learning materials.

This issue of the journal ends with a recollection by **Neville Crocombe** on his early days in adult education in Queensland and Tasmania, and three book reviews.

Celebrating Adult Learning Spaces

The 51st Annual Adult Learning Australia (ALA) Conference will be hosted by the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) in Melbourne, on **Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 September**. ALA Conferences have a strong tradition of bringing together international and national practitioners, stakeholders and researchers in the fields of adult education and lifelong learning to learn, share and celebrate! Early Bird Registration is available now and closes 30 June.

Roger Harris
Editor

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International vocational education and training—The migration and learning mix

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International VET students have divergent, shifting and in some cases multiple purposes for undertaking their VET courses. Students' motives may be instrumental and/or intrinsic and can include obtaining permanent residency, accumulating skills that can secure good employment, gaining a foothold that leads to higher education, and/or personal transformation. Moreover, students' study purposes and imagining of acquired values are neither fixed nor unitary. They can be shaped and reshaped by their families and personal aspirations and by the social world and the learning environment with which they interact. We argue that, whatever a student's study purpose, s/he needs to engage in a learning practice and should be provided with a high quality education. Indeed, we insist this remains the case even if students enrol only in order to gain the qualifications needed to migrate. The paper details the

association between migration and learning, and argues that the four variations emerging from the empirical data of this study that centre on migration and skills' accumulation better explain this association than does the 'international VET students simply want to migrate' perspective. We conclude with a discussion of why the stereotype that holds VET international students are mere 'PR hunters' is unjust and constitutes a threat to the international VET sector.
Key words: *VET, international education, migration, study purposes, learning experiences*

Introduction

In 2009, the extent to which the international VET sector has grown was brought to public attention by the charge that many colleges were catering to students who enrolled primarily to gain permanent residency (PR) and were producing poorly trained graduates (Marginson *et al.* 2010, Perkins 2009, Smith 2010). Responding to these charges, the Australian government amended the General Skilled Migration Scheme in ways that curtailed subjects popular with many international VET students, limited graduates' ability to gain immigrant status and required independent skills testing of graduates. These regulatory changes were widely applauded, but a number of observers warned that highlighting the poor quality of 'dodgy' private colleges risked labelling all international VET students as 'PR chasers' who have no real interest in study and hence increased the chances they will emerge as poor graduates (Mares 2009).

In this article we discuss the validity of the claim that international VET students simply want to migrate and are disinterested in the quality of their education (Birrell & Perry 2009, Birrell et al. 2009, Perkins 2009, Baas 2006) by drawing on interviews with 130 international students, teachers, general staff, directors and

CEOs from 22 public and private VET providers in three Australian states. We argue international VET students have divergent, shifting and in some cases multiple purposes for undertaking their chosen course of study. These motives may be instrumental and/or intrinsic, and can include obtaining permanent residency, accumulating skills that can secure good employment, gaining a foothold that leads to higher education, and/or personal transformation. We suggest, moreover, that students' study purposes and imagining of acquired values are neither fixed nor unitary. They can be shaped and reshaped by their families and personal aspirations and by the social world and the learning environment. We hold that whatever a student's study purpose is, s/he should be provided access to a high quality education. Indeed, we insist this remains the case, even if students enrol only in order to gain the qualifications needed to migrate. This is necessary because the education supplier has accepted their fees, there exists no sure way of knowing why a student elects to enrol, the motivators informing students can change, and because, as Smith (2010: 8) rightly observes, 'an immigration focus was not a crime'. Given this is the case, it is important that scholars, educators and policy-makers have a sound theoretical and empirical understanding of how teachers and VET providers can facilitate international students' engagement in learning and ensure high quality outcomes. The paper begins by introducing the literature that has examined why international students study in the VET sector. We then proceed to detail the association between migration and learning, and argue that four variants that centre on migration and skills' accumulation better explain this association than does the 'international VET students simply want to migrate' perspective. We conclude with a discussion of why the stereotype that holds that VET students are mere 'PR hunters' is unjust and constitutes a threat to the international VET sector.

International students' motives for undertaking VET courses

In 2009 VET became the largest education supplier by volume of enrolments and commencements (AEI 2009a). Asian markets dominated this activity, representing 85% of all VET enrolments with India being the lead market with a 29% share followed by China with 7%. 'Management and Commerce' were the most popular courses with 55% of enrolments, 'Food, Hospitality and Personal Services' ranked second with 17% followed by 'Society and Culture' with 10%. Most VET enrolments were with non-government providers (84%) and 16% were enrolled in state institutions (AEI 2009b).

VET's emergence as the largest education exporter catalysed speculation that the growth of the sector was being spurred by a rapid increase in the number of institutions that exist primarily to assist individuals attain residency rather than provide a genuine learning experience—in short, 'PR factories'. This was a charge fed by scholars who highlighted the large number of international students studying hairdressing and cookery (Birrell & Perry 2009, Birrell et al. 2009). These authors claimed that this fast growth was closely associated with the advantage that Australia's skilled migration program accords international students who complete their studies in certain areas of 'Food, Hospitality and Personal Services'. Those who assert immigration is the primary determinant influencing when and what VET international students elect to study can rightly point to quantitative and qualitative data that has shown VET students emphasise the possibility that they might be able to migrate. In 2007, Education International (AEI) reported 51% of VET respondents had stated that the wish to migrate was an important or very important factor influencing their study location decision and 38% conceded a migration agent had been an important 'influencer' assisting them to make the decision as to where and what to study (AEI 2007).

Commentators who emphasise the promise of migration when discussing why VET students study in Australia have also been informed by qualitative data. Notable in this regard is the work of Baas (2006) who draws on 200 interviews with Indian students and host professionals in Melbourne. His basic hypothesis is that Indian students' 'main objective is to obtain a permanent residence visa in Australia and … they tailor their choice of course and university with this end in mind' (p. 1). Baas divides Indian students into a number of groups, the first of which initially had no intention of migrating or did not know this opportunity existed but subsequently became aware of the possibility. A second group arrived with the intention of gaining PR but also wished to gain skills. Both of these groups were deeply concerned about the quality of the education they received. However, a third and rapidly growing body of students was focused only on PR and had little or no concern about education quality except to the extent that this would assist them gain the qualifications required to migrate. Although Baas concedes that the first and second groups are concerned about the quality of their education, his message is that the key driver is permanent residency and the education received is of marginal significance. This message is driven home by the minimal attention he accords students' aspiration for skills enhancement, intellectual formation, career advancement and personal enrichment.

AEI did not allow students the option of identifying migration as an influence when explaining their course selection in their survey (AEI 2007). Nevertheless, commentators highlighted the fact that a significant minority of students had chosen on the list of occupations those that gain maximum migration points but for which there may be little demand in their home country. While this practice is understandable, it unfortunately distracts attention from the fact that international VET students overwhelmingly provide answers to why they have chosen their courses similar to those that are key determinants for domestic students. With the latter,

primary influences are the possibility of employment advancement, personal aspiration and opportunity to progress to higher education (Blair *et al.* 1993, cited in Connelly & Halliday 2001, Connelly & Halliday 2001, Maxwell *et al.* 2000). International VET students, by contrast, report the issues that influence their course selection include employment (86%), course reputation (84%), reputation of institution (83%), and fees (82%). Moreover, and importantly, nearly all VET respondents (93%) indicate the quality of education is an important or very important motivator (AEI 2007: 15).

Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' as a form of investment for students' future

Recent research has generated a broader understanding of the motivations and experiences of international students through the concepts of investment and imagined community (e.g. Norton 2001, Norton & Toohey 2002, Arkoudis & Love 2008). Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', Norton and Toohey (2002: 122) argue that why and how learners invest in their course links to their desire to 'acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which in turn increase the value of their cultural capital'. Their argument underpins the connection of students' investment in a specific course, their purposes for so doing and their adaptation. This important relationship has, however, been examined mainly in the context of learners in English as a Second Language or English for Academic Purposes courses and has gone largely unexplored in the literature on international students in Australian VET. Within the distinctive context of Australian VET, Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital' can have different variations which are linked to the opportunity for personal transformation and cultural enrichment, employment advancement, possibility to proceed to higher education and opportunity to migrate.

The concept of investment focuses on the learner as an agent with a complex and mobile social history, multiple values and the capacity to organise and re-organise a sense of place and value in the social world (Arkoudis & Love 2008). However, discussion on VET international students' study purposes has made sweeping generalisations and implies uniformity in relation to international students' course selection. Analysing the link between students' values and purpose for investing in their course and their learning experiences can offer an alternative conceptual view from which to examine international students' learning adaptation and provide new and deeper insights into their learning practices in VET.

In sum, the literature suggests that, even if the course chosen by a VET student is influenced by a wish to migrate, it is highly likely the student will also be swayed by the desire for a positive learning experience. Highlighting this revelation is of the greatest importance. For if educators and policy-makers mistakenly believe VET international students have enrolled merely to meet migration requirements, they are unlikely to provide the commitment and resources individuals have the right to receive both as students and customers. In the next section of the paper, we discuss the methodology shaping the study and draw on the voices of VET international students to clarify the association between migration and learning.

Methodology

Drawing on qualitative data, the study explores the complexities of students' perceptions regarding their motivations to undertake their VET study. Moreover, a qualitative inquiry is appropriate for the nature of this study since it focuses on insights, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam 1998: 28).

The research draws on the views of 130 interviewees including 105 international students and 25 teachers, support staff, international program managers and CEOs from 22 VET providers in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Among the student participants, 46 are female and 59 are male.

The first named author of the paper contacted the international students' support coordinators and international program directors from VET providers and requested them to help circulate a call for international students to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Merriam 1998) were adopted. For a small number of student participants who were interviewed during their first two weeks following enrolment, a second round of interviews was conducted at the end of their first semester. The purpose of the second interview was to gain insight into how students are transformed in the process of adapting to the learning practices of their VET courses. The first named author of this paper also stays in touch with the participants after the interviews via email and telephone with consent in order to follow up important or emerging issues. She has also taken part in student activities, visited their homes and workplaces and participated in their workshops, practice and theory classes. The purpose of participating in these activities is to observe and understand the multiple dimensions of international students' life and study in Australia, some of which may otherwise be invisible through formal interviews.

The national origins and the VET courses in which the student interviewees were enrolled are captured in the table below:

Nation of origin	Number of interviewees
South Asia	
India	22
Other	2
Northeast Asia	
China	18
Korea	10
Japan	2
Southeast Asia and the Pacific	
Vietnam	18
Other (Malaysia, Philippine, Thailand)	7
Mauritius	5
Europe and the UK	12
South America	3
Others	6
Total	105

VET course	Number of interviewees
Food and hospitality	40
Management & commerce	10
Building & carpentry	16
Information technology	9
Hairdressing	8
Community welfare work	5
Automotive	4
Others	13
Total	105

Ethics approval was sought prior to data collection from RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee where the first named author is based. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, their names and institutes are kept anonymous. The face-to-face interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and then analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis was inductive and aimed to identify emergent themes and patterns.

International students' study purposes and learning experience

The data generated by the interviews uncovered four variations of the complex relationship between permanent residency and international students' motives in undertaking VET courses: some students are motivated to enrol in a VET course by a dual desire to secure PR and attain the skills associated with their chosen occupation, a second group views migration as a 'second chance opportunity'; a third sees PR as the sole reason to enrol in a VET course; and a fourth has no interest in gaining PR or has lost any interest they may once have had. In addition, as with domestic students, the data reveal personal interest, personal aspiration and the possibility of using VET as a pathway to university within Australia or employment in their home country as important to many international students. In short, the data show that, while migration is a motivator for many students, it is not present to the extent that has been suggested by numerous media commentators and by some academics.

Obtaining skills/qualifications and PR

A group of interviewees was enrolled in VET courses because they wanted to secure both PR and the qualifications needed to be successful in their chosen occupation. For example, a Filipino student enrolled in commercial cookery with a state training provider advised:

> First of all, I am very interested in cooking, that's my love, my passion… And the course is also a stepping stone for permanent residency. My love for cooking makes me really interested in the course right now and the PR gives me the will to survive—it gives me the drive to try harder. (Filipino, Hospitality, TAFE, Victoria)

This student explicitly expresses that both her passion for cooking and her desire to migrate to Australia are significant elements motivating her to study in the VET sector. During the interview, she emphasised how her passion for her chosen occupation and her determination to secure permanent residency provide her with

the strength to overcome the emotional hardship of leaving her son behind with her parents in the Philippines and the need to juggle a part-time job and study. The student positions herself as being ready and empowered to respond to the challenging educational experiences she must confront in Australia and reveals that, along with her desire to secure permanent residency, she is also driven by the wish to fulfil her occupational aspiration.

Other students when asked why they had enrolled in their VET course replied they wanted both permanent residency and work skills and qualifications and in so doing observed that they did not accept these two objectives were in conflict:

> To be a cabinet maker and to do a trade, but it's not so easy to get an apprenticeship in Germany as a girl. So I came to Australia. And of course, I also want to immigrate.
> (German, Cabinet making, TAFE, QLD)

> The main reason is for getting permanent residency because I've been in Australia for two years, like, on holiday visas, working holiday. And then at the end of that I went back to England in July last year and there's not much happening in England and I wanted to come back to Australia… And I thought I wanted to do a course that is going to give me something at the end of it, not just come for no reason. I want to enrol in something that is going to get me a job. So I looked into doing mechanics automotive. And yeah, I want to get permanent residency at the end, so I can stay over here. It's good fun. Yeah, that's one of the reasons I took the course because so I've always been around cars since I was little.
> (England, Automotive, TAFE, QLD)

From the first, these students had chosen an Australian VET course in the hope of attaining permanent residency and of gaining the skills and qualifications required to pursue their chosen occupation. In short, throughout their period of study, both *positional investments* and *self-transformative investments* have been of importance (Pyvis & Chapman 2007).

Permanent residency as a 'second chance opportunity'

For other students permanent residency was a prize that began to be sought only after their studies in Australia had commenced:

> Now since I've been here for nearly one year and I quite like here. If I can, I would like to apply for permanent residency. Before I came here, I had no idea whether I am going to like this place or not because I've never been overseas. It is my first time. I'd never been out of my province in the South of China, near to Hong Kong. (Chinese, Hospitality, TAFE, NSW)

> At that time [when the student decided to take the course], I did not think about PR, if now I can't take it, no problem. I can go back to my country and use my knowledge from here. I will try for that [for PR], if I could get it, it's good; if I don't get it, it's ok… I come here to study. I don't come here for PR.
> (Indian, Hospitality, private college, QLD)

These students revealed that, when they came to Australia, immigration opportunities were of little importance but, as they progressed through their course, they began to find the possibility of PR attractive. This commonly occurs because the student becomes immersed in the migration culture through interacting with peers who are applying for or have successfully gained PR. Commenting on the students who come to desire PR after arrival in Australia, Bass (2006: 11) acknowledges that some of these individuals progress along this path because they find the Australian social and natural environment attractive. However, he downplays the significance of this influence and instead elects to highlight the extent to which students develop an interest in PR because they see it as a 'form of compensation' for an unsatisfactory education experience. By so doing, he both denigrates the quality of education in Australia and conveys the impression that these 'dissatisfied customers' constitute a very large proportion of those who learn to desire PR. By contrast, none of our student interviewees saw PR as a 'form of compensation'. Rather, they invariably reported they had come to find PR attractive,

either because they like Australia or because they learn PR can be gained at little cost and consequently is a windfall prize one would be foolish not to seize.

Some students highlight that since they are interested in gaining international working experience in a context other than their home country, obtaining PR is important even if they do not intend to remain in Australia, because PR is often listed as the primary requirement in job descriptions. This group of students differs from the other groups described because, while international students in other PR-oriented groups view migration as an *outcome* of their study in Australia, for these students PR is an asset that enables them to realise a desired outcome or is seen as an *opportunity*. In this case, the acquired values that international students attached to their study in Australia are not fixed and limited to common values such as the enhancement of skills and employment advancement but have been extended to include migration. This reflects the flexible response of international students as a mobile population to the Australian government's policy on skilled migration and the potential for PR.

Initially motivated to secure PR but later on change their mind

The number of interviewees not interested in migration was also boosted by those students who initially enrolled in a VET course in order to gain PR but decided subsequently that this was not an option they wished to pursue:

> Well, when I first came to Australia two years ago, I definitely thought I was going to live in this country forever... Now I am thinking I'm still young and there are so many opportunities around the world. I am going to travel around the world and actually live in different countries.
> (Korean, Hospitality, TAFE, NSW)

> At the very beginning I wanted to live in Australia...Yeah and now I don't show much interest about a PR because I could very easily move to America, and I think that may be fit me better...
> (Chinese, Hospitality, TAFE, QLD)

These students initially saw PR as an important outcome of their study in Australia, but positioned themselves as globally mobile individuals as they came to recognise the options made possible by globalisation. For some, this change emerged from their growing confidence in themselves and the skills they acquired. Indeed, many students in commercial cookery and hairdressing reported they had enrolled because they wished to gain qualifications in an internationally mobile field and thus gain a 'global passport' that would enable them to work and settle in multiple countries. For others, Australia was initially seen as a promising land but along the way they realised the lifestyle did not well suit them. Thus, this study shows international students' imagining of the acquired values they wish to pursue via international education is neither fixed nor unitary, but can be shaped and reshaped by their changing perspectives, their learning experiences and the environment with which they interact.

PR chasing

Our interviews confirmed that there are international students who enrol in VET courses in which they have no interest other than the fact that they can generate the points required to immigrate. This was confirmed by student interviewees who commented on fellow students:

> So of course I do my own reading and my own research. And so when the teacher is teaching, you know a lot more compared to someone who's not very interested and doesn't make any effort... They're here mainly for PR in the end. Yeah. So they just come, take their time. You can see the attitude. Like, they're not always on time for class. They don't participate in class. Whether they pass or not doesn't matter. You know that kind of attitude? Yeah. And then they didn't pay attention when the teacher is talking. All they want to do is, oh, let's just take the notes or let's just pass the test. (Malaysian, Bakery, private college, Victoria)

Other interviewees conceded immigration was the sole reason they chose their course but in so doing highlighted the fact that this did not mean they would not work in the relevant industry:

> I enrolled in this course for immigration… No. I didn't like bakery. Now I just feel, have a little bit feeling [toward bakery]. So it's basically like people have contact with something for a long time and they have emotion in it… I just learn, yeah, it is because I said if I want to reach my PR purpose, my goal, I have to get the certificate. How can I get it? I must finish all the courses. So I have to finish all the courses and that's it. And how did I finish all the courses? Just following the teacher and listened. So I followed the teachers' instructions and do the assignments and finish exams. And that's it, finish. And now I reach my goals, I succeed.
> (Chinese, Bakery, TAFE, Victoria)

Indeed, other interviewees who had enrolled solely in order to gain migration points reported that their teachers had generated in them a genuine interest in the occupation.

> I was very bored in cooking. And I am scared at how can I go through this course because I never done any cooking before. But the method and the method of teaching and teachers are so good that now I am feeling very confident to cooking and I can work in the industry also. I enjoy everything. I enjoy most every day. Every hour, I enjoy… They [the teachers] are taking care all the time. They are pushing students, pushing for the whole of the students. And they always checking their students are taking the skills or not. They are very friendly and they are helping but at the same time they are strict also. They don't let you go for a single time… I want to be a chef. *It's my dream now.*
> (Indian, Cookery, TAFE, QLD)

> This course will help me to get the PR… No, in China I even don't know how to fry an egg. And my teacher, whose name is Mark, he's very nice and he's a very good teacher… Yeah, he changed me, he changed me a lot. He makes me like cooking… Because he's very friendly and his class style is very funny and active. He's very patient to teach us how to cook. Even when we make a mistake, he will help us to get through it.
> (Chinese, Cookery, TAFE, QLD)

These excerpts reveal that it is the teachers and VET providers that play an important role in making students interested and engaged in learning. Connelly and Halliday (2001) argue VET teachers should be responsible for taking students beyond mere instrumentalism and facilitating their engagement in learning. The students' views in this study highlight the significance of teachers' capacity to identify the study purposes of international students and their approaches to engaging students in the learning process and generating the interest of international students in the subjects, which were originally seen by these students themselves as nothing other than a means to migration. In dealing with this group of students, undoubtedly teachers' perceptions of their role and their attitudes towards this responsibility are the key to nurturing students' interest in learning, enabling them to move beyond instrumentalism and seeing migration only as an end goal, to being motivated to develop vocational skills. In so doing, teachers play an important role in legitimising student participation in the learning process (Wenger 1998). On the other hand, as revealed by some students in this study, some teachers' sweeping generalisations of all international students as solely motivated by the desire to secure PR while overlooking their genuine interest in the course, can lead to destructive attitudes and associated implications that impact negatively on international students' learning in VET courses and the teaching of international student cohorts.

Suggesting it is possible for teachers to inspire students who enrol in a subject in which they have no interest is not to claim this outcome can be achieved with all or even most students. To suggest otherwise is to place demands on teachers that are simply unreasonable and unrealistic. Indeed, it is a step bound to encourage 'teacher bashing'. Such a development would be particularly unjust in the case of teachers who are compelled to labour in colleges that are grossly under-staffed and under-equipped. In short, teachers who for

whatever reason work in 'PR factories' as described by one student interviewee in this way:

> Every time when you finish your work, you have to show it to teacher and then you have to get the signature otherwise, without that signature, you did nothing, but to get signature you have to wait so many hours. Busy. Teachers are just like screaming and running. They're also got stressed as well and the teachers would regularly change [resign]. I don't think that they really want to teach the students because they thought they just waste their energy and stuff. One day I said like, "I have done this, can you just sign it and check it for me?" And the teacher would say, "Okay, do you want to be a hair designer or you just want to stay here?" And I said, "I just want to stay here." And she rolled her eyes and said, "Okay, pass."
> (Japanese, Hairdressing private college, Victoria)

The private hairdressing college in which this student enrolled was the cheapest in Melbourne and recruited large numbers of international students even though it had only two teachers. There were often more than 50 students in one class and it is to the teacher's enormous credit that she asked her question and did not simply assume all her students who enrolled in a cheap course did so because they only wanted PR. But to expect that a teacher in this context should act differently when confronted by a student that confesses that she has no interest in the course would be unjust.

Accumulation of skills and qualifications

Another group of interviewees viewed their enrolment in VET solely as a means to gain the skills and qualifications required to pursue their chosen occupation and/or as a pathway to personal development. These students deemed PR an irrelevancy or, at most, a fringe benefit that might be garnered simply because it is a 'low hanging fruit', if not a windfall. For example, a Thai student explained why he had chosen to study hospitality management at a state Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college:

> I'm willing to do it because I love what I do… I mean, I know I will be eligible for PR but I am not focusing into it. I am not crazy all over it because I think that is the bonus to my part. But my main point is, I have to keep myself focused on my career, profession, refining my skills and that's the most important.
> (Thai, Hospitality management, TAFE, NSW)

This student worked as a pastry chef in his home country and the USA before enrolling in a diploma in hospitality management. He is motivated to study because he wishes to upgrade his skills and enhance his ability to secure rewarding and challenging employment in this chosen occupation. The following excerpts from interviews with cookery students offer further insight into the reasons why international students who are committed primarily to accumulating skills or qualifications would invest in a VET course:

> First of all, I am very interested in cookery. Second, I want to set up my own business of commercial cookery. Before I graduated from the university, to open a coffee shop or restaurant was my dream… Then, if I get a chance, I want to open a restaurant or a coffee shop. It doesn't have to be big. I really enjoyed so when I came here, the course is very good and everything is what I want.
> (Chinese, Cookery, TAFE, NSW)

> I found if I combine Korean cuisine with the Western cuisine it will rock in this country and anywhere in the world. Because many Koreans have come here and they are doing their restaurants, and it's all just plain Korean and many of the places are not good. My goal is actually to raise that standard by combining these stuffs. Actually, there is a chef from Belgium who is actually doing it. So maybe I can learn from him.
> (Korean, Cookery, TAFE, NSW)

Birrell *et al.* (2009) asserted that international students were willing to pay for cookery courses because this provided them with a pathway to migration. Subsequently, Birrell and Perry (2009) further argued that, as international students can potentially earn little if they return to work in developing countries with a VET cooking

credential, their investment in Australian education must be solely to secure permanent residency. Clearly, while this may be the case for numerous international students, the above quotes from interviewees reveal that a group of international students are prepared to pay for their courses because they are not only genuinely interested in the trade but also wish to run their own commercial cookery business. For a number of the interviewees who prioritised the accumulation of skills, a VET course is valued because it provides qualifications they can take to their home country:

> Before I studied at RMIT, I specialised in Business and then I studied that one year. And the purpose I moved to hospitality because, you know, when I come into Australia I started work in the hospitality industry. And truly, I fell in love. I love to deal with customer. And also like because, you know, in Vietnam tourism and hospitality is growing up very fast. And in the next ten years we enjoy different thing. That's why, that's the purpose I want to take this course to get the knowledge about hospitality, management or the skill how to become a good manager.
> (Vietnamese, Hospitality, private college, Victoria)

> This industry in my country is not very developed. So that's the main purpose of my study here in Australia. I don't really have intentions of staying here. So yeah, basically that's it.
> (Mexican, Horticulture, TAFE, NSW)

> I want to work there and make the system much better because our government is spending billions of dollars for the betterment of the people. But still we do have malaria cases existing in our country. There are hundreds of these small diseases which are still existing in my country. So, like, government is spending on the top billions of dollars but here it is not reaching at the bottom level to the people who really require that… So I want to become a part of this system… So that's why I wanted to have some formal education so I came here. I joined the community welfare course. So right now I'm pursuing it. And as soon as I finish that, then I may go back to country and join that health system in our country.
> (Indian, Community welfare, TAFE, NSW)

These students enrolled in an Australian VET course because they wish to gain skills and qualifications that would enable them to contribute to both their personal success at home and the development of their country. They commonly identified problems that needed to be tackled in their homeland and suggested that, by returning with their new skills, they would be able to help ease these problems. Others referred to emerging industries at home and the consequent growing demand for workers with an international education and qualifications. In brief, these students have pursued their VET course with a particular employment outcome and a particular vision for their future that assumes they will be returning to their homeland.

