commentaries on adult learning

view 2000

Adult Learning
Australia Inc.

ALA Commentaries are emailed to ALA members each week, and designed to stimulate discussion. They are written by people in the field of adult learning in the broadest sense, usually in Australia, sometimes overseas. ALA hosts an online discussion forum about the Commentaries, which anyone with an email address can join.

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Contents

Social capital

Learning and teaching contexts

The system

Technologies for learning

Learning Towns & Cities

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Telling tales out of class

John Falzon

"Class is dead", we are told. All we need to do now is think smart and connect.

There's nothing new about myth-making. The interesting thing, however, is to trace the development of myths to the economic conditions that give rise to them.

There's a powerful myth floating around today: the social capital myth.

Social capital? Isn't that just a way of measuring the levels of trust and collaboration in the community? Or is there more to the story?

"All we need to do now is think smart and connect."

Big businesses around the world are pursuing (through governments) a two-pronged plan to maximise profits: 1) the undermining of unions as collective representatives of workers, and 2) the dismantling of social security for working class families.

Unions are being systematically undermined. The worker is no longer a member of the working class but an individual consumer in the labour market who is meant to go where the jobs are and buy in the necessary training to get those precious jobs. That's why education (for whatever age group) becomes too valuable a commodity to be supplied freely.

As for social security (or welfare dependence as some like to call it), we are presently witnessing its dismantling. As each welfare service is dismantled, its broken pieces are sold off to the private sector and the service itself is magically transformed into a commodity (almost inevitably with government financial support for the company!).

The great government closing-down sale is not, however, limited to welfare services. Health, education, housing, transport, prisons, anything and everything, can be subjected to the logic of the market.

The role of government is no longer, even in a minimal sense, to ensure some measure of equitable distribution of human necessities. It is now quite nakedly committed to providing welfare for the rich and greater pressure on the swollen ranks of unemployed and working poor to work for bottom dollars.

This is where the social capital myth comes in handy. It posits social connectedness as an alternative to material infrastructure, employment and social security. Its bottom line is that 'citizens' should look to themselves to find solutions to the problems created by big business. If, perchance, people can't work things out for themselves they can always find a nice, albeit mandatory, home in prison.

The notion of social capital is used to denote the building of trust between business, government and community. It is posited as the way forward for acting responsibly (and cheaply) to cope locally with global change. It is pitted against the Welfare State as a method that embraces free choice, individual initiative, mutual obligation and fiscal responsibility.

Issues of material infrastructure are replaced by issues of cultural change. Conflictual realities are moved around (between neighbourhood, prison and workplace) but they do not disappear. However you want to paint it, the owners of capital are systematically attacking the working class.

The state grows smaller so that 'the community' can grow stronger. Non-government organisations are touted as the answer to the vacuum left by government. We are told that the community is actually being empowered by the move away from public ownership of resources.

The social capital myth presents us with a garden of Eden from which we have fallen and which we can re-enter if only we have trust in each other.

Then prisons will be empty and stomachs will be full. If only we realised this earlier. Silly us!

Earning interest on social capital

John McIntyre

Social capital has earned a lot of interest lately, and this Commentary follows an earlier and fairly acerbic writing down of the stock despite its currently high valuations (we are talking capital, and I freely mix my economic metaphors). We seem to want a debate on the valuation question, and why not? Social capital has been given huge credence in adult and community education circles of late. As regionalism makes a comeback in Australian politics, it is gaining ground as a policy construct.

Social capital, as I understand it from Eva Cox's and others readings of Putnam, is the idea that social relationships require trust and reciprocity for their maintenance, the 'oil' that lubricates social interaction, as Cox has it. Social networks break down where it is lacking, and where relationships are strong it is generated (or perhaps one says, 'accumulated'). The extended claim

is tantamount to saying that social capital makes 'community' possible, an inflation of the idea (depending on the meanings ascribed to 'community' in the marketplace of ideas).

Social capital is attractive as a rationale for the transformative effects of adult community adult education. Important links are always being made between adult education participation and community well-being that hark back to older ideals of 'civic participation'. Social capital is meant to imply more than mere participation, but how much is it adding much to the idea that 'participation' is a social good?

