



# ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN A LEARNER-CENTRED SYSTEM



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**ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA**



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**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education,  
Science and Training**

# **ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN A LEARNER-CENTRED SYSTEM**

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**FOUR PAPERS BY ALA VISITING RESEARCH FELLOWS**

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## PREFACE

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In recent times a view that post school education should focus almost exclusively on training appears to be evolving. Since COAG announced its agenda for national reform, a high priority has been given to increasing the participation of the adult population in education and training. Adult learning has become a major imperative.<sup>1</sup>

There is no question that community education, and Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations in particular, have a key role to play in reaching adults who wish to re-engage in learning and work as well as the providing for those who already participate. ACE contributes to a skilled workforce by making vocational education and training readily accessible in terms of both cost and local access. More broadly, it makes it possible for people to undertake learning that enables them to contribute to both to Australian economic life and to personal and community wellbeing.

Yet ACE is valuable in a further way—it contributes to our understanding of how to engage adults in learning within Australian VET system, and it contributes lessons from the experience of promoting participation.

The overview and four papers in this publication were commissioned by Adult Learning Australia from four leading researchers in the field to examine the challenges posed by the 'participation imperative' for the VET system as a whole, with particular reference to ACE. The papers explore key questions—what kind of capability is needed to re-engage those in the community who are missing out on the benefits of education and training? How can programs be made more adaptive to the needs and preferences a cross the spectrum? What kind of innovation in teaching and learning will be necessary to meet the needs of a broader spectrum of learners beyond the traditional clients of the system?

The publication provides further evidence of the key role that the community education can play in national reform, and provides further evidence of the benefits that will flow from greater investment in the sector and the coordination of its cohesive development by Australian Governments.

Thanks are due to Janie McOmish for her valuable editorial work.

We look forward to all responses from our readers.

**Peter Peterson**

Chief Executive Officer  
Adult Learning Australia

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President  
Adult Learning Australia

November 2007

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<sup>1</sup> See Adult Learning Australia's response to the DEST Discussion Paper, *Community Education and National Reform*, November 2007, at [www.ala.asn.au/report/Bardon\\_response\\_v4.pdf](http://www.ala.asn.au/report/Bardon_response_v4.pdf)

## OVERVIEW

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If Australia is to succeed in widening participation in adult learning and increasing levels of skill in the population, there will need to be fresh approaches to engage those adults who have been reluctant to enter the formal training system.

This is the collective view of four authorities who have written papers for Adult Learning Australia exploring the issues raised for the VET system by the participation and productivity goals of the national reform agenda of the Council of Australian Governments. Recognising that the main thrust of national VET reform should continue to be the creation of a client-centred system, the papers propose further action in four areas:

- *Understanding* engagement and participation in adult learning as a process with stages and milestones that can be translated into measurable outcomes
- *Expanding* the horizon of accredited training beyond institutions to embrace less formal, community and workplace learning that develops the capacities adults need to enter formal training
- *Recognising* the broad spectrum of adult learners beyond the traditional VET student, and their diverse needs, preferences and circumstances—making customised learning the norm rather than the exception
- *Remodelling* VET institutions to make learner-centred pedagogy fundamental to their culture—adapting teaching and learning according to learners and creating training solutions that are less institutionalised

Each of the papers by ALA's Visiting Research Fellows, Drs. Kaye Bowman, Darryl Dymock, Madeleine Fernbach and John McIntyre, takes a particular perspective on the engagement and participation of adult learners.

The four authors share the view that success in formal training depends on adults having those qualities that enable them to participate successfully in formal training—qualities that may be developed through a range of community and workplace contexts.

Darryl Dymock's paper examines the role of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy in building readiness to participate, arguing that it has been underrated and undervalued. The paradox is that these programs are more widely available to and used by 'returning learners' who prefer a less structured setting. The horizon of accredited training is far off for many adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills who are least likely to participate in formal training and often lack the capacities and qualities required for success. Despite the efforts of individual teachers and trainers, accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses in their nature have specific expectations and are less tailored to individual needs.

Dymock argues that engagement is a process of developing the capacities enabling participation in adult learning. He emphasises that construction of a learner identity and the development of confidence are major outcomes of less formal learning. Current VET policy rarely acknowledges the import of this in-

itial involvement, and has been slow to recognise that there are precursors to formal training, such as pathways from community learning, that are key to lifting participation levels. With the other authors, he points to the clear role that community providers can play in a reformed system that is more flexible and geared to client needs and preferences.

Madeline Fernbach analyses the challenge that diversity of adult learners poses for the VET institutions—what institutions have to do to accommodate ‘hesitant and reluctant learners’ that are being pressed to participate in the system particularly by welfare to work reforms. She notes that in the past, equity has been addressed by a paradigm of ‘accommodation’ to the needs and preferences of equity groups by modifying traditional teaching and learning approaches. The new policy environment is bringing greater diversity that cannot be accommodated in this way—what is required is a systemic shift to a wholly learner-centred pedagogy that recognises there is no ‘traditional student’ but only a spectrum of learners with needs and preferences to be taken into account in learner-responsive pedagogical design.

Fernbach argues that adaptive pedagogy is the key to a flexible system, and she sees this exemplified in what has become known as the ACE Pedagogy Framework<sup>2</sup> where pedagogy embraces ‘the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning, including the purposes, relationships, environment, management and social context of learning’.

Fernbach’s analysis suggests that institutional reform will be important with many implications for professional development of teachers and trainers. The adaptive pedagogy and client-centredness expressed in the ACE Pedagogy framework ought to be the norm throughout the VET system, not simply a quality of community provision. Too much is made of the community sector’s contribution of flexibility and client-responsiveness to a formal training system that is (by implication) less than flexible.

John McIntyre echoes the theme that client engagement will be a driving force in VET institutions in coming years. Like his colleagues, he argues it is only possible to engage that the broad spectrum of adult learners if the VET system becomes more adaptive, recognising that their needs and learning preferences are differentiated by a range of lifestyle, social, and economic factors, that they come to formal training by different pathways and connections.

He reviews a number of perspectives on client engagement—the social marketing approach of the National Marketing Strategy, a transactional perspective (participation as a decision weighed in terms of its costs and benefits) and a perspective on transition and social risk. He argues that the ‘riskiness’ of learning (its benefits relative to perceived costs) varies greatly across the segments of the adult population, that the social risks have increased with greater complexity of life-course transitions. For the most disadvantaged adults, the potential social costs may outweigh the perceived benefits. He concludes that higher levels of participation will require much more ‘client differentiation’, more flexible and adaptive providers and a system that recognises and connects to a

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<sup>2</sup> Sanguinetti, J., Waterhouse, P. and Maunders, D. (2004). *The ACE Experience: Pedagogies for life and employability*. Final Report. Melbourne: Adult, Community and Further Education Board, Victoria.

broader range of community and workplace learning opportunities—not 'more of the same' for those groups that already participate.

Kaye Bowman takes up the challenge of widening the policy horizon to encompass the breadth of outcomes implied by the process of engagement and participation in learning. She sets out a framework for conceptualising the steps from first engagement to maintaining skill learning at the higher national qualification levels. The proposal is for a set of adult learning milestones, that begin with the disengaged learner with no inclination to participate and their re-engagement through the development of enabling capacities mentioned by Dymock and Fernbach. Then further milestones of a 'bridging' nature are suggested towards vocational learning, via the acquisition of generic and employability skills (referred to as identity capital or 'soft' psychosocial outcomes, and related generic skills). Participation in lower level qualifications can then build a platform for higher qualifications. Finally, health and wellbeing outcomes, and continuing participation in learning may result from achieving former outcomes.

The authors share the view that there is a yawning gap between ambitious national goals for increased participation and qualifications, and current theory and practice in the VET systems across the jurisdictions, despite outstanding innovations in areas such as flexible learning.

While the papers touch on the contribution of the community (ACE) sector, all address the core challenges to be faced by the entire VET system in achieving the national reform agenda's ambitious goals for increased participation in adult learning. The drawbacks of an overly prescriptive and standardised approach to training are becoming ever more apparent. Increased participation will come through fresh approaches that challenge the norm, as Australia's VET institutions become much more responsive to the needs of a broad spectrum of learners. To do so, they will need to capitalise on existing learning in the community and workplace and find ways to connect this to nationally recognised training.

John McIntyre  
October 2007

**ENGAGING ADULT LEARNERS: THE ROLE OF  
NON-ACCREDITED LEARNING IN LANGUAGE,  
LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

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DARRYL DYMOCK

## INTRODUCTION

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At its meeting in February 2006 to develop a National Reform Agenda, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2006, p. 2) agreed that:

A healthy, skilled and motivated population is critical to workforce participation and productivity, and hence Australia's future living standards. By focusing on the outcomes needed to enhance participation and productivity, the human capital stream of reform aims to provide Australians with the opportunities and choices they need to lead active and productive lives.

Reforms in education and training were seen as one way of assisting this process, including improving the skills and qualifications of adults, particularly people on welfare, the mature aged, women, and Indigenous Australians (COAG, 2006, p. 4). However for some Australian adults, engaging with the education and training system is difficult because of their limited language, literacy and/or numeracy skills, so that the 'opportunities and choices they need to lead active and productive lives' are constrained.

In an international study that included Australia, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005, 85-6) concluded that those with the lowest scores on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) had the least likelihood of participating in adult education and training. A Canadian follow-up to the second IALS in that country (Brink, 2005) found that participation in adult education and learning activities was around 20% for those with Level 1 proficiency in prose literacy (the lowest) compared to some 70% for those at levels 4/5. The recent Australian Government discussion paper, *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, 11), recognised that one option for meeting the National Reform Agenda, was to 'better address the needs of particular target groups, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills'.

A key issue in widening participation in education and training is how to encourage such adults so that they can begin on pathways to further learning and employment, if that is their choice, as well as to participate more effectively in their communities. An earlier national consultation paper on adult learning in Australia (DEST, 2004, p. 1) noted that 'learning serves personal, civic and social purposes as well as vocational ones'. The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (2007, 13) recently called for a national discussion on 'alternative mechanisms for people to learn new skills, including educational skills, and take part in new forms of community engagement that are not limited to training for jobs'. This paper is about engaging adults in learning so that they not only meet their own goals but also increase their contribution to their communities in various ways.

Choy, Haukka and Keyes (2006, p. 41) observed that one area of educational provision in Australia well placed to provide such a role is Adult and Community Education (ACE), through its role in encouraging people who are intimidated by mainstream vocational training to return to study, in improving language and literacy skills, and in providing individualised learning for

Centrelink clients. Similar conclusions were reached in other recent studies of the role of ACE in Australia, including the two 'Cinderella' reports (Aulich, 1991, Crowley, 1997) and Clemans, Hartley and Macrae (2003). Campbell and Curtin (1999, pp. 84-5) identified the strengths of ACE as *responsiveness, community focus, flexibility, accessibility, collaboration*, and that it is *welcoming*. A report commissioned by the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board also pointed to the accessibility of ACE and the pathways it facilitates (Walstab. Volkoff & Teese, 2005).

The discussion paper on *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, 12) summed up the contribution of the community education sector as 'the ability ... to engage adults who would not otherwise use the formal VET system'. However the view of the Adult Community and Further Education Board in Victoria (2006, p.3) that non-accredited learning is not only a pathway into accredited courses, but also a means to 'building confidence, resilience and self worth, enabling learners to make connections with family and the wider community', suggests that the nature of the role is considerably richer, fostering personal, social and political outcomes.

One of the elements of ACE provision in Australia is that in some instances the learning outcomes are not accredited, i.e. the learners do not receive a nationally recognized certificate under the Australian Quality Training Framework. In the language, literacy and numeracy area, much community non-accredited learning uses volunteer tutors, often through one-to-one tuition. A recent study by Dymock (2007, in press), funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), concluded that 'there is a strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy assistance in Australia by the many adults who do not need or would struggle with accredited courses'. This is consistent with the observation in *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, 12) that community education offers 'second chance easy access opportunities for adults with literacy and numeracy problems'.

This paper explores the question: 'What is the role of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy learning in engaging adult learners in education and training?'

The project addresses two particular questions within that broader question:

1. What are adult learners' motivations and goals in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs?
2. To what extent is there a link between growth in confidence and the development of language literacy and numeracy skills in non-accredited adult learning?

These questions are explored through further analysis of the data collected by Dymock through a national survey and case study interviews for the NCVER report referred to above (2007, in press). This paper also draws on Australian and overseas research into non-accredited learning and into the significance of confidence as a factor for adults engaging in learning.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of non-accredited learning in language, literacy and numeracy for widening adult participation in education and training in Australia.

## THE RESEARCH—A SUMMARY

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The purpose of the research carried out by the author under a National Centre for Vocational Education grant in 2006 (Dymock, 2007, in press) was to obtain as full a picture as possible of non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia. Non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy were taken to include courses and other activities where students were given a statement of attainment or participation, but not nationally accredited qualifications, i.e. the learning outcomes were not formally assessed, even where the organisation used an accredited course for curriculum purposes.

Data were collected by a national survey sent to providers, identified through a variety of sources, including the Reading Writing Hotline (a national referral resource administered through TAFE New South Wales), as well as through the cooperation of peak bodies such as the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, Adult Learning Australia, government departments, and a number of other key agencies. Questions were asked about the nature of the organisations, the characteristics and motivations of the students, what the outcomes were and how these were assessed, and the nature and extent of pathways to other education and training and to employment.

In total, 125 eligible organisations from every State and Territory, except the Northern Territory, responded to the survey. Almost 60% of these were from organisations that identified their *primary role* as community education providers, and there was a further 13% which specifically provided English as a Second Language assistance rather than general education, but might be considered as an element of community provision. The other two main categories were registered training providers (21%) which offered non-accredited assistance alongside accredited training, and disability service providers (7%).

In addition, seven providers in three states were selected as case studies, a mix of urban and rural areas and of program types, including small group and one-to-one tuition. Across the seven sites, interviews were conducted with 37 people, including program and course coordinators, teachers, tutors and students.

The main findings of the research mapping non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia appear in the report published by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Dymock, 2007, in press). In this paper, the data analysis is reoriented to focus on the topics of learner confidence and identity, and learner motivations and goals, and their relevance for re-engaging adults in learning who have language, literacy and numeracy difficulties.

## ADULT LEARNERS' MOTIVATIONS

The issue of engaging re-engaging adults in learning through non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy support is influenced by their motivations and goals. Research into why adults learn has uncovered a range of factors, including communication improvement, social contact, educational preparation, professional advancement, family togetherness, social stimulation, and cognitive interest (Boshier, Fujita-Starck, 1996). Merriam and Caffarella (1999, 56) concluded from their review of research that learners' motivations for participating in adult education are many, complex and subject to change. This is particularly true of adult language, literacy and numeracy learning.

Dymock (2007, in press) reported that the main reason perceived by providers for learners coming to ALLN programs was to improve their language, literacy and numeracy for everyday living (35%). The next most important reason (16% of providers) was seen as vocational - those seeking employment or wanting to prepare for training for employment. Below these was a range of other reasons. The preponderance of a general aim, and the range of other aims indicate how diverse the area of non-accredited LLN is, and several respondents to the survey said it was too difficult to isolate particular reasons. Some illustrative examples of the range of motivations, taken from the case study interviews for Dymock's study, are presented in Table 1. Most of the examples come from providers; the final two are from students.

**Table 1: Examples of learner motivations in adult language, literacy and numeracy**

Illustrative data	Motivations
Last week, I interviewed a chap and he's quite a bright fellow, very well skilled in life skills but he worked as a machine operator and I said "What makes you want to come?" He said "Well I've always sort of thought about it... At work I know I could have moved on but not having the literacy that I need is costing me at least twenty grand a year"	Workplace demands; income loss
People that come to us as ESL students, they're there because they really want to learn English and usually there's some kind of vocational motivation. But Aussie students have come either because they're old enough now to have full-time jobs and they've got time to do it properly now, or young people trying to get into the workforce, or [who have] disabilities.	Preparing for employment; new opportunity to learn missed skills
Some come because they're not yet ready for TAFE -TAFE has a pre-literacy level but a lot of them do find it actually just overwhelming. Some have been to TAFE and not much has sort of got in, so they really come here to reinforce and some actually are going to TAFE and come here to supplement, to sort of flesh it out.	Preparation or support for accredited training
He was getting to the stage where he had a toddler son [who] was starting to ask him to read to him at night and he knew it was only a matter of time before he would be struggling being sort of there as a parent figure and to answer questions. ... But ... through that period he lost his job ... , so we went from the basic techniques we were working on to suddenly writing and assisting him with resumes and CVs ... . He then found a job and he found himself doing management reports and presentations and I was suddenly helping him with that.	Taking parental responsibility; employment preparation and workplace support

<p>Her mum brought her in because she was at the end of her tether, she'd been in all of these classes and she has trouble with money. ... Anything to do with numbers, she gets the wrong change and things like that, but she's improving on that, she's a lot more confident. ... She catches the bus now, we did a timetable session and we actually caught the bus to where she worked and caught it back.</p>	<p>Numeracy difficulties; parental pressure</p>
<p>[The learner] was referred ... by Centrelink where it was required that she take some study or do some work and she chose study. So I don't think she would have come unless she was required to but now I think she would certainly carry it on just because of her own interest and enjoyment and learning.</p>	<p>Mandatory requirement; satisfaction with learning</p>
<p>There's a very large African group who attend and ... a lot of the clients would fall into the age group of wanting to find employment and wanting to enter the workforce when their English does get to a good enough level, because that really is the primary concern of most of the people who are attending.</p>	<p>Preparing for employment</p>
<p>People just want to improve their reading and writing, mainly 'cause there's pressures at work to do certificates or further training ... We have old people who come who want to read to their grandchildren and their reading's not good enough. ... We have referrals from workplaces as well as from just people who are at home and just want to improve their reading and writing.</p>	<p>Changes in workplace requirements; family responsibilities; general skills improvement</p>
<p>I'd always wanted to go back to school, I do feel I'd always left school a lot earlier, and so I'd always wanted to go back but ... it wasn't sort of happening. I needed to ... really assess what I wanted to do with my life and myself ... and so I was given this opportunity.</p>	<p>New opportunity to learn what has been missed</p>
<p>The most important reason is to speak English and because I'm living in Australia, so the official language in Australia is English, so I must understand when the people talk to me, when I go shopping, go everywhere in Australia; and the second reason – seriously – is to take a Certificate of Level III and go to the plumbing college.</p>	<p>Social interactions; preparation for training</p>

In the introduction to this report, the question asked was: What are adult learners' motivations and goals in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs? The motivations identified in Table 1 include parental responsibilities (as well as parental pressure), taking opportunities to make up for learning missed at school, changes in workplace requirements, and preparation (sometimes enforced) for employment. Other research (Dymock, 2007, in press) suggests that learning language, literacy and numeracy for everyday living is a priority.