VET as a pathway to higher education

A group of interviewees reported they were undertaking a VET course with the expectation this would provide a pathway to university:

> It is because I am very interested in game design. This course in this TAFE can be connected to another university, called UTS. The game design course in UTS only accepts people who finish from this course. (Chinese, TAFE, NSW)

> Well, first, I wanted to be bilingual in English… I have to be bilingual and maybe this course will help me to get into a university. If I can hopefully get a bit of money before and I can maybe enrol for one year or two years in a university. So I think that is a good way to stay, to get a diploma and to have access then later to uni. And if not, I can still go back home and have a diploma, I can start to find a job as well. So yeah, and I like the fact that it's not as hard as uni, it's a bit more relaxed.
> (French, Communication and media, TAFE, NSW)

For many students, a VET credential is significantly less valued in their home country than a university degree. Therefore, their parents commonly expect them to obtain a higher education qualification or they themselves wish to do so. Student interviewees provided a number of reasons why they used VET as a pathway to higher

education. For the majority of this group, VET is their preferred choice because they can not afford the fees that universities charge and they hope their VET qualifications will enable them to gain a job that will generate the income they need to work their way through university. Others could not meet the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) requirement for university entrance and viewed the VET course as a means to improve their English and/or earn university entrance by completing a course that is taught in English.

Conclusion

Numerous articles in the media and publications by some academics have constructed the image of international VET students as 'PR hunters', which is a term that risks having serious negative impact on their learning. At the same time international students' interest in the acquisition of skills, their dream for professional advancement and their aspiration for self-transformation have been largely ignored in recent media as well as scholarly discussions of international VET students. The popularisation of these students as 'PR hunters' who have little or no interest in receiving a high quality education has also imposed and/or self-imposed serious costs on the sector itself. Without the protectionism provided by the migration-education link, the sector will find it difficult to market courses that have been devalued and stereotyped as low quality. In the context created by the 2010 amendments to the migration regulations, the sector will need to build an image that is based on an ability to provide a high quality learning experience and consciously address destructive ways of conceptualising international students.

As excerpts from the interviews with VET international students provided in this paper have revealed, these students are vibrant and mobile people who act on their dreams for the future and are motivated by multiple, differing and shifting aims. Their imagining

about who they are in the future and about potential future opportunities has motivated them to invest in VET courses and perhaps to be prepared to negotiate the complexities arising from studying in an unfamiliar environment and in a language that is not their native tongue. Consequently, the VET sector has a responsibility to ensure that it rebuilds its image and more fully develops its capacity to assist these students to realise their full potential in productive and fulfilling ways, to be engaged in an effective learning environment and to realise their dreams. That is, VET programs will need to become less migration-dependent and focus more on relevance to international students from different countries and capacity to accommodate the diverse study purposes of students. A broader VET program that is able to respond to a wide range of international students' instrumental and intrinsic motives will enable the VET sector to play a more sustainable role in global education exports. An emphasis on the adaptation of the content of the VET program, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices that can facilitate international students' engagement in learning and ensure high quality outcomes is needed.

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Occupational mobility in Queensland's Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors

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Current trends in workforce development indicate the movement of workers within and across occupations to be the norm. In 2009, only one in three vocational education and training (VET) graduates in Australia ended up working in an occupation for which they were trained. This implies that VET enhances the employability of its graduates by equipping them with the knowledge and competencies to work in different occupations and sectors. This paper presents findings from a government-funded study that examined the occupational mobility of selected associate professional and trades occupations within the Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors in Queensland. The study surveyed enrolled nurses and related workers, motor mechanics and civil construction workers to analyse their patterns of occupational mobility, future work intentions, reasons for taking and leaving work, and the factors influencing them to leave or remain in their occupations.

This paper also discusses the implications of findings for the training of workers in these sectors and more generally.
Keywords:
Occupational mobility; vocational education and training; aged care; automotive; civil construction; associate professionals; trades

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Introduction

In 2009, only one in three vocational education and training (VET) graduates in Australia ended up working in an occupation for which they were trained (NCVER 2010a). This implies that the flexibility of VET programs enhances the employability of its graduates by providing them with the knowledge and competencies to work in different occupations and sectors. Occupational mobility is an opportunity for workers to expand the diversity of work experiences and skills development. It also enhances the quality of Australia's globally competitive labour force. Given this, it could be detrimental to individual and workforce capability building to control or constrain the mobility of workers across occupations and sectors. For instance, preventing resources from flowing to the sectors where returns are highest could result in losses to both the individual and society. However, occupational mobility can lead to high turnover of skilled workers, skill shortages in occupations left by workers, higher costs for business and lower investment in training by employers.

Government departments focusing on workforce development, particularly through VET, must be able to respond to the impact of workforce transitions to inform efficient planning, purchase and delivery of VET. However, the links between VET and occupational mobility are complex, and research on the effect of training on mobility in Australia is limited to studies such as the 2004 study by Shah and Burke that stressed the importance of 'identifying individuals and labour market segments in need of training resources'

(p. 2). In response to these factors, the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (now the Queensland Department of Education and Training) funded a study to explore occupational mobility in a way that could inform the development of strategies to assist or manage the process of mobility. This paper will firstly present key findings from the study and then discuss the implications of findings for the training of workers in the Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors, and more generally.

The concept of occupational mobility

In Australia, the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) classifies occupation groups. Occupational mobility refers to a change in occupation within or between major occupation groups in the last 12 months (ABS 2007a: 16). The model of occupational attainment identified by ASCO tends to analyse occupational mobility in terms of upward versus downward movement; that is, a move to another occupation at a higher skill level as a 'progressive move', and a move from one occupation to another occupation at a lower skill level as a 'regressive move'. An alternative formulation, pioneered by Shaw (1987) and Harper (1995), and implemented in the study, is to compare those who move with those who stay, and to make the simplifying assumption that individuals move as part of a process of human capital accumulation. Therefore, while the study also examined the extent of progressive mobility, it used the same approach as Shah and Burke (2004) by focusing on occupational mobility in terms of moving versus staying. Table 1 differentiates between 'movers' and 'stayers' in order to show movements that represent and do not represent occupational mobility. People who voluntarily or involuntarily became unemployed or left the labour force in the last 12 months are not 'movers' or 'stayers'.

Table 1: 'Movers' versus 'Stayers'

Movement by 4-digit occupation, ASCO major group and employer	**Mover or Stayer**
Stayed in the same 4-digit occupation for 12 months or more: *Same* ASCO major group and *Same/different* employer	Stayer
Moved to a different 4-digit occupation sometime in the last 12 months: *Same* ASCO major group and *Same/different* employer	Mover
Moved to a different 4-digit occupation sometime in the last 12 months: *Different* ASCO major group and *Same/different* employer	Mover
Became unemployed in the last 12 months	Neither
Left the labour force in the last 12 months	Neither

Method

The study examined the occupational mobility of selected associate professional and trades occupations from the Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors in Queensland. The research focused on three occupational groups: enrolled nurses, motor mechanics and civil construction workers—occupations experiencing ongoing skills shortages (DEEWR 2010). To supplement the small number of enrolled nurses working in Queensland, estimated to be 2,946 for all sectors combined (ABS 2007b), the sample included assistants in nursing (AINs)/nursing assistants, personal care assistants and registered nurses who were working in the Aged Care sector. Considering the diversity of the civil construction workforce, the sample included civil engineering associate professionals, plant operators, labourers and other civil construction workers, including tradespersons.

The research set out to test a set of hypotheses relating to the following research questions:

1. What factors influence enrolled nurses and related workers, motor mechanics and civil construction workers in the Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors, respectively, to leave or remain in their occupations?

   Research question 1 also sought answers to the following questions:

   - What are the skills and attributes of these skilled workers?
   - To what extent does training contribute to skilled workers moving to these occupations?
   - To what extent do poor wages and conditions (or other factors) contribute to skilled workers moving to any of these occupations?
2. To what extent are the findings generated from the above questions applicable to skilled workers in other occupations and industry sectors?
3. What factors might be influential in managing occupational mobility?

The main data collection method was a survey consisting of questions related to demographic characteristics, skills and attributes, career development, wages and workplace conditions, and reasons for taking work with an employer and leaving an employer. The survey included questions that represent four measures of occupational mobility: *Current occupation same as previous occupation*; *Current industry same as previous industry*; *Changed job with current employer* (a proxy for progressive mobility); and *Transferred between locations while with current employer* (a proxy for progressive mobility). Due to the difficulties in accessing workers who had left their occupations, the survey also included questions to determine the future mobility

intentions of participants, generating the measures of *Intention to leave current employer in new future (but not retire)*; *Intention to stay in same occupation (next job)*; and *Intention to stay in same industry (next job).*

The study used a single-stage cluster sampling approach within each of the industry / occupation strata. Simple random sample of clusters was selected from each stratum, and data collected from every unit in the sampled clusters, i.e. Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction. The study attracted 624 survey returns, which included 70 returns from the pilot study and 554 returns from the main study. Table 2 provides a breakdown of returns by occupation for the main study, showing 307 returns from the Aged Care sector, 130 returns from the Automotive sector and 117 returns from the Civil Construction sector. Because employee response rates for the Automotive survey and Civil Construction survey were low, estimates for motor mechanics and civil construction workers had higher standard errors than estimates for workers from the Aged Care sector. The project team conducted descriptive analyses to examine the demographic and workforce information of the participants. In order to identify the factors that might influence occupational mobility, the project team conducted inferential analyses using binary logistic regression to examine the associations between occupational mobility and a range of demographic and other variables of interest.

Table 2: Participants by sector and occupation, main study

Sector	Occupation	n	% of sector
Aged Care	Enrolled nurses/enrolled endorsed nurses	42	13.7
	Assistants in Nursing (AINs)/nursing assistants	88	28.7
	Personal care assistants	59	19.2
	Registered nurses	95	30.9
	Other	23	7.5
	Missing	0	
	Total Aged Care	**307**	**100**
Automotive	Motor mechanics	109	83.8
	Other	20	15.4
	Missing	1	0.8
	Total Automotive	**130**	**100**
Civil Construction	Labourers	28	23.9
	Plant operators	10	8.5
	Civil engineering associate professionals	14	12.0
	Other Civil Construction workers (tradespersons)	32	27.4
	Other	28	23.9
	Missing	5	4.3
	Total Civil Construction	**117**	**100**
Total participants (N)		554	

Findings

Review of existing studies on occupational mobility

The study reviewed nine existing studies to identify factors found to influence occupational mobility that should be considered as part of the development of the survey instrument. These studies were as follows:

- Sommers and Eck (1977) analysed workforce status and occupational data from the US Census of Population to measure changes in work status and occupations between 1965 and 1970. They found the level of occupational mobility is linked to an individual's investment in education and training, incentives for staying in an occupation, and age, i.e. younger people are more mobile because they tend to test their likes and dislikes and prepare themselves for career commitment (p. 6).
- Shaw (1987) used changes in the 3-digit coding of occupations to identify shifts in the employment of 1,450 participants from England's National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men. She found that occupational change declines with age and the increasing length of stay in a particular occupation. She also found that employers who invest in the development of the skills of their workers may lead to workers with lower levels of skills and knowledge moving into occupations requiring higher levels of skills and knowledge, e.g. from labourer to tradesperson.
- Sicherman (1991) analysed the 1976 and 1978 waves of the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics data for males aged between 18 and 60 years. He concluded that over-educated workers have higher rates of firm and occupational mobility because they work in occupations that demand less schooling than they actually possess and represent a bad job match.

- Harper (1995) analysed data from approximately 20,000 employed or self-employed males, aged 16 to 43 years of age in 1974, drawn from the National Training Survey in England. He found that individuals are more likely to quit occupations if the yield (return on investment) is relatively great, their skills are transferable, the cost of occupational mobility is low, and they have previously quit occupations.
- Dolton and Kidd (1998) analysed data from a 1980 cohort of 2,291 male UK graduates from the Department of Employment survey. They found individuals with higher levels of investment in firm-based capital were more likely to remain in a firm with or without promotion, and individuals with occupationally specific or general human capital were more likely to change jobs or occupations.
- Tomkins and Twomey (2000) analysed data from England's New Earnings Panel Dataset to investigate occupational mobility between 1990 and 1994. They identified factors that promote or constrain mobility, such as age, ease of movement from home to work, qualifications, geographical location, wages, family responsibilities, and macroeconomic conditions that can change the supply of and demand for jobs in the labour market, to which workers may or may not respond.
- Shah and Burke (2004) analysed unpublished data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Mobility survey for 2002 to estimate job and occupational mobility in terms of demographic, educational and labour market variables. They found that workers with higher-level qualifications are less mobile because their chances of re-employment in the same major occupation group are higher; and factors such as marital status, location, age and employment status influence occupational mobility. In addition, they found good 'worker-job' and 'worker-firm' matches increase the probability of employers investing in training, thereby contributing to a lower turnover of workers.

- Shniper (2005) compared occupational mobility data of 60,000 households collected as a supplement to the January 2004 US Current Population Survey (CPS) with mobility data collected in earlier CPS supplements. She found that occupational mobility rates are influenced by occupation type, industry of employment and age, i.e. older people have invested more time in education and training and have built more experience in an occupation (p.30).
- Rubb (2006) analysed data from various annual demographic supplements of the March 1995 to March 2001 US Current Population Surveys (CPS) for the years 1994 to 2000. He examined the impact of educational mismatches on earnings and occupational mobility to conclude that over-educated workers achieve greater upward occupational mobility and under-educated workers achieve lower upward occupational mobility.

Review of the above studies enabled the project team to identify key factors that influence occupational mobility as described below and summarised in Table 3:

- Mobility declines with age. Young people are most likely to change occupations, experiencing 'intense job shopping and job search activities' early in their careers (Shah 2009: 11).
- The longer workers stay in a particular occupation, the less likely they are to change occupations.
- Workers with lower levels of skills and knowledge (e.g. sales and service workers) are significantly more likely to change occupations than workers with higher levels of skills and knowledge (e.g. professionals) who tend to 'make a job-to-job change in the same occupation' (Shah 2009: 14).
- Workers in industries such as accommodation, hospitality, retail trade, communication services and mining are most likely to change occupations, due to some extent to the large number of young people working in these industries and the seasonal nature of some of these industries.

- Males are more likely than females to move into different, higher paid occupations, which Tomkins and Twomey (2000) attribute to differences in preferences and opportunities for occupational movements.
- Non-married workers, part-time workers and workers from non-metropolitan areas experience higher levels of occupational mobility.
- Workers with higher levels of investment in firm-based human capital (i.e. employed in firms where the level of training is high) experience lower levels of occupational mobility.
- Workers are most likely to change occupations when demand for other occupations is high. They may remain in their current occupation or be forced to change occupations during periods of high unemployment to ensure job security.

Table 3: Summary of factors that influence occupational mobility

Demographic characteristics	**Employment**
• Age • Gender • Ethnicity (including English proficiency) • Income • Household type • Marital status • Geographic location	• Industry • Occupation • Full-time, part-time or self-employment • Employment status between occupations • Entry into the workforce • Private or public sector employment • Voluntary quit or involuntary quit from previous job • Number of previous moves between occupations • Years of experience in occupation/ workforce • Wages • Non-wage conditions (work conditions) • Unionisation
Education & training	**Other**
• Qualifications • Level of specialised training	• Macroeconomic conditions

Patterns of occupational mobility in Australia

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Labour Mobility survey indicated that 602,900 people who were working at the end of February 2010 had changed their occupations in the last 12 months. Just over 70% of these people had been with their current employer for less than 12 months. A greater number of males (323,100) than females (279,900) had changed occupations. Similar to some of the previous studies, people employed in occupations requiring lower levels

of skills and knowledge were more likely to change occupations. For example, 56% of sales workers who had changed employers in the last 12 months had also changed occupations, compared with 23% of professionals and 29% of technicians and trades workers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of people who had been with their employer for less than 12 months and who had changed their occupation, February 2010

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010)

The national *Job Outlook* site provides data on the internet vacancy level, job prospects and gross replacement rate (i.e. proportion of workers leaving an occupation and needing to be replaced) for different occupations (Australian Government 2010). For motor mechanics, the internet vacancy level is high, job prospects are good, and the gross replacement rate of 9.6% is below the average for all occupations of 13.1% (see Table 4), indicating a shortage of motor mechanics despite lower levels of occupational mobility.

The occupations of labourers (17.4%), nursing support and personal care workers (14.2%) and other mobile plant operators (14.5%) recorded gross replacement rates above the average.

Table 4: Factors that influence occupational mobility

Occupation	Internet vacancy level	Job prospects	Gross replacement rate (%)
Enrolled and mother craft nurses	Moderate	Good	10.5
Nursing support and personal care workers	Moderate	Good	14.2
Motor mechanics	High	Good	9.6
Building & plumbing labourers	Moderate	Average	17.4
Civil engineering draftspersons & technicians	Very high	Good	9.3
Other mobile plant operators	High	Average	14.5
Average gross replacement rate			13.1

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) collects data on the destinations of existing workers and new workers approximately nine months after completing an apprenticeship or traineeship (NCVER 2010b). These data provide insights into the possibility of existing workers experiencing progressive mobility by moving into occupations that require higher levels of skills and knowledge. The results are positive, with just over 80% of existing workers employed in occupations for which they were trained compared with 66.1% of new workers.

Profiles of study participants

Participants from the Aged Care sector were more likely than participants from the other two sectors to be older, female, living in a 'couple-only' household, holding a diploma level qualification or higher, undertaking self-funded work-related study/training, working fewer hours each week, working in a non-profit and/or large organisation, employed for a longer period of time, and earning an average of $20 an hour. Only 8.5% of participants were aged 30 years or younger. The main differences between enrolled nurses and other participants from the Aged Care sector were that they were older, employed for a longer period of time, working fewer hours each week and earning a higher hourly rate. Around 67% of the participants from the Aged Care sector had qualifications relevant to their occupation.

Participants from the Automotive sector were more likely than participants from the other two sectors to be younger, single, enrolled in a work-related certificate course, undertaking employer-funded studies away from the workplace, working in a business and/or small to medium-sized organisation and earning an average of $14 an hour. As motor mechanics accounted for 83.8% of participants from the Automotive sector, key findings for these participants were similar to findings for the Automotive sector as a whole. Almost 70% of motor mechanics had qualifications relevant to their occupation.

Participants from the Civil Construction sector were more likely to be self-employed, working in a business and/or large organisation, working longer hours, paid at above the award rate, employed by their current employer for a shorter period of time, and earning a higher income. Labourers were more likely than other participants from the Civil Construction sector to be single, have lower levels of English proficiency, have no non-school qualifications (35.7% had no qualifications), and less likely to be involved in work-related education and training. There was not a lot of difference in the

hourly rates of pay, ranging from an average of $25.10 an hour for labourers to an average of $28.56 an hour for civil engineering associate professionals. Almost half (48.7%) of the participants had qualifications relevant to their occupation, and the majority of Other Civil Construction workers (96%) and all of the civil engineering associate professionals (100%) had qualifications relevant to their occupation.

Participants' patterns of occupational mobility

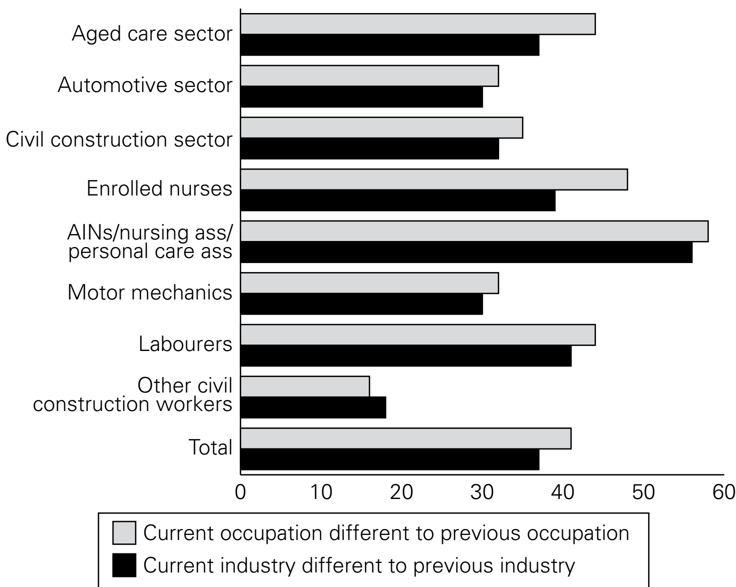
Figure 2 and Table 5 show participants from the Aged Care sector were more likely than participants from the other two sectors to work in an occupation and industry that were different from their previous occupation (46.9%) and industry (38.1%). Enrolled nurses indicated lower levels of occupational mobility and AINs/nursing assistants and personal care assistants indicated higher levels of occupational mobility. Participants from the Aged Care sector who had changed occupations had mainly worked in related occupations such as community carer, cleaner/domestic, kitchen hand, and disability services worker.

Participants from the Automotive sector were less likely than participants from the other two sectors to work in an occupation and industry that were different from their previous occupation (30.8%) and industry (28.5%). Participants who reported previously working in a different occupation worked in a range of occupations, some of which were related to their current occupation such as diesel mechanic, hydraulic fitter and car detailer.

Labourers were more likely than other participants from the **Civil Construction sector** to work in an occupation and industry that were different from their previous occupation (46.4%) and industry (39.3%). Other Civil Construction workers (e.g. tradespersons) indicated low levels of occupational mobility, with only 12.5% working in an occupation that was different from their previous occupation

and 15.6% working in an industry that was different from their previous industry of employment. Those participants who reported previously working in a different occupation mainly worked in related occupations such as carpenter, mechanic, drainer operator and boat builder.

Figure 2: Percentage of participants working in different occupations and industries



Participants also indicated their Intention to stay in same occupation (next job), Intention to stay in same industry (next job), and Intention to leave their current employer in new future (but not retire). As shown in Figure 3, participants from the Civil Construction sector (except labourers) were significantly less likely than participants from the other two sectors to indicate an intention to change their occupation (12%) and industry of employment (9.4%). Participants from the Aged Care sector (23.8%) were more likely than participants

from the Automotive sector (20%) and Civil Construction sector (17.9%) to indicate an intention to leave their current employer in the near future.

Findings from the two proxy measures of progressive mobility—Changed jobs while with current employer and Transferred between locations with current employer—suggest that a relatively small number of participants had moved into occupations requiring higher levels of skills and knowledge. Only 13.5% had changed occupations while with their current employer and 14.8% had transferred between locations with their current employer. Registered nurses and Other Civil Construction workers were more likely than personal care attendants, enrolled nurses, motor mechanics, and labourers to have changed occupations or been transferred between locations while with their current employer.

Figure 3: Intention to leave occupation, industry and current employer

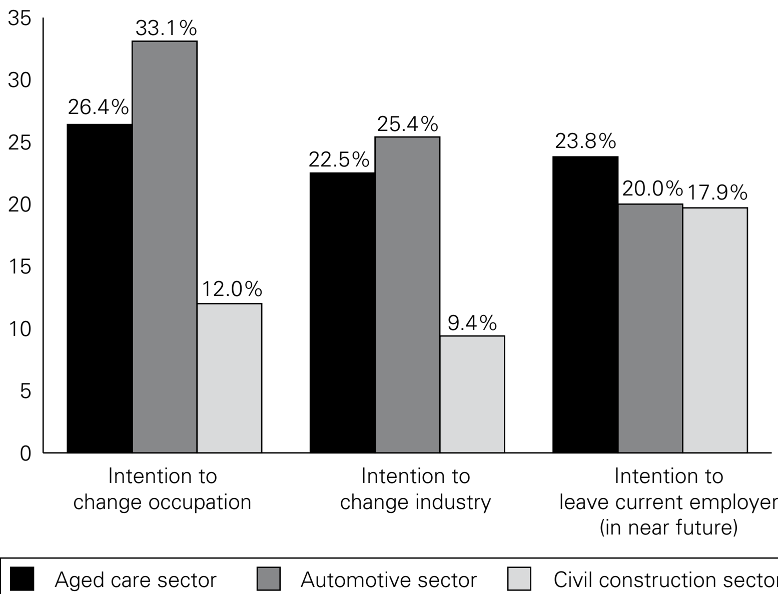


Table 5: Patterns of occupational mobility

Occupational mobility measure	No		Yes		Missing		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N
Current occupation same as previous occupation							
Aged Care	144	46.9	135	44.0	28	9.1	307
Automotive	40	30.8	57	43.8	33	25.4	130
Civil Construction	39	33.3	64	54.7	14	12.0	117
Total	223	40.3	256	46.2	75	13.5	554
Current industry same as previous industry							
Aged Care	117	38.1	160	52.1	30	9.8	307
Automotive	37	28.5	57	43.8	36	27.7	130
Civil Construction	36	30.8	65	55.6	16	13.7	117
Total	190	34.3	282	50.9	82	14.8	554
Changed jobs while with current employer							
Aged Care	216	70.4	44	14.3	47	15.3	307
Automotive	79	60.8	12	9.2	39	30.0	130
Civil Construction	71	60.7	19	16.2	27	23.1	117
Total	366	66.1	75	13.5	113	20.4	554
Transferred between locations with current employer							
Aged Care	219	71.3	38	12.4	50	16.3	307
Automotive	81	62.3	12	9.2	37	28.5	130
Civil Construction	58	49.6	32	27.4	27	23.1	117
Total	358	64.6	82	14.8	114	20.6	554

Occupational mobility measure	No		Yes		Missing		Total
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**N**
Intention to leave current employer in the near future (but not to retire)							
Aged Care	226	73.6	73	23.8	8	2.6	307
Automotive	98	75.4	26	20.0	6	4.6	130
Civil Construction	81	69.2	21	18.0	15	12.8	117
Total	405	73.1	120	21.7	29	5.2	554
Intention to stay in same occupation (next employer)							
Aged Care	81	26.4	112	36.5	114	37.1	307
Automotive	43	33.1	51	39.2	36	27.7	130
Civil Construction	14	12.0	68	58.1	35	29.9	117
Total	138	24.9	231	41.7	185	33.4	554
Intention to stay in same industry (next employer)							
Aged Care	69	22.5	152	49.5	86	28.0	307
Automotive	33	25.4	69	53.1	28	21.5	130
Civil Construction	11	9.4	75	64.1	31	26.5	117
Total	113	20.4	296	53.4	145	26.2	554

Reasons why participants take and leave work

When *taking work with an employer*, stayers were highly influenced by the reasons of 'treated with respect', 'occupation is secure into the future' and 'can apply and develop skills at work'. Movers were highly influenced by the reasons of 'enjoy tasks undertaken', 'treated with respect' and 'hours of work predictable'. When *leaving an employer*, stayers were highly influenced by the reasons of 'family and personal reasons', 'higher salary elsewhere' and 'occupation advancement elsewhere'. Movers were highly influenced by the reasons of 'leaving to retire', 'financial difficulties' and 'leaving to study'.