Doubts arise when social capital is displacing other political and economic ideas. Too rarely is it analysed in relation to other resources – other 'forms' of capital, financial and cultural available to 'communities'. Leaving out questions of their unequal economic resources within and between communities, it seems true that high levels of social participation are facilitated by other kinds of resources. To isolate 'social capital' from other kinds of capital, to give it first or even equal place among available resources, is to over-state its significance. A great deal of social participation is explained by economic resources (labour force participation, high family incomes, car ownership, heaven help us) and all that is captured by that term, cultural capital, including 'educational resources' as measured by schooling and qualifications. Participation in organised adult learning, we know, is associated with such resources.

Leaving that argument aside, should we be talking more about the underlying idea of 'participation'? This idea is central to the Federal Government's reworking of welfare in terms of concepts of 'participation support' (I refer to a recent report with this term in the title) and 'mutual obligation'. 'Participation support' is what people on welfare are supposed to need in order to get off welfare and 'function effectively' as citizens, with 'mutual obligation' as the governing principle requiring participation in community. Can social capital be thereby created? And if it is, in what ways might 'social capital' be refashioned as a conservative political discourse? Could it not be said that social capital is what 'mutual obligation', freely chosen, creates, just as some reluctant citizens (the most marginalised) have to be encouraged to reciprocity?

From this point of view, what then are some of the dangers in over-investing in social capital options (to revert to the market) – of putting all our social theory eggs in this particular basket? It might be time to look again at the other kinds of social and economic resources that indicate the well-being of communities. Should we hold, accumulate or sell social capital stock?

Learning social literacy

Eva Cox

Reading the society that we are part of is not generally seen as a skill. We separate out many of the activities of daily life and do not see these as on a par with formal or accredited learning. Years ago I was running a workshop in Adelaide and tried to get the group to unbundle the concept of communication skills. 'What were its components' I asked so someone put their hand up and said 'Listening'. I wrote it on the whiteboard and asked 'do we have to learn to listen?' 'Yes we had a workshop last week,' he replied. 'Could you listen before?' I asked and he looked indignant and said 'No'. Ah, the magic of formal training!

"Neo-Marxists can stop assuming that social capital is an apologia for less intervention by government."

I use this anecdote sometimes to illustrate the way we compartmentalise those skills we see as academic or trade-based, that is, those we are taught formally, versus those we absorb from life, our family and other informal processes. We neither examine nor train for levels of social competence, such as making and retaining relationships, developing networks for use and pleasure, or a capacity to read social mores so as to feel integrated into one's social milieu.

Some of this may be defined as cultural capital, Bourdieu style, which is the know-how we have that allows us to operate effectively. This is at the individual level, but obviously affects the ways in which groupings of people operate in workplaces, communities and so on. I tell my research methods students that formal research is an extension of what we do on a daily basis. We collate impressions, evidence, feelings and experiences that inform us of what to expect of the day, the week, the meeting, the trip, the workplace or whatever social process we undertake or avoid. However, unlike my students, there is little formal or even organised informal or experiential learning for those whose social literacy may be a major barrier to developing their capacities.

So maybe we need to consider how people develop social literacy. Do they have the social skills to enable them to work out how to do what they want to do? Can they read situations in ways that allow them to solve problems? Can they make sensible decisions, interpret their options and retain and develop friendships or relationships that work? These are serious questions and ones we tend not to address within formal educational systems. Some assume we are born with social attributes, others expect family and society to raise

children with these skills and if you miss out, tough.

On a wider scale, we learn from those we associate with, as social beings, we draw from others' views of us, learn from the groups we are part of or excluded from. We learn collectively to join with others, or to keep to ourselves, and draw from the resources of those who are prepared to give. We learn whether we have something to give, and whether others can respect us, or disparage what we try to do. It is the quality of these wider relationships that develops or diminishes social capital.