Motivation gets adults to the point of learning, and sometimes that point is slow in coming: one learner said it took him three years to make the phone call. That is the first step in re-engagement in learning. But as discussed in the next section, the research suggests that there is a *process* of re-engagement, which involves developing confidence and identity, and that the process may be ongoing.

## CONFIDENCE AND LEARNING

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Kearns (2006, p. 16) concluded from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning that a recurring theme is that personal outcomes, such as confidence, self-esteem, and the aspiration to engage in learning, are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'. Similarly, Ward and Edwards (2002, p. 39) found from their research with literacy and numeracy learners in north-west England that:

Perhaps the most profound change for most learners interviewed was a massive enhancement of their confidence and self-esteem. This increased confidence had a significant impact on their learning achievements, attitudes to learning, aims and aspirations, ability to do real life activities and their social activities with other people.

Eldred (2002, 27) found that a 'significant number' of adult literacy students appeared unable to achieve the external standards set, even after several years study, but that almost all students reported increases in confidence. This is consistent with Dymock's findings from his 2006 research into non-accredited learning that the development of confidence is a key aspect of language, literacy and numeracy learning. For example, one adult student said:

I'd always wanted to go back to school ... but it just wasn't sort of happening. ... it's a confidence thing I think, just to know you've got enough confidence to go back, 'cause it's easy coming the first time, but it's coming back, and you think, 'Can I do it?'

In Dymock's survey questionnaire, providers were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, from 'not at all' to 'very much', to what extent they thought that learners developed language, literacy and numeracy skills and self-confidence, respectively. There were no responses in the 'not at all' and 'very little' categories, indicating that all providers thought their learners were achieving above those baselines. In terms of *skills* development, almost half the respondents thought that their students/clients improved 'quite a bit', the second highest level, as a result of being in their programs. Around 20% thought the learners achieved the highest level. On the *self-confidence* aspect, more than half the providers thought their students/clients improved 'very much' through participation in their programs, and most of the others thought they improved 'quite a bit'. A significant finding for the purposes of the present paper is that the development of confidence was perceived as being slightly greater than the growth in skills.

There may also be a question of emphasis: one ACE provider wrote that they were 'not interested in the assessment of skills – just the increase in confidence so they will take the next step to join a class'. A coordinator said that 'some of the students we have are never going to move long way forward with their literacy but they may be moving forward with their confidence or other things that are going on, that ... you can't quite measure.'

In the interviews, coordinators and tutors talked about the importance of developing learners' confidence as part of the learning process. One person described it as giving them the confidence to make a mistake ('many of our

students haven't got that confidence'), and others suggested that competence and confidence were inter-related concepts.

The development of confidence was not explored *per se* in Dymock's study – it was an element that emerged through the written responses to the questionnaire and particularly in the interviews, mainly in relation to 'outcomes'. For example, a coordinator in a program in a community education centre said:

I think generally these people are pretty vulnerable, and they're not ready to go into a formal setting and they see it as a bridging. It's an opportunity to just build the person's confidence, just make that first step and then go into an accredited program.

An example was given by another co-ordinator of a person who had been in one-to-one literacy tutoring every week for almost a year before building sufficient confidence to go into a classroom. Another spoke of learners having the confidence to go into further education and to 'not feel like an idiot or feel ashamed'. An example is a mature age TAFE student, seeking to upgrade his trade qualifications to become a supervisor, who had sought one-to-one help when he found his literacy skills were not sufficient to cope with the training course: 'You feel like a bit of a dummy actually ... and [when the lecturer handed out papers in the TAFE course] I thought, oh gosh I'm in trouble here, and I sort of realised that I needed help. But [now] I think I'm on the right track.'

One coordinator mentioned that among those seeking help were young single men who had experienced problems throughout their schooling and were often employed in low skill jobs and who 'lack confidence to kind of kick on and do other things'. It was suggested that some young people who come for help in obtaining a learner driver's permit do so because they lack the 'grammatical skills, the literacy skills, or perhaps the confidence'. Another example is of a woman who opted initially to have a volunteer tutor and defer joining a class until the following year because she did not want to put her children into childcare at that time in order to attend classes. The coordinator observed: 'Part of it's also about confidence'.

The significance of the development of confidence as a measure of progress is encapsulated by this comment from a mature age woman recently made redundant and unable to find new employment because of a lack of formal qualifications and of literacy skills: 'Actually, I told a lady in Coles yesterday that I'm going to school learning to read and write, and I wouldn't do that before.'

When Watters and Turner (2001) asked learners in non-accredited learning in the UK what they considered they had gained from the experience, increased confidence was one of the outcomes identified, along with enjoyment and satisfaction, gains in skills, knowledge and understanding, a basis for further learning, a sense of well-being, seeing oneself and being seen differently, and seeing the world differently. According to that study, increased confidence was demonstrated by being able to speak up in class, feeling at ease with technology, learning that it's okay to take risks, and not being afraid of change. A sense of well-being came about through the emotional,

psychological and physical benefits of learning: 'Learning makes you feel good'. This study also found that a significant number of learners spoke positively about how learning had changed their perceptions of themselves as learners and as creative people and a realisation that 'you don't have to be intelligent to come to learning'. These attitudes were also part of seeing the world differently as the learners' views of other and beliefs changed. Schuller et al (2004 in Nashashibi, 2004, 29) said:

Education transforms people's lives but also, less spectacularly, enables them to cope with the multifarious stresses of daily life as well as discontinuous and continuous social change and contributes to others' well-being by maintaining community and collective life.

Watters and Turner (2001, 59) concluded that the range of anticipated and unexpected benefits identified reflected the 'diversity and complexity of the learners' purposes and the range of ways in which non-accredited learning enhances adults' lives'. Torrance and Coultas (2004: 25) inferred from McGivney's study (1992) of 50 adult education organisations that for some learners, involvement in non-assessed activities might be a prerequisite for developing sufficient confidence to be able to engage in formally assessed courses. Eldred, Ward, Dutton and Snowdon (2004, p. 57) made a similar conclusion from a UK study:

The importance of non-threatening first-step learning which gives learners time to gain confidence, [and] develop their identity as successful learners, and [which] supports diverse aims and aspirations is vital.

The development of identity as a learner seems to be one of the key factors in helping adults re-engage in learning. Waterhouse and Virgona (2005, pp. 28-9) concluded from an Australian study of adults who had succeeded in life and work despite the apparent handicap of inadequate literacy, that 'literacy issues are about identity as much as [about] skills'.

### **Learner identity**

There has been considerable recent research interest in the link between learning and identity (e.g. Gee, 2001, Falk and Balatti, 2003, and since 2004 the work of the 'Learning Lives' project of the UK ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme). Kelly (2006, 5) concluded from a review of the literature that

Identity is how a person sees themselves in relation to the world and their role in it. It is fluid, being shaped by the social context and membership of a community. Identity changes across a person's life cycle, based on a range of factors such as age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status and general life experience. ... Identity not only influences what a person is now, but also how a person behaves and conceives themselves in the future.

Clemens, Hartley and Macrae (2003: 47) characterised ACE outcomes in Australia as individual development outcomes, community development outcomes and economic development outcomes. Amongst the individual

outcomes were several related to personal identity, e.g. knowledge of self, the world and how to learn; and a healthy, mature self-concept in private life, public life and the workplace.

Falk and Balatti, (2003) explored the concept of 'identity resources' in learning, comprising behaviours, beliefs, feelings and knowledge. Guenther (2005, 5) interviewed more than 100 'VET stakeholders' at four sites across the Northern Territory and Queensland, including indigenous communities, and concluded that almost a quarter of all the perceived benefits from engagement with learning could be described as 'identity benefits'. He suggested (p.6) that the 'identity the individual comes to training with will influence his or her capacity to engage with the training context'. Such a conclusion has significant implications for adult learners, particularly in language, literacy and numeracy, who have had negative schooling experiences and are unsure of their ability to cope with the requirements of accredited training.

The power of successful learning and formation of a learning identity are illustrated by a study of adult numeracy students in England (Swain, 2006, 3) which found that almost three-quarters felt they had changed as a person in some way through their learning endeavours, and that some students increased their aspirations as their sense of achievement and level of self-esteem grew. In Dymock's study, a former learner who had gone on to become a tutor said:

I ... started having a look around at other people and I thought well maybe I'm not that stupid, ... and then I just kept going from there. I think, too, once you get into it, it becomes a bit addictive and once you see that you can do something that you never thought you could you want to take another challenge and challenge yourself a little bit further.

It follows that if the development of confidence and construction of an identity are essential components of learning in non-accredited LLN, the role of the teacher or tutor in language, literacy and numeracy learning is vital in encouraging and sustaining the learner. The role becomes much more than simply teaching language, literacy and numeracy skills, particularly if it takes into account even some of the factors identified by Kelly (2006) listed above.

### **Tutor's role**

In community non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia, there is considerable variety in the way that assistance is provided. According to the findings of the 2006 study (Dymock, 2007, in press), those in one-to-one volunteer programs usually met for between 1.5 and 2 hours a week, often in school term times, and the tutoring was ongoing, sometimes for several years. Volunteer tutors were preponderantly in the community-based programs, and usually worked one-to-one, a few with a small group or supporting a teacher with a larger group. Some volunteer tutors met with students in their homes, others in community centres and others in a 'neutral' venue such as a library.

When asked about learner needs and motivations, some of the tutors and program coordinators interviewed in Dymock's 2006 study were able to recognise their wider role. For instance:

If I get somebody who wants to do something towards a qualification, if I can get them so that they have the confidence and the necessary basics, to then be able to go into a classroom and cope and succeed, then I've done pretty well.

But really, that young man, all he needed was confidence building; he was very competent but he didn't think he was and ... he's done really well. And that's what I find with quite a lot of them. Sit them down, relax them, there's no pressure, they can do what they want to do. ... Just give them the confidence and a few extra skills and away they go.

I think their confidence more than anything has improved because I'm a person that they can relax with. I know their failings and their good points and they can say, 'I don't understand this'.

I think a lot of them are looking for help before they go for the accredited training, because I've worked [individually] with three people who've actually gone on and done the accredited training but didn't have the confidence to approach it first up. And by being the half-way person, which I think happens quite a bit, you help them over that.

These responses illustrate that the nature of the interaction is quite complex, whether or not all teachers and tutors are aware of it. This is true of any teaching-learning situation, but the learning identity that the learner brings with them to this particular learning endeavour means that there is considerable onus on the tutor in the relationship. In non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning, the interaction is often further complicated by the absence of a fixed curriculum, which sets non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning apart from accredited training. One coordinator explained how it worked in her volunteer program:

When I do the interview with them, and depending on what they've asked, what they want to learn, you draw your resources in that field. If they just wanted to learn how to spell, well we have a whole range of books on spelling. If they're right at the very beginning where they're not able to sound or anything like that, so you start right back at basics. If they've got past the sounding but they're having difficulty with how to sound vowels or words that have got the 'e' at the end that change the vowel sounds and things like that, well we look at a slightly different type of curriculum to start them. We ... have the books there that help us, and a lot of our work is commonsense.

Only some one-third of the respondents to Dymock's 2006 survey said that they used a structured course or accredited curriculum, as a basis for their tutoring, and some government funding was contingent on use of an accredited curriculum by community providers for non-accredited LLN learning. The rest did not follow a specific curriculum, with most of those indicating that their courses or activities were developed to meet learners' individual needs.

The widespread lack of a fixed curriculum places a heavy onus on volunteer coordinators and tutors in language, literacy and numeracy and also has implications for the efficacy of training. Almost 30 years ago Charnley and Jones (1979, 181) concluded from their research into the 'concept of success' in adult literacy that 'the counselling role of tutors and the criterion of

confidence as a mark of success needs to be emphasised in training schemes'. There is evidence that this is happening in Australia, as encapsulated in this comment from a coordinator interviewed by Dymock in 2006:

The training course offers ... the strategies that we know work with adults in the sense of literacy achievement, but it also focuses on rebuilding confidence of the learner [which] quite often is an issue, and then focusing on lesson planning so that they can work on the person's individual needs because there's no set curriculum.

Another key aspect of non-accredited learning in LLN that came through in Dymock's research was that learners often needed *time* to develop skills and confidence. Those whose self-esteem had been knocked around for various reasons, and who might also have other issues in their lives they were dealing with concurrently, take time to regroup their personal resources and develop the learner identity discussed above. The need for sufficient time to develop skills and confidence was emphasised by a number of respondents to Dymock's 2006 survey. For example, a volunteer group in a major regional city said: 'Consider the people as individuals not numbers; all have individual needs - not a set curriculum; all learn differently and at various speeds - no set timeframe'.

In providing time for growth, the role of the tutor as both 'teacher' and 'nurturer' is again clear. And coupled with this supportive role is the learning environment that is part of non-accredited learning in LLN, as articulated by a manager of a community adult literacy centre:

The reason a lot of people come here is that we're non-institutional and we're non-threatening, so for people who have got literacy problems as adults, it's not something that they're proud of, it's a sensitive issue. They're people that have failed at school because of literacy problems, so to walk back into a TAFE classroom is putting them back into the same sort of environment that they failed in the first time.

In similar vein, the coordinator of a community literacy 'drop-in' facility catering mainly for immigrants and refugees observed that 'they come here because it's sort of a trusted space and a comfortable one and they just come here and hang out ... and get a bit of English on the way'.

The references to 'non-threatening' and 'trust' and the apparent significance of the development of confidence and identity indicate that the answer to the question asked in the introduction to this report, 'To what extent is there a link between growth in confidence and the development of language literacy and numeracy skills in non-accredited adult learning?' ADD HERE

## IMPLICATIONS

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The research findings discussed above suggest that in terms of what has been termed 'client differentiation' in vocational education and training (McIntyre, 2007), learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy should be considered as having particular characteristics that set them apart from most other adult learners. LLN learners are not homogeneous any more than adult learners in general are, but what differentiates them from those

adults for whom the current education and training system is intended is that they lack confidence in their ability to learn and to cope with that system as well as the language, literacy and numeracy skills they need in order to be able to negotiate formal learning.

A few years ago, the then Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2000) categorised vocational education and training learners into eight 'social market segments': *passionate learners, almost there, learn to earn, might give it away, make it easier, learning on hold, done with it, and forget it*. However, in adult language, literacy and numeracy learning, such attitudes may well mask dispositional learning barriers that are to do with confidence and identity.

The learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy might be characterised as: lacking in confidence, often with negative experiences of school; some have disabilities, others are grappling with English as a second language; sometimes they are already in employment, often low skilled (but with exceptions); and sometimes they are already in accredited training but are not coping. All have taken the step (which for some is a large one because of the social stigma they perceive) to undertake non-accredited language, literacy and/or numeracy learning in order to meet their immediate goals. The diversity of needs is greater than those in accredited training, which by its nature is intended for vocational purposes.

These learners need time to grow in skills and confidence and to develop an identity as learners – as one learner said, it's about having the confidence to go back after the first time. They need encouragement and support to develop as learners, and non-accredited learning is the most appropriate way for them to achieve their diverse goals at this stage of their lives, whatever their age or situation. This diversity of goals points to the significance of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy in re-engaging learners so that they can contribute more fully personally, socially and vocationally. The tutor's role in this process is clearly a key factor.

The findings discussed above all point to the need for a combination of a broad role for the teacher or tutor, incorporating teaching expertise and encouragement for the learner's endeavours in order to develop skills and wider learning outcomes, and time for skills and confidence to grow. This is not new to people working in the LLN field (see, for example, Brennan, Clark and Dymock, 1989) but it is an aspect too readily discounted in an era of accredited training and an emphasis on achieving 'outcomes' in minimum time. Not everyone fits the dominant system. Nashashibi (2004: 27) noted that wider benefits of learning can result from *participation* in a learning activity as much as from *completion*, and that 'engagement in learning is not all future oriented', a comment that is very relevant to ALLN learners in non-accredited community programs (and of course to adult learners generally).

At the beginning of this report, the question asked was: What is the role of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy learning in engaging adult learners in education and training, and in developing people as individuals and as part of their communities?' The answer is that it has the capacity to develop the confidence and identities of adults so that they can move on as individuals, into other education and training, into employment, into engaging more strongly with other people and with their own

communities. In response to ANTA's marketing strategy for skills and lifelong learning, Sanguinetti (2000, 2) argued that what Australia needed was an 'integrated and innovative [education and training] system that offers unending opportunities for learning and re-skilling, accessible at every stage of life.' More recently, Kearns (2006, 29) concluded that the evidence 'points to the value of the ACE role as a learner-friendly gateway to learning for disadvantaged individuals, and the need to adopt systemic perspectives which cross sectoral boundaries in a more co-ordinated approach to second-chance opportunities throughout life'.