By sector, participants from the Aged Care sector were highly influenced by the reasons of 'enjoy tasks undertaken' and 'flexible employment' when *taking work with an employer*, and 'family and personal reasons' when *leaving an employer*. Participants from the Automotive sector and Civil Construction sector tended to take work with an employer and leave an employer for income-related reasons. The reason of 'Occupation is secure into the future' was also important to stayers in the Automotive sector.

Factors influencing occupational mobility

Research question 1 enquired into the factors that influence enrolled nurses and related workers, motor mechanics and civil constructions workers in the Age Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors respectively to stay in or leave their occupations. It also enquired into the factors that influence moves into occupations requiring higher levels of skills and qualifications (i.e. progressive mobility). Research question 2 enquired into the extent to which findings are applicable to skilled workers in other occupations and sectors. Key findings from the analysis of survey data are as follows:

- Factors associated with a *higher likelihood* of occupational mobility for participants combined were 'marital status of never married, 'engaged in work-related certificate', 'previous occupation temporary/casual' and 'penalty rates/bonuses'.
- Factors associated with a *lower likelihood* of occupational mobility for participants combined were 'age', 'educational attainment of part certificate', 'hours worked', 'years worked', 'years worked after returning to the workforce', 'pay above award with current employer' and 'promotional opportunities/higher income/ sufficient income with current employer'.
- Participants from the Aged Care sector had a *higher likelihood* of occupational mobility and participants from the Civil Construction sector had a *lower likelihood* of occupational mobility.

- No variables/factors were associated with a *higher likelihood* of progressive mobility as indicated by the proxy measures of Changed job with current employer and Transferred between locations while with current employer.
- Factors associated with a *lower likelihood* of progressive mobility were 'age', 'previously worked for a large organisation', 'number of employers in the last two years', 'previously self-employed', 'promotional opportunities', 'net personal income', 'left previous occupation for higher salary' and 'hours worked'.

Implications for training

This paper so far has focused on mobility patterns of study participants, their future work intentions, their reasons for taking work and leaving work, and the factors found to influence them to leave or remain in their occupations. This section of the paper will discuss the implications of the findings for the training of workers in the three sectors and more generally.

General implications

For some time, governments in Australia have invested in initiatives to increase the number of young people who complete Certificate III completions (especially in trades qualifications); increase the number of un-qualified, under-qualified and older workers participating in VET; and increase the number of people with higher level qualifications. Recent Commonwealth Government initiatives contributing to these aims include extending the *Apprenticeship Kickstart* scheme by 22,500 trade apprenticeships; creating 39,000 additional training places for industries suffering shortages as part of the new *Critical Skills Investment Fund*; and in partnership with industry, funding 11,000 extra training places for existing workers as part of its *Enterprise-Based Productivity Places Program* (Gillard & Swan 2010; Gillard 2010). The *Queensland Skills Plan 2008* includes a range of short- and long-term initiatives to alleviate skill shortages

at all occupational levels by focusing on five key areas: developing the skills of existing workers and apprentices; engaging unemployed and under-employed people; improving youth transitions to enhance education, training and employment outcomes; building the capacity of the Queensland VET sector; and building bridges to the profession (DETA 2008). Both the State and Commonwealth Governments have recently set up dedicated bodies, known respectively as Skills Queensland and Skills Australia, to assess industry skills needs, direct government investments in training and recommend reforms to the VET system.

Training at the Certificate III level accounted for two-thirds of all commencements for the year ending March 2010 and the training of young people aged 19 years and under accounted for 40% of all commencements in this period (NCVER 2010d). Similar to previous studies, the study found the factors of age, marital status and qualifications influence mobility. These findings, together with attrition rate data from the NCVER (2010d), indicate that young, single apprentices and trainees engaged in work-related certificate courses are most likely to leave their jobs and change occupations—putting at risk the future supply of qualified workers in occupations where demand is high. The ongoing challenge for governments is how best to assist young people to complete Certificate III qualifications, particularly technical and trades qualifications. ABS labour mobility data and findings from this study indicate that a high proportion of qualified technicians and trades workers remain in the occupation they were trained for. Studies by Smith, Oczkowski and Selby Smith (2008) and Richardson (2004) indicate that employers play a significant role in ensuring that young apprentices and trainees complete Certificate III qualifications by creating a ‘learning culture’ that supports both on-the-job training and informal learning, provides opportunities for advancement and growth, and recognises skills and strengths (Smith *et al.* 2008: 39). Changing the attitudes of students who are potential apprentices and trainees is also a

challenge. Students identified several perceived disincentives to entering an apprenticeship, many of which are reasons why young people drop out of training: low rates of pay, poor work conditions, unsuitable working hours, inadequate training arrangements, and the scarcity of opportunities for apprenticeships (especially in rural areas) (Misko, Nguynen & Saunders 2007: 19).

Workers with high levels of skills and knowledge tend to have lower levels of occupational mobility and are more likely to experience progressive mobility. In addition, the attrition rate for apprenticeships and traineeships leading to professional occupations at 19.3% in 2009 was significantly lower than the overall attrition rate of 38.8% (NCVER 2010e). These findings confirm the importance of government initiatives targeting higher-level VET qualifications. However, Foster, Delaney, Bateman and Dyson (2007) found that many employers do not understand the role and value of higher-level qualifications, which explains to some extent why enrolments in diplomas, associate degrees and advanced diplomas combined accounted for only 15% of VET qualifications in 2009 (NCVER 2010).

As already stated, 'age' and 'years worked' are key factors associated with lower levels of occupational mobility, with older participants less likely than younger workers to change occupations. On the positive side, these factors may lead to older, highly skilled workers remaining in occupations in high demand. On the negative side, these workers may be reluctant to change occupations despite a fall in demand, which could result in their skills becoming obsolete. Those older workers who need training to address skills gaps may face barriers to participation, such as negative employer attitudes, lack of information about options, work and family commitments, financial difficulties, and their own attitudes to participation—including doubts about their ability to succeed (Ferrier, Burke & Selby Smith 2008). As a result, employers may overlook them for training programs and career

opportunities, despite their experience and knowledge, maturity, strong commitment and work ethic, and reliability (CDAA 2010).

The review of existing studies on occupational mobility indicated that higher levels of firm-based investment in human capital reduces occupational mobility. Given that many participants indicated ‘apply and develop skills at work’ as a main reason for taking work with an employer, it is a concern that almost 70% of all participants and 22.7% of participants aged 19 years or under were not engaged in any work-related study/training at the time of the survey. These results are not surprising, considering the Mawer and Jackson (2005) study that involved 12 case studies of small to medium enterprises in the retail, manufacturing, and building and construction industries. They concluded that employers value experience and skills rather than accredited training, lack knowledge of the format VET system, use accredited training mainly to meet mandated requirements, and train existing workers when specific needs arise (pp. 5–6).

This study confirmed workers with lower levels of skills and knowledge experience higher levels of occupational mobility. Although the analysis of survey data did not show any association between ‘no post-school qualifications’ and occupational mobility, the high rate of mobility of AINs/nursing assistants (62.7% had changed occupations), personal care attendants (54.5%) and labourers (46.4%) supports this finding. Lack of post-school qualifications limits opportunities to experience progressive mobility. For example, almost 60% of motor mechanics with no post-school qualifications remained in the same occupation. Shaw (1987) recommended greater investment by employers in training to increase the likelihood of progressive mobility of people with low levels of educational attainment, skills and wages. However, Mawer and Jackson (2005) found that employers do not perceive a high need for training for lower skilled workers. Skills Australia’s 2010 discussion paper,

Creating a future direction for Australian vocational education and training, called on employers to better utilise the skills of workers 'by creating better job design, by better management and by better matching of skills to business strategy or organisational development' (p. 10).

Aged care sector

The clientele of the Aged Care sector is growing, changing and requiring higher-level care. The number of Australians aged 85 years and over is estimated to increase from 400,000 in 2010 to 1.8 million by 2050 (Treasury 2010). The National Health and Hospital Reform Commission predicted that aged care places must at least double by 2030 to meet projected demand (Productivity Commission 2010: 1). The Productivity Commission's issues paper, *Caring for older Australians*, stated that aged care services will become more diverse because of changing patterns of disease among the aged, growing and substantial affluence among older Australians, increasing diversity among older Australians in preferences and expectations, and improvements in care technologies (2010: 1).

Expanding the size, skills and qualifications of the workforce is essential to meeting the above challenges in a complex, labour-intensive sector. In its 2008 Research Report, *Trends in Aged Care services: Some implications*, the Productivity Commission found that pay rates, workloads, workforce culture, scope of practice, opportunities for training and career development, and changing consumer needs and preferences are affecting the recruitment and retention of workers. To some extent, these factors are responsible for personal carers accounting for a significant share of the direct residential workforce (63.6% in 2007) because registered and enrolled nurses prefer to work in other sectors. Participants involved in this study also identified a number of barriers to training and career pathways in the Aged Care sector:

- a social hierarchy from registered nurse, to enrolled nurse, to AIN
- the scope of practice, accountability and valuing of different nursing roles
- lack of understanding of the qualifications framework and career pathways
- lack of exposure to the Aged Care sector, through for example, work experience
- higher expectations of the different nursing roles without tangible rewards.

Similar to the Productivity Commission (2008), this study described a typical employee in the Aged Care sector as female, older than other employees and working shorter hours. Average weekly income of only $624 and reasons for taking and leaving work (such as 'enjoy tasks undertaken', 'flexible employment' and 'family and personal reasons') indicate money is not a key motivator within the Aged Care sector. Different intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are operating in this culture driven by age, gender and work-life balance. These same motivators might not attract the next generation of workers, as they will be part of a new mindset that will perhaps require a more clearly defined training and qualification pathway. Only 26 of the 307 participants in this study were aged 30 years or younger. Many of these participants were highly motivated by income-related reasons and the opportunity to 'apply and develop skills at work'—two key issues affecting the ability of the sector to attract and retain workers.

Another concern is the finding from this study that working in the Aged Care sector is associated with higher levels of occupational mobility. This finding is mainly due to the large number of participants working as AINs/nursing assistants and personal care assistants (almost 50% of the sample) who indicated higher levels of mobility than other participants from the sector. Around one-quarter of all participants in the Aged Care sector indicated they would change occupations (26.4%) and industry of employment (22.5%)

when next employed and leave their current employer in the near future (23.8%).

The above figures are not good news for Queensland Government initiatives that aim to attract and retain workers. These initiatives include the *Health Workforce Skills Capacity Development Program*, *Nursing Work/Study Pathways Program* and *Queensland Health Skills Formation Strategy,* which aim to identify barriers to industry development, determine workforce needs and solutions, and explore the integration of skills and work policy across the health industry (Health and Community Services Workforce Council 2006, 2008).

Automotive sector

Rapid technological change and associated 'innovation intensity', the ageing workforce, short-shelf life of skills, increasing customer expectations, competition for workers from other sectors, and poor public image (i.e. poorly paid, hard work, dirty and little prospect for advancement) are ongoing issues facing the Automotive sector (DET 2006, QASA 2007a, QASA 2009). Workers require constant up-skilling in a range of areas including engine management systems, emissions control, vehicle safety systems, occupational health and safety and GPS navigation as well in the areas of soft skills, business management skills and green skills. The Queensland Department of Education and Training (2009) predicts the future trend to alternative fuel vehicles, hybrid and ultimate fuel cell technology will significantly affect the training requirements of the sector and training content delivered to apprentices. The government has recognised the importance of the sector by identifying it as one of the 17 skilling priority areas, and investing $30 million in apprenticeships and traineeships and other vocational training in 2009/2010.

Employers are also under increasing pressure to invest further in the training of employees, particularly at higher qualification levels (QASA 2009:22). Some employees work in large, franchised

dealerships with access to modern technologies, clean safe environments, and up-to-date specialised training provided by the employer. Often large employers have career structures and human resources practices in place that enable career progression as well as career change within the same firm. Such firms are also able to offer greater flexibility to workers, thus enhancing retention. However, the sector is predominantly composed of small businesses, with less access to specialised training and up-to-date technologies, smaller economies of scale, and usually less training opportunities for employees (QASA 2007b). This study found that almost two-thirds of participants were working in small and medium businesses. The majority of participants (85.7%) working in small businesses were not undertaking any work-related training compared with 62.8% of participants working in large businesses with over 100 employees. Overall, around 20% of participants from the sector did not have any post-school qualifications.

One-third (33.1%) of participants from the Automotive sector indicated they would leave their occupation when they next changed employers. As well as quite low levels of work-related training described above, other key factors identified in this study that may encourage them to leave their occupation were low pay rates (e.g. average weekly income of $582), and the high number of participants aged between the 16 and 25 years and undertaking work-related certificates. Although some participants indicated they would remain in their occupation because it was 'secure into the future', many others were motivated to stay and leave work for income-related reasons.

Civil Construction sector

Participants from the Civil Construction sector work in busy worksites within a complex, dynamic, unpredictable and intensely competitive industry sector. Training is constrained by a sector dominated by subcontracting and casual employment. Workers

are increasingly required to have skills in project management, business skills, customer service and new technologies. In the case of new technologies, some workers need specialist knowledge on new construction materials and skills in computer-based applications in design, procurement, communication and management. Workers also need to be aware of occupational health and safety, regulatory and licensing requirements that are relevant to their jobs (Mawer & Jackson 2005, CPSISC 2006).

The single biggest issue facing the Construction sector worldwide has been chronic skills shortages. Despite the Global Financial Crisis, strong demand for skilled workers in Queensland is likely to continue for some time given major investments in infrastructure projects as part of the Queensland Government's $82 billion *South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2007–2026* and the Federal Government's *Nation Building and Occupations Plan*. More recently, Queensland's *Coal Steam Gas (CSG) to Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Industry Workforce Plan (Construction Phase)* estimated a need for 9,000 workers, with workers from the Heavy & Civil Engineering Construction subsector identified as the best equipped to work in construction roles (Construction Skills Queensland 2010). Strong demand for workers explains to some extent why participants indicated an average income of $1,201 a week (the highest of all three sectors), and except in the case of labourers, why participants indicated lower levels of occupational mobility than participants from the other two sectors.

The Queensland Government has made a significant investment in initiatives to attract, train and retain new entrants and existing workers in the Civil Construction sector. As part of its first (2006) *Queensland Skills Plan*, the Queensland Government launched the $1 million *Civil Infrastructure Skills Formation Strategy* to encourage joint responsibility for training and skills development. It also launched the *Civil Infrastructure Vocational Education and*

Training Action Plan in October 2007, which included an estimate of a need for over 34,000 new workers (Construction Skills Queensland and Queensland Department of Education 2007). The *Queensland Skills Plan 2008* includes further initiatives, such as the *Innovative Skilling Partnerships Program—Engineering and Construction*, dual trade opportunities in a number of trades, and developing civil school-based programs.

This study found that workers in the sector vary in terms of their occupations, qualifications, participation in work-related training, employment type (business, self-employed) and mobility patterns. What participants seem to have in common is working for income-related reasons. This can result in skilled workers moving into related and unrelated occupations with higher wages, as well as workers withdrawing from training or not pursing training because they can secure higher wages without having the necessary qualifications and training. Almost 30% of participants did not have any post-school qualifications and over 80% of participants did not report any work-related study/training. As demand for workers and high wages are likely to continue for some time, many unqualified or under-qualified workers may not take advantage of government incentives to participate in training.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present key findings from a government-funded study that examined the occupational mobility of enrolled nurses and related workers, motors mechanics and civil construction workers from Queensland's Aged Care, Automotive and Civil Construction sectors, respectively. The study involved identifying participants' mobility patterns of study participants, their future work intentions, their reasons for taking work and leaving work, and the factors found to influence them to leave or remain in their occupations.

The review of existing studies identified a range of factors that influence mobility, such as age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, occupation, industry of employment, level of specialised training, years of experience in the workforce, employment type (i.e. part-time, full-time, self-employed), geographical location, wages and macroeconomic conditions. This study confirmed many of the findings from these studies. For example, factors associated with a *higher likelihood* of occupational mobility for participants were 'marital status of never married, 'engaged in work-related certificate', 'previous occupation temporary/casual' and 'penalty rates/bonuses'. Factors associated with a *lower likelihood* of occupational mobility for participants were 'age', 'educational attainment of part certificate', 'hours worked', 'years worked', 'years worked after returning to the workforce', 'pay above award with current employer' and 'promotional opportunities/higher income/sufficient income with current employer'.

The study identified differences in the mobility patterns of participants. For example, enrolled nurses who were qualified, older and had been in the workforce longer (factors that discourage mobility) indicated lower levels of occupational mobility than AINs/nursing assistants and personal care assistants who were younger, less qualified and working in occupations requiring lower levels of skills and knowledge (factors that encourage mobility). The same is true for the Civil Construction sector when comparing the mobility patterns of civil engineering associate professionals and tradespersons with those of labourers. Participants from the Automotive sector were least likely to change occupations, despite the sample including younger, single workers undertaking certificate level qualifications and about 20% of participants not having any post-school qualifications (factors that encourage mobility).

The study also found differences in the reasons given by participants for taking work with an employer and leaving an employer.

Participants from the Aged Care sector were motivated by the reasons of ‘enjoy tasks undertaken’, ‘flexible employment’ and ‘family and personal reasons’, whereas participants from the other two sectors were motivated by income-related reasons. Participants from the Automotive sector were also motivated by the reason of ‘Occupation is secure into the future’, which may explain why participants from this sector experienced lower levels of mobility than participants from the other two sectors. Many participants were also motivated by the reason of ‘can apply and develop skills at work’ when taking work with an employer.

Finally, this paper discussed implications of the findings for each sector and generally. Despite government initiatives targeting apprentices and trainees, existing workers and people seeking to undertake higher-level qualifications, mobility patterns of participants suggest it will take some time for the three sectors to attract, train and retain enough workers to address ongoing skills shortages. Around 40% of participants were in a different occupation from their previous occupation; 34% were in a different industry from their previous industry; 25% of participants intend to change occupations when they change employers; 20% of participants intend to change industries when they change employers; and 22% of participants intend to leave their current employer in the near future to work elsewhere. The results are due to some extent to the number of participants working in occupations requiring lower levels of skills and knowledge (around 30% of all participants). These participants indicated higher levels of occupational mobility than did other participants. As already stated, workers employed in organisations which are committed to training are more likely to move into occupations requiring higher levels of skills and knowledge (i.e. to experience progressive mobility) and to stay longer with their current employer. However, this study found that 70% of participants were not undertaking any work-related study/training, and only 19% of participants were undertaking employer-sponsored study/training at the time of the survey.

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The role of cultural context in continuing vocational training: A study on auto repairmen in Turkey

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This study analysed how auto repairmen working in micro-enterprises undertake continuing vocational training in relation to cultural context. The study was conducted in Kırıkkale, a city in central Anatolia in Turkey. To this end, the descriptive research technique of structured interview was used. Interviews with 33 auto repairmen were recorded and analysed. The results revealed the means used by auto repairmen to receive vocational training. It was found that the auto repairmen who participated in this study mostly consulted their co-workers as a means of vocational training. In addition, almost all of the craftsmen and foremen seemed to receive help from their co-workers when they encountered a problem which they could not solve on their own. The second most common means included computers and the Internet.. On the other hand, face-to-face education and printed materials were the least commonly used means for vocational training. These findings show that, although

they are literate, auto repairmen, who mostly do not take full advantage of formal education and grow up in traditional cultural environments, prefer to use oral communication instead of printed materials as their information sources. These results should be taken into consideration while developing vocational training programs for auto repairmen and other similar groups that are not born into a written culture.

Introduction

One criterion used in determining the developmental level of a country is the quality of that nation's human resources. The importance of education in development and economic growth was recognised after the 1960s, and the role of individuals' mastery in education, science, technology, entrepreneurship and management was identified (Mayor & Forti 1995: 90). Bagnall (2000: 462) pointed out that education has come to be a source of economic growth with the use of information in production, and consequently gained increasing importance in developed and developing countries. In recognising the relationship between technology and productivity, which emerged as a result of the transformation of information to output, both education and science started to be considered national investment.

The dissemination of and the rapid increase in information and technology has caused modern societies to be labelled as information and learning societies. These societies which produce and distribute information through networks, which know how to reach the existing information and which can use it effectively and efficiently, are known as information societies (State Planning Organisation 1999). Computers and the Internet, which are the products of technological advancement, are a symbol of information societies. The precedence of the value of information over other economic tools has made

the dissemination of information and the presence of educational institutions even more important. In recent years, certain terms such as learning companies, learning organisations and learning societies have come to signify the rapid change of information and harmony between institutions.

Concepts such as ‘lifelong learning’, ‘lifelong education’, ‘continuing education’ and ‘adult education’ emphasise the need for education to last for a lifetime. Stating that individuals should remain in the process of learning throughout their lives, Hines, Frey and Swinker (2005: 55) assert that key responsibility lies with the individual in realising what information is needed, determining how to locate information, and deciding how the information will be used and evaluated. This process is called ‘information literacy’. A person with information literacy knows how to learn. During this process of learning how to learn, continuous personal and vocational education is needed.

Continuous vocational education practices in Turkey vary. The main provider of adult education is Public Education Centres affiliated with the Ministry of Education. Adult education programs are run by different institutions. These institutions, whose primary purpose is adult education, can be examined under three headings: governmental, private, and non-governmental and voluntary (Ural 2007: 198).

Continuing vocational education in micro-enterprises in Turkey

Defined as the vocational education received by workers throughout their lifetime or as the training for workers to keep up with developments in a given field and gain new skills related to their profession (Alkan, Doğan & Sezgin 2001: 5), continuing vocational education involves education offered by employers, trade chambers, universities and ministries of education.

With changes in tools and equipment used for work, continuous vocational education has become a necessity. Problems emerge in the continuity of institutions and individuals when they can not attune to new methods and applications. Starting from this fact, the continuity of education and open access to it have become the principles of the Public Education Law. In light of these principles, it has become a legal obligation for businesses with 20 or more employees to offer vocational education to their employees. These businesses have obligations such as offering in-service training (skills training) or making a financial contribution to vocational training. Businesses with 50 or more employees, on the other hand, are obliged to offer courses to ensure the development of their staff and also enable their employees to attend other courses (Ministry of National Education 2009: 42). It is observed that there are not any legal regulations concerning the continuous vocational education of those working in businesses with 20 or fewer employees. For people working in such businesses, there are craftsmanship and foreman education programs available in Vocational Education Centres. After these educational programs, the responsibility for vocational development lies with the individuals themselves.

According to the General Industries and Businesses Inventory carried out in 2000 in Turkey, micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees comprise 94.7% of all companies (Ministry of Industry and Trade 2009). In Turkey, there are approximately 200,000 businesses with employees fewer than nine (OECD 2004: 27). The personnel employed in these businesses have problems in developing vocational knowledge and skills related to new technological and scientific equipment and methods. It is apparent that these people need help in topics such as locating information, developing skills pertaining to new technological equipment, and acquiring new literacies. Sağlam (2009: 208) states that small and middle scale enterprises in industry and trade zones operate to a large extent with the help of those who are 'trained from the cradle'. This is also true

for today's greatest technologies in the areas of communication and computers.

Developed countries place great importance on continuing vocational education, whereby workers continuously develop their vocational knowledge and skills. They especially focus on increasing the qualities of youth and preparing educational programs to the advantage of those who have made little or no use of educational opportunities (Commission of The European Communities 1995: 23; OECD 2003: 7; Szekely 2006: 76). Most non-formal training programs in Turkey, apart from in-service training offered as a legal obligation, are 'spare time programs' (Ural 2007: 202). There are problems concerning the continuing vocational education of those who are employed in micro and small sized enterprises, particularly those who have not had much opportunity to participate in general and vocational education.

Continuing vocational training and cultural context

It is stated by proponents of contemporary learning-teaching approaches that the social structure within which an individual is immersed affects his/her perception of the world, values, attitudes and cognitive structure (Brooks & Brooks 1999; Caine & Caine 1995). The key proponent of transformative learning theory, Mezirow (1997: 7), believes that the meaning schemas and perspectives that emerge within a cultural context affect individuals' perceptions, perspective, moral and esthetic preferences and learning styles. According to Billett (2002b: 458), people think and behave together with the social world they live in. Cultural context affects many areas including how educational institutions function, the methods used in the classroom and teacher-student roles. These findings and observations may suggest that cultural context affects continuing education and continuing vocational education practice and behaviours.

Cultural context also determines literacy habits and functions, which are the most important variable in the process of learning-teaching. The theoretical construct of Ong (1982), who analysed past and present cultures as 'oral' and 'written', sheds light on the continuing vocational education of staff in micro-enterprises in Turkey. Ong (1982: 23) analysed cultures under three headings: those where the concepts of writing and print do not exist and for whom communication is only achieved through oral means are called 'primary orality cultures'; those in which information is no longer stored in the oral stores of memory but is preserved in written scripts are called 'written cultures'; and those which are formed by the 'oral' qualities of the telephone, radio, television and other electronic media entering our lives through today's advanced technologies are known as 'secondary orality cultures'.