Such skills tend to be badly distributed, so those with low human and financial capital may also lack cultural and social capital. Using generalised trust as the best current indicator of social capital, we find that inequality seems to negatively affect trust. Unfairness, lack of confidence in the legal system, expectations that governments will not reduce inequalities, civil unrest and poor tolerance of diversity show up as factors that reduce generalised trust. It seems obvious that many of the social problems that have been identified in 'progressive politics' can be shown to be the result of unequal distribution of wealth but also the ways people interpret this. So neo-Marxists can stop assuming that social capital is an apologia for less intervention by government, just because some people misuse the concept. Marx's view of the potential for revolution has not worked because in most cases change comes not from the most oppressed, but from those who feel that change is possible and desirable. The 'solidarity' that is seen as a necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisite for change comes from the ability to build trust in a movement. Many of the populist revolts come from loss of trust in anyone who is 'not like us'. So maybe we need to look at whether we need to spread social literacy, that is, the capacity to read the state of one's own part of the world and work out how we can collectively change what worries us.

One way of understanding social capital is to think of it as part of the stories people tell about their communities. If you listen to people describing their street/suburb, their workplace, local organisation or networks of friends and acquaintances, you can hear their perceptions of trust and relationships, which permeate their stories. One story might be of the pleasures of goals achieved, the sense of work well done, and the pleasures of friendship and cooperation. Another story is of fractions and factions, victories scored against the 'enemy', other people's failings, and unresolved problems. Still another story tells of constant senses of exclusion, impotence, invisibility, unfairness, anxiety and misery.

The term social capital is valuable for exploring human society. Possibly, it describes the way group processes can work to benefit the society as a whole. It can also identify the effects of distrust and bad relationships in groupings, which may limit the life chances and quality of life of the people involved.

Understanding what is needed to make the changes we want, or just to maintain some of what we value, requires a learned set of skills. For too many communities, the learning has tended to be negative as they react to powerlessness with distrust of political process. While recognising that learning to trust others contingently will not make a revolution, it may foster forms of collective action. We cannot move on if we expect everyone else to be untrustworthy. However, if we want to ensure that we can achieve progressive change, we need to work for popular support, and diminish the need to deal populist solutions, or the cynicism of those who don't trust in democratic process.

We know there are communities with low social capital, with little capacity to learn and move on. We know there are subgroups in some areas who are excluded from the local networks, we know there are some groups whose networking is driven by a desire to advantage themselves at the expense of others. My question is whether adult learning can explicitly offer people experiential learning that can build social skills so people become more able to assess who is trustworthy, and recognise opportunities for change.

Human capital and social capital – what's the difference?

Ian Falk

I would like to take a step back and review some of the basic ideas surrounding the burgeoning field of social capital. Many people I have spoken to feel excluded from the discussion about social capital because it is a relatively new term, it is about apparently intangible things and is rarely described in ways that connect it with real life. Abstract notions such as 'norms' and 'networks' do not help those entering the discussion relate the ideas to everyday activities. Many consider that social capital is 'old wine in new bottles' – another word for, say, community development or a sound learning environment. In addition, many people are confused about the differences between social capital and human capital. Is there a difference? Why does the difference matter? This commentary is an effort to address these matters.

I will then close with a discussion about the differences between human and social capital in relation to adult learning. Readers can then enter the discussion and start to critique the ideas and practicality involved, and a new debate can emerge if needed.

Social capital is the cement of society's goodwill – it creates a cohesive society. The networks, trust and shared values of social capital bring to life our human values, skills, expertise and knowledge. Social capital results from effective communication. Social capital provides the social infrastructure support for our lives in a web of elastic networks related to home, work, learning, leisure and public life. Social capital constructs the meaning around the visible picture we present to the world. It tells the world who we are and what we are like. Through social capital we define who we are, what we do and why we do it. Interactions that create social capital give our lives meaning, and in a real sense they weave the fabric of our lives. Social capital is a term that refers to the social values (norms), networks and trust that facilitate a group's purposeful action. Social capital encompasses the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit, as Michael Woolcock says. Another writer on the subject (Portes) observes that, 'Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships'.