If the National Reform Agenda is to 'better address the needs of particular target groups, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills' (DEST 2006, 11), there needs to be recognition of and support for the role of non-accredited learning in language, literacy and numeracy in re-engaging learners in education and training in Australia.

### **Acknowledgement**

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**HOW THE NATIONAL REFORM AGENDA IS  
CHANGING ADULT LEARNING PEDAGOGY  
AND PRACTICE**

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MADELINE FERNBACH



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Recent policy reforms through Welfare to Work (2005) and the COAG National Reform Agenda (COAG, 2006) have indicated there is a strengthening commitment at a policy level to the inclusion of diversity and disadvantage in Vocational Education and Training (VET). To a large measure, this accommodation of disadvantaged and difficult learners reflects the belief that these cohorts of the population, traditionally under-represented in training and employment, may provide one solution to the current and projected skills and labour shortages.

Increasingly vocational training providers such as TAFEs and private training providers are enrolling higher numbers of learners from traditional "equity groups" such as Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and disengaged or at-risk youth. In addition, learners who are reluctant or hesitant such as those who have never been in the workforce, the generationally unemployed and those wishing to re-enter work after a long period of unemployment are also presenting to undertake learning. These learners in general undertake lower AQF level courses (certificates I and II) or non-accredited, bridging programs which are designed to re-engage learners with a learning environment and to provide basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. However in time, these learners will undertake more vocational qualifications.

The increased proportion of disadvantaged learners in VET presents challenges at a practical level for training delivery. Teachers and trainers must facilitate classes with a higher proportion of learners who have learning needs beyond what traditional students have. Disadvantaged learners will have different learning styles, different expectations for outcomes and possibly different real outcomes from the training. Each of these needs must be accommodated within the learning environment and it provides a significant challenge to trainers, especially those with limited prior experience of doing this.

This project explores the implications of the increase in diversity in the vocational learning environment for teaching practice in non-accredited and low-level accredited training. It reviews existing literature within and beyond Australia to examine what the learning environment might look like and identifies the issues and practical solutions that might accommodate such diversity.

The paper identified the need for the vocational education and training sector to be flexible so that it can integrate new and disadvantaged cohorts. In order to do this, there must be less emphasis on labelling how disadvantaged a learner is, and there should be more emphasis on their learning needs. Indeed, this must be systemic: all learners should receive teaching using the same, learner-centred pedagogy. The Adult Community Education sector is very successful at this style of teaching and engagement. We need to learn from this and apply it to the whole of the VET sector. ACE has shown us that it *is* possible.

Perhaps for the basic skills training at non-accredited and low-AQF courses it is relevant to create classes specifically for disadvantaged cohorts but it is critical that these learners be integrated into mainstream classes in the higher AQF qualifications. In that way, disadvantaged learners will gain vocational qualifi-



cations that must be recognized as identical to that of other learners. This is where the challenge to integrate and accommodate these learners becomes more marked.

If institutions are to adopt an integrative or 'engaged' pedagogical approach, it will make the shifts in pedagogical approach required of teachers a whole lot easier. Support of this nature may well make it possible to change a whole institution or the entire VET sector to a more holistic approach to teaching and learning.

We know that there is a political and economic imperative for introducing disadvantaged cohorts into VET and from there into employment. The Australian Reform Agenda has highlighted this and through the Welfare to Work initiatives is implementing it. In addition, though, there is a commercial imperative emerging, where Australia needs to shift more to a service focus in line with most of the Western world and through this, it is hoped, change from being a "high quality low equity" training deliverer to a "high quality, high equity" country. Finally, there is a logistical imperative for change: it simply is not possible to integrate and accommodate new high-needs cohorts of learners into the VET sector without a radical shift in practice. More brochures on how to teach people with disabilities is not going to make the problem go away: the solution is to focus on a system-wide culture shift with commensurate focus on teacher professional development. The change needs to be easy, clear and cheap. How this will work needs significant amounts of thought and a straightforward, achievable implementation strategy.

## BACKGROUND

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### The changing population

There has been much interest and concern in recent times about the impact of Australia's ageing population on our ability to provide sufficient workers to fill the vacancies in the job market. This issue is not new: we have known for many years that workforce shortages were inevitable when baby boomers approached retirement. However, the problem has been exacerbated by the recent economic boom via commodities, building, manufacturing and related industries. As the baby boomers move towards retirement, so too are we in need of more workers to accommodate our growth industries. It is estimated, according to the Centre for Economics of Education and Training, that in order to meet the demand for skilled labour, 2.47 million additional formal training places will be required over the next decade at Certificate III or above. This represents more than 240,000 additional higher level qualifications than the current system can provide (Shah & Burke, 2006).

Immigration and importation of these skills is one short term option to address the shortage, however it cannot provide the whole solution as there is already strong competition for skilled workers throughout the developed world as many Western countries face the same issues. The urgent need for skilled workers has focused attention on the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

### The policy context

Recent policy reforms through Welfare to Work (Australian Government, 2006) and the National Reform Agenda (DEWR, 2005) have indicated there is a strengthening commitment at a policy level to the inclusion of diversity and disadvantage in vocational education and training (VET)<sup>1</sup>. To a large measure, this accommodation of disadvantaged and disengaged learners reflects the belief that these cohorts of the population, traditionally under-represented in training and employment, may provide one solution to the current and projected skills and labour shortages.

The National Reform Agenda (DEWR 2005) proposes to find ways to engage those who have kept away from formal learning. In particular, it focuses on the 4 million Australians between 15 and 64 without year 12 or equivalent qualifications; the 40 percent of Australian adults of working age who do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills to operate in the workplace; casual workers in lower skilled occupations; the long term unemployed (around 92,000 people); people with a disability; unemployed migrants; and employees of two thirds of small businesses in Australia who do not provide structured training (Shah and Burke 2006). The Welfare to Work initiatives, arising from the National Reform Agenda, focus on four priority groups: people with disabilities, principal carer parents, mature age job seekers (50 or over) and people who have not worked for a period of time (Australian Government, 2006). These new initiatives encourage people to seek work or undergo training to develop skills needed by the workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, vocational education and training includes Adult Community Education (ACE), TAFE and private providers who are each critical elements of the VET system.

Skills vouchers released by Federal government in 2006 and 2007 provide some financial assistance with engagement and re-engagement in VET to support areas of greatest skills need. Some state governments also provide support for re-entry of disadvantaged learners through Parents Returning to Work programs and other initiatives.

It is likely that in time we will see additional funding to support re-engagement into VET of the range of individuals described above. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the initiatives implemented since the commencement of the National Reform Agenda have resulted already in an increase in enrolment in VET – accredited and non-accredited courses – by the target cohorts. This paper examines the possible implications for teaching practice of the influx of higher proportions of reluctant or disadvantaged learners in vocational education and training. The paper will explore what the VET classroom might look like as a result of the changes and it will draw on published literature to identify the theories, approaches and solutions that can suggest ways the system, a training provider, and an individual trainer or teacher, can work more effectively within a class that includes a significant number of disengaged, disadvantaged or resistant learners. First, it is worth examining what we mean by “disadvantaged” and how that articulates with the National Reform Agenda.

This paper, however, does not undertake an exhaustive search of the literature and in particular it does not include the many resources that are designed to address the needs of a particular cohort of disadvantaged learners. Rather, the paper is intended as a commencement of the discussion and thought around this issue rather than providing an exhaustive final word on how to address it.

### **Disadvantaged learners**

We know that people who are disadvantaged can experience significant difficulty in undertaking vocational education and training. The most disadvantaged learners often have a suite of social, educational, economic and other barriers and experiences that make learning difficult: either at a particular juncture in their lives or challenges that create barriers throughout their lives. Particular cohorts of learners, such as Indigenous Australians, disengaged youth<sup>2</sup>, people with disabilities, rural and remote learners, the long term unemployed, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and mature aged students, have historically experienced disadvantage within the VET system as well as schools and higher education institutions (e.g. Equity Research Centre, 2006; Considine, Watson, & Hall, 2005; DEWR, 2005; Zyngier, 2005).

Disadvantaged learners often have particular learning needs that must be accommodated in order for them to have a successful learning experience. Success can be the traditionally accepted completion of qualifications and successful transition into meaningful employment, but it can also mean an increase in self esteem, the ability or desire to re-engage with community and so on.

Barry McGaw, former Director for Education at the OECD, describes Australia's weakness as "the magnitude of the influence of social background on educational achievement". He says that "Australia languishes with a high-quality, low-equity label" (Black, 2007), p.2. This is a major concern because in order

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<sup>2</sup> Disengaged youth, or “at-risk” youth are terms used synonymously here. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum defines “youth at risk” as those not in full time education, not in full time employment and not actively seeking either activity. Youth who are disengaged from education and employment in this way are the cohort of interest in this paper.

for the National Reform Agenda and associated Welfare to Work initiatives to make a difference to the workforce, individuals from these disadvantaged cohorts *must* be successfully engaged in education and training and achieve successful outcomes. The challenge is for the VET sector to have the flexibility to change so that this becomes possible.

Significant research has been undertaken on how to provide education and training to Indigenous learners, to culturally and linguistically diverse groups, to youth, to people with disabilities and also to some extent mature aged learners. In my view this work has been necessary but it is not sufficient. Providing literature on how to work with particular groups encourages a focus on the group and the associated social and cultural barriers to learning. It ignores the individual by overlooking the fact that every learner has individual and particular learning needs.

Individuals within a particular community or cohort may experience individual disadvantage or cultural disadvantage resulting from their membership in and history associated with a particular cohort or group (Kearns, 2006). Considine et al. (2005) argues that a 'client group focus approach' has only limited success as it does not allow for individual needs. In order to achieve successful outcomes for our students, it is imperative that learners be treated as individuals with particular learning needs as well as taking into account their needs as a result of their group memberships. Indeed,

Secondly, a focus on particular cohorts of disadvantaged learners is no longer relevant. With the influx of disadvantaged learners targeted by the National Reform Agenda, the mix of students is changing. Rather than having classes that may comprise one or two students with disabilities, for example, it is likely to expect that any given class may host several disadvantaged students with any number of learning requirements. The current state of VET requires acknowledgment that teachers must come to terms with delivering training to suit *all* students rather than treat disadvantaged students on an as-needed basis. To become experts in teaching all students and all cohorts may be overwhelming and unrealistic. To change the way the teacher teaches so that it accommodates all students is more straightforward. What is required is a shift in pedagogy.

Pedagogy is "about the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning, including the purposes, relationships, environment, management and social context of learning." (Sanguinetti, Waterhouse, & Maunders, 2004), p.9. Teaching pedagogy must incorporate notions of individual learning. This is critical but is not new: indeed, there has been significant movement towards a learner-centered pedagogy within . However, what is required is a fundamental shift throughout the VET system. There is no longer time for prevaricating and procrastination: in order to produce the workforce for the future, changes to the VET system must be made now.

## **Pathways**

Patterns of engagement in vocational education by particular cohorts, such as Indigenous Australians, disengaged youth, people with disabilities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and mature aged learners, tend to show that these learners engage with non-accredited or low-AQF level accredited courses or single subjects in the first instance. After a successful initial experience, disadvantaged learners often build on this by taking on a vocational or a higher-level vocational qualification.

Non-accredited and low-AQF level courses have traditionally had a higher proportion of disadvantaged learners within them and the adult community education segment of the Vocational education and training sector has developed the skills and teaching practice to address this need (Bardon, 2006). Indeed, adult and community education (ACE) demonstrates high proportions of disadvantaged learners relative to the rest of VET (Bowman 2006) and provides a high proportion of qualifications and non-accredited training (Bowman, 2006; Choy, Haukka, & Keyes, 2006). ACE therefore can play a key role in addressing the skills shortfall by delivering AQF I and II qualifications, especially for specific target groups (Bardon 2006).

ACE is **efficient**: Volkoff and Walstab in a report to the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board, describe ACE as a “cost effective sector with diversified funding, low cost community infrastructure, flat administrative structures and volunteer staff contributions matched with high levels of learner satisfaction, strong course completion rates and employment outcomes”. (Volkoff & Walstab, 2007, p.3). It is also **effective**: ACE receives the highest satisfaction levels in the NCVET annual national survey of student outcomes (Bardon, 2006). Bardon suggests this outstanding result is due to community training provision being organised around adult learning principles and delivery that suits the needs of its clients.

However, the influx of “reluctant” learners - those who feel they must undertake training or else they will lose their welfare payments – are a relatively new cohort to accommodate. These reluctant learners as well as the disadvantaged learners who are moving beyond non-accredited courses present a challenge not only for the Adult Community Education segment but also the whole VET sector.

Sanguinetti et al. (Sanguinetti et al., 2004) believe that the pedagogical skills and knowledge within the ACE sector have application beyond ACE to schools and to the VET sector. The distinctive characteristics of the TAFE sector (with strong links with industry) and the ACE sector (with a strong community base) are critical to serving the vocational education needs of the community and for the overall quality of education and training services (Waters, 2005). Private training providers can be responsive and experiment with new approaches that can subsequently inform VET sector practice. However, it is important that the three segments of the VET sector have complementary pedagogies. It would be a useful activity to develop a strategy to implement ACE-style pedagogies within the whole VET sector. In the next section, we explore the implications for teaching practice of delivery to disadvantaged learners. Bean (Bean, 2004) proposes that diversity needs to be embedded into management systems and organizations, while Kearns (2006) acknowledges the need to accommodate individuals’ learning needs through personalised learning models.

## THE ROLE OF TEACHERS AND TRAINERS

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As described earlier, pedagogy relates to the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning. Teacher practice incorporates this element but is also dependent on other things as well. Teacher practice is influenced by:

- Pedagogy
- The skills of the teacher
- Access to, nature of and quality of learning resources
- External demand for outcomes of a particular type (e.g. completion of qualification or increase in self esteem)
- Systems and structures within which the teacher works (the context)
- The characteristics of individual learners
- The characteristics of the group as a whole.

In this section, we examine each of these elements separately in light of the changing environment of VET as a result of the National Reform Agenda.

### Pedagogy and paradigm

Inclusion of diversity in vocational education and training can happen in one of two ways. The first is accommodation (my term): to add effort into a trainer's existing teaching style to accommodate someone with special learning needs. When a class includes one person with particular, specific learning needs, such as an Indigenous student who requires that the trainer interacts with and negotiates with the Indigenous student's community in order to learn effectively within the classroom, the teacher can accommodate the difference by adding effort to the classroom. The Indigenous learner would be treated as a special case requiring extra attention.

In accommodation pedagogies, the person is identified as "special" or requiring additional effort and accommodations are made to the curriculum specifically for that person. The benefits of this model are that the trainer can deliver a qualification in a way that he/she knows works for the majority of people, delivering predictable outcomes for the majority of students. It draws on the trainer's experience in what worked in the past to achieve performance. In addition, materials have often already been prepared specific to the qualification being studied, so that adjustment of the class to accommodate one person is relatively straightforward.

The problems with the accommodation model are several. Firstly, as the number of people entering the class with particular needs or disadvantages increases, it adds effort to the trainer's workload. For example, a trainer might add an additional 30% of their preparation time to accommodate one person into a class, but adding an extra 50 or 60% to the workload with multiple learners with particular needs is an unreasonable and impossible demand to place on the trainer. Secondly, it does not take account of the dynamics of the class: including a "special case" or two into a class differentiates that person or persons from the others in the class who are "normal". Tensions could exist between students, especially if the majority learners perceive a disproportionate amount of time is being allocated to a needy few. Evidence indicates that

adjusting a curriculum to accommodate learners does not lead to as effective outcomes for some cohorts (Zyngier, 2005). Zyngier writes: "*As early as 1981 Newmann warned against programs designed to make students just feel good. Eliminating alienation is not the same as eliminating stress or effort.*" (p.9) It is relatively clear that teaching practice should not merely "humor" disadvantaged learners but create opportunities to learn to an appropriately rigorous standard.

Another aligned pedagogy is the transmission model. The 'transmission' model of learning is under great scrutiny because it treats the teacher as the font of all knowledge and the learner as the unquestioning receptacle (Waters, 2005).

The second approach is a learner centred one. This type of pedagogy changes the way a trainer delivers training entirely: to assume that all learners within a classroom will have learning needs of one sort or another, and to embed this assumption within the teaching framework. This requires gaining an understanding of all individuals in the class in terms of their learning needs, so that learning, targets and other key elements of the class are negotiated with all individuals.

Programs that are connected with the world in their curriculum are associated with positive academic and social outcomes for all students and especially disadvantaged learners. Evidence has indicated that "programs that recognize and engage student differences in classroom teaching can produce systematic and sustainable interventions that could serve the needs of at-risk students" (Zyngier, in press-b p.14)

(Phuntsog, 1999) describes culturally responsive teaching as including and involving the students' cultural experiences and background to help them learn the fundamental academic skills such as reading, writing and computing.

Universal Instructional Design (UID) was developed by disability specialists, educators and scholars to expand educational practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities. It ensures that instructional methods, activities and materials are accessible and fair, are flexible in use and presentation, are straightforward and consistent, can provide a supportive learning environment and minimize unnecessary physical effort or requirements and ensures a learning space that accommodates students and instructional methods (Johnson, 2004). A focus on universal instructional design creates the possibility for educators to address racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and class concerns (Johnson 2004).

The notion that learners have an important part in negotiating the development, delivery and assessment of their learning programs is crucial to current contexts, but almost certainly will be more so in the future. (Smith & Blake, 2005) p.6.

The cost of this model is that it requires initial flexibility and openness about the way the class will be conducted: existing materials may not be appropriate to everyone within the class. In addition, it can be a somewhat daunting or frightening experience for trainers who are unused to this style of teaching.