Another quality which makes Ong (1982: 74) views as important is that he focused on 'mentality' differences in oral and written cultures. According to him, in order to change thinking processes, writing should first of all be totally internalised. In oral cultures, continuous repetition is necessary to ensure that the learned and gained information does not get forgotten or lost. Structured ways of thinking are necessary for both wisdom and effective public administration. In contrast, since information is preserved in scripts in written cultures, there are more authentic and abstract means of thinking for the mind (p. 38). In oral cultures, there is a necessity for another person who asks questions of the thinking individual and who converses with them. It is not easy for one to talk to oneself for hours. In oral cultures, thinking on one subject at length depends on communication (p. 49). It may be useful to examine Mezirow's (1997: 5–6) transformative learning theory. According to this, there are two kinds of learning: instrumental and communicative learning. Instrumental learning focuses on learning through task-oriented, problem solving and empirical-analytic discovery. Communicative learning, on the other hand, is learning involved in understanding

the meaning of what others say (Taylor 1998: 13). Billett states that (2002a: 61) individuals' learning will always be unique in some ways, but knowledge is co-constructed reciprocally between the individual and the social experience. As can be seen, today's adult educators focus on social interaction without making a distinction between oral or written culture.

Another example that makes Ong (1982: 21) relevant to the present study is his writing on how vocational learning takes place in oral and written cultures. In oral cultures, when one is learning both a vocational skill and religious knowledge (discipleship), one does so in a mentor system. They use methods such as listening, repeating what has been said, creating authentic expressions from clichés, and viewing the common past from one perspective, none of which can be considered analysis. Ong (p. 59) states that there is no such thing as a guidebook that teaches a profession in oral cultures. He also adds that such books are rare even in written cultures and that they gained the acceptance they have today long after the printing press was in common use. For the individual who can not acquire a profession through books and formal education, the way forward is through apprenticeship. Ong (p. 59) asserts that the situation is the same even in advanced technology cultures. In these cultures, apprenticeship is also based on observation, application and minimum oral explanation. Since words are made up of sounds in oral cultures, one may try to remember them, yet there is not a concrete source to look up and find them (p. 46). Billett (2002b: 459) writes that we resort to text-based vocational education when we need urgent vocational training, thinking it is useful; however, it may not respond to individual needs and readiness levels. He believes that (p. 459) interactions with the social world then become key bases for learning.

In written cultures, reading and writing are activities that individuals engage in on their own. Societies are examined differently according to the way information is transferred: 'orally' or 'written'.

According to what Ong (1982: 41) cites from Tanen (1980), there are many modern cultures which have not yet transformed into written cultures, despite being literate for centuries. Other Mediterranean cultures such as the Arabs and Greeks are examples of these cultures. These cultures still continue with structured phraseology. Many sources state that the 'word' is still an effective means of transferring the heritage of information in Turkish culture. Göka (2009b) believes that, although Turkish people know how to read and write and the numbers point to a high literacy rate, they exhibit a state of mind specific only to oral culture. It is maintained that the functional literacy rate in Turkish culture, which may be defined as using the knowledge obtained from literacy in daily life, is 25%. The preference of colourful newspapers to black and white ones and television to books (Göka 2009a), the shift to electronic culture without passing from oral to written culture (Ungan 2008) and the regression in reading and writing skills or the common instances of total forgetting (Yıldız 2008) are given as evidence of an oral culture in Turkey. Göka (2008: 138) attributes the low rate of literacy in Turkey to oral culture and states that, especially in groups where traditional values still exist, literacy is seen as an activity only specific to elite administrators. According to him, people want their children to 'read' but they themselves do not have a passion for such 'vain' activities. The author of many works in Turkish history, Ortaylı (2007: 34) states that writing is not enough to promote an idea in Turkey—it also needs to be discussed orally.

Based on these explanations, oral culture may be expected to exist more commonly among groups which have made less use of educational opportunities, both in other cultures and the Turkish culture. It is apparent that, in cultures which depend heavily on oral culture, oral communication will be used more than written sources in transferring knowledge and skills, and in locating information. That is why attention should be paid to certain basic requirements when preparing educational programs for adults in environments

where an oral culture is dominant. These requirements involve having attention-grabbing books that are easy to understand (Ungan 2008), learning to take place more in the context of 'on the job' settings, and needing a narrator or an instructor rather than learning from a book (Goody 1992). Billett who proposed workplace pedagogic practices (2002b), Andresen, Boud and Cohen who suggested experience-based learning (1995), and contemporary educators such as Felstead, Fuller, Jewson, Unwin and Kakavelakis (2007) who see the workplace as a learning environment, advocate that the workplace and work itself should be used for educational purposes in continuous vocational education.

In his book entitled, *Communication conflicts and empathy*, Üstün Dökmen (1997), a writer with important observations and assertions related to traditional Turkish culture, divides societies into two as 'adult society' and 'child-parent society', and defines the Turkish society as the latter. While the characteristics of such societies are 'dependence, sense of trust and fear of reasoning', those of adult societies are 'loneliness, individualization and trust in one's own reason'. When people of child-parent societies look at societies with more individualised—more adult—people compared with themselves (for example, western societies), they find them 'lonely' and even 'selfish'. The dependent individuals of child-parent societies live in the comfort of their social surroundings (Dökmen 1997: 270). In child-parent societies, individuals take on the role of either the child or the parent. They are not welcome to speak out; knowledge is transferred as it is; and asking the idea of someone who knows is expected.

Another characteristic of child-parent societies mentioned by Dökmen (1997: 268) is hiding information from the public. Dökmen (1997: 262–268) analysed stories about the traditional mentor system and found that, while foremen are preached in these stories not to be disrespectful to their craftsmen and not to act ungratefully, craftsmen are given the message that they should not teach everything they

know to their foremen otherwise they might replace them. Ong (1982) states that in some ages and societies, literacy was attributed only to certain classes in society, especially to religious functionaries.

When Ong's (1982) and Dökmen's (1997) studies are considered together, it is seen that oral words are used more than writing to transfer knowledge in traditional Turkish culture, and individuals are raised to become 'parents' or 'children' who are dependent and distrustful of themselves, instead of developing adult characteristics such as loneliness, individualisation and using one's own reason. It can be said that an individual who has these characteristics would consult other people instead of books in the process of learning. This happens as individuals remain alone in learning from a book, and they have to form and apply their own opinions and hypotheses towards finding solutions. Individuals who can not be alone, have not become individualised and do not trust their own mind, according to Dökmen (1997: 269), would naturally not play a highly active role in their own vocational development.

The cultural properties mentioned above should be taken into consideration in providing continuing education to disadvantaged groups. In the vocational training of groups under the dominance of an oral culture, it would not be fair to say 'you know how to read and write, develop yourselves'. The interpretations of the principle of willingness in parent and child societies should also be considered. It seems that individuals do not demand education without the guidance and encouragement of the 'benevolent state'. That is why it is necessary for institutions commissioned to be more active in guiding people. The fact that disadvantaged groups in an oral culture prefer their learning experience to be through face-to-face training by hearing, seeing and doing rather than by printed materials, places important responsibilities on the institutions that will offer continuing vocational training.

That learning and teaching is not independent from an individual's social and cultural environment is a principle accepted by educational approaches such as constructivism, thematic learning and brain-based learning (Caine & Caine 1995: 23, 126). That is why the target population and their social and cultural context should be taken into consideration when designing educational programs, and planning and implementing instructional processes. All formal and non-formal training systems are affected by a given society's culture and values as much as its economic needs (Winch & Hyland 2007: 30).

In the light of this information, the aim of this study is to determine how auto repairmen working in micro-enterprises meet their educational needs and interpret these in relation to their cultural context

Method

This study used the descriptive research technique of structured interviews. In addition, descriptive and content analysis has been utilised. Some answers in the video recordings have been reported without any interpretation in order to directly present people's views. During analysis, data were coded in categories. The analysis continued by adding data to the related category and forming new categories for those that did not fit existing ones.

Study group

Participants in this study were employers and employees working as auto repairmen in micro-enterprises in the auto industrial estate in Kırıkkale. It was found that approximately 150 micro-enterprises existed in the auto repair business, and that all of these auto repair enterprises had fewer than nine employees. While deciding on the sampling of this group, enterprises that dealt with specific jobs like auto painting, tyre changing and selling spare parts were excluded, and only personnel working in enterprises that dealt with auto mechanic and electronics repair were included in the study.

Employees working as foremen and craftsmen in these enterprises were included in the study, while those in apprenticeship were excluded. Factors such as geographical distribution, economic status and number of employees were used in deciding on the study group, and face-to-face interviews were carried out with 33 auto repairmen.

The city where participants are located: Kırıkkale

Kırıkkale is a city located in the Central Anatolian region of Turkey, 76 kms away from the capital city of Ankara and with a population of 256,263. The educational status of people living in Kırıkkale above the age of six is as follows: of the total population, 7.5% are not literate and 18.7% are literate but have not graduated from a school. Those who have graduated from primary school (five years' basic education) comprise 26.5%, graduates of primary school (eight years' basic education) comprise 17%, and graduates of high school comprise 19%. The proportion of college and university graduates is 4.6%; and that of people holding a post-graduate degree is 0.3% (Turkstat 2008).

Data collection instrument and implementation

In order to collect data, an interview schedule with open-ended questions was used with the auto repairmen. In addition to the personal questions on the interview schedule, the following questions were asked: How do you receive vocational training?, Did you have any face-to-face training after your apprenticeship?, Do you use books, for your vocational training?, Do you know how to use the computer and the Internet?, Do you make use of these tools for your vocational training?, Do you and your co-workers help each other? and How do you reach information when you encounter a problem you can not solve? Probing questions were also asked. A total of 33 auto repairmen were interviewed face-to-face and the process was videotaped. This assisted the analysis and interpretation.

Findings

The results obtained from the study are presented below. First, personal information on the auto repairmen involved in this study is given, followed by interpretations of the findings concerning their means of reaching vocational training.

Personal information

More than half (17) of the auto repairmen in this sample were within the age range of 26-35 years. More than half of the participants (18) were primary school graduates, and 11 had been through secondary education. While two-thirds (22) of the auto repairmen included in this study worked together with two to three people in their workplace, seven worked alone.

Almost all of the people interviewed started their apprenticeship between the ages of 11–14 years. All learned their profession within a mentor system and then took lessons (once a week) from Apprenticeship Education Centres and obtained their certificates.

Methods and tools used for vocational training

The methods auto repairmen used for their vocational training are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Methods and tools auto repairmen used for their vocational training

Type of vocational training	**Participation status**	**n**	**Subgroups**
Participating in face-to-face training	Participants	10	**Those who participated in short-term commercial training** The majority of those who participated in face-to-face training seminars did so by going through the commercial training provided by advertisers of products such as oil, battery and shock absorbers. **Training in authorised services** A few of the craftsmen pointed out that they had gone through training in authorised services before they started running their own businesses. **Training in the military** Two of the craftsmen said they participated in a course during their military service.
	Non-participants	23	Non-participants indicated that they had not participated in any other vocational training programs after completing their craftsman and foreman training.

Type of vocational training	Participation status	n	Subgroups
Using printed material	Those using printed material	8	**Catalogue users** Catalogues were used for the purpose of familiarising oneself with the items, looking at the circuit diagram and seeing the critical value. **Book and photocopy users** Those consulting printed materials for circuit diagrams and injection timing fall within this group. **Those who used printed materials in the past** A group mentioned that they had used books during their craftsman and foreman training. The latter were stated to be useless.
	Those not using printed material	25	**No books** The majority of those who did not use printed materials indicated that they did not have books, did not need to look through them and could not find information in books. **Those who can not learn through books** The majority of those who did not use printed material held the view that learning through books was not possible. They stated that learning will occur on the job by practice and observation. **Those who can not learn because books are in English** Some of those who did not use books said that the books on new automobiles were in English and that they did not know the language.

Type of vocational training	Participation status	n	Subgroups
Computer use	Users	15	**Diagnostic purposes** Computer users in this group made use of computers for diagnostic purposes. **Semi-professional purposes** They used computers to see photos of automobile parts from the Internet. Some also used it to play games.
	Non-users	18	**Those who realise the importance of computers** The people in this group knew the importance of computers, although they did not necessarily use them. **Those who want to use a computer as a diagnostic instrument** The majority of non-users wanted to learn how to use computers in order to be able to use a diagnostic instrument.

Type of vocational training	Participation status	n	Subgroups
Internet use	Users	15	**Technical information** Internet users mostly used it to obtain information about technical subjects such as injection timing and functions of EGR valves. **Those who search for the prices of auto parts** A few of the craftsmen used the Internet to learn the prices of auto parts and to buy them. **Those who use it for non-professional purposes** Those in this group made use of the Internet but not for professional development purposes.
	Non-users	18	**Those who realise the importance of the Internet** The mechanics in this group realised the importance of the Internet for professional development. **Those who do not realise the importance of the Internet** The mechanics in this group were not aware of the opportunities the Internet offers for professional development.
Consulting co-workers	Consulters	30	The mechanics in this group asked for their co-workers' help when they could not solve a problem on their own. They mentioned that their greatest asset was helping each other out.
	Non-consulters	3	Those who did not consult their co-workers pointed out that there was jealousy in industry and no sharing of information.

According to the answers given to the question, 'How do you ensure vocational development?', the auto repairmen used five different methods for their vocational training: face-to-face training, printed materials, computers, the Internet and consulting co-workers.

Participating in face-to-face training

It was found that most continuing education programs the auto repairmen in this study participated in were a few hours of commercial seminars, training programs in authorised services which was their prior workplace, and courses attended during military service. The auto repairmen voiced their opinions related to the training programs they attended as follows:

> I received craftsman and foreman education as part of my vocational training. Apart from this, we did not participate in any training programs. We just received some information about oil from the travelling salesmen that came here. We did not receive any education other than that.
> (age 30, primary school graduate)

Some auto repairmen worked in authorised services before working in private services and received training there.

> I worked in an authorised service in Istanbul. There were seminars there. They would offer training on Tuesdays. They would train us by saying if there is a problem with the car, the first place you should look is this. Whenever there was a problem not encountered before, they would call the factory and find the solution to share with us. (age 29, secondary school graduate)

Two thirds of auto repairmen did not participate in any training activities after their craftsman and foreman training. The statements below are examples from the people in this group:

> We received apprenticeship, foreman and craftsman training related to our vocation. Apart from that, I did not participate in any other training programs.
> (age 27, secondary school graduate)

> I have not participated in any vocational training. Since we are in private business, I have not had internship in companies like WW, BMW and AUDI. We did not have any training.
> (age 28, primary school graduate)

Printed material use

Less than one third of the craftsmen and foremen made use of printed materials for their vocational development. These materials comprised catalogues, off-print books, brochures and photocopies. The skill of reaching necessary information through printed materials seemed to be limited among the craftsmen. Below are some statements by those who made use of printed materials for their vocational development:

> When there is a problem, we sometimes refer to prospectuses and catalogues in order to get to know the auto parts. We do not always use them.
> (age 27, secondary school graduate)

> For instance, when there is a new car and we have to pour oil into it, now that there are many kinds of oil, we find which one to use by referring to printed materials. We do not use books. We look up from the catalogues.
> (age 29, secondary school graduate)

Several participants among those who did not consult printed materials for vocational development said: 'there are no books'. A greater majority pointed out that either they could not find information in the books or it was impossible to learn from them. Those in this group were of the opinion that learning could take place on the job and by observation. Below are the opinions of those who did not use printed material:

> I have never used books. We were only given a book during our apprenticeship training. Other than that we have not received any books. We have not had anything to do with books.
> (age 33, primary school graduate)

> I do not make use of tools like books, brochures, etc. I find out and fix the problems only by observation and trial and error. (age 40, primary school graduate)

Computer use

Almost half of the craftsmen and foremen stated that they made use of computers while they were working and for their vocational development. The majority of those who used computers for vocational training were those who used computerised diagnostics instruments. Another group made use of computers for the purpose of using the Internet and getting to know automobile parts. Below are some of the opinions of craftsmen who used computers:

> We have a diagnostic instrument and while using that we learned how to use computers. It shows the location of the parts. It shows how to fix them. We use it.
> (age 29, secondary school graduate)

> When there are new cars released, we connect through here and look at their features. There are CDs that introduce the car parts. We look at the pictures in them.
> (age 28, primary school graduate)

It is possible to divide the auto repairmen who did not use computers into two groups. The first includes those who regarded computers as ‘the basis of everything’, and the second includes those who wanted to learn how to use computers in order to be able to use diagnostic instruments. The statements below are examples showing the opinions of those who did not use computers for their vocational training:

> The computer is the bottomline. You should have a computer. You should understand it. That is our problem. In other words, we should stop running things with old methods here.
> (age 32, primary school graduate)

> I do not have a computer. We do not know how to use it. We would not be able to use it even if we had one. That is why we should have training.
> (age 30, primary school graduate)

Internet use

Analysis of the interviews revealed that almost half of the auto repairmen working in micro-enterprises used the Internet. They use it for purposes such as getting technical information, learning the price of auto parts and personal reasons. Among the group who made up the majority as non-users of the Internet, there were some who realised its importance. However, there were also some who had no idea about it:

> There is an Internet connection in our workplace. We log on at night. When you type something there you immediately come across it. For instance, you type EGR valve. You find the details.
> (age 29, secondary school graduate)

> There is an Internet connection but I do not always use it related to our profession.
> (age 36, secondary school graduate)

The majority of those who did not use the Internet realised the importance of it. Another group, on the other hand, was not aware of the role of the Internet in vocational training:

> I do not use the Internet because I do not have the money. But it is a must.
> (age 40, primary school graduate)

> I have never used the Internet. I do not know how to use it.
> (age 27, primary school graduate)

> The findings suggest that the computer and the Internet were foreign to most of the craftsmen and foremen and that they only just started using the Internet for vocational training.

Consulting co-workers

The answers show that all of the auto repairmen in this study often consulted their co-workers for their vocational training and when there was a problem. The findings reveal that, when they had difficulty in solving a problem, almost all of the auto repairmen

consulted their co-workers. Only a small minority stated that they did not help each other out.

Below are some examples which show the opinions of the auto repairmen who consulted their co-workers when confronted with a problem:

> Of course we make use of each other's experience. That is our greatest asset. Whenever we have a problem, we talk with each other.
> (age 29, secondary school graduate)

> Let's assume that a windshield wiper motor of a car is broken. You go to a craftsman while he is doing the job and stay there for 1–2 hours and you learn it. The next time you have a case like that, you do it yourself. This is our training.
> (age 27, primary school graduate)

One of the people in the group who did not consult his co-workers said: 'There is no sharing in the industry. Information is not shared. There is the 'I know it all' attitude. Noone says 'we know' (age 46, primary school graduate). Another craftsman explained why he did not help others as follows: 'I grew up with them. I know what they know and what they do not know. I think they know as much as I know'.
(age 33, primary school graduate).

Results

The results obtained from this study are consistent with the information provided through the conceptual framework. Auto repairmen who have grown up in traditional mentor systems use oral communication for their continuing vocational training and consult their co-workers in solving the problems they encounter. Although all of them are literate, obtaining information from printed materials is very rare. Usually catalogues are used as printed materials. Drawing on Dökmen's (1997) proposition, it can be said that the

auto repairmen who have grown up in a mentor (child-parent) system rarely resort to their own reason and instead prefer behaviours such as transferring information verbatim and asking someone who knows.

Not making enough use of printed materials despite literacy shows that writing is not fully internalised. This finding can be interpreted as the fact that the effects of oral culture persist in people who learn their profession in a mentor system and who have not made much use of educational opportunities. That the auto repairmen in this study consulted their co-workers when they encountered a problem shows that they used 'words' as a means for vocational training. It is known that in oral cultures another person is needed for thinking (Ong 1982), and the person who 'does not exhibit the characteristics of an adult' prefers to consult others instead of using their own reason (Dökmen 1997: 271). The internalisation of literacy skills may be affected by a number of other factors than an oral culture, such as not making enough use of formal educational opportunities, not needing these skills in social and professional life, and the lack of printed materials relevant to people's level.

This study showed that almost all of the Turkish auto repairmen who were raised in the Turkish culture and did not make full use of formal education opportunities contacted their colleagues for their continous vocational training. Although the study focused on the Turkish context, this seems to be the case in other cultures too. Studies conducted particularly by Billett (2002a, 2002b) corroborate this argument. A contemporary educator, Billett (2002a: 156) stresses the issue of making room for social practices in workplaces and ensuring participation in these. The findings of the present study offer support for his view that 'adaptable learning occurs outside of educational institutions' (p. 158). The auto repairmen studied here found their contacts with colleagues valuable and stated, 'This is our training'. Workplaces were found to be an effective environment for vocational practices too (Billett 2002b: 458). Learning is a

co-constructive event (p. 459). Historical and cultural practices were also found to be effective in workplace relationships (p. 462). These results show that in our day known as the second oral culture age, learning via interaction with colleagues at the workplace is important. Whether people are raised in oral or written cultures, they value social interaction in their learning processes and interact with others for meaning sharing. In brief, the situation observed among auto repairmen in Turkey who have not made much use of formal education can actually be generalised to people of other cultures involved in similar sectors. After all, instead of writing which is perceived as 'artificial', humans prefer speaking which is deemed more 'natural' (Ong 1982: 101).

It was found that an awareness of using computers and the Internet for vocational development existed, but they were not used by the majority due to lack of knowledge and skills. The group who did use the Internet and computers did not use them for vocational development. It is a serious issue that computer and Internet literacy is not created in our day known as the second oral culture age. Increasing the computer and web literacy of groups who can not effectively use the materials of a written culture may be an important step towards overcoming their lack of knowledge. The oral culture related materials, such as drawings, animations, films, music and sound, offered by computers and the Internet in addition to text, and their help in facilitating interaction between people, make them useful in the process of vocational education.

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Visy Cares Hub and Victoria University: Making the door of a University open to the community

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In 1999, a group of men embarked on a remarkable project that resulted in building a two million dollar youth centre in one of Melbourne's most disadvantaged communities. From the outset, Victoria University (VU) was a keen partner in the project. This project had key synergies with the current experiences of the University—a dual sector higher education and vocational education institution in Melbourne's western suburbs. There were also alliances with emerging government policy, in particular policy focused on responding to the rapid social and economic transformations that were occurring where increasingly the social and employment divide was apparent in the western region of Melbourne.

Education, and in particular vocational education, it was hoped was to be part of the solution. And on that basis Government policy was focused on ensuring that young people stayed in the education and training system. Young people, as a result of policy changes in 2000, were encouraged or forced to re-enter education to continue

to secure any government income support. For Victoria University this meant that an increasing number of young people with complex issues came to their door. It is a situation that is again being faced by the education system in Australia with the most recent announcement by the Federal Government on the jobs and training compact (Council of Australian Governments 2009).

This paper outlines a dual track journey, one of a project destined to be built and another of a University that embarked on research, reflection and action to create a very different learning environment for some of the most disadvantaged young people in Australia. In the end, the University located one of its entrances at a multi-purpose youth centre in Sunshine, with the aim of re-orientating its welcome mat to young people and engaging them in returning to study and fulfilling their own aspirations to succeed.

Introduction

Each community requires a service infrastructure that can act as a gateway, providing pathways for young people into education and to connect to their community. For young people who do not have the common community facilitators such as parents, adult coaches, informed siblings and mentors, they require tailored entry points whereby they have the opportunity to develop their own information trail.

The Visy Cares Hub is one of the original Harvester company wool stores; a building of historical significance in the heart of Sunshine in Melbourne's west that has been renovated into a co-located youth centre that is currently 1,000 square metres in size. The Visy Cares Hub houses a broad range of youth services and programs, and represents the development of an integrated service delivery model assisting young people to engage and connect with their community.

The project has been premised on the notion that building the capacity of communities to be active collaborators in the challenges that are faced by community members can make fundamental and sustainable change in young people's lives. Cavaye (2000) would define community capacity as consisting of the networks, organisation, attitudes, leadership and skills that allow communities to manage change and sustain community-led development. In this case, this premise was coupled with the belief that in order to build the capacity of communities, community practice must be linked to appropriate physical infrastructure that can house the suite of services and activities required.

Victoria University has a long standing commitment to the western region of Melbourne. Encapsulated in the latest policy framework of the University is commitment number five which states: to resource three initiatives for a better life in Melbourne's western suburbs and to share this knowledge with other communities in Australia or overseas that may face similar challenges. The University was an active collaborator throughout the establishment of the Visy Cares Hub, using its own internal expertise to work alongside the project group. The result was intellectual capital combining with philanthropic interests and business acumen to build a $2.5 million youth centre in one of the most disadvantaged communities in Australia.

For VU it identified the important role that a University can have in partnering community change. Partnership with this project provided an opportunity for the University to develop a community entry point for young adults, in effect making the door to the University much wider. The aim of this paper is to explore how the University, in particular the Vocational Education section of this dual sector University, has reflected on its own practice resulting in active participation in this project that would see the front door of

the University open for business to some of the most disadvantaged young adults in Melbourne's western suburbs.

The context of literature and policy: 2000–2005

This project was originally underpinned by a growing body of knowledge that identified the importance of community partnerships, collaboration and the delivery of a much more consistent and cohesive service system, essential to connecting young people to successful education transitions. More importantly, the ideas of this project were also finding synergy in current policy, similarly informed by a growing body of community research on young people, the communities in which they live and how they connected to and built social capital.

The Visy Cares Hub project was being developed at the same time as a (relatively) new State Government was driving policy and enacting change. This body of work gave rise to new concepts of social capital and community-building which had resulted from a growing concern by governments about the complexity of community issues. The nineties had fuelled discussions on how governments can support the development of communities, in particular, how they can act as an enabler for local communities to take action on local solutions to local issues; in this case, how communities could be more inclusive of young people.