It is the quality of the shared values of the participants that determines the effects of social capital and holds groups together. Shared values and social norms (the tacitly agreed-to social rules we all usually abide by, such as language, dress and manner codes) are at the core of what makes us the same, and what makes different groups of people different. For example, dress codes vary from one social situation to another, as do manners and speech. These vary even more significantly across cultures. Those shared values that we work with in our close family, neighbourhood and community experiences help shape that 'sense of sharing' and 'belonging' – aspects of our identities that are crucial for us to feel wanted and valued members of our societies. For healthy communities and members, these 'bonding ties' of close group relationships need to be balanced by links with the values and norms outside our immediate groups, through 'bridging ties'. Shared values are the crystals around which networks grow. They can make the difference between good and bad networks. Anti-social, aggressive or embittered values by themselves will lead to unproductive, negative networks and interactions. Shared values based on individual worth and collective endeavour will be more likely to be productive, positive and lead to wellbeing.

"Social capital constructs the meaning around the visible picture we present to the world. It tells the world who we are and what we are like."

Networks link people to each other and to their communities and society. Bad networks promote interactions that are restricted and only inward-focused. The resources of knowledge and information they draw on are poor and the interactions are typically narrow in terms of the interpersonal identities that inform them. What's more, they seldom link with networks outside the well-used and local ones. Good networks, on the other hand, build on the strength of their internal bonding ties and draw on an array of external knowledge and information resources as well. They display variety in both their character and content. Good networks take nourishment from sources outside the local networks.

Trust is an important dimension of social capital. Trust underlies and contributes to the quality of interactions between people. I think all of us would agree that trust leads us to the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms. Trust is certainly the critical component of any social cohesion. Trust seems to be everywhere but nowhere. Trust underlies all positive social interactions – it's what makes them work as a positive force. Trust operates at several levels. There is the trust that forms when people find things in common to talk about, and this first step may lead to the next. People make frequent mention of the role of trust in their first steps towards learning. Trust seems to be the substance that provides the reward for taking the risk of the first step – both in learning and in social relations. Trust is above all learned. When people don't trust, they don't learn, nor function effectively in society.

Social cohesion is used to refer to the ties between people in groups and communities that cause a bonding through common interests. It is frequently pointed out in the press that Western societies seem to have lost a proportion of their social cohesion, symptomized by conflict, breakdown in family structures, intergenerational communication and so on. Strong social cohesion within one group can be likened to group 'solidarity', and these 'bonding ties' can be detrimental if they are not balanced by suitable links to external information and knowledge through 'bridging ties'. So bonding ties cause the communication between people that builds a sense of cohesion or solidarity in a small group or community. Bridging ties are those interactions through networks that link a smaller group or community's solidarity with external information and knowledge. In addition to the quality of

the interactions is the impact of those interactions on the wider community and society. This impact can take several different forms, such as impact on health, impact on safety, impact on employment, on creativity, education and training, on the environment and so on. Therefore it is the development of trust that determines the impact of individuals on their communities.

How the difference between human & social capital relates to adult learning

Human capital includes the skills and knowledge we gather in formal and informal learning. Social capital, built through meaningful interactions between people, facilitates the learning and use of these skills and knowledge.

Social capital therefore promotes active and sustainable learning. A learning environment poor in social capital will concentrate on skill and knowledge acquisition in a top-down fashion, will underplay the importance of trust and interpersonal issues such as self confidence, and assume learners know why they are there and are self-motivated. Signals of a strong social capital learning environment include: that it is connected both to its community and outside sources, that it develops interpersonal trust and self-confidence that provide a platform for further action, that it encourages informed decision-making working from commonly identified values, and that it has a clear purpose for each stage.

Lifelong learning, social capital and capacity building: individualising the politics of social cooperation.

Terri Seddon

The current rhetoric around education and training presents an upbeat view of the potential of learning through life. As educators we are urged to build capacities for action in our students and organisations, and to build social capital to reinvigorate communities. Moira Scollay's (2000: 12) vision, for example, is lyrical about 'education and training as the cornerstone of Australian democracy'; in the 'creation of a "learning society"'; in enhancing 'national economic performance, sustainable growth and ... international competitiveness'; and in which 'intellectual and human capital [is] acknowledged as the heartbeat of national, enterprise and individual wealth creation and prosperity in the 21st century'.