Smith and Blake (2005) comment that

Contemporary education and training has moved from being almost entirely instructor- and provider-controlled to being a process where learners are much more likely and are expected to be involved in

planning what is to be learned, how and when - and how the learning will be assessed. Many VET teachers have already adopted [this] approach ... For many others, however, these approaches to teaching and learning may be both challenging and confronting. (p.11)

It is clear that a paradigm shift towards the facilitation of learning and the role of addressing the dynamic needs of learners has already occurred within the VET sector. The majority of ACE learning occurs this way (e.g. Sanguinetti et al. 2004; Bowman 2006) and in some situations within TAFE institutions and private training providers this occurs also. In particular, the classes most likely to accommodate this approach are often those specifically designed for disadvantaged learners. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the areas that have not yet adopted a learner-centred pedagogy tend to be those of the more traditional trades type areas: the areas where there is a strong focus on vocational and employment outcomes.

Research indicates that there has been a shift from mass production to mass customization with respect to the service economy in the Western world, with VET service provision being no exception. Customized programs and personalized services are predicted to become standard options for learners (Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman, & Roy, 2006). It is reasonable to expect that, in time, *all* learners will expect tailored learner-centred training delivery. We have both a logistical pressure and also a commercial opportunity to make learner-centred pedagogy standard practice in VET.

Pedagogy assumes that teachers are active agents who assist students to learn (Waters, 2005). Our challenge in the next stage of Australian workforce planning is to do this as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is important, then, to ensure that teachers are well equipped to undertake the changes that should be asked of them.

### **Teacher skills**

Rowe (2004b, in Zyngier, in press-b) argues that the influence of students' home background and individual characteristics on educational outcomes "*pale into insignificance compared with class/teacher effects. That is, the quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students' cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes of schooling, regardless of ... students' backgrounds*" (p.18).

Only about half of the current VET staff possess the necessary knowledge and skills required to meet new challenges in VET (Waters, 2005). Appropriately teaching these groups is "only being managed by organizations 'riding on the back of experienced teachers who are managing to cope with a very difficult situation'" (Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick, & Cipollone, 2006) p.27.

Teachers and trainers need the time and space to extend their existing skills to meet the challenges of the new VET environment (Mitchell et al. 2006), yet disadvantaged learners are already entering the VET system and have need of these skills now. Learning a new way of approaching teaching will be a significant issue for many teachers, especially if they are part time or casual and if they face significant teaching loads.

In an "At a Glance" research review for NCVET, Smith and Dalton (2005) identified that there is need for professional development for teachers in terms of

effective training techniques to adapt to the different learning needs of a range of disadvantaged learners. I think that we need to go one step further: teachers need training in how to integrate *all* learners' needs into class delivery. Smith and Dalton also say that professional development can be most effective when there is a practical focus rather than learning new theoretical models (Also Mackay et al. 2006). It is important that this training is not one-off, particularly when learning to include a culturally responsive curriculum (Phuntsog, 1999).

Teachers in a number of studies have requested training to develop their skills in how to deal with emotional, physical, mental health and financial disadvantages of learners (Mackay et al., 2006; NMIT, 2003); challenging behaviors, learning difficulties, poor self esteem, motivation, self discipline, and engagement (Stasiak, 2004), and to address negative attitudes to and experiences of learning (NMIT, 2003).

In Attachment 2, I have collated the key principles from a number of studies that identify excellent teaching practice from schools, ACE and VET more broadly. These show that good practice is alive and well in VET. However, it remains a challenge to create a VET system that consistently delivers learner-focused, flexible and adaptable training that addresses the needs of disadvantaged learners and their advantaged peers. This will require significant resources and a system and structures that support it. The next sections explore these issues.

## Resources

A recurring problem with teacher resources is how to access them, how to promote the availability of particular resources, how to maintain them and how to minimize duplication. A recent study investigating learning resources found that many were under-used or had limited impact (Mawer & Jackson, 2006). Where they were known about, resources were generally highly valued as appropriate and user-friendly. Practitioners found communities of practice very useful in supporting the implementation of equity resources, and there was an acknowledgment that the systems for dissemination of resources were non-existent or poor.

"The system needs more effective and efficient coordination and more resources to ensure that reluctant students are supported culturally, emotionally, educationally and vocationally to enable them to become committed and continuing students and, subsequently, workers." (Alford & James, 2007), p.10.

Both TAFE and ACE teachers want to learn more about how to manage the changing profile of learners. They have a strong need to access appropriate resources and learning materials to meet the needs of specific learner groups (Mackay et al. 2006). They were particularly concerned about their ability to deliver teaching to youth at risk, students with undisclosed psychiatric and neurological disability, African and other students with a background of limited literacy in their first language coupled with experience of torture and trauma.

For many teachers, this may mean "developing new resources as well as learning and assessment methods. This may involve significant rethinking and 'soul-searching' about their VET practice." (Smith & Blake, 2005 p.11)

There are a range of methods needed for VET teachers and trainers to learn new skills, through work-based learning such coaching, mentoring, industry release and work shadowing, participating in networks, communities of practice

and professional conversations (Mitchell et al., 2006). Certainly I am not advocating that one set of resources be developed that will be relevant to all teachers in all situations. This is not only impossible but also is inconsistent with a learner-centred framework. However, a change in pedagogy will require a financial commitment to supporting the development of relevant resources to support the transition to a learner-centred pedagogy. These should have longer term, broader distribution to be most effective.

### **Required outcomes**

Those schools that achieve successful outcomes for students, including disadvantaged students, use a student-centered approach to learning (Black, 2007).

Coordinators involved in a project with Jones et al and colleagues (Jones, Brittle, Haisma, Teese, & Vanderslik, 2003) said that delivery involved taking a flexible approach and addressing the problems before getting to the learning. While it was important to be aware of social welfare issues, they felt it was beyond the scope of their role to deal with these emotional and social problems. Thus there is a conflict between the clear jurisdiction (not their problem) and the need to resolve issues in order to engage the student in effective learning.

It must be recognised that there is no one "recipe" from which one can draw answers to create successful outcomes for every disadvantaged learner. There is a tension between the individual needs and collective needs of disadvantaged learners. Much success has resulted from creating specific classes catered to people with particular needs (e.g. a class for people with disabilities to learn literacy and numeracy through the certificate of work education or a class for Indigenous students to study a certificate in nursing). To make generalisations about particular learning groups' needs can work at times (such as with the several publications designed to educate teachers and trainers about the needs of Indigenous communities – Getting' Into It; What works), but to assume that a course designed for a particular group is relevant to all people from that group runs the great risk of stereotyping disadvantaged students and reduces the complexity of dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity (Phuntso, 1999).

Outcomes in VET by their nature tend to be centred around re-entry or first entry into the workforce. Outcomes such as module completion, course completion, achievement of a qualification and enrolling in a higher AQF course are valued – and measured – as stepping stones to employment. For people in some disadvantaged cohorts such as the long term unemployed, people with disabilities and Indigenous students, outcomes can include increases in self esteem and merely turning up to each class (O'Callaghan, 2005; Robertson, Oldfield, Young, Hunter, & Yow Yeh, 2004). Just as course completions are interim outcomes toward employment, so too should these "softer" outcomes be measured, reported and valued as stepping stones to course completions.

In addition, there is a tension between running "boutique" classes for groups of students with similar needs (e.g. the certificate of Work Education for people with disabilities), providing good outcomes, and integrating disadvantaged students into mainstream classes. It is important to try to avoid marginalizing the people who most need to re-engage with learning and broader society. A class of people with mixed abilities enables those who are disadvantaged to develop skills and confidence in interacting with people from the wider community.

Many of the qualifications and non-accredited courses that the disadvantaged

cohorts undertake are designed to re-engage learners with learning and are often not a direct pathway to the workforce. In a vocational class where there is a range of abilities and learning needs, successful completion of a qualification will be recognised by potential employers as indicative of their employability. A person with a disability who completes a qualification in the same class and with the same conditions as a person without a disability will have an identical qualification. There is the danger in specific classes that disadvantaged students could be marginalised by employers, perhaps assuming that the qualification is not identical. More work is desperately needed to understand what the barriers are, from the perspective of employers, to employing VET graduates from disadvantaged cohorts, and how to address these barriers. Without a commitment from employers and industry to employing the disadvantaged cohorts currently undertaking VET as a result of the National Reform Agenda, we will see little improvement in employment outcomes for these learners.

### **Context: systems and structures**

*"Schools are largely responsible for the weak connections between students and their communities as a result of inflexible curriculum pathways, lack of relevance of teaching and learning programs, inadequate skills of teachers, inability to participate in the class and the life of the school. We certainly know what is the issue – the question then is why do schools continue with such practices?" (Zyngier, 2003) p.12.*

Burgell and Schulze (Burgell & Schulze, 2005) express concern about TAFE institutions' continuing role and capacity to meet the needs of growing numbers of young people disengage from the school system before completing their education.

It is unclear the extent to which the current VET system has the capacity or the flexibility to support the successful integration of disadvantaged cohorts, especially those entering as a result of the National Reform Agenda. Certainly our track record has been poor (Black, 2007) and it is my opinion that there is need of significant systemic and cultural change.

If the VET system is to transform itself into a learner-centred institution, it is going to need a clear goal and an implementation plan. That is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is critical to the future of Australia's VET system.

### **Characteristics of learners and groups**

Learner characteristics are becoming more important as learners become more articulate about their needs and expectations for learning. As those who engage with learning for the first time (or after a period of disengagement) bring their fears, barriers and resistance to the class, there is an urgent need for teachers and trainers to have the skills to support their learning. In 2006, a series of equity projects was funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training. At Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT), a project sought to establish the needs for literacy and numeracy support in a target group of pre-apprentices, apprentices and trainees in a number of industry training areas. Through administering a literacy and numeracy assessment tool as part of the induction process for all first year pre-apprentices, apprentices and trainees in 2006, NMIT established that 59% of enrolled students would require some kind of assistance in order to successfully complete their studies. Of these, 90% needed numeracy assistance, 41% with writing and 21% with reading. Through improved liaison and collaboration across departments and

faculties, trade teachers felt supported and aware of literacy and numeracy issues and strategies and were able to improve student support. Initiatives were taken by trade teachers to present material in a way that included all students in the learning experience (Coppolillo, 2006). This is the sort of approach that can be undertaken in traditional trade areas of a TAFE institution.

Different learners (and, indeed, different cohorts of learners) bring with them different learning needs and barriers. They can have different styles as a function of gender, culture and age (Smith & Dalton, 2005). For example, literature describes Indigenous students as needing one on one support and, ideally, peer tutoring. Teachers recommend the use of real-life texts customized to individual Indigenous students' needs. Resources must be culturally appropriate, written in plain English and contain sufficient visual content (McGlusky & Thaker, 2006). Young people can present at a vocational course with initial reluctance to accept change and take risks, low motivation, low numeracy and mathematics skills and a negative attitude towards learning numeracy, limited understanding of the requirements of being in the workplace, being poorly informed about career options, job prospects and pathways and are unrealistic about their immediate job prospects (NMIT, 2003).

In contrast, people from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds may require course content to be delivered in simple language to address English as a second (or third or fourth) language but may respond better to formal style classes than flexible learning ones. On the other hand, learners from other cultures may have never experienced formal learning before and may align with the needs of Indigenous students. Interestingly, there appears to be not so much difference between "the poorest groups and the less poor" (Zyngier, in press-b) in terms of psychological, attitudinal or cultural dimensions. We cannot assume that the most disadvantaged people are necessarily fundamentally different to those who are not so disadvantaged. This has implications for teaching practice, which suggests that delivery of training in a way that works for disadvantaged learners is likely to work just as well for less disadvantaged learners.

In support of this idea, it is reasonable to assume that there will be some principles for success that are common to most learners, as well as some that are specific for particular individuals or cohorts. The literature is, as Smith & Dalton (2005) put it, "inconclusive" about whether designing curriculum tailored to particular learning styles is beneficial or incidental to learning. It would appear that there is no particular point in expending unrealistic amounts of effort in preparing learning style-specific learning materials: what is important is learner self-awareness, the skills of the teacher or trainer, and the support to develop meaningful outcomes and valid pathways to employment where these are appropriate.

## DISCUSSION

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This paper explores the implications for teaching practice of such a situation. It is crucial to the future of VET that the role of teachers and trainers in addressing the skills shortages be examined: through provision of training to disadvantaged learners, trainers are the front line of Australia's attempt to solve its workforce crisis. Without a detailed exploration of the impact that Welfare to Work is having on teachers and trainers' every day practice, we are trusting that the current system, the current pedagogies, the existing resources, knowledge and the capability of our teachers and trainers will be sufficient to deliver effective training and achieve successful outcomes. This is a critical risk within the Vocational education and training system that must be considered and managed at a system-wide level.

The paper identified the need for the vocational education and training sector to be flexible so that it can integrate new and disadvantaged cohorts. In order to do this, there must be less emphasis on labelling how disadvantaged a learner is, and there should be more emphasis on their learning needs. Indeed, this must be systemic: all learners should receive teaching using the same, learner-centred pedagogy. The Adult Community Education sector is very successful at this style of teaching and engagement. We need to learn from this and apply it to the whole of the VET sector. ACE has shown us that it *is* possible.

The literature provides evidence that the ways learning and teaching is delivered to people who are in disadvantaged cohorts is useful for those who are not disadvantaged in the same way. What this means is that it makes the labels "disadvantaged" and "Indigenous" and "disabled" and "youth at risk" and "culturally diverse" and "mature learner" irrelevant to the nature of the teaching being delivered. It leads us to a learner-centred pedagogy that is applicable, relevant and tailored to every learner.

One tension is between creating an environment where people with similar learning needs are clustered together so that delivery of training can be tailored to that group particularly, and on the other hand, limiting the options of those learners to learn things beyond the defined group: a flexible teaching structure that accommodates everyone would be ideal. Perhaps for the basic skills training at non-accredited and low-AQF courses it is relevant to create classes specifically for disadvantaged cohorts but it is critical that these learners be integrated into mainstream classes in the higher AQF qualifications. In that way, disadvantaged learners will gain vocational qualifications that must be recognized as identical to that of other learners. This is where the challenge to integrate and accommodate these learners becomes more marked.

If there are one or two learners within a class who have particular learning needs, it is a relatively straightforward thing to make adjustments to learning delivery for the individuals concerned. As a result of the welfare to work initiatives and the changing composition of learners in VET, it is possible that, instead of one or two people with particular learning needs within one class, a teacher or trainer may be presented with several people in need of particular adjustments.

If institutions are to adopt an integrative or 'engaged' pedagogical approach, it will make the shifts in pedagogical approach required of teachers a whole lot easier. Support of this nature may well make it possible to change a whole in-

stitution or the entire VET sector to a more holistic approach to teaching and learning.

We know that there is a political and economic imperative for introducing disadvantaged cohorts into VET and from there into employment. The Australian Reform Agenda has highlighted this and through the Welfare to Work initiatives is implementing it. In addition, though, there is a commercial imperative emerging, where Australia needs to shift more to a service focus in line with most of the Western world and through this, it is hoped, change from being a “high quality low equity” training deliverer to a “high quality, high equity” country. Finally, there is a logistical imperative for change: it simply is not possible to integrate and accommodate new high-needs cohorts of learners into the VET sector without a radical shift in practice. More brochures on how to teach people with disabilities is not going to make the problem go away: the solution is to focus on a system-wide culture shift with commensurate focus on teacher professional development. The change needs to be easy, clear and cheap. How this will work needs significant amounts of thought and a straightforward, achievable implementation strategy.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

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The use of and access to resources to support learning and teaching with individuals with specific learning needs or cultural backgrounds needs to be improved. The quality of resources is not under question; it is the need for longer term dissemination strategies and a centralised clearinghouse that are the key issues.

Work is desperately needed to understand what the barriers are, from the perspective of employers, to employing VET graduates from disadvantaged cohorts, and how to address these barriers. Without a commitment from employers and industry to employing the disadvantaged cohorts currently undertaking VET as a result of the National Reform Agenda, we will see little improvement in employment outcomes for these learners.

It is important that we develop a strategy to implement ACE-style pedagogies within the whole VET sector. If the VET system is to transform itself into a learner-centred institution, it is going to need a clear goal and a practical implementation plan.

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## ATTACHMENT 1

### FRAMEWORKS AND THEORIES

For many years, substantial effort has gone into identifying the best ways to teach and establishing the most effective conditions for learning. There have been meta-analyses, case studies of best practice, collection of raw data and synthesis of secondary data. The quality of these studies, in general, has been excellent. Rather than provide yet another synthesis of all of this wisdom, which runs the risk of simplifying the information to the point of inutility, I have chosen to present a selection of the best frameworks and theories below. I apologize to the authors of those paradigms that I have not included: this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. For those who expect to see your models in graphical or pictorial format, again I apologize. I have reduced things to bullet points for the sake of ease of comparison. Things that are relevant for one group may well be relevant for all, however they have been clustered where this was possible. It is intended that the frameworks and theories provided here will form the basis of the development of a learner-centered implementation framework for VET.

#### Pedagogy

Murray, Mitchell, Gale et al. (2004) review and summarise the factors associated with engagement and disengagement with learning. While this had a focus on schooling, the factors are relevant to learners within the vocational education and training context. Non-school risk factors for educational disengagement are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Non-school risk factors for educational disengagement

#### Individual factors

- Poor self esteem
- Low intelligence
- Psychological and psychiatric problems
- Physical ill-health and disability
- Poor prior academic performance
- Repeating a subject
- Specific learning problems e.g. poor literacy or numeracy
- Learning disabilities
- Behavioural problems
- Frequent or chronic school non-attendance

#### Family factors

- Large family size
- Family dysfunction e.g. conflict and abuse
- Family break up and the formation of new families
- High family mobility
- Separation from family
- Parental illness
- Low socio-economic status – low income and educational attainment, unemployment

#### Social factors

- Gender – maleness
- Non-Anglo race or ethnicity
- Neighbourhood and regional characteristics – low SES, remote or rural location, negative community norms e.g. prevalence of anti social behaviour

(adapted from Murray et al. 2004).