Governments were concerned with how they could facilitate the building of social capital in communities.Social capital is a term that is regularly used to describe the kinds of social networks and social agencies that individuals rely on to give them meaning and purpose in life. Such connections gained through friendship groups, employment pathways, community organisations and cultural resources provide individuals with the ability to feel empowered and in control of decision-making processes that occur during their life span. Priest (2008: 4) asserts that, for young people, social capital is a

vehicle through which goals, civics participation, successful education transitions and career pathways can be created, sustained and achieved. Stokes *et al.* (2006) states that, in the presence of positive family relationships, and school, peer and community networks, young people are better positioned to navigate themselves into healthy states of thinking and being.

However, the concepts of social capital and private and public intervention remain a contested subject matter. Cavaye (2000) explored a number of these debates suggesting that technical assistance is development *in* or *for* the community, rather than development *of* the community. He goes on to discuss the work of Brown (1980) who argues that technical assistance does not address a community's capacity to manage the assistance it receives. Putnam (2000) points out that government programs, such as urban renewal and public housing projects, have 'needlessly ravaged existing social networks'. This was a project that wanted to collaborate with its community and build capacity and as such, suggests Cavaye, a project's service delivery is to form part of a new dual role that also includes the facilitation of community capacity.

This is the framework that underpinned the development of the Visy Cares Hub. Framed by the key research on social capital, the project set the benchmarks high, aiming to provide the opportunity for young people to be valued, connect with their community, develop new skills and experience the world around them. One of the key drivers of that focus was to explore how the Visy Cares Hub could assist in connecting young adults into a range of new learning opportunities. In the heart of the western suburbs, disadvantage had long become entrenched. Changing the opportunities for these young people to break that intergenerational hold on their future would take systematic change at every level, including each community.

The level of unemployment in these communities suggested that those who do not complete secondary school or its vocational equivalent

face relatively high risks of unemployment and low earnings (Access Economics 2005, Prime Ministers Youth Pathways Taskforce 2001, Teese 2000, Helme 2009, Lamb *et al.* 2008, Vaughan *et al.* 2005, Marks 2006). In this situation, young people often lack the necessary general education skills and knowledge to anticipate and respond to changes in the labour market and wider society. Early school-leavers tend to spend less time in employment—thus gaining far less access to on-the-job learning in the first five years after exiting education than do their better-educated peers (*ibid*).

The new Government of Victoria in this period generated a number of initiatives to ameliorate the difficulties young people were experiencing in the transition from school to further education and/or employment. The Kirby Report (2000) commissioned by the Victorian Government outlined a raft of reforms. It found that in 1999, 30% of school students left Victorian secondary schools without a qualification, and just under 20% left school before completing Year 12 and did not proceed to engage in any further education or training. The report found that in Victoria the provision of post-compulsory education and training for young people was fragmented and their pathways from school to further education, training or employment were not clear and difficult for young people to connect and access the necessary community support mechanisms. More importantly, however, the report found that young people were not achieving the type of outcomes that were necessary for them to enter vocational pathways, which was further highlighted by the rapidly changing employment market that required a range of skills and knowledge. Finally, the report noted, the absolute imperative related to improvement of a system of vocational education and training for young people given the strong links between educational failure and social and economic exclusion.

The Federal Government was also embarking on a number of key policy changes that were to highlight the importance of the

University-community partnership. The (then) Federal Liberal Government developed the Mutual Obligation policy that required young people to be connected to other education, employment and/or training activities to secure income support. It was as a result of this policy that by 2001 the University was seeing much higher numbers of young people enter its doors, often in a haphazard way that required each young person to be provided with information, educational assessments, identification of educational pathways that may be available to them and specialised support to act upon the information.

In this period the Federal Government also commissioned a report on welfare reform. The McClure report (2000) outlined that, amidst the economic and social transformation, it was necessary to re-think and reconfigure the approach to social support. The appointed Committee, led by McClure, identified that the current social support system may be failing many of those it was designed to help:

> Australia, though in its eighth year of strong economic growth, joblessness, underemployment and reliance on income support remained unacceptably high. Disadvantage, the report outlines, is also concentrated increasingly in particular segments of the population and in particular localities. Over recent decades a variety of economic and demographic factors have combined to create the new and disturbing phenomena of 'jobless families' and 'job poor communities'. These unequal outcomes have generated the unacceptable prospect that significant concentrations of economic and social disadvantage might become entrenched (McClure 2000: 5).

McClure could have been referring to Sunshine, where high youth unemployment was exacerbated by intergenerational poverty and adult unemployment.

Minister Kosky in her Ministerial statement on 'Post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria' (January 2000) identified that:

> … in Victoria and Australia, inadequate attention has been given to guidance and support for young people in their transition from education to further education, training and employment. Guidance has been treated as an information process rather than a program that will encourage young people to actively investigate and engage with opportunities for their own futures (in Schmit 2002, p. 6).

In 2001, the Victorian Government Department of Education, Employment and Training produced a discussion paper, 'Knowledge, innovation, skills and creativity: A discussion paper on achieving the goals and targets for Victoria's education and training system' (Department of Education, Employment and Training 2001) which included a focus on increasing the percentage of young people who successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent, specifically to raise the retention rate to 90% by 2010.

In 2001, *Footprints to the future* (known as the Eldridge report) was commissioned by the Federal Government to investigate the barriers to the development of engagement by young people in education, training and employment (Prime Ministers Youth Pathways Taskforce 2001). The report called for the development of local partnerships within a network governance framework based on a 'place management' or local community approach.

Similarly, Noonan (2002) in his review noted that Vocational Education must provide more workplace-oriented environments to accommodate young people, while at the same time helping them improve their skills, particularly literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills, so that they can move on to some form of pre-employment training. Once this group leaves formal education and training, they will be difficult to get back and risk becoming a burden on the welfare and justice systems (Noonan 2002).

The UK, like Australia, was managing a similar set of complexities as a result of the changing economic and labour market demands.

The concept of education and adult learning as a partnership had emerged primarily as a result of the *Every child matters* Green Paper. This Green Paper took a systemic view of children's services, which focused on the idea that individuals and agencies across the system were not effectively integrated. Each area of service delivery came under review and, as a result of this, a focus on personalised learning was also an emerging area of interest (Department for Education and Skills 2005).

In 2003 the Victorian Government released its *Blueprint for government schools*. The Minister for Education, at the launch of the policy, identified that one of the key drivers was the changing and challenging demand of our increasingly sophisticated economy and a more complex and rapidly changing society. The ultimate measure of the success of the *Blueprint for government schools* would depend on effective partnerships. The Government alone could not deliver educational excellence for all students; nor could schools. Such excellence could come only from joint initiatives between the Government and the Department, schools and their teachers, principals and other workers, parents and other school community members (Department of Education and Training 2003).

The policy constructs of community, education, government/ community partnerships, young people and their transitions became the focus of the two youth policies released during the (now) three terms of office. The first, called Respect (2003), referred to the encouraging of young people's contributions to building communities and increasing young people's skills and resilience through broader community participation (Department of Victorian Communities 2003).

It was these policy intersections and the growing government focus on these issues that provided the vehicle for Victoria University to apply for State government funds to further develop its partnership with Visy Cares Hub and take a tenancy in the new building. The concept

was one of partnerships: the focus on re-engagement of young people in education and employment. The partnership between the Visy Cares Hub and Victoria University strengthened as the synergies of their mutual directions became obvious, serving to build a common direction between government policy and what the University and the Board understood to be good practice.

Background to the Visy Cares Hub

In 1999, a group of men who were working in the justice system and in the judiciary were brought together by a key community liaison worker in the Victoria Police and two lawyers: two successful and respected lawyers, from the western suburbs, children of immigrant parents, three Chief Magistrates, Victoria's most senior Supreme Court Judge and soon (at that time) to be Chancellor of Victoria University, Justice Frank Vincent, and a number of their colleagues. Their motivation was underpinned by their own personal pursuit to be a part of the solution, instead of a constituent of the system, that would see a constant stream of young lives in front of the courts. Many, it would seem to them, were destined to enter into a life that would spiral into crime and punishment.

Over social occasions and 'court talk', they drew together a band of men that met regularly to consider what philanthropic venture they would like to be a part of. They were familiar with the Visy Cares Centre at Dandenong and were interested in such a concept in the Western Region. They asked an academic from Victoria University to attend and provide advice about current models of youth centres and to assist their ideas to take shape.

The model of a co-located youth service (or the one-stop-shop model) captured the interest of the group. The notion of a youth centre, particularly the concept of building something, became the focus of the discussion. It had appeal as it would leave physical infrastructure in the community. The concept of one-stop-shops and co-located

youth services had already been established in Victoria; previously the Whitlam Government had funded the NOW centre, and later through the establishment of the youth specific Visy Cares Centre in Dandenong. The concept had also taken shape internationally, and as such, there was growing evidence that such projects could be successful in providing community connections for young people.

Though there were other discussions with Local Government in the west, Brimbank City Council had a strong focus on the needs of young people and sought out the group which had now formalised their structure and incorporated the gaining of deductable gift recipient status, commonly referred to as registering as a charity. In 2003, the Council commissioned a Youth Needs Analysis, which raised the issue of youth facilities within the municipality. The Council was talking about co-located youth services, with the possibility of developing a new centre and new programs. Concurrent with these discussions, the Youth Junction (their registered name) Board had secured some funding from the State Government with the assistance of the Pratt Foundation.

What was needed was land or a building. The community at Brimbank had spent a long time campaigning and securing from demolition a building in the heart of Sunshine. The building was one of the original bulk stores of the H.V. McKay family Harvester Company. The company had strong historical links not only to Sunshine but also to Australian industrial relations history. The Harvester decision of 8 November 1907 is etched in the Australian history books as it mandated the wages of women and men.

This potted version of history does not do justice to the challenges that were met and overcome, however they are not the purpose of this paper. It is sufficient at this point to note that the Visy Cares Hub was officially opened on Monday, 14 May 2007.

The Visy Cares Hub 2010

The Visy Cares Hub in 2010 offers a range of co-located services (Table 1) aimed at improving access by young people and reducing travel between multiple locations. The Visy Cares Hub works collaboratively with agencies, organisations, groups and departments to assist young people, whilst recognising their differences, aspirations, constraints and backgrounds.

Table 1: Current agency list

Agency	**Service provided**
Robert Stary & Associates	Legal Services
Brimbank Youth Services	Local coordination and youth programs both generalist and early intervention
Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues	Refugee Support Services
Sunshine Youth Housing	Housing referral, support and advocacy
Ardoch Youth Foundation	Education support for young people
Victoria University Youth Transitions	University youth portal, education guidance and support and youth transitions service for young people to reconnect with education and/or training
Western Melbourne Headspace	Young people and Mental Health, research, practitioners, counsellors and health professionals
Victoria University Student Legal Clinic	The clinic is a partnership between Sunshine Community Legal Service and Slater and Gordon. It provides a unique professional placement experience for VU law students
Melbourne City Mission	Jobs Services Australia; employment services for young people

As a part of its charitable status, the Visy Cares Hub runs a number of programs for free. Young people from the local area attend these programs. The partnership with VU is essential to the delivery of

many of these programs, as it is students from the University that facilitate their implementation.

Victoria University Youth Transitions Unit

The changing policy environment of the early first half of this decade required broader educational solutions for young people in the western region. It was a period where a number of initiatives were colliding and finding synergies in their resultant focus on young adults in the region. There are still many similarities in the current policy environments that are driving the University in 2010 to work harder at integrated educational solutions.

The Commonwealth Government Youth Compact (2009) compels young people to enrol in an accredited training program to ensure receipt of their benefits. As a result of a decade of policy response in times of economic change, an increasing number of the University's students are aged 15 to 19 years of age. This is a situation that is common in community learning centres around Australia. More importantly, the young people that are re-entering the education system in this way are more likely to have failed in mainstream schooling and so bring with them a range of personal and academic issues.

Developing further educational pathways for young people who are economically and educationally disadvantaged is different from the more traditional role of providing further education and/or industry based training to adult learners. In the past, TAFE had been geared to workplace learning, particularly in relation to the re-skilling of workers often displaced through globalisation in a government and industry purchasing market. This focus on job training had determined the institutional structures and product range.

As in 2002 when the University undertook its own research into the changing demographic of its student cohort; the University still faces

challenges in managing this complex cohort of young people, many of whom have not developed the necessary skills to navigate through the secondary school system and are being left at the door of the adult learning system with little support. The Visy Cares Hub partnership was the first community project where the University entered a long-term alliance to develop a model of practice that could underpin future programs.

As a result of all of this work, several plans of action were implemented. The TAFE Division worked towards the establishment of a Youth Portal that would house all of its initiatives in one area. The concept aimed to facilitate staff to more effectively link themselves and the young people with whom they worked into important community connections. A youth portal, with a coordination focus, was created to be the central point for youth-specific programs (like VCAL), professional development, building community linkages and supporting a more systematic approach to sustaining the growing cohort of ‘high risk’ young people.

Concurrent with this work, the Youth Transitions Unit was established at the Visy Cares Hub. The three staff of the unit undertake a case management role for young people wishing to reconnect with education and support the development of educational programs. Given the limitations of staffing, the model has been supported by a partnership with the University based on the student clinic or field placement model.

The University requires that each student completes a ‘Learning in the workplace project’ as part of their study program. Students have undertaken a range of roles at the Visy Cares Hub. At the VU unit pre-service youth workers, teachers and recreation students have run a range of programs, supported individual young adults with their own educational challenges, met with local schools and assisted in representing VU at the range of events that are held by the centre. It has added a unique dimension to the Youth Transitions Unit, whereby

the University's own clients are involved in the broader community; of course for many of the students, it is also their community, strengthening their own education and community links.

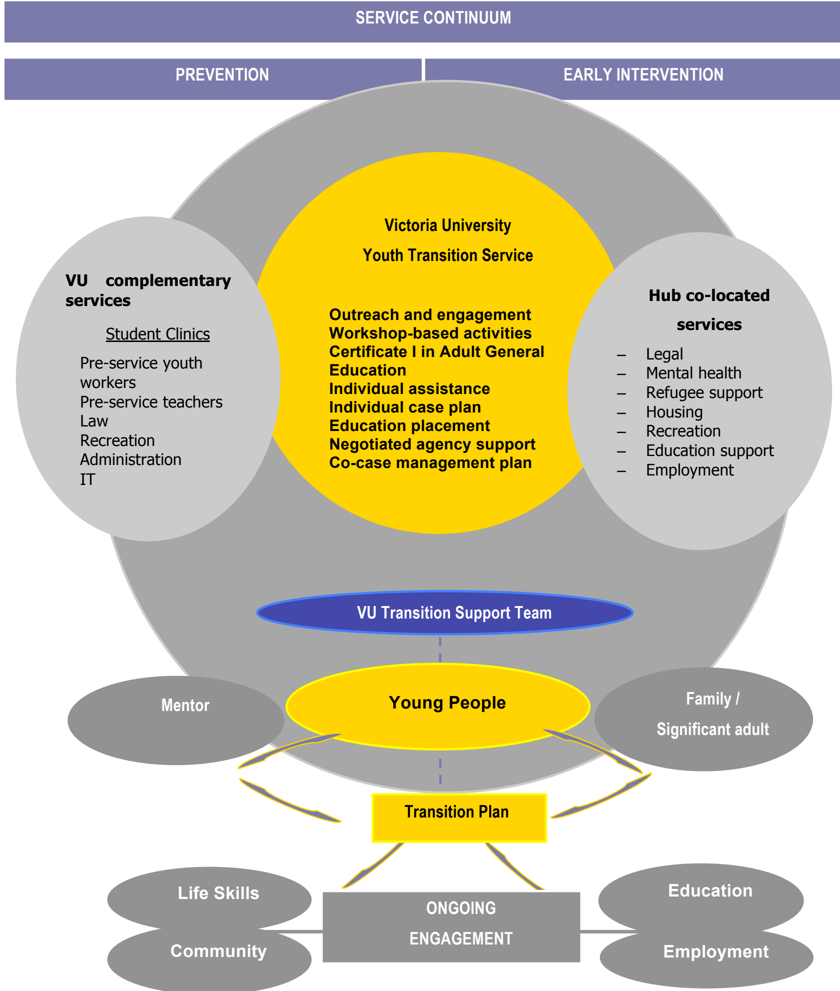
In 2009, 109 students from Victoria University undertook a professional placement at the Visy Cares Hub. As a result, 296 young people participated in programs delivered by students of VU and 950 young people attended events. These are young people with high aspirations, who are connected to education and in the case of this cohort were overwhelmingly from the western suburbs. This evidences how partnerships like this build the capacity of a community, with local role models working alongside local young people.

For students it has been a unique opportunity to develop a model where learners must not only learn to problem-solve the project at hand but also learn to transverse the challenges of an interdisciplinary team from their own group of peers that may share many of their values and professional ideals. At the Visy Cares Hub, there are professionals with different practice skills and values, a common challenge in the workplace.

The diagram below identifies the different components of the Youth Transition Service and the student clinics and how it is seen to be complementary to services that operate at the Visy Cares Hub.

Given the number of young people who are being referred with complex issues, the Transitions Unit is responding with a range of workshops and short courses to strengthen the ability of young people to connect with a pathway of their choice. These have included: careers workshops, financial literacy, learning for entrance tests and license tests as well as working with other professionals to induct them into the range of programs available in a dual sector university such as Victoria University.

Visy Cares



The Unit has also developed a number of partnership programs to support the young people who are looking for assistance. In 2008 the TAFE Division of the University explored using multi-media as a tool for high-risk young people located in the broader community. The project that uses Avatars and the University's own virtual world will be one of a new suite of programs that aim to connect African young men who come into the centre, primarily to use the computers, with a new learning environment that will aim to develop a broader group of life and employment skills with this largely disconnected group of young adult men.

In 2009 the unit formed a partnership with Headspace to implement a Baby Space program for young mothers with mental health issues. That program delivered a second program in 2010. Another partnership is with the employment service. A new life and employment skills program has begun for young people referred from the employment service to the VU Unit.

In 2010 they have also begun the delivery of the Certificate of Education in General Education—in effect, building on the relationships that have been developed to provide these young adults with the opportunity to expand their skills to progress into Further Education.

The unit has also become active in the range of policy discussions, particularly those that highlight the barriers young adults face in returning to education. For many young people, these barriers are multiple and a coordinated set of responses is required. The position of the Unit to challenge these barriers is strengthened when young people can also be referred to mental health specialists, a housing service, employment and legal aid. In effect, the policy and the practice are in synergy.

Below is a case study of a young man that has attended the Youth Transitions Unit at Visy Cares Hub and demonstrates the breadth of program response to which a community unit such as this is now responding.

> 20 year old male presented at VU @ the Hub wanting information on where he could study music. He had alcohol and other Drug (AOD) issues (regular alcohol and cannabis use and recreational amphetamine and heroin use), legal issues as well as severe anxiety. His anxiety preceded his drug use and in reflection he realised this contributed to him leaving school early and only obtaining a Year 8 pass. He did not realise at that time the symptoms he was experiencing were social phobia and generalised anxiety disorder.
>
> The young person was linked in with a GP from Head Space at the time; however, he had no other supports. He did have a supportive family but they were at a loss to know what to do. VU @ the Hub provided the young person with case management to assist him to address his AOD/mental health and re-engage him back into education.
>
> Over the course of one year, rapport and trust have been developed and the young person has dramatically reduced his alcohol and cannabis use and has ceased his amphetamine and heroin use. He is now linked in with a psychologist at Head Space for 12 sessions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to address his anxiety as well continuing to see the GP.
>
> VU staff worked on a transition plan with the young person, outlining the steps and strategies that he would work towards before engaging in full-time study. This included maintaining his appointments with Head Space, completing a Music Mentoring Program at VU and joining a boxing program. There were also many discussions with his family and linking his mother in with an agency that supports parents with children who use drugs.
>
> The young person is looking to the future with optimism and, working on his career planning, he has decided he wants a career working with animals and becoming a zoo-keeper. While he is working on the personal changes in his life, VU assisted him to

> enrol in an on-line course in captive animals through VU. This is only two modules that will give him a slow but steady start into studying at TAFE. VU youth transitions has sponsored the young person to do this, as he could not afford the full-fee paying course.
>
> Staff will continue to support him through this transition as well as assist him to then apply for Certificate II in Animal Studies at VU for 2010. He will be starting volunteering shortly at an animal hospital to improve his chances of getting accepted into the course. Until this time, he will also be taking part in the 'Tools and Skills 4 Life' Program run by VU @ the Hub. The young person has stated many times that he never thought anxiety could be treated and he would always be that way. He now believes that his life can only get better and is excited that he can study and have a career.

Conclusions

The Visy Cares Hub project took a building of historical significance that has been derelict for some years, and rejuvenated it into a youth centre in one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities in Australia. To make generational change in these communities takes vision, commitment, physical infrastructure and resources, as well as Government doing business differently. In this case, a small group of committed people partnered with the Pratt Foundation to be a part of that generational change.

The VU TAFE Division began discussions in 2002 with the Board of the Visy Cares Hub with the aim of establishing a University youth transition service at the Visy Cares Hub. This was to provide a new and innovative way to link the University with young people and to youth service organisations. It was anticipated that young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement from education, training and employment, would benefit from the ease of access to cross-sectoral services made available at the Visy Cares Hub. The University's involvement in the Visy Cares Hub offered an unprecedented opportunity to provide a service to young people

already enrolled and opportunities for other young people to re-engage with education.

Committing to the Visy Cares Hub as an anchor tenant on its opening in 2007 was a commitment to a holistic approach to vocational education that recognised the range of needs young people have that must be addressed to ensure success in education. The Visy Cares Hub provides the University with the opportunity to continue to forge stronger links with the range of community services that are essential to ensuring successful education outcomes for many young people.

Though not fully understood at the time, it also provided a very unique learning opportunity for students who could then undertake a component of their studies at a local youth centre. For many, the western suburbs of Melbourne is their community, and as such, it is their opportunity to role model the benefits of education and in many cases simply provide role models of young adults who are following their own aspirations to succeed. It has been a unique partnership in many ways.

The benefits are reciprocal, as community services have also benefited from the direct link to the University, in effect ensuring that the University door is not only wider but is open for a range of business. These relationships have the potential to provide a more seamless approach to ensuring young people have educational access and pathways not only in secondary education but in making the very important transition to further and higher education. In the Western region, not enough young people are successful or even in many cases have the aspirations to be successful, but this project is challenging the business of learning in a marginalised community with the aim of making a difference.

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About the author

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I feel like I'm being hit from all directions: Enduring the bombardment as a mature-age learner returning to formal learning

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The mature-age learner's re-engagement with a formal learning environment may be somewhat akin to the novice Paintball player who, unless well positioned and attuned to the rules of the combative game, is bombarded and worn down by constant 'hits'. For the mature-age learner, such 'hits' may come in the form of tensions surrounding institutional protocols, social interactions with other peers and personal challenges related to other life-role responsibilities. Transformative learning theory (Cranton 2006, Mezirow 2000) accounts for the often erratic and contradictory trajectories of personal change that some mature-age learners make manifest. Data from a 13-week research project with a group of mature-age learners indicate that these trajectories need to be taken into consideration by educators. A proposition is made that, through the assurance of appropriate, meaningful curricula and the promotion of learning communities (Gabelnick, MacGregor,

Matthews & Smith 1990) that build resiliency (Knight 2007, Goleman 2002, Resiliency Initiatives 2001), educators can empower mature-age learners to cope with the challenges that will inevitably confront them.

Introduction

Mature-age learners represent a unique sub-set of university students in the Australian higher education context. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2010), in 2008, approximately 1,064,050 citizens in Australia were enrolled in either bachelor programs, associate degree programs, other undergraduate programs or Enabling programs. Of this figure, students 20 years and over accounted for 860,050, approximately 6,784 of whom were enrolled in a pre-university Enabling program (ABS 2010). These figures indicate that within university settings, mature-age learners represent a significant sub-set of learners. Such learners are generally typified by defining characteristics that the world of work, community engagement, parenting, travel and other life experiences have imprinted upon them. These learners generally demonstrate a wide diversity in their learning approaches and preferences, in their idiosyncratic coping strategies and in their prior schooling histories. For some, the return to formal study after varying periods of time can elicit feelings of anxiety, stress, disorientation and even fear, yet for others it can induce great excitement and result in consequent personal empowerment. Returning to a formal learning environment, such as an Enabling program, can therefore pose as a somewhat paradoxical experience for mature-age learners in that they need both change and stability for personal growth, yet to achieve and maintain stability, they must undergo personal change of some nature.

Contextualisation, rationale and future relevance

Enabling programs

Characteristically, pre-university Enabling programs are designed to support beginning and interrupted learners from non-traditional backgrounds who are at risk of being marginalised from university study. Such programs offer those in sub-groups traditionally under-represented in the tertiary sector the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills that predispose a learner to a university experience. It would be reasonable to predict from the Australian Government's response (Commonwealth of Australia 2009) to the Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education that the number of mature-age learners seeking higher education opportunity in Australia is set to rise. The federal government's initiatives have significant bearing on the future importance of the conception and delivery of Enabling education, especially given proposed increases in the number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from regional and remote areas in possession of higher education qualifications (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). A plethora of Enabling programs have emerged from Australian universities since the early 1970s as a means of addressing social imbalance in accessing higher education, one of which is CQUniversity Australia's well-respected STEPS program.

STEPS as an Enabling program

STEPS (Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies) is a 13-week, full-time or 26-week part-time, internal or external, pre-university preparatory program that is available to learners who are eighteen years or older, of Australian or New Zealand citizenship or to those who hold a permanent resident or humanitarian visa. It is expected that applicants have completed the equivalent of a Year 10 education, or show a propensity to succeed at the tertiary level. Offered for a period of 24 years, STEPS has to date afforded in excess of 4,900 learners an entry to undergraduate study at universities

throughout Australia. STEPS is offered to its participants free of tuition fees and textbook charges and attracts a federal government financial supplement. The target audience for STEPS are those learners from the previously mentioned equity groups that have been traditionally recognised by the Australian Commonwealth Government as disadvantaged in their access to higher education. CQUniversity's regional campuses satisfy the first two of those categories.