Such purple prose, calling on us all to work together for the common good, is a little unnerving in the light of recent governments' actual record in supporting education and training. There is no doubt that educational investment has been oriented to skills formation which will enhance national economic performance but it has also sustained a remarkable privatisation of learning – both by individuals, who must now be self-responsible learners, and amongst education and training providers.

Skills formation is, of course, the old story of education and training. The development of workforce skills and discipline was the original rationale for government investment and, since the 19th century, has underpinned the formation of public systems of schools, TAFE and universities. Such investment increased the 'productive power of labour' which not only served the nation and those individuals but also the private appropriation of profit.

Privatisation is both an old and new story. The old story is about reproducing cultures and prevailing patterns of privilege. Private provision enabled particular communities and employers to induct young people or employees into preferred beliefs, practices and social disciplines, and their place in the social order. Historically, certain faith communities and the rich had the political clout to assert that their culture needed special treatment in terms of education and were able to maintain schooling outside the public system. The rest were scooped up in public systems, irrespective of their claims to cultural distinctiveness.

The new story of privatisation is less about cultural reproduction, although the rich and faithful continue to renew their cultures and privilege across generations, and more about the state supporting rational investment strategies. The assumption is that families and individuals will, as a priority, seek the best returns on their educational investments and, therefore, it is important to open up access to private provision so that individuals can choose to invest through either a public or private educational enterprise. Reconfiguring the public-private debate in this way individualises the ethic of learning and work. Individuals seek rational investment in skill formation rather than their educational choices being guided by older loyalties to particular communities and cultures.

Such individualisation is crucial for contemporary capitalism. In the mid-19th century, Karl Marx pointed out that industrialisation brought workers into factories and disciplined them through a labour process that harnessed their skills in cooperative ways. But the increased productivity and profits arising from cooperation between workers was seen as a benefit of capital rather than of labour. He states: The socially productive

power of labour develops as a free gift to capital whenever the workers are placed under certain conditions, and it is capital that places them under these conditions. Because this power costs capital nothing, while on the other hand it is not developed by the worker until his labour itself belongs to capital, it appears as a power which capital possesses by its nature – a productive power inherent in capital (Marx, 1976: 451).

Through the 20th century, the discipline of work became largely accepted. Workers expected that they would work together both to meet employer demands and to protect their own interests. Now, at the turn of the 21st century, social cooperation is presupposed in all the operations of informational capitalism (Negri, 1996).

This expectation of social cooperation shifts the fracture line of industrial politics away from struggles over the organisation of work and work time. Politics increasingly centre on the antagonism between social cooperation and profit-oriented command. At heart, the question is whether the productive power that is released through the orchestration of social cooperation within contemporary capitalism will be directed by the collective capacity of cooperative citizen-workers or the imperatives of privately-oriented profitability?

The rhetoric of lifelong learning, capacity building and social capital is ambiguous but, more often than not, it plays into the politics around social cooperation in individualistic terms that generally do not acknowledge the way individuals are always embedded in cultures and communities. This rhetoric drives an individualisation of responsibility, skills, capacities and networks that are usually disconnected from older ties to communities, cultures and patterns of collective action. It supports new forms of collective and civic action informed by an individualistic ethic and realised through individual's life style, investment and consumption choices. And with this individualisation, the imperatives of privately-oriented profitability are both generalised by becoming part of us all and freed in ways which define and drive our future.

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LEARNING AND TEACHING CONTEXTS

My arms ache

Joyce Stalker

My arms ache from embracing this machine
The right arm is stretched out to move the mouse on the green pad
The left one is poised, always at the ready
Tensed to capture a fleeting, brilliant thought.

Once my arms embraced the world.
I stood on empty foreign beaches
Held them outstretched to the sky
Captured the wildness of waves and wind and sun.

Now I sit desperately seeking 500 words to move your world.
500 words to penetrate the numbing demands of your endless emails.
500 words to create a mood so that you might embrace my ideas.
500 words to convince you.

But I don't do 'academic' very well any more.
I'm fed up with being measured
Well-referenced, well-published, well-crafted.
I have eight years, maybe ten, maybe fifteen until retirement
I want to make a difference.
I've always wanted to make a difference.
And now I want to make a difference now.