Murray et al. (2004) describes a range of factors relating to learner engagement and disengagement. Earlier we examined their non-school factors, while here it is useful to inspect their list of institution-level and class-level factors as they relate directly to the way a teacher can deliver his/her class. See Table 2.

Table 2. Institution factors that affect student engagement.

Institution-level
Institution leadership
Institution size
Student – staff ratio
Gender mix of institution
Quality of infrastructure
Disciplinary climate
Social climate e.g. tolerance of diversity, prevalence of bullying and anti-social behaviours
Staff professional development
Staff workload and relationships
Community participation
Class-level
Class size
Access to learning resources, eg..g technology
Classroom climate or culture
Student – teacher relations
Peer relations
Teacher experience and knowledge
Teacher morale and commitment
Teacher planning and behaviours
Curriculum
Instructional activities
Assessment practices

(adapted from Murray et al. 2004)



According to Phuntsog (1999), culturally responsive teaching involves:  
Being culturally literate  
Self-reflective analysis of one's attitudes and beliefs  
Caring, trusting and inclusive classrooms  
Respect for diversity  
Transformative curriculum to engender meaning.

According to (Zyngier, in press-a), there are four CORE elements to teaching pedagogy that support both social justice and academic achievement.  
Connecting - to and engaging with the students' cultural knowledge  
Owning - all students should be able to see themselves as represented in the work  
Responding - to students' lived experiences and actively and consciously critiquing that experience  
Empowering - students with a belief that what they do will make a difference to their lives and the opportunity to voice and discover their own authentic and authoritative life.

A list of over 20 pedagogical approaches was distilled by Sanguinetti et al. (2004) to yield four broad pedagogical dimensions. These dimensions were:  
The teacher (the personal, social, and attitudinal values and characteristics of ACE teachers)  
The teaching (i.e. the practices, approaches, methods, strategies and purposes)  
The pIACE (the geographical, social and institutional contexts of ACE)  
The curriculum (including content, purposes and approaches to assessment).

"The presence of all four elements: intellectually challenging material, connectedness, difference and social supportiveness within a particular lesson contributes to the practice of a productive pedagogy." (Zyngier, 2003, p.11)

A student-centered approach to teaching and learning:  
Is based on a challenging curriculum connected to students' lives  
Caters for individual differences in interest, achievement and learning styles  
Develops students' ability to take control over their own learning  
Uses authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration  
Emphasizes building meaning and understanding rather than completing tasks  
Involves cooperation, communication and negotiation  
Connects learning to the community (Black, 2007).

Characteristics of facilitative teaching (Smith & Blake, 2005):  
Placing a strong emphasis on the workplace to provide a meaningful context for learning where problems are framed by the context of the workplace  
Encouraging 'hands on' and interactive approaches to learning activities to allow learners to apply and interact equally with the thinking and performing aspects of learning  
Establishing learning outcomes that are clear in their intent to achieve 'work readiness' for learners  
Giving learners the opportunity to collaborate and negotiate in determining their learning and assessment processes  
Understanding learners as 'co-producers' of new knowledge and skills  
Recognizing that the prior learning and life experiences of learners are valuable foundations for constructing new knowledge and skill sets (although they can also impose limitations)



Using flexible teaching approaches that address the different learning styles of students  
Valuing the social interactions involved with learning in groups.

Program

Zyngier (2003) undertook a meta literature review to identify over 178 differently named characteristics of good practice in education. He divided these into four themes (Program focus, student focus, teacher focus and community focus) and these are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 A meta-analysis of elements of good practice programs

Program Focus

- \* real life issues of immediate relevance (13)
- \* integration into mainstream (10)
- \* use integrated approach across many subject areas (7)
- \* separate streaming – withdrawal (2)
- \* emphasis on basic skills and remediation (1)

Student Focus

- \* student well being (20)
- \* responding to student needs (17)
- \* students having control of their lives – student empowerment (12)
- \* high expectations and challenge (10)
- \* long term training and future needs (9)
- \* student involvement in planning (7)
- \* students as active learners (5)

Teacher Focus

- \* importance of positive student teacher relationships (17)
- \* selection of quality teachers and continuous teacher training (14)
- \* school leadership and vision (2)

Community Focus

- \* community connectedness – involvement of and engagement with student’s world (21)
- \* collaboration with community organizations and groups (8)

Note: numbers in parentheses indicate the number of characteristics from many studies that could be ‘bundled’ together. Taken from Zyngier, 2003.

Zyngier suggests that there was commonality on four points:

Alternative programs should be both mainstream and relevant, reflecting real world problems. They should not focus on remediation or basic skills, nor should they be based on separate programs for the few chosen to participate. Alternative programs must be socially supportive, be intellectually challenging and respond to student needs both current and long term. The selection and training of the participating teachers is crucial, while it can be inferred that leadership “from above” is less vital. Alternative programs must actively involve and be connected to the students’ world and the community.

The Access Training and Employment Centre (ATEC) presented a series of examples of good practice in achieving equity and diversity in Victorian TAFEs. The key elements of best practice in a study centre in the Agriculture and Horticulture Department of Wodonga Institute of TAFE included:  
 a clear, single communication point;  
 a collaborative model;  
 inclusive teaching practices’  
 a flexible learner-centred approach;  
 teacher support and development. (ATEC, 2003)

The third program reviewed by ATEC was the Work Education Unit at Northern

Melbourne Institute of TAFE which provided support and training to people with disabilities. The main strategies that were considered key elements of the success of the Unit were:

- a flexible learner-centred approach
- an employment focus
- developing partnerships
- an integrated holistic approach and organisational support. (ATEC 2003)

#### Learners

ANTA noted that educational programs for at-risk learners should focus on teaching within a context of linking individual students with key people in their community, achieving 'education by stealth' (Szirom, Jaffe et al., 2001, in Zyngier, in press). Other authors (e.g. Luke et al. 2003) argue that education must move beyond integration of curricula and addressing people's needs, to achieving actual educational outcomes through the encouragement of higher order thinking and high intellectual demand and expectations (in Zyngier, in press).

Two-dimensional representation of factors describing VET learner preferences: dependent vs. independent/ self-directed and verbal vs non-verbal. teachers are able to work with these two dimensions in a way that enables them to respond to the characteristics of individual learners and groups of learners. Teachers and trainers have a wide range of instructional forms available to them. These forms of instruction can align with the two dimensions described above and can be located along the continuum. (Smith & Blake, 2005)

Student engagement is an interesting term, where it assumes that it is the responsibility of the student to engage with learning and if they are 'disengaged' things must be done 'to' the student in order to make them re-engage with learning. Vibert & Shields (2003, in Murray et al. 2004) argue that students are engaged when their learning institution is an engaging place to be. An international review of enabling and inhibiting conditions for student engagement was presented by Murray et al. (2004) and is reproduced in Table 4.

Table 4 Enabling and inhibiting conditions for student engagement



Collaborative learning in a variety of configurations that cross age, grade and ability levels and that reduce student isolation

Democratic attitudes:

Ensuring that institutions provide enabling conditions for all students, not just those who actively pursue leadership positions, achieve highly or have influential family/community.

Bureaucratic structure:

Formal, bureaucratic and hierarchical governance structures  
Top-down decision-making  
Emphasis on labels and special programs for students with specific problems

Source: Murray, Mitchell, Gale et al. (2004) p.17



### Indigenous

Successful VET programs are underpinned by a view of teaching and learning in which:

- \* Learners have control over their learning
- \* Learning is experiential
- \* Learning is cooperative
- \* Learning is reflective. (Robertson et al., 2004) Getting' into it! Working with Indigenous learners)

programs that are directed at Indigenous learners should also be informed by the following principles:

- \* Intercultural competence
- \* Respect
- \* Negotiation
- \* Meaningful outcomes
- \* Relationships
- \* Indigenization (Robertson et al. 2004 "Getting' into it! Working with Indigenous learners).

In a program delivering Certificate IV nursing to Indigenous students at Goulburn Ovens TAFE, the key strategies identified as contributing to the success of the course were:

the role of community and family;  
institutional respect for Aboriginal culture and identity;  
linking training to employment opportunities;  
on-the-job training;  
providing a range of supports. (ATEC 2003)

In the "What Works: The Work Program" guidebook for improving outcomes for Indigenous students, McRae et al. (McRae et al., 2005) describe success in education for Indigenous students as being dependent on three key elements: cultural recognition, acknowledgment and support; the development of requisite skills; and adequate levels of participation; They say that a partnership between the school (or institution), the student and the community is important.

McGlusky and Thaker (McGlusky & Thaker, 2006) describe six principles for best practice for Indigenous adult education: intercultural competence, respect, negotiation, meaningful outcomes, relationships, Indigenization (ensuring curriculum is adapted for Indigenous students). These principles acknowledge the need for a flexible and culturally supportive environment and incorporate the principles of best practice for adult learning.

Recent research reviewing positive outcomes from vocational education and training for Indigenous Australians indicates that there are seven critical factors that must be present in order to achieve positive training outcomes for Indigenous students (O'Callaghan, 2005)). The seven factors are:

- The involvement of and 'ownership' of training by local communities
- The incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values into training programs
- The establishment of true partnerships between Indigenous communities, training providers, industry and government organisations
- The inclusion of flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- The commitment, expertise and understanding of all staff
- The provision of appropriate and adequate student support services
- The provision of funding that is ongoing and responsive to the realities of location.

Indigenous learners' satisfaction levels with training are generally very high.

The most highly rated aspects of training were:

- \* Being with other Indigenous people (90%)
- \* Talking/communicating with others (86%)
- \* Access to computers (82%)
- \* Understanding how to finish a course (82%)
- \* Flexibility of course/teachers/institute (81%)
- \* Quality of teachers/tutors (81%) (O'Callaghan, 2005).

#### Youth

Teachers of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) need to be:

1. passionate about the cohort of students they work with
2. upfront in their expectations of the students
3. able to set and communicate clear boundaries within a non-traditional environment
4. able to build relationships with students
5. prepared to discard traditional teaching styles
6. prepared to review delivery to include more practical tasks
7. presenting learner-centred teaching and learning methods (Jones et al. 2003).

Best practice principles for working with 15-19 year olds are:

- youth development principles
- resilience building
- empowering young people
- a democratic classroom
- resolving conflict effectively
- managing challenging behaviours (Slater & Jarvis, 2004).



A series of elements was articulated by many TAFE institutes as being essential to achieving successful outcomes for 'at risk' young people. These included:  
offering a curriculum which was 'relevant' to young people's needs and interests, and contained considerable 'practical' learning opportunities  
ensuring that students experienced success in learning  
developing positive relations between teachers and students  
ensuring programs were sufficiently flexible to accommodate the needs and circumstances of individual students  
providing high levels of personal support. (ATEC 2003)

Strategies for teachers working with 15-19 year olds:

- \* recognising and managing stress
- \* seeking support for other colleagues
- \* clarity on policies and procedures
- \* personal coping strategies
- \* relaxation and social nurturing
- \* training opportunities (Slater & Jarvis, 2004)

# PERSPECTIVES ON CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

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JOHN MCINTYRE

## SUMMARY

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This paper argues that if the Council of Australian Government is to succeed in raising levels of adult participation in formal training there will need to be a shift by providers to a paradigm of client engagement.

Training reform in Australia so far has developed nationally coordinated systems and frameworks, but in doing so, it has tended to strengthen a view of formal training as institutionalised provision at the expense of an understanding of skills formation in contexts of application. While 'client focus' has been a key policy goal it has not been a major imperative for reform.

The new emphasis on raising levels of participation in the population means that client engagement will need to be a driving force for policy in coming years. Achieving higher participation will require—

- A greater appreciation of the spectrum of adult learners, differentiated by a range of lifestyle, social, and economic factors
- A greater adaptivity on the part of institutions, as they customise services more to individual and enterprise need, and reduce inflexibility
- A greater appreciation of the range of learning opportunities that are needed to connect adults to learning and facilitate their entry to formal training

The parameters for client engagement have been well researched and rich data exists in the National Marketing Strategy developed by the former Australian National Training Authority. Its social marketing approach treats the potential adult learner as a consumer of learning 'products and services'. This approach rests in a form of exchange theory where the client decides to participate or not by performing a kind of cost/benefit analysis informed by their past experiences and current life and work situation. When adults decide to learn, they are weighing costs and benefits.

To this transactional view of adult learning can be added an appreciation of transition and social risk factors. For the most disadvantaged adults, the potential social costs may outweigh the perceived benefits. The 'riskiness' of learning varies greatly across the segments of the adult population, and these social risks have increased with greater re is a complexity of life-course transitions, especially transitions in and out of employment. Accordingly, concepts of career development now recognise the imperatives for individuals to manage life and work in a pro-active way.

Current policy in skills development lags behind these understandings. Increased efforts to achieve higher levels of participation will not be achieved by reaching those groups who already populate the TAFE providers or the employees who already access workplace learning opportunities, with a 'more of the same' approach.

## CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

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Client engagement is a term widely used now by government. In business parlance it is known as 'a marketing and advertising term [that] refers to a meaningful interaction between a consumer and a brand'<sup>1</sup>. Applied to vocational education and training (VET), client engagement highlights the issues in developing a more client-focused system, a key policy goal for more than a decade.

'Client engagement' implies 'terms of engagement' in a contractual sense. It directs attention to what the institution (in an era of effort and activity targets) offers to do to attract and retain the involvement of the learner, and what the client in turn will do to perform the learning and assessment contract.

Inherent in this 'interaction of consumer and brand' is the adaptation of services to learner needs and expectations. The 'brand' is skill development and the 'consumer', the individual or enterprise seeking training solutions. The provider 'knows the market' and what segments of the markets they have competitive advantage, and so on.

Understanding client engagement requires a good understanding of the factors that influence adult participation in learning. The demand that Australians should participate fully in learning and work is the keystone of national reform espoused by the COAG process. Current policy emphasises the re-engagement of those who do not fully participate work and skills formation—engagement and participation are linked.

The expectation of full participation means that the circumstances of engagement and re-engagement of people across the adult population have to be better understood than they have in the past. Increasingly, the focus will be on how well provider organisations are able to adapt to increasingly differentiated learning needs. This will require a better appreciation of the 'realities' of participation, understood in terms of the calculus of work and lifestyle factors that favouring participation over disengagement.

The National Marketing Strategy for VET (2001) was the first comprehensive attempt to differentiate the VET client base in demographic terms, across the spectrum of the adult population. This research remains the primary reference point for analysing 'client engagement'. Time has validated the wisdom of such an approach, leaving behind the inadequacies of 'target equity group' thinking, without detracting from the specific difficulties faced by some VET clients, notably indigenous and disabled learners.

It has to be acknowledged that past policy has set up strong presuppositions about the meaning of client engagement, some of which can lead to misunderstandings. It is arguable that the trend in VET equity policy has been to reinforce an institutional perspective on client difference—that equity is to be achieved more by removing barriers to participation and setting targets for increased representation for certain groups, in existing provision, rather than through customising delivery. Thus, 'client engagement' is still likely to be something of a contested area within the VET system, especially when it challenges institutionalised training arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Client\\_engagement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Client_engagement)

## The shift to client engagement

The National Marketing Strategy For Skills And Lifelong Learning (NMS) based on research commissioned by ANTA (ANTA 2000), marked a definite shift to a 'client engagement model' for the VET system—from an unquestioning emphasis on standardised 'delivery' models to a client-focused model that presumes learning needs to be 'customised' to the particular expectations of a client group. A key assumption of the NMS is that participation in formal training will not be maximised unless VET institutions recognise that different client groups require different kinds of learning opportunities.

In the current context, this is even more pertinent. Levels of participation and qualification will not be raised by a 'more of the same' approach – this is particularly true of those groups that tend to be styled as 'resistant' or 'reluctant' learners, those 'hard to reach' identified by the NMS.

It may be helpful to summarise some key aspects of this policy shift, which has been driven more by a desire for industry responsiveness and cost-effective skill formation than a consideration of the demographic and other drivers of learning for adults that have been highlighted in European policy.<sup>2</sup>

- The client population should be *comprehensively differentiated* in terms of its varying attitudes to and participation in learning, not as divided between 'target groups' and the rest. The shift is from specific target equity groups to recognising the full spectrum of target audiences who have different characteristics, motivations and preferences for learning, and who respond to some key messages.
- A client focus recognises the impact of *life and work circumstances* as driving the desire for and possibility of participation in education and training. In a social marketing perspective, participation is motivated by pitching the right messages about learning to a particular demographic groups. It signals that some groups will 'resist' certain messages and accept others. This view goes beyond simplistic motivational theories, including the old idea that removing 'barriers' will release the motivation to learn (as it certainly will with some clients). A better explanation of participation can be found in the perceived 'cost/benefit' of engaging in learning. It makes use of the 'social risk and transitions' perspective to suggest that different cost/benefit equations result from the particular 'risk conditions' of the life and work circumstances experienced by different groups.
- An approach to client engagement that gives full play to life and work circumstances is reinforced by the emphasis on *career development across the lifespan* found in current policy, as it is expressed in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD or 'Blueprint'). This assumes that work skills are not the only domain of adult learning, nor is skill development simply a matter of training nor is it acquired without reference points of work history and career planning, especially in a more dynamic and flexible workplace.
- A shift to a comprehensive view of client engagement will need to

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Kearns admirable analysis of international trends—where the focus is on the drivers of adult learning for individuals and their implications for policy (Kearns 2003).

acknowledge that *formal training is one end of the spectrum* of learning opportunities that will draw adults, particularly 'resistant' adults, into learning. On the one hand, we need to better understand the pathways from non-formal learning that enable would-be learners to engage with system, and on the other, to understand how formal training relates to broader skill development in the workforce. Non-formal learning has a fundamental role in underwriting participation in formal training—not only in community settings where it most obviously practised and valued as community education, but also in workplaces. This entails a broader concept of adult learning (as recommended by the OECD) as embracing a wide range of activities, take place in a variety of settings and achieve a wide range of life and work purposes.