Characteristically, STEPS applicants seek to access higher education but find they lack the essential knowledge, skills and confidence to gain successful entry. Many have been hindered by both past and present educational, social or cultural circumstances, and most have serious misgivings about their academic ability and capability to succeed. In general, however, STEPS students are highly committed and dedicated learners who have a real thirst for knowledge and a determination to succeed. Most view STEPS as a starting point, an educational experience that will facilitate a tertiary entry, and thus an enhanced quality of life through improved educational standing. As such, many show great courage in their quest to achieve what was once considered too far out of reach. During their time in STEPS, it is not unusual for students to confront very challenging personal circumstances; yet, in the main, they are successful in conquering the obstacles that would once have located them on the perimeter of higher education. Thus STEPS not only provides a strategic pathway into university, but aims to instil in its students the confidence and skills necessary to enhance a successful undergraduate study experience. This is achieved largely through the design and delivery of the STEPS curriculum.

STEPS curriculum design

In general, Enabling programs have, as crucial to their design, a curriculum that addresses the challenges encountered by novice learners at the tertiary level, be they educational, cultural, social,

economic or personal (Cullity 2006). Curriculum design generally centres on the means by which mature-age learners may be assisted to gain the knowledge, skills and personal attributes to progress to undergraduate studies. However, in order to acquire qualities essential to transit to this space, it could be argued that there is a demand for a curriculum that offers far more than just an opportunity to acquire the rudimentary knowledge and skills (Cantwell 2004, Cullity 2006, Flint & Frey 2003) required in the higher education learning context. To this end, the intention of STEPS is to present a holistic curriculum that provides opportunities for students not only to learn to plan, research and write an academic essay and acquire basic mathematics and computer skills, but also to discover the value of an optimistic outlook on life and learning and come to acquire a higher level of self-confidence and resiliency. The STEPS curriculum is therefore designed to have its mature-age learners acquire a more fully developed understanding of self as learner and also an acceptance of self as capable, intelligent and capable of embarking on the tertiary experience. In such an environment, there exists potential for significant personal growth.

The STEPS curriculum caters to the diverse needs of its cultural and social groups and encourages its students to acquire the skills that will foster a resilience to study. Pedagogical frameworks and strategies, underpinned by adult learning principles (Knowles 1998, Foley 2000) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow 2000, Cranton 2006), are specifically designed to challenge mature-age learners to reformulate perceptions of themselves as learners. Critical reflection (Mezirow 2000:19) on long-held assumptions about themselves as learners and the consequences of holding such views is actively encouraged through curriculum that is structured to provide opportunities for the deconstruction and reconceptualisation of assumptions and perceptions of self as learner. This is achieved through a curriculum comprised of four component courses.

STEPS component courses

STEPS comprises four core courses. *Language and Learning* aims to have students acquire the reading, thinking and writing skills necessary for academic purposes. *Transition Mathematics 1* is a course in elementary mathematics designed to have students commence work on the foundation concepts, rules and methods of basic mathematics. *Computing for Academic Assignment Writing*, a basic computer literacy course, aims to make students aware of the fundamental operations of a computer and promotes familiarity and competency with the essentials of word-processing, report writing, PowerPoint presentation, spreadsheets and the Internet. *Tertiary Preparation Skills* aims to introduce students to the skills necessary for academic studies. As such, students are familiarised with the diversity of under-graduate university programs, courses and procedures and most develop oral communication techniques as well as organisational strategies and research skills necessary for academic success. In combination, the four STEPS courses provide a solid foundation of skills and knowledge that can enhance articulation to university studies, not to mention the significant personal growth that can be experienced through the confidence many students feel when contemplating the next phase of their formal learning journey.

Three theoretical perspectives underpin the STEPS curriculum and provide a frame for this article. First, transformative learning theory allows for a conceptualisation of the dichotomy of personal change, particularly in its acknowledgement of the physical, cognitive and emotional tensions that can accompany personal transformation. Second, the notion of learning communities (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews & Smith 1990, Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones 2003, McKegg 2005, Tinto 1997, 1998) provides a frame to explain the need for supportive learning environments in order to enhance the learning of mature-age students. And third, theoretical underpinnings of resiliency (Knight 2007) allow for a portrayal of the capacity of individuals to transform and change, regardless of perceived or very

real risks. A brief discussion of each theoretical perspective now follows.

Transformative learning theory

Transformative learning theory seeks to explain the cognitive, affective and operative dimensions of adult learning and the personal transformation process. Often portrayed as a rational, cognitive conception (Mezirow 2000), more recent interpretations of the theory incorporate the affective, emotional and extra-rational dimensions of personal change. These interpretations include a constructivist-developmental conception (Daloz 1999, Taylor 2000), an extra-rational conception (Boyd & Myers 1988, Scott 1997, Boyd 1991, Dirkx 1997, 1998, 2000, Cranton 2002, 2006) and an ecological conception (O'Sullivan 2003). Transformative learning essentially occurs when an individual's taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations supporting beliefs, feelings and judgements are unsettled, critically assessed and revised.

From a developmental point of view, transformative learning occurs when the mature-age learner constructs new meaning structures in order to make sense of their changing world (Dirkx 1997). It calls for the learner to broaden their perspectives and come to see that values and beliefs of others, though different from their own, are equally valid (Taylor 2000). However, while some individuals may experience exhilaration as a result of significant personal change, for others the experience can be 'traumatic and overwhelming' (Taylor 2000: 160). Thus, the extra-rational conceptualisation of transformative learning theory allows for the inclusion of emotion, spirit and soul, intuition and imagination in the transformative learning process. Dirkx (1997: 84) sees such a conceptualisation as 'an attempt to embrace the messiness and disorder that is adult learning'. Making sense of such disorder can be discourse, dialogue and support from others (Cranton 2006) which can be facilitated through the establishment of learning communities.

Learning communities

The notion of learning communities can be used in diverse ways, but it is its close association with lifelong learning that is of relevance in this article. More specifically, it refers to the creation of a learning environment in which mature-age learners have opportunities to experience success. While definitions of learning communities vary from context to context, the definition that best informs the underpinning philosophy of the STEPS program is that espoused by Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews and Smith (1990: 19), namely, that:

> A learning community is any one of a variety of curricular structures that link together several existing courses—or actually restructure the curricular material entirely so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise.

Common to the many conceptions of learning communities are two key characteristics: *shared knowledge* and *shared knowing* (Tinto 1997: 4). *Shared knowledge* is promoted through the construction of a coherent educational experience in which 'students come to share, as a community of learners, a body of knowledge that is itself connected'. *Shared knowing* relates not only to how students come to know each other quickly and relatively intimately, but also to how they come to share the experience of trying to know or learn. Within the learning community, collaborative and cooperative pedagogies are designed to purposefully encourage students to take active roles in their construction of new knowledge.

Learning communities generate many important benefits. They provide a supportive 'learning space' (Tinto 1997: 13) that promotes working and learning together; they enhance the students' learning and educational attainment; they reduce attrition; and they benefit the institution, broadening the 'educational "repertoire" … and the possibilities for student learning' (Tinto 1997: 13). Kilpatrick,

Barrett and Jones (2003: 3) believe learning communities can create new knowledge that benefits both the individual and the community. The authors also cite learning communities as places in which a common or shared purpose is a focal objective; where collaboration, partnership and learning are promoted; where diversity is respected; and where potential and outcomes are enhanced. Tinto (1998) attributes learning communities as being instrumental in the development of supportive peer groups to assist students in balancing the struggles they face in the higher education context. Furthermore, Tinto (1998) claims that the learning community influences the students' desire to continue on to further studies. From an inclusive viewpoint, McKegg (2005: 294) values the opportunity learning communities provide in terms of embracing different cultural backgrounds and allowing the student to 'have a voice [and] to feel safe articulating fears and ideas'. Equally important to the establishment of learning communities and the promotion of transformative learning is the learners' resiliency to succeed.

Resiliency

Upon their engagement with formal study, many mature-age learners are confronted with challenges and obstacles that in one way or another hinder their potential for learning. In seeking a solution, many turn to other people for advice or suggestions on how to overcome personal adversity. However, a resilient individual is one who can draw on their own resources to enact effective interventions to find solutions to problematic situations. Although no universal definition of resiliency can be found (Knight 2007), resilience is generally associated with optimism and is based on the premise that 'we can encounter change and adversity but still find hope' (Knight 2007: 543). Goleman (2002) conceptualises resilience in terms of one's emotional intelligence and its role in facilitating one's ability to cope with change. Similarly, Greenberg (2006) asserts that

the stresses associated with learning can be better tolerated by those learners who take responsibility for their emotional state.

Risk and protective factors are fundamental concepts associated with resiliency. Risk factors, which can be internal and external, are those issues related to 'disabling, cultural, economic, or medical conditions that deny or minimise opportunities and resources for human development' (Resiliency Initiatives 2001: 2). Protective factors refer to particular qualities and situations that facilitate the reversal or alteration of expected negative outcomes, and it is through the provision and nurturance of these protective factors that resiliency can be promoted (Resiliency Initiatives 2001). Thus, for the mature-age learner, family networks, peer relationships, relationships with teachers and commitment to learning represent components through which resiliency can be promoted. More specifically, strengths such as self-concept, self-control, cultural sensitivity, empowerment, social sensitivity and empathy provide important internal strengths to the adult resiliency framework (Resiliency Initiatives 2001).

Methodology

Having established the three theoretical concepts on which this article is premised, the next section uses data from a doctoral thesis that examined transformations in how a group of nine mature-age learners perceived themselves as learners while engaged in the 13-week, on-campus STEPS program (Willans 2010). The participants, all of whom volunteered to be part of the research group, were typically from low socio-economic backgrounds and first in their family to attend university. During their time in STEPS, each participant partook in four interviews: two semi-formal, individual interviews and two group interviews. A case study methodology was employed to frame the research, allowing for the use of a researcher's journal and pre- and post-documents composed by the participants. Discourse analysis was used to analyse the data, allowing for the

emergence of dominant discourses. These various discourses provided evidence to suggest that, for these nine mature-age learners, undertaking STEPS was at times akin to enduring an ongoing physical and emotional bombardment.

Enduring the bombardment

Personal change can entail degrees of uncertainty and exposure of self to possible threats of failure or fear of the unknown. This is due to the fact that maintaining our assumptions and particular worldviews provides us with a certain degree of safety, and to question them is to question our 'assimilated ways of knowing, believing, and feeling' (Cranton 2006: 23). However, in avoiding the process of personal change, the mature-age learner can potentially face stagnation, and having the courage to critique long-held personal assumptions about self as learner can be problematic. Resiliency is required to cope with not only the epistemological challenges faced by the mature-age learner but also certain forms of bombardment that may include financial constraints, job and family commitments, confusing institutional practices and protocols, and a perceived or very real lack of family support. As the following section will now illustrate, without resiliency, this constant barrage of physical, cognitive and emotional demands can significantly impact on the mature-age learner's re-engagement with formal education.

The physical

Many mature-age learners already fulfil multiple roles when they take on the additional role of 'student' (Stone 2008, Cullity 2006, Darab 2004). Embroiled in these multiple roles can be tensions related to juggling finances, paid employment, parenting, civic commitments and other life stresses. For many women in particular, becoming a 'student' can conflict with the multiple life roles many fulfil. Debbenham and May (2004) found that when women become students, they are in general still largely responsible for family care

and the majority of domestic, household chores and child-minding responsibilities. The implication of having to physically juggle so many roles was made manifest by STEPS student Ella, a 42 year old, married woman with four children:

> The pressure of time, from working at night, being a wife and mother with household duties, civic responsibilities and children with sporting commitments, was hard. I found that I stuck to myself a lot, and didn't have time to give to the class. At times I even thought about pulling out of STEPS as I felt it was coming from all directions.

Twenty-eight year old STEPS student Tess, a single mother of two children, experienced similar physical challenges as STEPS reached its program mid-way point:

> I'm feeling pretty run down at the moment. I think it has been my son so sick and with nine lots of anti-biotics. … I can't concentrate. I haven't been well since the weekend and that hasn't helped and trying to keep everyone happy is so hard.

The tension experienced by both Ella and Tess is not unusual in an Enabling context. Darab (2004) suggests that the volume of women's time commitments have resulted in intolerable workloads, and that the unbounded nature of family work involves significant time costs. Likewise, Stone (2008) found that lack of time, time management skills, balancing the needs of study, home and family and changes in family relationships were challenges facing the female student. Stone (2008: 279) also found that female students had to accommodate their study time around other family and domestic responsibilities and ensure their study hours did not 'impinge on family time'. Thus, similar to Ella, many women who are already fully tasked with demanding domestic and other routines can feel somewhat bombarded when trying to integrate study requirements into their existing and often very busy weekly schedules.

The cognitive

For other mature-age learners, cognitive challenges surrounding the exposure to new knowledge can make problematic their return to study. For many, the hiatus from formal schooling has left residual, distant memories of formal prose and lapses in the practice of certain higher order cognitive processing. Trying to comprehend the structure and discourse of academic writing and its associated protocols can be anxiety-provoking for many mature-age learners, and the "confusing culture' of higher education, with its rules and regulations, word limits, language, assessment assumptions and other 'academic' issues' (Askham 2008: 90) can give rise to significant tension. The difficulty of this was illustrated by June, a 32 year old, single STEPS student:

> Even though for the essay I know what to say, I just don't know how to say it. I just can't get it out of my head on to the paper! I was yelling in my head, 'You can't do this', but Julie was saying, 'Yes you can'. I am trying to enjoy it but I am finding it so hard.

STEPS student Tara, a married mother of five, experienced a similar apprehension:

> Writing is still a challenge for me. I'm still trying to get from the thought to the paper in the proper sentence and essay structure. That is what challenges me and I think I am slowly getting here.

For Bill, a single, 28 year old STEPS student, trying to synthesise the information to compile his academic essay was clearly problematic:

> The research essay was a big challenge for me to start with. I could get conclusions very easily. The introduction was an absolute nightmare for me and I eventually got the introduction okay by looking at my conclusion then I looked at the body of the research assignment and... It's not there! And I thought, 'Oh no, what's going on here?

Finally, Tess' words capture the cognitive challenge of trying to make sense of disparate pieces of new information:

> I sat last night and I just couldn't get going. I can't do the maths and the language at the same time. I just don't have the head space.

The cognitive rigours demanded by the genre of academic writing can be quite disorienting for many mature-age learners. However, such events, argues Cranton (2006), can pose as catalysts for transformative learning, whereby either consciously or unconsciously, long-held assumptions about self as learner can be critiqued, tested and revised. Meyer and Land (2005: 2) refer to this conceptual territory as the 'liminal space', a 'not-so-sure' (p. 5) place of meaning making, in which personal transformation occurs through the altering of one's state to another. This space, however, is not without its tensions as the acquisition of new knowledge and subsequent new personal status can be problematic for the individual who, according to Meyer and Land (2005: 3), is not positioned 'fully in one category or another'. From this conceptual borderland, emotion can run high.

The emotional

Intricately enmeshed in the physical and cognitive challenges confronting many mature-age learners is the construct of emotion. Foremost in the formal learning context for many such learners is the anxiety and fear they experience when they step into the 'intellectual unknown', placing their 'private and public "neck" on the line' (Cantwell 2004: 12). Knowles (1998) suggests the learning experiences for adults are optimised in a non-threatening, challenging, supportive environment. However, despite the best intentions of the educator to create such, as the mature-age learner experiments with new personal identities, confronts possible mismatches between the discourses of home and the formal learning context, experiences confusion and uncertainty in light of new and diverse worldviews, and interacts with individuals from many diverse socio-economic and other backgrounds, emotions can run high. Such

tension was articulated by 48 year old STEPS student and mother of four, Rita:

> I was upset with the rudeness of some class members. We had a lot of rudeness and comments that were unfair and people were very demanding. I also had trouble with thinking, well, I can't get caught up in their [class members'] stress 'cause I've got my own. That was the hardest but I handled it okay, I think.

Despite varying levels of anticipation and excitement experienced as a result of their return to formal learning, lack of self-confidence is experienced by many mature-age learners. Cullity's (2005: 1) findings substantiate self-doubt as one of the most common causes of anxiety for mature-age learners, manifested in a complex interplay of 'attitudinal, academic and social' dimensions that affect such learners as they prepare for undergraduate study. This was clearly the case for Tara who articulated a lack of confidence in her writing ability:

> Low self-esteem with my writing is still a major thing. It's still there. I just can't get over the line 'cause I don't know if it will be right or not. And I don't want to look silly or anything like that.

Prior educational learning failures and negative schooling experiences can adversely impact the mature-age learner's study potential by clouding the perception many of them hold about themselves as learners. Cantwell and Grayson (2002) suggest the impacts of prior experiences of educational failure for mature-age learners can have a negative impact on perception of self as learner, and that different types of learning demanded in the university environment can fuel the notion of personal inadequacy. Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) note that most of the Enabling program women in their research expressed feelings of alienation from aspects of the learning environment, manifested by their sense of inadequacy and anxiety, as well as fear of possible humiliation. This was illustrated by June, who, despite proudly sharing previous accomplishments with the class, perceived herself as a less than capable learner:

> Although I have travelled the world and owned three businesses, I was hopeless at English at school. I never was a good writer. It has always been a downfall of mine. My spelling is hopeless, too.

Feelings of guilt and regret can also be emotional factors that negatively impact the mature-age learner on their re-engagement with formal learning. Evidence suggests that when mothers return to formal study, many can feel their familial roles are compromised (Debbenham & May 2004). This was evidenced by the guilt expressed by Tara as she lamented the time not spent with her toddler:

> My two year old is talking a lot more just with me being away and it has been a bit heart-wrenching. She's about twelve months behind with speech with talking and she's actually putting three and four words together when she's talking. She never did that before. I'm sorry that I'm not there seeing it. A couple of weeks ago she went through a stage where she cried every time I left, which made me feel guilty, thinking 'Should I be doing this? Should I be here?'

Sonia, a 35 year old, married mother of two, alludes to the emotional upheaval that being a student entailed for her:

> Juggling work, children, sport, husband, time management skills… The pressure has at times played havoc with my emotions. I don't have the time to spend with the family or do the other things I used to do. I even went downstairs to study last week and didn't even cook tea!

Lack of family support can compromise the success of the mature-age learner who re-engages with study. Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite and Godfrey (2004) note that changes in family circumstances and the level of family support can have a serious impact on the mature-age learner's motivation and academic progress. The authors suggest that strong family support is one of the most important factors outside the university in ensuring persistence and success in higher education studies. Likewise, Cantwell and Mulhearn (1997) suggest that lack of family support can impact negatively on the ability of some mature-

age women to cope in the formal learning arena. This appeared clear for Gina, a 25 year old STEPS student:

> The family and friends that I thought would support me and be happy for me were a little bit jealous and envious and wanted to see me fall flat on my face … I found out who was for me and who was against me.

Lack of support from family can also be manifest in the low aspirations that some family members have for their parent, partner or sibling-turned-student. Cullity (2006) perceives that this attitude can discourage some mature-aged students from attending university, for to do so can risk being ostracised by family and friends who send 'ambivalent messages' (Spreadbury 2007: 77). This was clearly the case for Bill, who spoke of the family tension surrounding his decision to undertake STEPS:

> I told my father what I was doing and why I was doing it and I thought he understood at the start of it, but I got a phone call from him last week telling me about a job being a priority. I told him, 'This is a priority'! He will come to understand it as time goes by.

Minimal aspirations due to low socio-economic backgrounds and low status employment can be a negative factor for some mature-age learners who re-engage with formal learning. The transition away from low socio-economic background status through education can entail a fragile balance between the mature-age learner's realisation of their potential and 'maintaining a sense of an authentic self' (Reay 2002: 404). Reay (2002) argues that some can even feel like impostors in the higher education context and this influence their choices about future direction. Twenty-seven year old STEPS student, Andy, reflected this tension:

> Well, I came into STEPS to do teaching but then all the ideas that have come into my head … I might not be a teacher. I might just be something else like a health and safety officer.

Imposter syndrome was also made manifest by Tess in her comparison between past career and identity as student:

> When I started STEPS, feelings of doubt filled my head ... I wondered, would anyone notice that I was just a lowly shopkeeper trying to masquerade as a higher, more intelligent being? I kept waiting for someone to say, 'You can't do this'.

Implications

The articulations of the mature-age learners presented in this article indicate that re-engagement with formal study can be physically, cognitively and emotionally challenging as old identities clash with new and previous perceptions of self as learner are contested. From the spaces where such collisions occur, tensions related to multiple life roles and new roles, such as that of 'student', can occur. Thus from an educator's perspective, awareness of this tension necessitates that certain pedagogical practices must be adopted in their work with mature-age learners in Enabling programs. First is the creation and maintenance of a stimulating, responsive, intellectual learning community wherein the mature-age learner, regardless of previous schooling experiences or socio-economic background, is empowered through shared knowledge and shared knowing (Tinto 1997) to engage in collaborative relationships with peers and educators. Additionally crucial is the educator's establishment of learning spaces (Tinto 1997) in which opportunities are created to foster social connections and promote transformative learning. In such an environment, mature-age learners can be encouraged to 'safely' deconstruct long-held negative perceptions of self as learner that have hindered potential, and allow for the conceptualisation of new perspectives about self. Additionally, educators must acknowledge the diversity of life role challenges that confront the mature-age learner and take such into consideration when designing and implementing curriculum through appropriate and meaningful pedagogical practices, assessment regimes and more flexible time frames.

Of vital importance is the educator's acknowledgment of the multidimensionality of learning, that it is comprised of physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions, and that each dimension can significantly impact the success of the mature-age learner who re-engages with formal learning. In the enhancement of a successful educational experience, through the discussion of risk and protective factors (Resiliency Initiatives 2001), Enabling educators can also strive to promote resiliency as a way for their mature-age learners to address the challenges they confront as 'student'. Furthermore, through an open door policy and the encouragement of various networks and relationships with family, peers and others, support from the learning community can be readily available. Of equal importance is the development of a holistic curriculum that encapsulates frameworks and self-management strategies that successfully develop self-regulated and engaged learners. Alongside this would be the gradual acquisition of skills, knowledge and confidence that, in a scaffolded way, would help prepare mature-age learners for the physical, cognitive and emotional dimensions of their future undergraduate studies.

Conclusion

Enabling programs across the higher education sector provide a much needed pathway for those under-represented at the tertiary level; however, to be truly effective, such programs should aim to foster more than just skill acquisition. To address the unique needs of the mature-age learner who wishes to prepare for a university education, Enabling programs should look to the whole person and the myriad of factors that have bearing on the success of the learner. Over the duration of the STEPS program, most mature-age learners acquire the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success at the tertiary level. However, more importantly, STEPS provides them with the opportunity to develop a sense of their own power to confront the many obstacles that may stand in the way of success. In a new

learning context that is typically accompanied by a degree of chaos, confusion and uncertainty, many mature-age learners gain the confidence to endure as they are 'hit from all directions'. The process of enduring the struggle, and successfully overcoming the obstacles that have previously blocked the learner's progress, results not only in academic progress and the development of resiliency, but also in personal transformation for those who persist.

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Secondary level re-entry of young Canadian adult learners

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This paper illuminates and details some of the traits, pressures and semi-autonomy of the young adult between the ages of 18 and 24 who must confront the barriers and challenges upon returning to secondary school within the high school and the adult education centre context. Focusing on these young adults is fundamentally important to begin to understand and appreciate the many variables such as gender, early school-leaving, re-entry and needs that impact students who are re-entering secondary school. We present the negative experiences that many of our young adult students have had in a manner that is summative yet touches on the underlying socio-economic challenges that have forced their hand and placed them not only at risk but caused them to leave the secondary school program before program completion. A number of personal insights and qualitative collective observations present an accurate picture of the situation in one central Ontario (Canada) site.

Introduction

This paper illuminates and details the barriers faced by young adult learners who return to secondary school (high school). Focusing on adults between the ages of 18 and 24 is fundamentally important to this discussion in order to understand the many challenges of secondary school reentry. Early school leavers are repeatedly labelled 'dropouts', however the term needs further attention. In the past, the term 'dropout' was applied to:

> ... any student, previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absence, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrollment in another licensed educational institution. (Chuang 1994: 1073)

This understanding is used henceforth within this critical area which is omnipresent for us as authors, as we are both also educators. One author was a secondary educator who currently teaches adults at the post-secondary level and the other is currently a vice (assistant) principal with responsibilities for an adult education centre. The adult education centre has been experiencing declining enrolment in recent years in spite of the increasing facilities for drop-outs within the jurisdiction of central Ontario (Canada). This writing effort developed from discussions with current adult students at the centre in order to understand how to support this group of learners in pursuit of personal goals that often results in the awarding of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Many adult students have overcome obstacles in their lives and believe it takes a lot of courage to come back to school. Nonetheless, surprisingly, little research has been directed towards finding factors that influence the decision of a dropout, aged 18 to 24, to re-enrol, as well as strategies and programs that need to be in place to support these learners (Bradley & Goldman 1996a, Chuang 1994, Skaalvik &

Skaalvik 2005). We believe that this age group is often overlooked by various researchers and community stakeholders.

Within Ontario there are many programs to keep students aged 16 to 18 in school, for instance, the Learning to 18 initiative developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education, but there are many students who do not achieve an OSSD by age 18. These students often leave high school in need of only a few credits to complete secondary school and graduate. We believe it is vital that educators acknowledge this problem and step forward to help students achieve an OSSD so that they have more options when considering future education or career paths.

The young adult: pressures

Often employers want their employees to have an OSSD; however, young adults are confronted with many pressures. For example, Chuang (1994: 1071) explains that 'dropouts are disproportionately from low socio-economic status and racial or ethnic minority groups, and their grades are poorer than those of their peers' when they are in middle school and high school. The need to step out of the academic life and into the world of work is considerable, we believe. Similarly, Raymond (2008: 7) found that dropouts are more likely to come from low-income, single-parent households or from a family where the parent(s) do not have a post-secondary diploma or degree. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2005: 1) has characterised the situation as follows:

> Adult learners live complex lives. Their re-entry into the learning environment, in many instances, requires a profound leap of courage, and yet their learning success is integral to the health of our communities and our economy … They are young adults who want to contribute but need to find a way back into the education system before they can enter the workforce. Often, they are students at risk of leaving school, even 16- and 17-year olds, who can benefit from strategies used in adult programs.

The broad strokes of this characterisation to some extent ignore the individual nuances of each learner and their unique needs; however, in order to serve more than one person at a time, a broad portrait made up of a small number of traits needs to be put forward herein as is often the case within government frameworks.

The young adult: traits and outcomes

One characteristic trait of this age group is that they enjoy the freedom of adult life but avoid typical adult responsibilities, such as parenting and marriage. This period of emerging adulthood is a period of semi-autonomy where many draw on parental resources, while trying to find their place in the world (Marcotte 2008). Eckstein and Wolpin (1999: 1335) concluded that 'youths who drop out of high school have different traits than those who graduate'. In addition we have found that specifically they have lower school ability, motivation and lower expectations about the rewards they will receive from obtaining a high school diploma; they place a higher value on leisure and have a lower attendance rate while still in school. We have realised that attendance issues can contribute to a student leaving a high school setting because students who have reduced attendance also demonstrate diminished achievement on assessment and evaluation events and therefore depart without completing the OSSD requirements.

There is a need to find out what motivates young adult students and to understand why they discontinue studies. What is the reason or reasons for remaining a student versus the reasons for departing the secondary school environment? We know that students in a high school setting do not spend as much time with individual teachers as they do in Ontario elementary schools and, as a result, teachers may not be aware of some of the struggles and issues they face out of school (Raymond 2008). Parental involvement is also less in high school (Marcotte 2008). Perhaps one message worth sending

to parents is that increased parental involvement at the high school level may enhance or ensure completion rates. As well, providing parents with information about course options (e.g. high skills major and programming pathways) and other current information would help parents support their child (Raymond 2008). The high skills major initiative is one of several steps taken by the Ontario Ministry (2007: 1) to help more students graduate:

> In 2006, the province launched the first five majors—construction, hospitality and tourism, arts and culture, manufacturing and primary industries (landscaping, agriculture, forestry and mining). This September, most school boards will offer at least one of the nine majors. Students enrolled in a major are required to complete a bundle of classroom courses, workplace experiences and industry certifications to receive a special designation on their diploma.

In addition some schools in the central Ontario jurisdiction have started to send home an information page with each monthly newsletter that helps support the link between parents and secondary schools. This enhanced communication initiative is cost-effective and we are monitoring outcomes at present in our central Ontario region.

Dropping out of high school before program completion (early) often is the threshold for failures across a wide range of areas, including employment, involvement in crime and substance use, as well as unsatisfactory personal relationships (Eckstein *et al.* 1999, Marcotte 2008). This situation only serves to enlarge the number, currently over 13 percent, of young adults who were unemployed in the province of Ontario in 2004 (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2008). This is troublesome, since occupations with the fastest expected growth in the next decade will require post-secondary credentials, and those with the greatest expected decline will require only on-the-job training (Kazis *et al.* 2007: 9). For these reasons, we support the need to establish retention policies, school practices and instructional strategies to sustain this group of adults aged 18 to 24

in obtaining a high school diploma, and assisting these same young adults in achieving a fulfilling and rewarding life beyond school.

Gender and age differences

According to Raymond (2008), high school dropout rates have been falling over the past fifteen years from 19 percent in 1990/1991 to approximately 11 percent in the 2004/2005 school year. There is a difference, however, in the rate of dropouts according to gender. In 2004/2005, the rate of dropouts declined to 14 percent for males and nine percent for females. Between 15 percent and 18 percent of dropouts aged 20 to 24 return to school every year, with females returning in greater proportions then males (Raymond 2008). In a study conducted by Norman and Hyland (2003), it was found that those who dropped out of high school at the age of 16 did not engage in future learning at a greater rate then those who dropped out at age 17 or 18. It was also found that the longer a dropout stayed away from school, the less likely they were to return, and of those who did return, 70 percent did eventually complete high school requirements (Chuang 1994, Raymond 2008). On the other hand, Bradley and Goldman (1996a) found that the younger students who re-enter high school are less successful than older ones and concluded that, if students re-enter too early after first leaving high school, they tend to follow previously unsuccessful behavioural patterns. We believe this variable has much to do with the maturity of the student. In our program many adolescents develop a pattern of behaviour which becomes a routine that is easy to follow, such as sleeping in. As these students mature, they realise the significance and necessity of obtaining a secondary education diploma, especially once they realise they can not support themselves the way they would like on a minimum wage (Norman & Hyland 2003). Conversely, we have also witnessed students who leave school and return a few months later just to follow the same pattern that led to their withdrawal from high school in the first place. If they follow this pattern, they

are unsuccessful once again (Bradley & Goldman 1996a). We have theorised that it may be viewed as a combination of two variables: motivation and determination. Our theory suggests that once they are motivated to reach their goal of an OSSD, then they can break the pattern of maladaptive behaviour that initially led to their withdrawal.

As noted earlier there is also a difference between males and females and the reasons why they drop out of school. Chuang (1994: 1072) found that 'male dropouts most often cited work-related reasons; whereas female dropouts most often cited family-related reasons [such as] marriage and/or pregnancy'. In Canada, the proportion of young adults 'leaving school due to personal reasons is four times higher among young female dropouts than among young men … The≈proportion of young men wanting/needing to work as the reason for dropping out is double the proportion of young women' (Raymond 2008: 17).

Very few factors influence young women's decisions to return to school; most often they return to school because they still have aspirations to obtain a post-secondary education and the circumstance that brought them to leave in the first place (e.g. birth of a child) is no longer perceived to be an obstacle in their lives (Raymond 2008). Young women will also return to school if only a short time has elapsed since they originally left school. However, young men's return to school depends on their past academic experience and their labour experience (Norman & Hyland 2003). We believe that it is essential to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the gender differences and problems faced by these young adults who drop out of high school. It is imperative that this is done in order to establish policies, services, curriculum and programming that are needed in order to help them achieve a high school diploma. We need to determine what they need, support them and keep these students engaged. We believe that we are on the right path with the implementation of High Skills Major credits and Dual

credit (apprenticeship training and post-secondary courses, earning dual credits that count towards both their high school diploma and their postsecondary diploma, degree or apprenticeship certification) that link students to the post-secondary system. Some students are more suited to a less structured environment such as that found at the college level and that is why they are successful in these new programs. But we must also be flexible with student timetables and offer other options such as correspondence courses or credit recovery to help students catch up on credits missed.

Early school leaving and re-entry

Adult learners live complex lives and it is their 're-entry into the learning environment, in many instances, [that] requires a profound leap of courage, and yet their learning success is integral to the health of our communities and our economy' (Wynne 2005: 1). Many of these young adult learners need to overcome the negative perceptions they maintain of the educational system (Marcotte 2008). Each learner who returns to a secondary school setting to obtain a high school diploma comes with varied memories of their earlier experiences. Adult learners have a variety of reasons for leaving school, and an even greater number of reasons for returning. Once again, in order to support these adult learners, we believe we need more than a simple recipe. We believe that we need to determine what supports each individual either academically or socially. This is frequently missing at many Adult Learning Centers; for example, there is often no guidance counsellor or any other supports within most adult schools and, at our particular adult education centre, even the administration is assigned onsite infrequently (two days per week). This fact has been communicated to upper administration within our education system order to correct this situation.

An Australian study by Bradley and Goldman (1996a) and a Canadian report by Raymond (2008) found that students had many reasons for withdrawing from high school such as financial, family (includes having a baby) and outside school commitments. These young adults also put emphasis on the fact that they lacked motivation and had difficulty coping with school structures. Poor attendance and feeling overwhelmed with the school workload (inability to catch up from work missed) also led to their early departure from school (Norman & Hyland 2003). A number of school dropouts also see school as irrelevant and devalue formal training and attribute effective performance in a job to common sense and experience (Chuang 1994, Gorard & Selwyn 2005).

A variety of reasons can motivate a young adult to return to school such as 'parental pressures, recognition of the economic benefits obtained from the completion of a diploma and disappointing labour market experiences' (Raymond 2008: 7). Chuang (1994) found that an unemployed young adult who dropped out of school was more likely to return to school if there was a high rate of unemployment as compared to an employed young adult in the same situation. These findings are not only echoed by Bradley and Goldman (1996b), but these authors also state that dropouts also return to school for a variety of social reasons that include the need to please their parents and enjoyment of the student lifestyle. It is interesting to note that boredom is a reason that students gave for dropping out of high school, as well as a reason why they returned.

Informal channels such as parents, friends and their own inquiries are the major sources of information regarding returning to school (Bradley & Goldman 1996b). This information is important in trying to help young adults find out about adult education programs and achieving their goals of obtaining a high school diploma. We believe that it is important to have detailed adult education information accessible within the community via radio, print ads, internet

and local community mailing to provide information and support that may prompt and encourage young adults to return to school. Although young adults may not be the ones to read or hear about educational programming, others can pass the messages on. Above all, these young adults must be supported in their decision to return to school by key family and community members.

Adult learners: barriers

Norman and Hyland (2003) place major obstacles and barriers of adult learners into three categories: situational, institutional and dispositional. Situational barriers include time, daycare and family responsibilities. Especially if these young adults have families to support or take care of, the cost of daycare might be a barrier that prevents them from returning to school. It is often very difficult for students in this type of situation to find the time to attend school, work and take care of their family (Kazis *et al.* 2007).

Course timetabling problems, lack of information informing young adults about learning opportunities available to them, as well as the use of inappropriate teaching/learning strategies are some examples of institutional barriers. Timetables as well as teaching/learning strategies must incorporate the principles of adult learning. It is important to include time for talk, hands-on activities, and an opportunity for these students to be able to relate their coursework to real-life experiences. Learning should be both formal and informal (Norman & Hyland 2003).

Dispositional barriers include having a negative perception and/or attitude towards learning. Some young adults are hesitant to re-enrol into a high school setting because they may have had previous encounters where they formed the perception that they can not trust the system or they lack confidence because of their prior experiences. This is a barrier that prevents them from using the services offered. Therefore, it is important for educators to recognise this barrier,

understand the individual student, and work at establishing interventions where the student can feel comfortable, return to school and achieve a high school diploma. Services and supports must be established, accessible and appropriate to fit the young adult learner (Marcotte 2008, Norman & Hyland 2003).

Adult learners: strategies, programs and services

Often young adult dropouts are hesitant to re-enrol in school programs because they mistrust the system (Compton, Cox & Laanan 2006). Therefore, it is imperative to establish interventions that will help serve these emerging young adults and prevent them from leaving the school setting a second time. Marcotte (2008: 10-11) suggests that services and supports must be accessible to these students because

> Given the critical period that emerging adulthood constitutes, especially for at-risk youths, the importance of school achievement and perseverance in subsequent adult adjustment and the potential turning point that the adult education sector may represent for these youths, it is imperative to establish interventions that will serve those emerging adults enrolled in these school settings, as it may be the last chance to take action during that developmental period and prevent subsequent maladjustment. To improve service delivery to this segment of the population, programs must be created with respect to the developmental status and features of emerging adulthood.

The potential intervention must also be coordinated and developmentally appropriate to enable these young people to pursue their goals. Curriculum must involve and permit the development of personal choice and social responsibility that is both authentic and meaningful. Further, we believe that this adult-oriented learning environment must build on the principles of accessibility for, and inclusion of, all young adults, and be flexible in meeting their individual needs. For example, we could schedule night or weekend

classes, or provide daycare at the school. We can also offer the course in various formats such as in a regular classroom setting or correspondence. At our adult education centre, we offer Literacy and Basic Skills training (LBS) which can help prepare students for the credit courses. In our opinion there is a need to locate programs that sustain the interests and abilities of these young adult students such as high skills major and dual credit courses. If students have been away from a formal school setting for many years or those who do not have many credits on their transcript, we recommend they spend some time in this program upgrading their literacy and numeracy skills. It is also important to incorporate their adult experiences in work and life (Kazis *et al.* 2007).

It is essential that programs for young adults who return to high school are meaningful and relevant, and the delivery of the curriculum is focused around the use of current adult teaching methods. For example, when teaching adults, emphasis should be placed on 'self-directed rather than teacher-directed methods: learning should be based on sharing experiences within the group' (Bradley & Goldman 1996a: 72). Teachers of young adult students should have students draw on their own life experiences when making connections and discussing curriculum. Adult learners have the ability to use prior experiences and link them to new ideas and situations, making learning easier. The delivery of the curriculum must also provide new and engaging learning opportunities (Compton *et al.* 2006).

Students need to see the relevance of what they are studying. They also bring to the classroom a wide range of experiences that can be used to enrich the learning in the room. Learning should also take many forms such as co-operative education and be offered across different interdisciplinary settings. This will help reach the various learning styles of these young adults and, for some, this type of learning will help them feel successful and keep them motivated

(Compton *et al.* 2006, Kazis *et al.* 2007, Norman & Hyland 2003). We believe the curriculum must provide engaging learning opportunities and be customised to the needs and interests of individual adult students.

Adult learners also want to minimise the amount of time they spend in class (Kazis *et al.* 2007). Therefore, it is important to offer flexible schedules such as day, evening and weekend classes. Schools should also offer various forms of instruction, which includes on-line instruction, in-class instruction, and correspondence courses. Given that there are a variety of reasons why these young adult learners return to obtain a high school diploma, schools should also offer multiple entry and exit points (Bradley *et al.* 1996a, Kazis *et al.* 2007). Parnham (2001) found that adult learning programs should also allow participants to progress at their own pace and to achieve their own personal objectives.

The exact potential of the adult education centre (school) has yet to be realised, as many of the assigned teachers have not yet been trained in the theories and teaching practices within adult education. Without this vital training, the staff is unable, through no fault of their own, to meet the needs of the young adult learners. To help out in this area, we have put up various statements about adult learners in our staff room. We have explained to the staff that these statements refer to the people sitting in their classroom and these statements reflect how they learn and their immediate needs. As a staff we look at one principle a month during staff meetings and hopefully dialogue as discussion unfolds amongst the staff.

It is also important that teachers of young adult learners establish a learning environment where students feel secure, feel free to ask questions, and can work at demonstrating the curricular expectations. If students avoid seeking help, it may result in misunderstandings, lack of important skills and reduced motivation (Skaalvik *et al.* 2005). Remedial courses and/or informal tutorial assistance should be

available to returning students (Bradley *et al.* 1996a). Remedial classes can help students enhance their numeracy and literacy skills, if needed, before entering into a credit accumulation program. Tutorial assistance should also be available and easily accessible so that returning students can get the help they need and have their questions answered in a timely fashion.

Many of the young females that leave high school do so because of family responsibilities and their focus changes to their child. To help female students re-enter a high school curricular program, it would be important to establish childcare facilities either in or close to the school (Bradley *et al.* 1996b, Raymond 2008).

Young adults re-enter a high school setting with mixed feelings which may include fear, insecurity and doubt. Some of these feelings are heightened because of their past experiences in a similar setting. It is therefore important to help these students feel comfortable, and provide the supports needed as they re-adjust to this new lifestyle. Because it is still a school setting, these adults still have to obey 'rules'; however, every attempt should be made to make this environment comfortable and it should recognise the uniqueness of an adult education centre (Bradley *et al.* 1996a). Guidance counsellors should also be available to help these young adults with course selection, be available to answer questions, and provide information about higher education and jobs. These guidance counsellors will also be able to assess gaps in students' prior knowledge and recommend the need for bridging or remedial courses before they delve into a regular course curriculum (Bradley *et al.* 1996a).

It is interesting to note that Bradley *et al.* (1996b) found that almost 90 percent of students who returned to high school to obtain a diploma would advise younger students not to leave school or to think very carefully before doing so. Perhaps this finding demonstrates and signals the need for guidance of these young adults.

Conclusion

Limited research that focuses on young adult learners aged 18-24 who return to school to obtain a high school diploma was uncovered and there is a need to conduct further research in this area. The literature reviewed to date suggests that young adult learners have diverse needs, responsibilities and ways of learning. We believe, as a community we need to explore this area and find out how to motivate and engage these students. Once this is done, we can help them achieve mutual goals. We know that adult learners bring a wealth of life and work experience with them when they re-enter education and, as educators, we need to incorporate this knowledge into the curriculum. Our adult education centre has a neighbourhood reputation among local education leaders of being a 'hassle' to visit and extra work for the school board administration. This is not the sentiment of all educators, however, it needs to be acknowledged and made public in order to change this reality.

We also believe that high school credits should be granted to adult learners who bring with them life experiences. These credits can be obtained through a testing or a portfolio system. Another goal of ours this coming year is to implement Mature Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (MPLAR) at our adult education centre as a similar system can be found elsewhere in the province of Ontario. Through this program, adults will have the opportunity to gain credits for life experiences and skills they obtained while not in school. Our point of view suggests a shift to an 'adult friendly' school model is too slow, but with time we are hoping to help transform the centre into a school that promotes lifelong learning and helps young adult learners achieve their goals. Our work has produced a number of key factors to achieve these goals.

We believe secondary level re-entry of young Canadian adult learners can be enhanced when:

1. We increase the student contact time with individual teachers—Relationships.
2. We increase parental involvement—Community.
3. We establish supportive retention policies, school practices and instructional strategies to sustain this group of adults aged 18 to 24—Administration.
4. We assist these same young adults to realise fulfilling and rewarding lives beyond school—Life Skills/Community.
5. We better understand what motivates young adult students—Knowledge.
6. We build flexible timetables and offer options such as correspondence courses or credit recovery to help students catch up on credits missed—Administration.
7. We put in place guidance counsellors and other supports within adult education centres—Services.
8. We put in place meaningful programs, and deliver these via curriculum focused around current adult teaching methods—Curriculum.
9. We provide engaging learning opportunities and customise to meet the needs (entry-exit flexibility) and interests of individual adult students—Opportunity.
10. We acknowledge that participants need to progress at their own pace and achieve their own personal objectives—Individualise.

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Older adults' training courses: Considerations for course design and the development of learning materials

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Demographic trends indicate that older adults live longer and maintain active lifestyles. The majority are educated and many enjoy the stimulation that ongoing learning opportunities present. In order for these older adults to benefit from learning opportunities, circumstances specific to these individuals (e.g. age-related decline) need to be considered. The current paper reviews cognitive literature to establish older adults' ability to learn. This is followed by a discussion of training programs as well as suggestions for course design specifically focused on older adults.

Introduction

With adults now living longer and healthier lives than in the past, the size of the ageing population continues to increase. Recent reports from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2009) indicate that, while in 2007 there were 2.4 million Australians aged between 65 and 84, there will be an estimated four million by 2022 and 6.4 million by 2056. With this continual growth in mind it is crucial for older adults to maintain healthy and active lifestyles. The importance of this maintenance is twofold: to increase older adults' quality of life and to reduce the increasing demand on the public health system. In order for this to be achieved, course designers need to be informed of the latest research in healthy ageing. This paper focuses specifically on recent advances in cognitive ageing and cognitive training, placed in an educational context. Of particular relevance is the older person's ability to learn new information. As such a discussion on training programs and suggestions for course design and learning materials will be prefaced by considering older adults' cognitive and sensory abilities.

Older adults' cognitive abilities

Cognition refers to mental functions and mental processes, and in adulthood, cognitive functioning contributes to the maintenance of independence and psychological well-being (Llewellyn, Lang, Langa & Huppert 2008). Older adults show declines in a number of cognitive and sensory abilities, potentially reducing independence and increasing the demand on caregivers and the public health system (Anstey, Stankov & Lord 1993). For example, cognitive abilities associated with fluid intelligence (Horn 1982) (e.g. working memory—ability to maintain and manipulate information; episodic memory—recalling information acquired at a specific time and place; and executive functions—integrating and organising information, for example planning and abstract thinking) show age-related declines. At the neurochemical level, age-related declines in the

neurotransmitter dopamine have been linked to declines in cognition, notably episodic memory and perceptual speed (Bäckman, Nyberg, Lindenberger, Li & Farde 2006). Similarly, age-related declines in processing speed underlie some of the declines associated with cognitive functions (e.g. Salthouse 1996, 2000). In addition to processing speed mediating age-related declines in cognitive abilities, working memory (e.g. short term memory maintenance and active processing of information) also mediates declines in cognitive functioning (Park & Reuter-Lorenz 2009). This is related to inhibitory dysfunction which implies that older adults take into account some irrelevant information in the contents of their working memory, thereby slowing down their processing speed (Hasher & Zacks 1988, Park & Reuter-Lorenz 2009).

Compared with younger adults, older adults show different patterns of functional activation during cognitive tests. For example, functional imaging techniques (e.g. fMRI or PET scans) show that young adults have neural activation in the left prefrontal area when conducting verbal working memory tasks, whereas older adults show activation in both the left and right prefrontal areas (e.g. Cabeza 2002, Reuter-Lorenz *et al.* 2000). To explain this phenomenon, Park and Reuter-Lorenz (2009) have proposed the Scaffolding Theory of Aging and Cognition. According to their theory cognitive function is maintained by recruitment of additional neural links, and the brain functionally reorganises and adapts to compensate for deficient or low functioning neural links. Park and Reuter-Lorenz further believe that evidence from experimental animal studies support their claim and has relevance to older adults. These types of studies indicate that brain structures of older animals can change as a result of training, cognitive challenges and stimulating environments. Research has indicated that cognitive engagement assists in protecting against Alzheimer's disease, and this also lends support to this theory (e.g. Bennett *et al.* 2003). Park and Reuter-Lorenz also suggest that cognitive training promotes scaffolding by creating additional neural

connections, thereby making it easier for older adults to compensate for neural deficits in some areas.

According to the cognitive reserve theory some factors, such as high intelligence in childhood, educational success, and an active, stimulating lifestyle act as a buffer in preventing cognitive decline in old age (Stern 2002, Stern *et al.* 1994). The brain reserve theory was developed to explain findings from autopsy studies showing that older adults with neuropathological changes did not necessarily show cognitive impairment. There is growing evidence that interventions do improve cognitive function and so may impact on cognitive reserve throughout the life course.

Sensory changes in late adulthood

In addition to cognitive changes, there is also a decrease in sensory function in late adulthood. Research indicates that declines in sensory functions mean that older adults experience increased perceptual thresholds and decreased cognitive abilities to respond to sensory information (e.g. Levine *et al.* 2000). For example, in the eyes changes occur, such as declines in visual acuity, size of visual field, colour vision (blue-yellow defects) and contrast sensitivity (Haegerstrom-Portnoy, Schneck & Brabyn 1999). In turn, the prevalence of eye diseases (e.g., cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration) also increases in old age (Evans, Fletcher & Wormald 2007). Thus, older adults might have more difficulty with text-based information presented in small fonts or when information is presented at low levels of luminance. In the ear there is a loss of hair cells in the cochlea (Pheiffer *et al.* 2009) and a loss of sensitivity to high frequencies (Blake & Sekuler 2006). Therefore, many older adults experience hearing loss and have difficulty hearing information presented at high frequencies. In addition, due to increased hearing loss and a decrease in being able to make use of auditory cues, older adults have difficulty following conversations where there are

two or more speakers, or where the environment is noisy (Murphy, Daneman & Schneider 2006).

Sensory declines (e.g. auditory and visual) have also been associated with cognitive function in cross-sectional studies (Lindenberger & Baltes 1994), although longitudinal research has shown weaker associations (Anstey, Hofer & Luszcz 2003, Lindenberger & Ghisletta 2009). Studies have shown that the connection between sensory and cognitive declines is not the result of reduced visual and auditory acuity during cognitive assessment. Researchers found that by simulating the sensory experiences of older adults (e.g. reduced visual acuity and reduced auditory acuity), middle-aged adults did not experience any reduced cognitive performance (Lindenberger, Scherer & Baltes 2001). Another recent longitudinal study indicated that the connection between sensory and cognitive decline in old age is weaker than what was originally suggested by Baltes and Lindenberger in 1997 (Lindenberger & Ghisletta 2009). Anstey, Hofer and Luszcz (2003) examined cross-sectional and longitudinal data from a large sample and suggested that independent factors merge to give the impression of one underlying factor leading to declines in both cognitive and sensory functions.

Training programs and training considerations

The majority of older adults continue to live in the community, are educated and maintain active lifestyles (Mehrotra 2003). Their motives for participating in educational programs are influenced by personal interests, social contact, and a desire to maintain a high level of self-efficacy and functioning (both cognitive and physical); it could also be facilitated by a transitional experience (e.g. death of a spouse) (Mehrotra 2003). Jamieson (2007) found that formal study (through process and content) contributes to older adults' quality of life.

Despite inevitable brain ageing and sensory declines, functional and neural plasticity is retained into late life, allowing for the acquisition

of new information through the development or scaffolding of new neural pathways. This may allow cognitive training programs to stimulate further development of new neural pathways and could also be a protective factor against developing dementia related diseases such as Alzheimer's. With this in mind, we review some training programs that have been developed for older adults.

The most significant cognitive intervention study is the ACTIVE trial. Ball and colleagues (2002) conducted this large-scale (N = 2834), randomised, community-based training study of adults aged 65 to 94. Specifically they focused on areas previously identified as problematic for older adults (memory, reasoning and speed of processing) and designed group-based training across ten contact sessions. They found that, in comparison with the control group, each of the interventions had the desired effect of improving performance in memory, reasoning and speed of processing, and the targeted cognitive abilities were still improved at two years follow-up. These types of interventions would indicate that age-related, cognitive decline can be reversed or at least slowed down.

Dahlin, Nyberg, Backman and Stigsdotter-Neely (2008) conducted a comparative training study between young and old adults. Using a computerised adaptive training program over a period of five weeks that specifically focused on enhancing executive function in cognition, they found that although younger adults showed the greatest improvements, older adults also made significant gains. These results were maintained at 18 months. Particularly, older adults showed post-training improvements that were comparable or surpassed younger adults' baseline measurements. However, whereas younger adults in this study showed some transfer to other cognitive tasks, older adults did not. Dahlin and colleagues attribute this to older adults in this study not quite reaching the task proficiency that younger adults attained, but also in general, to the greater neural plasticity evident in younger adults.