- A corollary of the differentiation of client needs is that *providers will become more adaptive* (Brown et al 2007, Couldrey 2007), working more in the contexts where skills are applied and making workplace development an organising concept. Adaptivity is enhanced where providers work in partnership with a range of agencies—enterprises, employment services, specialised providers, and intermediaries that can bring clients to appropriate training. This includes community partnerships among the agencies that support high levels of participation—a logic for the TAFE systems forcibly argued by the recent IPART report on skilling in NSW (IPART 2007).<sup>3</sup>

### **Social marketing perspectives on engagement**

A major resource for understanding the different 'terms of engagement' of adult clients of the VET system is the seminal national research commissioned by ANTA that formed the basis for what became the National Marketing Strategy For Skills And Lifelong Learning (NMS, ANTA 2000). The research took a client-centred perspective to examine what views of learning in general are found in the general community (learners) and employers, and differentiated 'segments' according to their past engagement with learning and their interest in future learning. The data of most interest is the segmentation of the general community.

Using a social marketing approach, the analysis used a national quantitative telephone survey of 3,866 people (aged 16 years and older) to perform an 'attitudinal and behavioural segmentation' of the population. This segmentation was intended as the basis of a marketing strategy to reach target audiences on the basis of their characteristics, past experience of learning and likelihood of participating in learning in the future.

The analysis determined eight segments described as in Table 1. These comprise a spectrum ranging from positive attitudes to learning and greater likelihood of participating to more negative attitudes and lesser likelihood of participating.

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<sup>3</sup> *Upskilling New South Wales*, Sydney: IPART. This recommended a new mission for TAFE, a focus on *workforce development*, retraining the workforce and re-engaging those who do not participate in training. The Report emphasises building *community partnerships* — that TAFE Institutes 'establish and cultivate regionally based networks and partnerships organised around the principle of community capacity building as the groundwork for sustainable workforce development'.

Table 2 (Appendix 1) summarises the main demographics (the characteristics of people over-represented in each segment) and the motivations or barriers and the messages that are relevant for each segment. A segment may, for example be characterised by its over-representation of older women in non-professional

**Table 1. The ANTA National Marketing Strategy: Community segments**

Segment	%	Characteristics
Passionate learners	21	They love every aspect of learning. It delivers personal and work benefits and every experience reinforces their love of learning. Young and in mid-life, they are leaders of the learning age.
Almost there	6	They love learning and believe it's the way to reach their goals. They want to learn more but have to overcome their fears and many other barriers.
Learn to earn	17	They are actively learning because it's the way to get ahead. Mostly young, they only value learning that brings material benefits and leads to jobs or qualifications.
Might give it away	7	Young and pessimistic, they are learning now only because they feel they have to. Other people expect it. They haven't seen any benefits from learning yet.
Make it easier	16	While they love learning, they face the highest barriers to participation. Their focus is on getting by every day. Learning is all too hard, just another stress to contend with
Learning on hold	11	They love learning and have already benefited from it. But it's not on the short term agenda. They've either achieved their goals or there are just too many other priorities right now.
Done with it	14	They valued learning for work but they've achieved what they can. They see no point in learning any more, unless they face a career reversal or some other major work change.
Forget it	8	Their heart is just not in it. The learning they've done hasn't got them very far, they don't love it and anyway, they are happy with their lot. What more do they need?

occupations. Information was also assembled on each segment's leisure use, media preferences and participation in recent education and training.

The social marketing approach is consistent with a 'client engagement' paradigm for the vocational education and training system, because it draws attention to the primary decision to engage in training or grasp learning opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Social marketing embodies a form of exchange theory<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The material in this and the following section draws upon an unpublished report for the Career Development Section in the Department of Education Science and Training (McIntyre 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Put succinctly, people make a behavioural change only if benefits will arise for them. The benefits and opportunities for the target audience (the product) must not come at too high a price (in resources, effort or opportunities foregone). The exchange and its oppor-

The analogy of the potential adult learner as a consumer of learning 'products and services' implies a kind of calculus of exchange, a transaction. The client decides to participate or not by performing a kind of cost/benefit analysis informed by their past experiences and current life and work situation. When adults decide to learn, they are weighing costs and benefits.

This explains why large numbers of adults do not participate in learning. It is one thing for an adult in skilled and secure employment to contemplate continuing learning, and another for those in underpaid and insecure work, or those not in work. The risk conditions for participation differ greatly—it is these risk conditions that will influence *whether* engagement in learning is seen as an opportunity, or not.

The implication of this perspective is that there are different opportunity structures for different demographics—that is, more or less advantageous cost/benefit equations for participating in learning and different degrees of 'social risk' in committing to learning. It is no surprise that so-called passionate learners 'love learning', since their prior educational successes practically ensure an optimum cost-benefit equation—they have learned successfully in the past, have little to fear from further learning and have some certainty about the benefits they will gain both personally and for their careers. Learning for them is a low-risk activity.

At the other end of the spectrum, a much less favourable cost/benefit equation may obtain for the 'forget it' and 'done with it' segments that are readily labelled as disengaged (resistant, reluctant or averse to participation). They face barriers that are both psychological (fear of technology or dislike of schooling) and material (price, travel or access difficulties). Moreover, they may judge any benefits from learning to be less certain, making learning overall a riskier business. Thus mature age learners may decide not to participate in training because they perceive the personal and financial costs of investing in training to outweigh the likely employment payoff in a labour market that discriminates against older workers.

The idea of the variable cost/benefits of learning for community segments points up the variable 'riskiness' of learning in the adult population. This approach fits well with the growing emphasis on the 'social risks' arising from complexity of life-course transitions and the imperatives for individuals to manage life and work through pro-active career development (and more broadly, for social policy to assist individuals to manage transitions).

### **A transitions and social risk perspective**

A transitions and social risk perspective (Ziguras, Considine, Hancock and Howe 2005) is useful in further analysing how more reluctant community segments may perceive their engagement with future learning. It expands on the concept of the 'risk conditions' that deter many from participating.

Contemporary thinking is highlighting the breakdown of the earlier linear pat-

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tunities must be available in locations that reach the audience and fit its lifestyles (places). To reach the audience, the potential of the exchange must be promoted through channels that bring about the desired behaviour (US Social Marketing Institute).

terns of transitions over the life-course and the complication of social roles (caring, working, learning, leisure) for both men and women in contemporary life. It argued that the end of the old policy settlement based around goals of secure full-time employment for the male breadwinner in an industrial economy—the workers' welfare state—has left institutions including formal education out-of-step with new patterns of transition.<sup>6</sup>

Different risk conditions arise from the complexity of 'transitional labour markets'. Some disengaged adults may experience quite different transitions in and out of labour markets, and these different transitions will affect their perceptions of the worth, accessibility, relevance and riskiness of engaging in learning. An important international conference in 2005 highlighted the significance of social risk for contemporary social policy that makes the participation ethic a key focus.<sup>7</sup>

Transitional factors are clearly driving demand for formal and non-formal learning by client groups (such as the educationally qualified women who predominate in ACE courses) that have already used education and training to manage their changing life and work roles. However, not all groups are so advantaged in their ability to manage the risks of transition, especially those with less schooling who face greater risks and uncertainties in the knowledge economy.

The idea of the relative 'social risks' of engagement in training and learning can therefore be tied back to the position of adults in the labour market. Transitions in a more flexible labour market are becoming more complex. Transitions from standard employment include: from education to work; between unemployment and work; between unpaid work and paid work; and the transition to (and out of) retirement. This concept has implications for social policy that will assist individuals (and communities) with life-transitions through strategies directed to modifying risk conditions (Ziguras et al 2005).

The obvious implications for client engagement are that the policy conditions for encouraging participation need to carefully consider how they construct 'opportunities' including training and income support components, for disengaged or resistant learners.

For disengaged adults, the effort of participation in formal training may represent a highly indeterminate 'exchange' for its supposed benefits (personal, social or economic), and a high risk that the benefits may not eventuate. In effect, potential participants calculate the social risks as a condition of participation—whether or not learning is a good bet. Disengaged learners may be disengaged precisely because they perceive that beneficial outcomes may objectively be improbable (especially given their aversion to past educational experiences). In sum, much disengagement has a large component of social risk-aversion.

This perspective helps to explain why the community sector with its friendlier and flexible approaches, and supportive pedagogical culture of adult learning, supports the creation of pathways from informal learning to formal training.

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<sup>6</sup> See Ziguras, Considine, Hancock and Howe (2005) Background paper, *From risk to opportunity: labour markets in transition* conference (see following).

<sup>7</sup> *Transitions and Risks: New Directions in Social Policy* Conference (University of Melbourne, February 2005) canvassed the application of this framework (especially the German work of Gunther Schmid) to Australian social policy.

Good examples abound of the work being done by community providers for older workers (Gelade et al 2003) and career development development advice (Beddie et al 2005).

## CLIENT ENGAGEMENT AND A SEGMENTED VET MARKET

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Client engagement in a mature VET system will be marked by clear market segmentation, with different types of providers specialising in meeting the demands of particular markets. There will be a high degree of *client differentiation*, an identification of differences in learner needs and circumstances and the type of opportunities that particular clienteles enjoy.

This argument has been powerfully stated in the Discussion Paper Community Education and National Reform (Bardon 2006) where the claims for the contribution of the community (not-for-profit) sector are very clearly made out in terms of market segmentation and the specialisation of function of the public and private sectors.

In this model Community Education is used as the outreach arm of the VET market, using its community linkages and many points of presence to engage and re-engage adults into the VET system.

At the same time the public provider is drawn to the spheres of higher VET qualifications and high volume provision for school leavers particularly at Certificate III level and for traditional trades, the areas it is best placed to provide.

Meanwhile private providers are valued for their industry specialisation and flexible approaches, and moved away from high volume market niches that could easily be serviced by Community or Public Providers. (Bardon 2006:13).

This is a rationalisation of the claim that the community sector reaches people that the TAFE system cannot—yet it may be closer to the truth of client differentiation that certain demographic groups simply make a cultural choice about the way opportunities are constructed by different organisations and not simply on the basis of the availability of a course. The preponderance of women in ACE may be equally about the 'culture of place' (Sanguinetti et al 2005) and agreeable pedagogies as it is for large numbers of men who would go nowhere else but their TAFE institute. These cultural factors in participation are all but suppressed in the policy debates about the relative flexibility, effort and efficiencies of different types of providers, yet they are crucial to understanding client engagement, challenging entrenched educational practices and questioning unimaginative pedagogies of skill formation.

The shift to greater client differentiation is sharpening awareness of the different functions that providers may perform for different client groups. A good example is found in the capacity of adult and community education (ACE) organisations to engage different groups of learners with different career development and training needs. This is well reflected in Bowman's typology of the six functions of ACE organisations:

- *Platform builders*, re-engaging adults with basic education and support

services

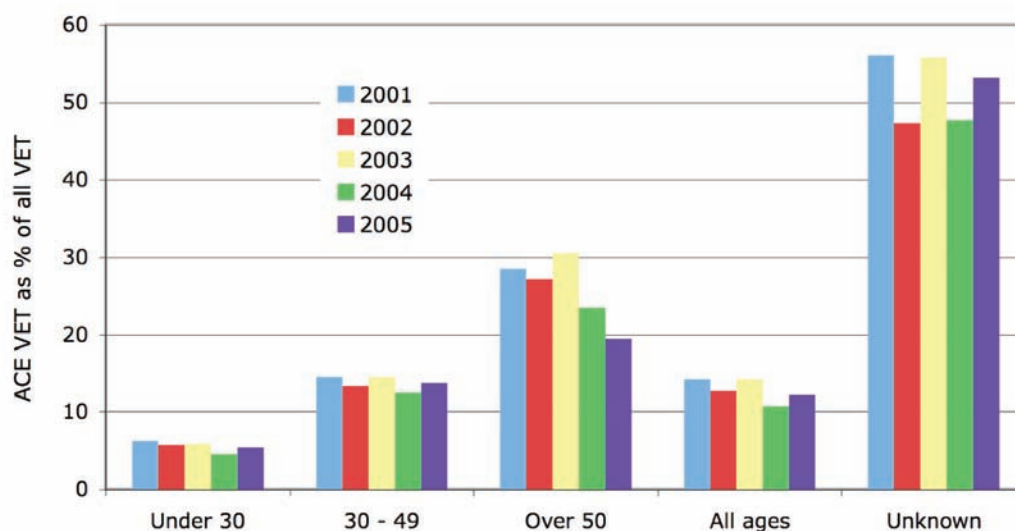
- *Bridge builders*, providing pathways into formal tertiary education and paid work
- *Work-skills developers*, offering accredited vocational training in their own right
- *Facilitators of adult health*, improving mental, physical and emotional well-being
- *Promoters of citizenship*, achieving adults active in community activities, and
- *Community capacity builders*, facilitating local networks and community-led development at various levels, of suburb, neighbourhood, small town and district. (Bowman 2006:1).

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Older learners in community providers

The extent of client differentiation within the VET system is increasingly evident in the statistical collection. The case in point is the older adults in the community sector already referred to. National data for over 950 community education providers Australia-wide collected by NCVET<sup>8</sup> shows that students over 50 dominate in the VET courses they provide.

**Figure 1. Students enrolled in vocational courses in community providers by age group as proportion of all VET students in that age group**



<sup>8</sup> Community education providers are those registered with NCVET as ‘providers who identify themselves as community education providers and have a primary focus on education and training for personal and community development’. As of June 2007, there were 959 providers, of whom 238 (25%) are registered training organisations (RTOs). See <http://www.ncvet.edu.au/statistics/vet/ann05/id05/appendixB.htm>.

Over the period 2001-2005, the number of VET students was stable at around 1.6m, while the proportion of students doing their courses varied between 10% to 14%. The absolute number of students fell from a high of 238,734 to 199,842 in 2005. However, trends over time are in part attributable to collection factors rather than activity—the application of tighter data classification rules and incomplete data collection (in NSW in 2004). Activity in later years is likely to have been under-reported.

Figure 1 shows that:

- Of all those students aged 50 years and over doing VET courses over the period, around 25% were enrolled in community providers. The figure reached 30% in 2003 but has fallen back since to less than 20%.
- In comparison, the 30-49 year-old age group has somewhat less than 15% of all students enrolled, while the under 30 age group is much less well represented in community providers—around 5% of the age group.

Figure 1 also shows that the student age data in community providers has, relative to all providers, a large 'unknown' component—around half the VET students not stating their age are to be found in these providers. Table 1 shows that the proportion of students in different age groups in vocational and non-vocational courses in any year has not varied greatly over the period.

This analysis does not refer to trends in the main non-vocational activity of community providers, since that is known to significantly under-report its extent nationally. Figure 1. Students enrolled in vocational courses in community providers by age group as proportion of all VET students in that age group

### **Men's participation in ACE**

Recent work in Victoria on men's learning in ACE and community organisations throws important light on the problem of the hardest to reach groups that are dominated by numbers of older men lacking in formal qualifications and work skills and often with literacy problems.

The work of Barry Golding of Ballarat University (Golding 2005) is receiving considerable attention as the idea of 'men's sheds' gains popularity as it is recognised that promoting older men's learning will require fresh thinking about the kinds of venues and learning cultures that work best in terms of their learning needs and preferences. Golding's work For ACE has underwritten a new strategic direction for Victorian ACE, particular in rural areas.

The report 'Men's learning through ACE and community involvement in small rural towns' drew on survey data to contrast the culture and provision of ACE with the learning needs and preferences expressed by groups of rural men, exploring the cultural and other factors that discourage their participation in ACE and documenting the nature of their disadvantage.

The 'men's learning' policy area well illustrates that to meet the goal of 'widening participation' requires a challenging of entrenched assumptions surrounding formal training and what it expects of adult learners. It might be better to see the 'problem' not in terms of labelling groups of learners as 'reluctant' to engage in institutionalised delivery but rather, in terms of persuading educational organisa-

tions to adapt their modes of training to the life circumstances, needs and preferences of potential adult learners rather than

The irony of the men's learning policy project in Victoria is that it is the flexible and responsive community sector that is taking steps to question its institutionalised assumptions about the meaning of participation in ACE. The policy agenda for men's learning emerges from the very success of the historical project to develop appropriate adult learning and community services for women, particularly through the neighbourhood house movement. Because the ACE context is feminised in many respects, men's preference is to learn where they socialise in a range of voluntary organisations and sporting clubs.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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The balance of institutional and client perspectives is shifting to favour the client, and that there is a need to better understand the dimensions of this change, so that policy can more comprehensively work in the interest of clients. We have come a long way from the assumption that institutions can depend on the same kind of people coming through the doors just as they have done in the past. Yet in the TAFE systems, and even in many community providers, there are still unquestioned assumptions that it is up to the student to 'grasp the opportunity' rather than the responsibility of institutions to bend their practices to the changing and increasingly complex circumstances that determine how readily adults can take up learning opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> That 'men are typically only occasional users and marginally attached to ACE' is more acute a problem in small rural towns where there may be no formal educational opportunities aside from ACE. Yet it is in rural areas that older less skilled men are to be found.

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**RECOGNISING THE DIVERSITY OF ADULT  
LEARNERS IN PERFORMANCE  
MEASUREMENT**

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KAYE BOWMAN



## **ABSTRACT**

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Successfully completing a qualification and getting a job are the main performance measures currently used in the post compulsory education sector in relation to individual clients. This paper argues that these measures are important but not fully adequate if the intention is to provide for the diversity of adult clients. An extended key performance measures framework is required that covers a fuller range of learning outcomes-personal, economic and social.

The paper identifies a comprehensive but still high order set of outcomes related to adult learners that enables the "distance travelled" in each learning experience to be recognised and rewarded, based on a review of existing research

The set of adult learner outcomes of milestone significance may be used by all adult education providers to show the various contributions their programs make to the desired life-long and life-wide adult learning agenda.



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## INTRODUCTION

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Successfully completing a qualification and getting a job are the main performance measures currently used in the post compulsory education sector in Australia when assessing benefits to individual clients. As yet, research on the wider benefits of adult learning has not been translated into the existing key performance measures. The existing economic focused measures also need expansion if we are to gauge the value added to a person's employment situation by each learning program. This paper suggests an extended set of performance measures that displays the full range of outcomes adults might achieve from participating in learning programs. To quote Watson (2004, p 11)

The trend in performance measurement in recent years has been to make the purposes of education narrow in order to measure the outcomes of government expenditure more accurately. As lifelong learning policy recognises multiple goals for education and training programs, the challenge for performance measurement will be both to broaden the goals of education programs and to find ways of measuring the outcomes of such programs.

For example, increased workforce participation and productivity levels are key goals of the national human capital reform agenda of COAG<sup>1</sup> (2006). In the current "full" employment situation in Australia, the participation goal requires that adults be encouraged and assisted to re-enter the workforce. For some, the pathway to a job will involve a number of learning steps. The individual might need to be motivated to re-engage with learning and then foundation education programs might be required, such as in literacy and numeracy, before a specific job related learning program is undertaken.

The higher workforce productivity goal requires workers to keep learning. There is a need to recognise work related learning outcomes beyond just getting or having a job if our model is to enable the "distance travelled" in each learning experience to be recognised and rewarded.

The higher workforce participation rate also requires adults working for longer periods of time if we are to ensure an adequate sized workforce. For the more mature aged worker the consequences from participation in a learning program might be more personal than work-related. Similarly, retired adults and others not able to work also seek non economic outcomes from learning.

In summary, there are many domains of adult learning outcomes. As a national consultation paper on adult learning in Australia (DEST, 2004, p. 1) noted- 'learning serves personal, civic and social purposes as well as vocational ones'.

To this end, a *simple* adult "learning continuum" model is presented in the next section. Milestone outcomes experienced on the learning continuum corresponding to the various domains of learning are then identified from learner outcomes studies. Finally, a comprehensive but still high order set of adult learner outcomes are proposed. In the concluding remarks, measuring the

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<sup>1</sup> The Council of Australian Governments

outcomes is briefly considered by drawing on performance measurement literature.

### A SIMPLE ADULT LEARNING CONTINUUM MODEL

There is great diversity among adult learners. This diversity, in Australia, has been quantified in research done as part of the development of a National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning in 2000. A national survey of people aged 16 and over on their attitudes to learning revealed four distinct adult learner types or segments, through detailed analysis:

- lovers of learning-value all forms of learning (32% of adult Australians)
- learners for earning-feel that only jobs and qualifications matter (31%)
- unrequited lovers of learning--perceive many barriers (22%)
- learning...not on your life-(15%)

When a behavioural dimension was added to the attitudinal dimension, based on the individual's stated likelihood of undertaking a learning program in the next 12 months (in the year 2000), adult Australians fell into 8 groups or segments, along a learning continuum (Table 1).

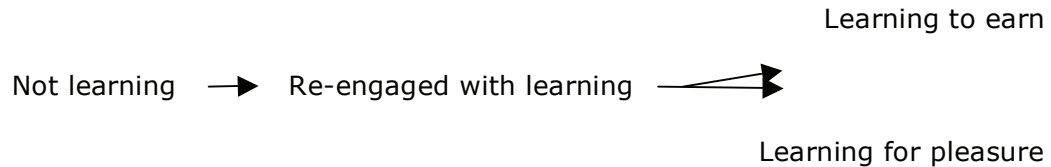
**Table 1 Australian adult learner types**

Forget it (8%)	I'm done with it- (14%)	Only if you make it easier- (16%)	Been there done that- (11%)	Almost there- (6%)	Might give it away (7%)	Learn to earn (17%)	Passionate learners (21%)
<p><b>Not engaged in learning</b> <span style="float: right;">▶ <b>Fully engaged</b></span></p>							

These and other perspectives on adult learner differentiation are reviewed by McIntyre (2007) in a companion to this research paper that seeks to illuminate implications for client engagement policies and strategies. The relevance of drawing attention to the marketing study here is to acknowledge that people's motivations for learning are diverse and consequently, the type of programs they enter and the results or benefits they gain will differ. We need a broad set of outcomes measures that recognise and reinforce the value of adult learning from the client perspective to achieve an inclusive adult learning performance measurement framework. Not taking into account the client perspective is to run the risk of learning programs that are not of quality to the learner and do not attract patronage.

Below we identify the key outcomes experienced at each milestone point along the learning continuum from learner outcomes studies. The simplified, "learning continuum" used as a guide follows: ◀

**Figure 1 A simple starting point adult learning continuum model**



### **ADULT LEARNING MILESTONE OUTCOMES**

For many adults the starting point is not engaged in learning. Consider the adult learner table above -in 2000, 8% of all adult Australians said "FORGET IT". We cannot assume that a motivation to learn is innate in all individuals. Reasons for not being engaged in learning are often an interwoven mesh of social issues.

It is beyond the scope of this report to examine how to engage reluctant learners in a learning experience. Madeline Fernbach (2007) explores what the learning environment needs to look like and what teaching practices need to be employed when dealing with adults with low previous levels of learning in her companion research report. The key observation to be made here is that the first critical adult learning milestone is 'turning up-participation' in learning. This base outcome should not be under-valued in performance measurement.

The next key interest is to determine the key common outcomes from an initial re-engagement in learning experience.

#### **Re-engaged in learning–psycho-social outcomes**

The Adult and Community Education sector is renowned for re-engaging adults with learning. Clemens, Hartley and Macrae (2003) have classified the outcomes individuals gained from learning programs delivered by the adult and community education sector into three domains-private, public and work and Bowman (2006) has put them into a table reproduced here as Table 2 below. Clemens et al found that ACE providers across Australia contribute variously to an individual's personal condition, their social relationships and work-related needs. Walstab et al (2003) identified similar outcomes for adults from ACE programs in the state of Victoria.

Dymock, 2007, who discusses research into why adults learn, has uncovered a range of similar factors, including communication improvement, social contact, educational preparation, professional advancement, family togetherness, social stimulation, and cognitive stimulation. One value of Dymock's (2007) companion paper is that it helps us refine non-work outcomes for those in the process of re-engaging with learning to a critical few.

**Table 2 Outcomes individuals gain from Adult & Community Education**

<b>In the private domain of family, friends and personal interests</b>	<b>In the public domain of citizenship, community participation and debate</b>	<b>In work domain of both paid and unpaid.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• emotional wellbeing</li> <li>• physical wellbeing</li> <li>• spiritual peace and maturity &amp; achieving a sense of belonging</li> <li>• cognitive development</li> <li>• communication skills</li> <li>• enhanced personal relationships</li> <li>• home sustainability</li> <li>• creative abilities</li> <li>• literacy and language</li> <li>• expanded personal choices and pathways</li> <li>• mastery of recreational skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social connections</li> <li>• cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity</li> <li>• contributions to organisational capacity</li> <li>• individual involvement in the community</li> <li>• knowledge of community and government services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• skills towards and for employability</li> <li>• self-sufficiency</li> <li>• expanded pathways to work</li> <li>• income generation</li> <li>• professional development</li> </ul>

Source Table 2 in Bowman, 2006, p14

Dymock argues that there is a *process* of re-engagement with learning, which involves the individual developing confidence and identity. Dymock refers to many student outcomes research reports that identify the development of confidence as a key measure of progress (or outcome) from a learning activity among those with limited previous educational experiences. He refers to recent research that examines the link between 'learning and identity'.

As well as confidence, the development of identity appears to be the major outcome when adults re-engage in learning. Dymock notes several outcomes related to personal identity amongst the individual outcomes identified by Clemens, et al (2003, p. 47), e.g. knowledge of self, the world and how to learn; and a healthy, mature self-concept in private life, public life and the workplace. This is not to say that more and higher levels of learning do not develop further an adult's concept of self. It is to say that the building of (self) identity capital is a critical milestone outcome for those in the *process* of re-engaging with learning.

Dymock suggests attitudes of some of the adult learner social market segments aforementioned - the *might give it away, only if you make it easier, learning on hold, done with it, and forget I segments*- may well mask dispositional learning barriers that relate to confidence and identity. We all know that learning experiences can be negative as well as positive. The effects of negative school experiences, during which one fails to learn can undermine self -confidence and sometimes these effects can last into adult hood and keep people from participating in life-long learning.

Equally, Kearns (2006, p. 16) concluded from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning that one recurring theme is that personal outcomes - confidence, self-esteem, and the aspiration to engage in learning - are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'.

Miller (2005) agrees, finding from a systematic review of research on Indigenous Australians in VET that the personal outcomes Indigenous Australians aspire to and obtain through training are the most critical. She mentions enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, improved communication skills and feelings of being respected by others within the community as of high value to the students. She refers to these outcomes as the enabling factors that allowed individuals to achieve even more and other positive outcomes. Her review suggested the structure that reflects the interrelations between the outcomes from training that are valued by Indigenous Australians is personal outcomes as the platform, followed by education outcomes, and then employment and community-related outcomes. With regard to monitoring these outcomes, Miller notes (p16)

In terms of data collection and analysis, there has traditionally been a focus on statistical measures, such as module completion rates, pass rates, movement to higher-level courses and post-course employment rates ....However, research over the last decade has emphasised that there are many outcomes that Indigenous people aspire to and achieve through training ...This review shows that there are fundamental outcomes established by undertaking training, particularly at the personal level for individuals, which facilitate the achievement of other outcomes such as completing a course, moving to other education, getting a job and running a community organisation.

We need to be aware that some adults may require several years of 'study' to develop positive attitudes about themselves as learners and move from learning for personal reasons to learning for vocational purposes.

A report titled *Outcomes of enabling courses* (Phan and Ball 2001), referring to lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, found that almost half of the graduates of enabling courses enrolled again at the same level of qualification in the next year and that over 80% of these students enrolled in the same course they had successfully completed the previous year! The tendency for enabling course graduates to re-enrol in the same course in the following year was subsequently investigated.

Dawe (2004) undertook case studies focused on students in Vocational Preparation, Disability and Aboriginal Education programs at metropolitan and rural TAFE campuses to learn why many re-engage in the same program in subsequent years. Staff reported that low-level skills (literacy, numeracy and social) and unemployed status were the usual reasons students re-enrolled in enabling courses. Some young people re-enrolled to increase further their self-esteem or maturity. In addition many students enrolled in a mainstream course purely for personal interest. Positive outcomes did ensue and included improved quality of life, health benefits, leadership in the community, and encouragement of younger students by mature-aged students. Dawe noted that with more self-

confidence or motivation, personal interest might lead to paid or unpaid work in the community.

In summary, re-engagement in (the right kind of) learning commonly offers the benefits of improved confidence (both personal, in one self, and social through interaction with others) and a positive self identity but as Dawe found and Dymock also notes, it can take a long time or several learning experiences before they may move on to learning directed at achieving other non-personal outcomes.

### **A Bridge To Learning To Earn-Generic/Employability Skills Outcomes**

The ability to communicate with others is another critical outcome often mentioned by adult learners as they re-engage with learning. Improved communication is one of several generic skills that contribute significantly to an individual's effective and successful participation in life in general and the workplace. Generic skills are sometimes called Employability Skills or Key Competencies. They are also referred to as enabling or key skills.

Generic and/or Employability skills are mentioned here as possible outcomes from learning that should be included in our high order set of adult learner outcomes for measurement because of the emphasis they are currently being given. Employers are increasingly asking for Employability Skills to be facilitated and recorded as part of the student outcomes from an education program. There is research evidence that generic skills are more important to employers in their decisions to hire than are technical skills (see Lowry, 2006 for example). Especially among students doing learn to earn programs at higher levels of VET employers seek graduates with initiative or enterprising and problem solving skills. Employers often choose university graduates over VET diploma graduates for paraprofessional jobs because the former are perceived to be more enterprising. As a result, learners need to know what these skills are and how to demonstrate them and providers need to facilitate their development, assessment and recognition.

Of note from a comparison table produced by Gibb, 2004 of generic and employability skills (and reproduced here as table 3) is that they have many elements in common with the exception that the basic literacy skills -of reading writing and speaking and numeracy- are not in the employability skills list. The employability list only includes the new literacy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century- use of technology. However, given that a lack of basic literacy competencies may exclude individuals from a range of opportunities and services, it is considered important that all literacy skills be part of an adult learning outcomes framework. This is desirable because large numbers of adult Australian do not have literacy skills sufficient to enable them to maximise their life opportunities.

Measurement of literacy levels is also Australian government policy, at least for the school aged and immigrants. Further, Dymock illustrates the significance of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy in re-engaging adults in learning and building the individual's capacity to develop their confidence and

identities as learners. From here, they can move on into other education and training and into employment and/or engage more strongly with other people and their local communities.

**Table 3 Generic and Employability skills**

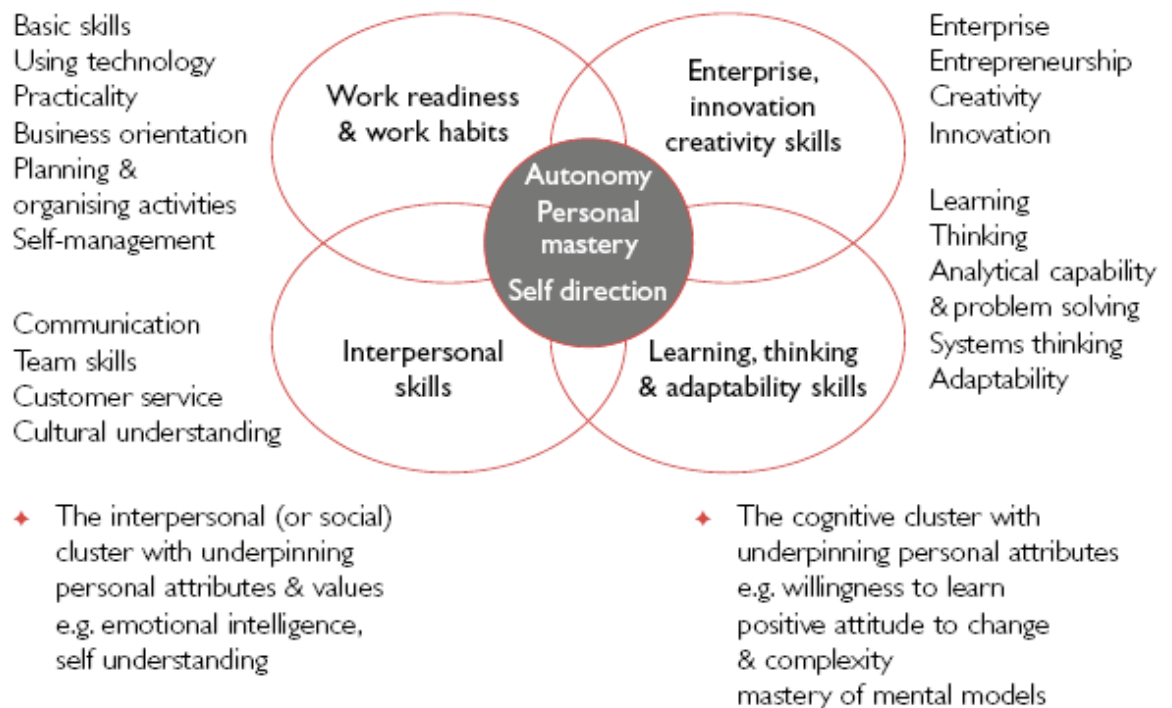
<b>Common elements of various listings of Generic skills</b>	<b>Australia’s agreed set of Employability Skills</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic/fundamental Skills: literacy, numeracy, using technology</li> </ul>	Use of Technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People-related skills: -communication, interpersonal, teamwork,</li> </ul>	Communication Teamwork
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual/thinking skills: -collecting and organising information -problem solving, -planning and organising, -learning-to-learn skills, -thinking innovatively and -creatively, systems thinking</li> </ul>	Problem solving Planning and organising Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal skills and attributes: -being responsible, resourceful and flexible, -being able to manage one’s own time, -having self-esteem</li> </ul>	Self-management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business skills: -innovation skills -enterprise skills</li> </ul>	Initiative and enterprise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community skills: -civic or citizenship knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	

*Source: Gibb, 2004*

With regard to the various generic or employability skills, Kearns (2001) provides us with a view on how they fit together.

Kearns has undertaken a review of research on generic skills. He identifies five skills clusters of generic skills, or life and employability skills and attributes as he prefers to describe them, which he regards as inseparable. Kearns produced a framework that illustrates the connections between the five skills clusters as shown in Figure 2 below. Kearns suggests that the development of the skills set of autonomy, self mastery and self direction underpins the development of all other of the skills sets: of interpersonal skills; enterprise, innovation and creativity skills; learning, thinking and adaptability skills; and work readiness and work habits.

**Figure 2** Connections between clusters of key generic skills



*Source; Kearns, 2001, p52*

### Learn To Earn –Jobs And Economic Outcomes

Teese suggests that the post compulsory education sector of vocational education and training (VET) performs four major roles based on the age pattern of distribution:

- a platform building role, for the young into work or adult re-entrants to the workforce
- a promotions and skills enrichment role for established workers
- a re-orientation role for older workers, and
- a personal enrichment role for older workers and people not in the workforce.