The major criticism of training programs focused on skills, such as the ones noted above, is that learning tends to be quite specific and often does not transfer to other similar tasks. As discussed, this lack of transfer is particularly evident in older adults (e.g. Dahlin *et al.* 2008). Green and Bavelier (2008) suggest that, in order to improve the transferrable skills gained from learning experiences, the learning task should relate to real-life experiences and be more complex than, for example, a task focused on one aspect of cognition (as is often found in experimental studies). They cite examples of these more complex learning paradigms which include action video games, musical training and athletic training where improvements are found across a range of skills. (Incidentally, this relates to the recent development of Nintendo Wii computer consoles specifically focused on older consumers with games such as "Brain Training" and "Sight Training"). Green and Bavelier furthermore note that an incremental increase in task difficulty, once the learner has shown sufficient mastery of skills, significantly aids the learning process. (This corresponds to Vygotky's (1978) 'zone of proximal development' and Bruner's (1975) scaffolding process). Green and Bavelier furthermore argue that appropriate levels of task difficulty (i.e. 'when the task is challenging, yet still doable', p. 697) influences the learner's motivation and helps maintain optimal arousal/interest levels. Mehrotra (2003) notes that older adults vary greatly in the learning abilities, learning experiences and individual interests that they bring with them to the learning environment. For example, some older adults have participated in a range of educational experiences, or have held highly technical occupations until quite recently. For these adults it is much easier to participate in educational programs, and according to Mehrotra they need little encouragement. However, other older adults have low levels of formal education and as a result they need more guidance, encouragement and support. To encourage self-directed learning, Mehrotra suggests that courses for older adults be designed to incorporate information on the learning process itself,

including memory techniques, which can then be transferred to other settings. In turn, this would have the added benefit of enhancing cognitive development more broadly with the potential of enhancing other activities of daily living.

Mehrotra (2003) furthermore suggests that course designers cater for individual differences by providing a variety of options (e.g. variety of topics, variety of skill levels). Already, training institutions, such as the universities of the third age, offer a wide variety of online (e.g. www.u3aonline.org.au) and community-based courses for older adults. One of the main advantages of web-based learning is the flexibility and convenience it offers older students in that they can participate in courses at a time and location suitable to them. This is particularly relevant to older adults who live in isolated or rural communities. These courses presented in an online learning environment are different from other traditional distance learning modes in that students can participate in, and develop, a learning community, for example, via online discussion forums. As social support continues to be an important aspect for older adults, such courses can facilitate peer-to-peer learning. Older adults have a wealth of knowledge and by utilising peer-to-peer learning formats (e.g. small team projects), older adults' needs for social contact and knowledge sharing can be facilitated. Although some older adults might initially lack technological knowledge to utilise online learning platforms, this could be overcome by introductory web-orientation courses.

Given older adults' reduced cognitive processing speed, and wealth of knowledge gathered over a lifetime, it can be suggested that older adults be given time to think and reflect on learning tasks. Course designers should thus not only consider the pace of presenting material, but also leave sufficient space for older adults to reflect and share experiences with each other. However, given that older adults can be very attached to world views or ideas (Spigner-Littles &

Anderson 1999), the course designer might find it helpful to establish clear, mutually agreed upon discussion protocols and boundaries. As older adults are accustomed to exercising their judgment, Spigner-Littles and Anderson furthermore recommend that it is useful for older adults to play a key role in planning the pace of their course work. To aid the learner Delahaye and Ehrich (2008) also note that instructors should return prompt and meaningful feedback on performance, and although older adults might require more positive feedback to attain equal gains in self-efficacy as younger adults (Mehrotra 2003), the feedback should consist of informational and motivational elements.

Course design considerations

Given the literature discussed, the following course design considerations can be summarised as follows:

- Cater for a wide variety of interests and skill levels by adapting the learning to the learner, given that older adults bring diverse life experiences and expertise to the educational setting
- Develop tasks that are challenging, yet doable, and which progress the learner from beginner to advanced levels
- Include frequent breaks to minimise fatigue, especially if the learners are on medication, have health problems or are experiencing stressors (e.g. family concerns, health issues, money worries, or impending life transitions such as loss of driver's licence or shift to a rest home)
- Reduce distractions in the learning environment, as older adults may have more difficulty inhibiting irrelevant information
- Allow sufficient time to complete tasks
- Develop built-in adaptable print and audio functions to allow for larger text, higher contrast text and louder audio when using online formats

- Include larger, high contrast text where possible and test audio to ensure all learners can hear in class-based teaching
- Use a constructivist paradigm that facilitates peer-to-peer learning, group discussions and social contact
- Enable learners to participate in planning the pace of their course and encourage self-directed learning
- Include clear, mutually agreed upon boundaries at the start of the course regarding discussions and group participation
- Include information about the learning process and memory exercises to enable transfer to other domains of functioning
- Repeat instructions if learners forget and normalise memory concerns
- Give clear, prompt and personalised feedback to learners

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has reviewed older adults' cognitive and sensory abilities and established that older adults are still very capable of learning new information and skills. For a variety of reasons (e.g. interest, a desire to maintain cognitive or physical functioning), many older adults also want to participate in courses, and research indicates that it contributes to their psychological well-being and quality of life. Older adults are a unique student population and, given the literature on cognitive ageing, a number of these course design considerations could be generalised to the older learner. However, future research could focus on examining the effectiveness of these course design considerations for older adults in an empirical sense.

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RECOLLECTION

Recollections on adult education in Queensland

Neville Crocombe

The Board of Adult Education in Queensland was one of the first such organisations established in Australia. It drew on the success of Army Education and literally bought some of their old 16mm projectors for screening documentary film drawn from the National Library of Australia and various embassies.

In keeping with the long-held policy of decentralisation, the very first public lecture was presented by Les Carter, the first State Superintendent, in Mackay. This was a bit of nostalgia on his part as that was where his father first arrived on Australian soil with his toolbox ready to make a new life in the colonies.

My first contact with adult education was as a Year Twelve [or Senior] student, as we were known at the time. Les presented a lecture in a local primary school on the Shakespearean play which we were studying for our matriculation examination, so I gate-crashed to get a second opinion to that provided at Wynnum High School.

Staff were appointed initially at the major centres of Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Maryborough, and Toowoomba and what was called Moreton. (The officer appointed to this 'Moreton' area declined to live in Ipswich and travelled from his home in Brisbane.) Les Carter ran the program in the capital city—Brisbane.

Three one-ton miniature pantechnicons were purchased and allocated to Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. They were known as the butcher's wagons. The intention was that, if one should break-down or become stranded, there was room in the back to roll out one's swag and camp for the night. However, with the load consisting of a driver with a suitcase of clothes, a 16mm projector and transformer plus a box of films, they proved to be totally unsuitable with their heavy duty springs and were exchanged for three new (second model) Holden panel vans. By the time these were replaced with over 100,000 miles on the odometer, the Rockhampton one was completely eaten out by rust at the back of the front mudguards. A policy of regular replacement was adopted from then on, as were automatic gearboxes later when one fellow burnt the clutch out three times on his unit by riding the clutch in anticipation of changing traffic.

My second contact was when I was visited, while Head (and only) Teacher at Dingo State School, half-way between Rockhampton and Emerald, by Len Culpan, then Assistant District Organiser, Rockhampton. I undertook to present some very basic, adult education programs at Dingo using my battery-powered slide and film-strip projector. Lighting in the school room at night was by my personal Tiley pressure lamp, as there was no electricity in Dingo until some time after I left in August 1958.

My third contact was to read in the Education Department *Gazette* (April 1958) that the position of Assistant District Organiser, Rockhampton, was available. Since the beginning of February, I had been driving 100 miles to Rockhampton on alternate Saturdays to see

a specialist at 8.00am for one of my sons—so I applied. A prerequisite for the position was a university degree which I had not completed. I was appointed without even an interview and, at the end of the August school holidays, reported for duty under Dudley Richardson, the District Organiser. At the end of the year, Dudley transferred to Toowoomba and I was left holding the fort in Central Queensland till the following August when Ernie Jensen, with two degrees, was appointed.

One of the rules was that we could not use the government vehicle if it was possible to travel by train. I therefore designed my trips to Mackay to include other places beside Mackay and Sarina, and when working west to Winton, also detoured off the rail line.

The program in the Mackay District grew under my monthly visits of four or five days and became the next staffed centre when Frank Bitmead, a former staff member, returned to Queensland. However, after a year he moved to Lismore and I was promoted to the position despite still not having completed my degree. I then knuckled down and gained my Bachelor of Economics. The University of Queensland wrote to me and suggested that, as I had majored in Public Administration, I might care to add another couple of subjects and be awarded the Diploma in Public Administration as well, before they converted it to a full degree. I declined, as I was not into collecting pieces of paper.

In addition to what talents we could recruit from within local communities, we arranged and publicised the visits of Commonwealth Literary Fund lecturers, and those from the Queensland University Public Lectures Committee.

The only activity in some of the outlying places was 16mm documentary film screenings once per month in the local school. In pre-TV days they were always popular. During my time in Rockhampton, I established weekly, lunch-hour screenings on a

'bring your lunch and eat while watching' basis. Unfortunately, as I switched on our projector, several businesses switched off their machinery, and so I blew the projector bulb three times in the first month till my friends in Capricornia Electricity Authority read the power level and found the 240 volt supply was peaking momentarily at 260 volt at 1.00pm.

Craft lessons, mainly for women, were always well supported. After running a few basic or elementary level courses, we would invite graduates of those to participate in an advanced level. To ensure they did not become 'sewing circles' for the same group *ad infinitum*, we then encouraged and assisted them to become a self-supporting club or organisation.

When Townsville became vacant, I applied and was transferred, as my sons were thinking of their futures. This gave them the choice of a larger technical college or the James Cook University. In my usual fashion, I built on the work of my predecessors in the more remote places to such an extent that an officer was appointed to Mt Isa.

It was while in Townsville that I applied for and won an Imperial (later called a Commonwealth) Relations Travel Bursary. After five months in United Kingdom, I returned via Canada and USA at my own expense. The then Director of TAFE could not make up his mind as to whether he wanted to create a position for me in Brisbane or transfer me to be the Principal of the TAFE College in Townsville.

About that time, an adult educator in United Kingdom sent me a clipping that announced that Douglas Paine was not renewing his contract in Tasmania and was returning to England. I therefore wrote to the Director-General of Education in Tasmania offering my services, and became their Senior Superintendent of Adult Education and External Studies, thus ending my long, challenging but enjoyable link with adult education in Queensland.

I joined the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE) soon after it was established despite Les Carter, on his return from the first meeting, telling us the organisation had been formed but that he could not see much point in us joining as he could not see how any of us would ever get to a conference. My only benefit for many years was receipt of the *Journal* and *Newsletter*.

After taking up the appointment in Tasmania, I became actively involved and served as editor of *Adult Ed. News* for some years. I established the calendar or diary page, listing any events that I thought might be of interest to members. For a short time, after the untimely death of Doug Robertson, our part-time employed Executive Officer, I also became printer and distributor. I guess that is why I was made the first Life Member of the AAAE, though I felt that that privilege should have gone to Alan Davies who kept the Association going as Honorary Secretary.

Alan Davies and I first promoted the change of name of the Association from Adult Education to Adult Learning.

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BOOK REVIEW

Making learning happen: A guide for post-compulsory education

Phil Race
London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010 (2nd Edition)
ISBN: 978-1-84920-114-8 9 (pbk), 250 pp.
Available in Australia and New Zealand through local bookshops or direct from Footprints, RRP A$68.00

The author of this soft-covered textbook about teaching in post-compulsory education is Phil Race, Emeritus Professor at two universities in the United Kingdom. He is also an independent education consultant, presents conference keynote speeches and conducts workshops for teaching staff in universities, colleges and commercial organisations in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. In 2007, Race was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship and the status of Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He has been publishing about educational matters since the 1970s.

In the preface of the book, Race states that 'this book is rooted in my own experience during the last four decades, where I have been working on four fronts of the interface between teaching, learning and assessment' (p.11). And this is exactly what the book reflects. It is highly practical and pragmatic; I found only one brief reference to andragogy (the underlying principles of which he queries) and none to pedagogy. Such an approach could be quite a relief to new educators who may find the language of academic educationalists to be challenging, if not elitist.

Race describes the differences between the earlier edition and this version, and in so doing, justifies its existence with refreshing honesty. The book takes an applied approach and is initially, deceptively straightforward; its structure is clearly explicated in the summary. Chapter one, 'Setting the scene', in essence explains constructivist theories of learning without using the term and instead learning is explained in simple 'how to' terms with caveats about the problem in English language wherein we blur the distinctions between learning, understanding and knowing. While this may be the case in non-educational fields, this assertion could be readily challenged by many educationalists, not the least of whom include Patricia Cranton and Elizabeth Tisdell. Their engaging educational writings about transformative learning, in which they examine cognitive and emancipatory perspectives and the multiple dimensions of knowing, contradict this.

Race writes tidily and succinctly using phrases, words and analogies which are intrinsically meaningful. Moreover, he states that he is neither examining theories about the ways in which people are posited to learn, nor investigating theories about, for example, learning styles; instead, he is explaining what he describes as the seven factors underpinning the ability to learn. In chapter two, Race jumps straight into these 'Seven factors underpinning successful learning'. They include: Wanting to learn, Learning by doing,

Learning through feedback, Making sense of what has been learned, Explaining/teaching/coaching and Making informed judgements (assessing) about what we have learned. This is certainly more readily comprehensible to an educational novice than using terms which underpin these concepts, such as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, experiential learning, socio-cognitive learning theories, information processing, double loop learning and so on. I was engaged by this elegant simplicity and deconstruction of complex theories and potentially excluding language. His science background is demonstrated by his use of carefully constructed diagrams, bullet points of key factors and ideas, and numbered lists of practical, how-to information. In Chapter three, Race explains how to design curriculum which relates to the above seven factors. Again, he uses tables, grids and diagrams to illustrate his points.

Chapter Four, titled 'Assessment driving learning', is again practical in that it is full of useful grids and proformas written in what he regards as plain English (a moot point which I discuss later). He ends the chapter perhaps unconsciously with the significant statement that: "teaching is effective communication, not word games' (p.103).

The following chapters are equally prescriptive and are written in the confident language of closed statements and verbs in the past perfect and the imperative tense. Clear, strong and action word oriented, there is little room for error of comprehension here; headings are assertive: 'Sharpening the alignment by thinking about marking' and 'Designing exactly how students will get feedback' are cogent examples.

However, I felt disquieted by a growing sense that his was a form of teaching in which the teacher is expert and the student must be made to learn, an underlying premise which challenged my own notions about the teacher-student relationship being more multifaceted and richer than this approach would suggest. While this unease is obviated somewhat by the description of what lecturers do that

hinders learning (e.g. ‘droning on and on’, ‘telling [students] things that [they] already know’), the use of the term lecturer here struck me. Why not teacher, educator or even facilitator?

Chapter nine addresses employability and opens with an unreferenced quotation from Barack Obama (2009) in which the American President states that ‘Community colleges provide lifetime employability’. This segues into Race’s assertion that one purpose of education in the grand scheme of things is to get and keep people in employment. Could be, but other ‘purposes’ are not discussed.

In chapter 10, Race gives various tips related to ‘what if ‘scenarios, including: “What can I do when I don’t know the answer to a student’s question?’ His strategy begins with the statement: ‘A common nightmare.’ A nightmare? His following advice is reasonable, but why does he assume that this is a ‘nightmare’ scenario? Does this say more about the author/teacher who needs to be the expert in everything, than it does about the teacher who readily accepts that students can and do ask challenging questions, which for teachers can be uniquely rewarding. In my own experience, students who enjoy and understand the topic enough query and think deeply or laterally about it that it can be a source of joy.

The final chapter ‘Reflective observation’ is new to this edition, which is not surprising given the rest of the book. While this is not a chapter about developing deep, internal, critically reflective practice as I understand it, it argues a solid case for the use of personal feedback and again gives useful templates. His detailed explanation of how (and why) to whittle personal reflections down to 200 words failed to convince me.

Back to my moot point about language. Race argues convincingly for the use of clear English language. Agreed. However, his own use of English is particular; it can be identified as strongly rational, or masculine, or closed or even judgemental. It sits comfortably with

the language of rationality and positivism, human resources, project management and engineering consultancies. From a post-Jungian perspective, it would be identified as belonging to people with STJ or NTJ preferences; there is no wriggle room in language such as this, no space for questioning or challenging the many assertions that he makes. This is learning how to teach by using tips (based on his ideas about learning effectively), templates, bullet points and checklists. As such it could be identified as an instruction manual or even a toolbox, rather than a book. All diagrams are uniform and make easy handout material for workshops (not forgetting copyright). The index is useful; it includes readily accessible entries which refer to solutions to problems such as 'Students packing up too early'.

In the reference list, references and further reading span 1993 to 2009, with the majority written in this millennium. Overall, and despite some personal misgivings related to my own approach to teaching, this reasonably priced text would be useful to a teacher who desires and enjoys a clear and prescriptive approach to imbue them with confidence in their teaching strategies.

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BOOK REVIEW

Implementing a critical approach to organizational development

Laura Bierma

Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company
ISBN: 978-1-5724-266-8, 176 pp.

This book is entitled, *Implementing a critical approach to organizational development*. The author, Professor Laura Bierma, is a tenured professor at the University of Georgia, Georgia, USA in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy. She has a career spanning more than twenty years in human resource and organisational development, firstly in the automotive industry and then for about ten years in academia. Laura Bierma has an extensive list of publications comprising books, book chapters, journal articles and conference presentations written about her interests in adult education and human resource development that focus on women's learning, career and organisational development, critical human resource development, diversity and multiculturalism, and qualitative research. The full list is detailed on her professional website.

Bierma sets out to develop a resource book for adult educators and human resource development professionals. The book is written from a critical, feminist perspective for the Professional Practices Series for Krieger Publishing Company, which provides textbooks predominantly to the United States' college market. The book is presented in an easily readable format, taking a thin slice of a topic which focuses on organizational development and theory for human resource development (HRD) practitioners, developers and educators. The book offers a range of critical intervention strategies and a critical action research model which is strongly focused on assisting early career practitioners.

Implementing a critical approach to organizational development is focused on assisting adult educators and HRD professionals in the workplace with critical perspectives to newly encountered situations. Bierma's extensive range of contacts through her work in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy make this book an ideal avenue to promote her work in this publication. Bierma's interests in critical management studies, feminist theory, critical human resource development, critical cultural analysis and critical-interpretive approaches feature robustly in this publication. The book's context may be further examined through the seven headings presented in the book, which provide an overview of the evolution of organisational development and how the consultant fits into this context. Bierma explores the organisation from a critical consultant perspective considering ethics and the stakeholders within the organisation. The structure of the book is easy to follow and promotes confidence in the new practitioner.

The book is presented as guide to assist adult educators and HRD practitioners make the link from university or college studies to the reality of the workplace. As a result, theory is underpinned with practical strategies for practitioners encountering challenges in the workplace. In reality, experienced practitioners do not need this book;

they will be able to draw on their experiences and wisdom to critique the situations which they face. The chapters are designed to provide an overview of organisational development and then to give the practitioner a critical magnifying glass to examine what is happening in the workplace. As many adult educators and HRD professionals provide a consulting service to workgroups and teams, the book uses this aspect to help the practitioner reflect on actions they could take in newly encountered situations in the workplace.

The writing is very American focused, using a range of references from classical organisational development studies and workplace learning, including Alvesson (1996), Alvesson and Willmott (1992), Argyris (1964) and Argyris and Schon (1974), to make new practitioners comfortable in their workplace environment. Bierma herself features heavily in the references, using the style of a thesis or journal article to shape each chapter. Modern writers on critical theory and critical perspectives are also featured including Brookfield (1987), Fenwick (2004) and Sambrook (2003) to provide credibility in the writing. The book is useful in providing signposts for new practitioners in confirming theoretical knowledge; however, experienced practitioners may find the book too clinical as it does not present the 'chaotic' view of organisational reality. Faced with real problems, this book does not provide strategy to inform action and would be rendered obsolete with its main use in confirming theory.

There are other sources embracing critical thinking in HRD and organisational development that could provide practitioners with the opportunity to make up their own minds about the view presented rather than the prescriptive approach presented by Bierma. Her text may be useful for beginners but there are other publications which provide a more thorough and considered, English-based perspective to critical HRD for a similar cost (Rigg, Trehan & Stewart 2008; Turnbull & Elliott 2005).

Bierma's text is a useful comparison to these other texts for scholars and new practitioners, but of limited value for experienced practitioners who really do want a critical perspective.

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BOOK REVIEW

Power and love: A theory and practice of social change

Adam Kahane
San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2010
ISBN: 9781605093048, 172 pp.

> Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change. … And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. Now, we've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic … it is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time.
> (Martin Luther King Jnr, 'Where do we go from here?',
> 1967 speech, cited in Kahane 2010)

Adam Kahane's new book, *Power and love,* applies Martin Luther King Jnr's understanding of these two crucial forces, by tracing their impact upon various 'social change projects' in which he has been closely involved. *Power and love* is Kahane's attempt to deal with unfinished business from his acclaimed first book, *Solving tough problems* (BK Publishers, San Francisco, 2004)*,* a book which Kahane came to see as 'only half right, and dangerously so' (p. x). No less a figure than Nelson Mandela praised *Solving tough problems* in these terms: "This breakthrough book addresses the central challenge of our time: finding a way to work together to solve the problems we have created". So it would seem fair to ask why Kahane had come to doubt his first book? In his own words:

> *Power and love* picks up where *Solving tough problems* left off and reports the second discovery. In order to address our toughest challenges, we must indeed connect, but this is not enough: we must also grow (p. x).

Thus Kahane's new book explores his learning about the human growth that is both the driver and the product of social change:

> We must exercise love (the drive to unity) and power (the drive to self-realisation). If we choose either love or power, we will get stuck in re-creating existing realities, or worse. If we want to create new and better realities—at home, at work, in our communities, in the world—we need to learn how to integrate our love and our power. (p. x)

Kahane is a director of Reos Partners, an international organisation which facilitates innovation and collective action across a range of social systems, large and small. Over the past twenty years, he has worked in more than fifty countries, in every part of the world, with business leaders, politicians, civil servants, trade unionists, NGOs and UN officials. Kahane is perhaps best known for his leading role in the Mont Fleur Scenarios Project (1991-92), in which a diverse group of South Africans came together amid mutual fear and suspicion, yet ended up playing a central unifying role in the transition to a multi-

racial democracy. He is currently working with Professor Patrick Dodson on the University of NSW project entitled, 'Democratic dialogue and capabilities: New opportunities in post-reconciliation era Australia'.

In *Power and love,* the author draws directly on his vast and multilayered experiences at the forefront of 'co-creating new social realities'. The book begins with a compelling analysis of the 'generative' and 'degenerative' aspects of power and love, before a series of very candid reviews of diverse change-projects under the headings of 'falling', 'stumbling' and 'walking'. These metaphors are central to the book's structure and message:

> We fall down when our power and our love become polarised; when our power is without love and our love is without power. (p. 57)
>
> We stumble when our power dominates our love. (p. 75)
>
> When we walk, we engage both our power and our love, each balancing out and bringing in and building up the other. When we walk, we move forward, learning as we go. (p. 103).

Kahane does not pretend to have all the answers; his humility is striking in places, as he unflinchingly explores his own challenges and failures. In this, he underlines a central theme of the book: 'If we want to learn and move forward, we have to be willing to fail and fall' (p. 137). It becomes clear that, without the courage of personal humility and vulnerability, no amount of theory will ever bring life-giving and enduring social change; changing the world and changing ourselves are two sides of the same coin.

The achievement of this book can be understood as a radical personal extension of Kurt Lewin's famous dictum: 'you can not understand a system until you try to change it':

> … the old quip, 'if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem, is less useful than the alternative formulation: 'if you're not part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution.' (p. 125)

Kahane elaborates on the deeper meaning of this reformulation:

> Our capacity to address our toughest social challenges depends on our willingness to admit that we are part of, rather than apart from, the woundedness of our world. What holds us back from exercising all of our power and all of our love? Fear. Because we are afraid of offending or hurting others, we hold back our purposefulness and our power. Because we are afraid of being embarrassed or hurt, we hold back our openness and our love. We dysfunctionally allow our fears to prevent us from becoming whole. (p. 132)

Power and love is a confronting read. The author's honesty and authenticity present an immediate challenge to the reader to respond in kind. The global challenges Kahane addresses are vast and can seem overwhelming. Yet the generous sharing of his profound inner journey is deeply empowering: it opens a hope-filled and practical path towards living out power and love in a coherent and holistic way, through both the ordinary events of life and the major change projects that engage us. In Kahane's vision, 'building our capacity for co-creation' of new social realities (p. 127) emerges from the balance of power and love in both our inner and outer worlds. It is a slow and gradual process demanding much patience and commitment:

> So I have also come to understand that—contrary to my training in answering, controlling, and solving—social change work never produces final, ticked-off failure or success … In order to keep moving—and especially to lead such movement—we can and must make, and keep on making, only one simple choice: what is our next step?
>
> How can we learn to walk with power and love? The way is long, the terrain is rough, there is no path, and there is no map. We need companions on this journey, but no-one else can make a way

> for us. We must use both of our legs; we must put one foot in front of the other. We must step forward. (p. 140)

Power and love is a very forthright and timely step in the direction of sustainable and holistic personal-social change; it demonstrates the classic adage that 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory'.

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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
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   for books: Athanasou, J. (ed.) (2008). *Adult education and training*, Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing.
   for articles: Hamer, J. (2010). 'Recognition of prior learning—Normative assessment or co-construction of preferred identities?', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(1): 98–113.
   for chapters: Newman, M. (2009). 'Educating for a sustainable democracy', in Willis, P, McKenzie, S & Harris, R (eds.) (2009), *Rethinking work and learning: Adult and vocational education for social sustainability*, Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer: 83–91.
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