With regard to the platform building role we have already provided some information on lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in the VET sector. However it is worth noting that many VET qualification courses at the Certificate levels 1 and 11 also are largely platform builders-they do not assure the learner of a job outcome directly or at least a stable job outcome. Stanwick has found that certificates I and II graduates experience reasonable employment outcomes in the 15 to 19-year-old group but not in or the 20-24 years of age. Overall, vocational and further study outcomes from certificates I and II qualifications among young people could only be described as fair (Stanwick 2006a). For those aged 25 and over his findings were that Certificate levels 1

and 11 qualifications were not particularly useful in terms of gaining employment. There were some modest career advancement benefits. Notably, further study pathways were not among the outcomes of these courses either (2006b). Thus, perhaps, the emphasis on job experience through job placement as a feature of training for work programs for employability skills development purposes.

Stanwick suggests that Certificate level III is the benchmark qualification level that leads to good and sustainable job outcomes. His analyses suggests to this author that we might need to take into account the type of jobs gained in some way in performance measurement not just whether one is in a job.

The university sector also performs the four roles assigned by Teese to VET to varying degrees, and adults can make use of both sectors in their quest for sustainable employment outcomes. A study by Harris (2006) illustrates this point well. These researchers interviewed 149 adults who had a history of study in both VET and university. The number of moves per respondent between the education sectors ranged from two to seven. Three-quarters of the students had made three or more moves. Given that 49 of these moves were from school, the remaining 116 were moves between and within the two tertiary sectors: 64 inter-sectoral moves and 52 intra-sectoral moves. Analysis of these pathways led Harris et al to develop a categorisation of adult learners (p11) and as set out below, for further investigation before becoming part of a lifelong learning framework.

- *Interest chasers*: who were 'multi-directional', 'searching', or 'yo-yo'—bouncing between different fields of interest.
- *Career developers*: who showed consistent interest, even though they may have made several sectoral moves. Sometimes this looked like a domino pattern, where an element of one learning experience led to a sectoral move to further develop this as a career. This pattern was more linear, being less of a 'jump' than a 'flow' into another course of study.
- *Career mergers*: who, having explored interests in other areas, then drew different experiences together to move into a more focused course of study. This was different from the 'career developer' pattern, in that it was usually non-linear.
- *Forced learners*: appeared to be a completely different course of study for professional development reasons. Sometimes this change was due to some practical factor, which obliged them to undertake a particular course, such as affordability, location or entry requirements. This might appear like a detour or side step.
- *Two-trackers*: who were more experienced respondents attempting to develop an alternative career as insurance for a time when their current career was no longer possible. This pattern also occurred when students were trying to improve their chances of earning an income while studying.

The above categories of learners illustrate the many and multiple reasons why adults might seek to learn. Reflecting in performance measurement the continuous learning that goes on among adults for work purposes, beyond their

first post school learning experience to get a job would enable the “distance travelled” in each learning experience to be recognised and rewarded.

Routine reporting on student outcomes by VET currently is limited to numbers employed before the learning activity compared to numbers employed afterwards in reports on the key performance measures of the VET system. Numbers undertaking further study are also reported as a critical milestone measure (ANR 2005). For university students, outcome reporting is similarly confined to graduate numbers and how many had a job a few months thereafter. Such outcome measures are of key importance but they are not sufficient, if our adult learning outcomes framework is to be inclusive of all adult clients.

A value- added approach to learning to earn outcomes would involve recognising the following milestones

- not there yet -doing more study towards a job
- obtained a first job or a job after time away from the workforce
- retained an existing job, through more skilling to maintain competence
- advanced to a higher level job through up-skilling
- changed career or developed skills and knowledge towards an alternate career, through re-skilling.

Another potential key milestone outcome, given it frees up a position in the workforce for another or expands the workforce in total size is

- now running own business, with developed business skills.

### **Learning For Pleasure- Personal And Health Outcomes**

Here we are most interested in considering personal outcomes from adult learning that are of importance to many adults and relate to national development agendas. Two key outcomes appear to be paramount. One is civic engagement. The other is positive health.

Active citizenship is a common goal of governments and there is considerable learning that goes on among adults for the purposes of volunteering, taking part in community building activities, such as the Sydney Olympic Games to nominate a well known example. So, for some adults the new VET skills may have been obtained for the outcome of

- using skills in a community volunteer capacity

This outcome is quite common in the adult and community education sector. Volunteers are widely used and trained to tutor or manage aspects of the business.

Health has also been singled out because good health is a fundamental goal for everyone. (006). Good health is especially important if our ageing population is to stay active members of the workforce as is desired for prosperity reasons. COAG has included some health-related targets within the human capital reform agenda, such as decreasing the effect of illness, injury or disability on the working age population (COAG Communique, July 2). So we consider here the

impacts of learning upon health-what the relevant outcomes to measure might be.

Evidence of the impact of learning on an individual's health and wellbeing comes in two forms: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research, the analysis of linkages between individual's health data and education data, suggests that the relationship is complex. Stanwick, Ong and Karmel (2006) have undertaken a statistical analysis using Australian health (HILDA) data and Australian educational (highest qualification) levels data to see what links they could find. They found that the largest education effect on health is for people holding degrees, with the second largest for people with diplomas. In contrast, the size of the effects for people with certificates 1 to 1V and Year 12 are so small as to not be substantively different from the year 11 and below reference group. These researchers concede however, that there are some indirect relationships that are very important including through the socialisation that accompanies the learning process in groups as well as income levels.

Hammond (2004) notes similar findings from British statistical research-

Recent analyses of national British datasets suggest that levels of qualifications protect individuals from obesity and depression, but that the health effects are not universal and vary depending upon the level of qualification gained, whether it is an academic or vocational qualification, and the gender of the learner (Feinstein, 2002). These findings highlight the importance of understanding more fully the processes through which learning affects health outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to explore just that issue (p522).

Hammond provides a very interesting qualitative assessment of the impacts of lifelong learning on health based on in-depth biographical interviews with 145 adults about the effects of learning throughout their lives. In addition, 12 group interviews were conducted with practitioners about their perceptions of the effects of learning upon their students. Her key finding from this fieldwork was that participation in lifelong learning can lead to a range of positive health outcomes; well-being, protection and recovery from mental health difficulties, and the capacity to cope with potentially stress-inducing circumstances including the onset and progression of chronic illness and disability.

Importantly, Hammond explored the pathways that linked learning to these positive health outcomes. She found that the immediate 'soft', psychosocial outcomes of learning evidenced in many educational research reports (to which she refers), mediated the achievement of the health related outcomes, in the longer term. Hammond identifies and discusses in detail five groupings of psycho-social qualities that learning impacts on relatively immediately: self-esteem and self-efficacy; identity, self-understanding and the capacity to think independently; a sense of purpose and hope; competences and communication; and social integration. Her study suggested that learning developed these psychosocial qualities through extending boundaries, a process which is quintessential to learning.

However, Hammond went to some lengths to point out that not all educational experiences had positive effects upon adults' health. Some learning can have a damaging effect on a person and their sense of wellbeing and health. The identification of aspects of learning experiences that are important to generating positive health outcomes for individuals was another key aspect of Hammond's

study. The 145 people interviewed had a wide range of life experiences to enable identification of the kinds of adult learning provision that generates positive health outcomes.

Hammond concluded from her study that people succeed in a learning experience and achieve positive outcomes when the learning matches the interests, strengths and needs of the learner, is at the right level of challenge, and is provided with the right level of support and encouragement as determined by their background and current circumstances. Such learning can benefit the health of all individuals, regardless of their initial levels of psychological and mental health.

Moreover, Hammond suggests that where learning has positive impacts upon psychological health, this will contribute to positive family functioning and social cohesion. Indeed, in real life, it is impossible to separate an individual's psychological health from their attitudes and practices relating to social integration and social responsibility, although conceptually and theoretically it may be useful to do so.

In summary many researchers have found evidence that adult learning can yield health and well being benefits, as suggested by Clemens et al (see table 1 in this paper). Hammond's evidence suggests that it is the immediate psychosocial outcomes of learning that may promote attitudes, practices and life circumstances that are conducive to positive health outcomes. The secret is that both the content of the learning program and how it is delivered must relate well to the learner: it must be tailored to the individual client.

## **INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN ADULT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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We have looked at the range of outcomes adults might achieve from participating in a learning program. One possible way to represent the apparent interrelations between the significant types of outcomes from adult learning is as in figure 3.

Figure 3 seeks to convey that many types of the outcomes may be obtained from a single learning experience. An adult may gain improved confidence, and self esteem and motivation to learn that is sometimes referred to as 'identity capital'. During the learning experience they might gain improved generic skills-literacies, people related skills and analytic thinking skills. Improved social capital may also result including friendships with class mates and wider community connections. The human capital outcomes refer to certified skills and knowledge and qualifications and jobs and income. Combinations of these types of outcomes lead to health and wellbeing outcomes.

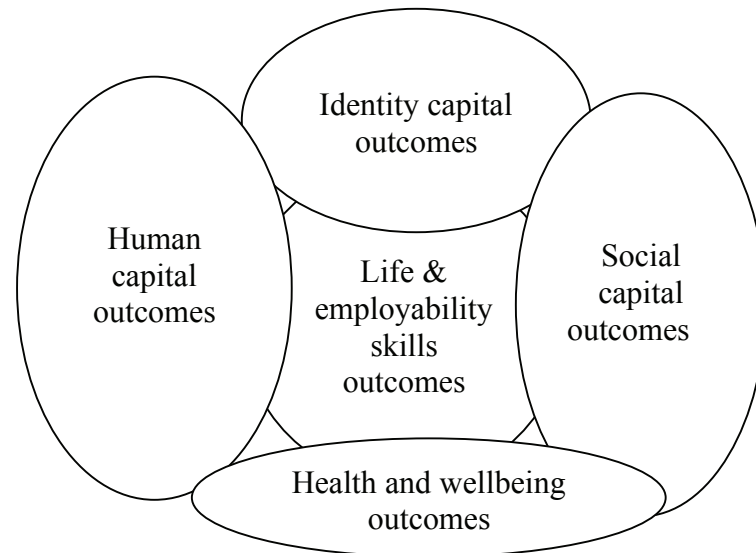
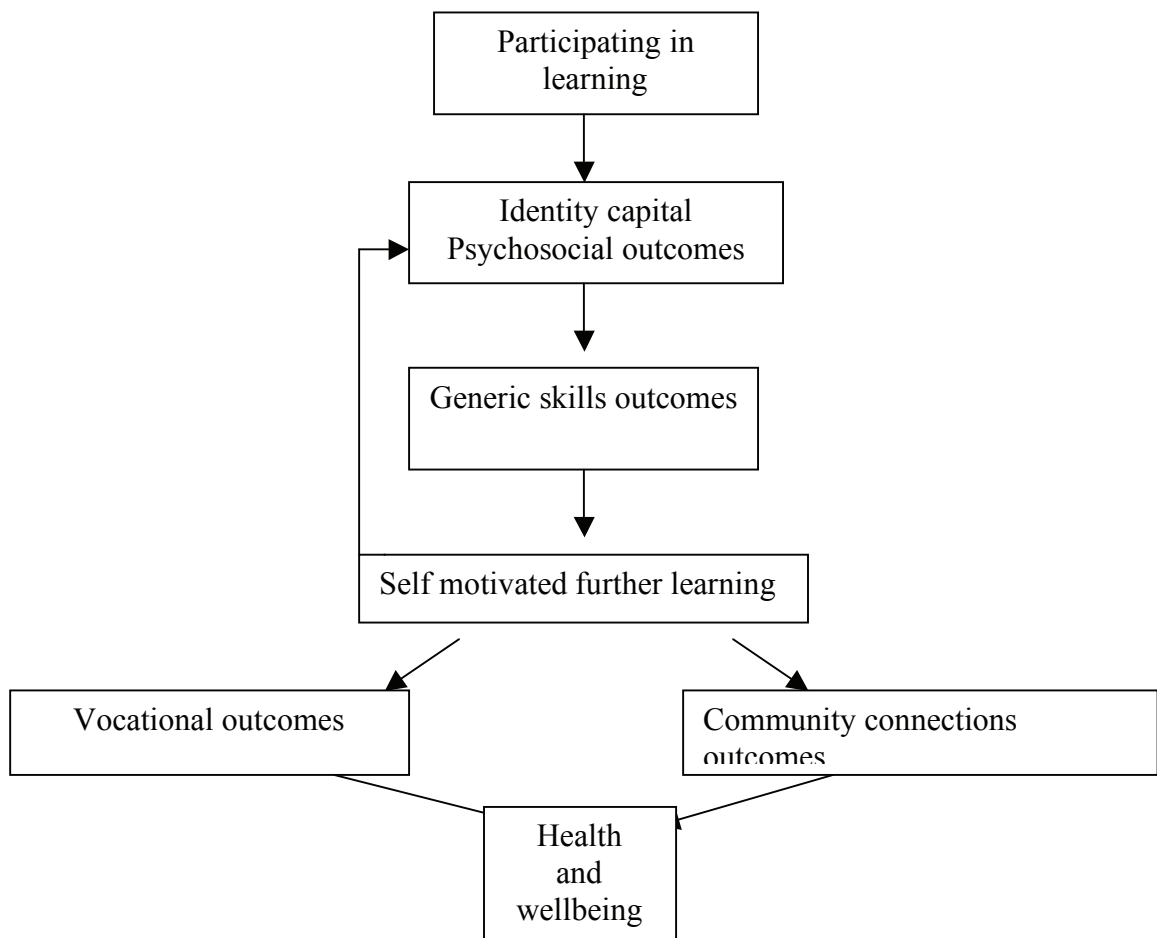
**Figure 3 Connections between outcomes from adult learning**

Figure 4 is an attempt to illustrate the continuum of outcomes for adult learning from a starting point of not engaged in learning and as has unfolded from our analyses.

Figure 4 shows that the first critical milestone outcome is to be (re)engaged in learning. The second critical milestone outcomes are the identity capital or 'soft', psychosocial outcomes, and related generic skills, that may take several learning events to develop sufficiently before more directed learning is attempted for work and/or community outcomes purposes. The achievement of positive health and wellbeing outcomes is as a result of achieving the former outcomes.

**Figure 4 An after- analysis adult learning continuum model**



**TOWARDS MILESTONE ADULT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR MEASUREMENT**

Using the five types of capital outcomes for adult learning shown in figure 3 as the framework, a set of adult learner outcomes for measurement for performance reporting purposes is suggested in table 4 below based on the previous discussion of what appear to be the most critical, value adding outcomes only, to keep the number manageable to avoid burdening providers and others with data collection and analysis. There is also a comments column where the author has offered a few thoughts regarding measurement but this is premature as the first thing to be decided is what the measures should be. The key point to note is that, in the past, data has been collected on each of proposed milestone measures in Table 4, just not consistently for all learning programs.

**Table 4 Critical outcomes from adult learning for measurement**

Outcomes Category	Significant Outcomes to Measure	Comments
Base	Number of adults participating in a learning program  Or  Numbers apparently not engaged in learning	Although hard to measure indicative figures are better than none. Who is missing out on learning research may provide some assistance. Alternatively, ABS data may provide part answers to as also would the combining of university enrolments with VET enrolments and adult and community sector enrolments, noting the latter are somewhat more erratically reported and there will be overlapping students across the sectors. Perhaps Adult Learners Week offers an opportunity to do a random sample national survey?
Identity capital	Self confidence  Self esteem  Personal enrichment  Self concept as a learner	Can be measured through self reporting by the learner. Surveys using a 5 point Lickert scale have been used to determine degree of change experienced.  Aspects of identity capital were included in the special Indigenous Australians survey of training experiences by NCVET (Butler et al, 2004)
Generic skills	Literacy levels  Interpersonal skills  Problem solving  Enterprising skills	There is an international adult literacy survey instrument that the ABS has used.  Allen Consulting Group (200?) recommends the assessment of employability skills by descriptive reporting approach by providers supplemented by student portfolios of evidence  There has been an employer satisfaction with graduates generic skills survey undertaken for both VET and uni grads (2001)
Social capital	Social connections  Community connections  Volunteer work	Changes in peer networks, membership of community groups and participation in voluntary work have been reported on in the past especially by ACE providers.
Human capital	Doing more study  Got a first job  Retained existing job  Advanced to higher job  Changed careers/ developed skills towards new career  Moved to self employ	This level of differentiation of job outcomes (move to being self employed excepted) is collected in national VET student outcomes surveys and, analysed and documented under that name ( e.g NCVET, 2005)  The more fulsome account of the economic outcomes of VET 'learn to earn' programs that this set of measures provide should be considered for inclusion in the VET key measurement report to better illustrate the value added by the learning program than does the currently reported key measure of numbers with jobs before compared to after participation in the training program.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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The most significant outcomes for adult learning in Table 4 are open to debate which is the purpose of this paper, to raise discussion on the multiple goals or outcomes from adult learning programs that should be reflected in a performance measurement framework.

There are many and multiple reasons why adults might seek to learn. We need to a comprehensive set of outcomes measures to enable the value added by the learning program to be recognised and the stepping stone nature of learning acknowledged.

The set of adult learner outcomes of milestone significance may be used by all adult education providers to show the various contributions their programs make to the desired life-long and life-wide adult learning agenda.

Table 4 provides a checklist also for individual students to consider, to enable them to convey the full range of benefits they want from a learning experience and importantly, what they do in fact gain. For example whilst having learnt new job skills the learning experience may have been harrowing and not provided a sense of motivation to do more. This is valuable information for the practitioner—the impact of the learning process on the outcomes.

Once measures are agreed there is expertise work required with regard to data collection. For comparative purposes the data needs to be reliable and consistent. The proposed data needs to be judged against the 'SMART' criteria:

**Specific** – clear, simple, single items of information

**Measurable** – items that can be reliably quantified

**Attainable** – data that is easily and cost effectively gathered and available

**Relevant** – to the goal, objective, and

**Timely.**

Fortunately, there are examples of data on the proposed measures having been collected in the past; it is a matter of bringing it all together.

For further reading about the wider (than economic) benefits of adult learning and modeling and measuring them see Schuller et al 2001 and Plewis and Preston, 2001

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