I want the widening gap to close
I want the streets to be safe after dark for women
I want deaths in Africa to be as important as those in Kosovo
I want us all to feel shame for the people who sleep under the bridges
I want poverty to foster strength in those who suffer it so that they demand changes
I want structures that care, nurture and encourage
I want wealth to carry with it responsibility

At night, my arms embrace my sanity
My lover's laughter, admonishments and touch
Soothe the throb of my muscles.

Together, we de-construct our day
Talk of lives we have touched
Paradigms we have shifted
Concrete ways in which we think we might have made a difference
Created a better world.

Together, we re-construct our lives and make plans to re-capture
The feeling of standing on empty foreign beaches
Arms outstretched to the sky
Capturing the wildness of waves and wind and sun.

And the ache eases.

Teachers on screen

Tony Brown

Come home from work and sit down to a TV drama and it's likely you'll end up watching a lawyer or a doctor. But these days if you venture down to the cinema you might come across an embattled teacher trying to juggle not only the demands of a classroom but the daily battles with politicians, social workers and educational authorities. Stand and Deliver, Dangerous Minds and Higher Education were commercial releases that dealt with racial tension, and the underbelly of American cities.

Two other recent films portray the contemporary classroom with particular passion and realism. Bertrand Tavernier's It All Starts Today is set in Hernaing, a failing industrial town in Alsace (also the setting for Emile Zola's Germinal), while Zhang Yimou's Not One Less is set in China's rural, under-developed Shiuquan.

In Hernaing the students are from working class families. Many have been broken up through unemployment, despair and their consequences such as alcoholism. The local authority, under pressure to reduce funding, has left the teachers to raise money and protect their working conditions. The school is enveloped in an atmosphere of grinding pressure on the families and the teachers and yet Daniel, the teacher/director, works to establish a safe and creative

space for learning and make a difference in his community.

When Daniel confronts the Mayor about the cuts to the budget and the impact on the school, the viewer is only mildly surprised to find that he is a member of the Communist Party. Such is the dominance of free market economics and the rush to cut social spending that the Mayor can see no other alternative. It is a far cry from the maxim that might have been expected of 'from each according to their ability to each according to their need'.

For peasants of the small village Shiuquan, it is too much work just to make ends meet. So difficult is the situation and such is the allure of the rapidly industrialising nearby city that already a quarter of the primary school students have set off to work there. Their meagre wages help their families but their new conditions of crowded accommodation and scrounging for food leave them anonymous in the crowded city. In a story reminiscent of the prodigal son, the 13 year old relief teacher Wei tries to bring young Zhang Huike back to the village to finish his schooling, to receive her pay for maintaining the class numbers. Her journey is one from unprepared substitute teacher to leader. In both cases the teachers' lives are unglamorous. The situation they find themselves in and the extra-curricular problems they confront will be familiar to educators in Australia because the core of the stories rings true.

Educators are faced with a call to be more learner centred whilst struggling for resources to meet their learners' needs.

The shift in emphasis from teaching to learning in Australia is welcome. It could be seen as a convergence of the legacy of the 1970s struggle to equalise power relations between the teacher and learner and the current free market ideology's centrality of the consumer.

"The shift in emphasis from teaching to learning in Australia is welcome."

There are potential democratic aspects in this shift. Working to facilitate meaningful learning, which takes into account cognition, emotion and social context, means moving from didactic teaching toward self-directed learning. Creating educational situations in which learners can be self-directed requires respect for the learners' experiences and a belief that individuals and groups can determine their own futures.

However, a policy shift that focuses too singularly on the learner risks ignoring the critical role of the teacher, and the resources that are needed to sustain both teacher and learner.

Tavernier was optimistic that meaningful learning could be achieved because of the determination and compassion of teachers such as Daniel: 'It is fashionable now for the media to only focus on stories which are cynical; on people who are disillusioned. Yet I meet so many people who are incredible, teachers and educators that keep fighting to preserve little islands of life in derelict places. This film is a tribute to them.'

Confident engagement in other cultures

Kaye Schofield

In his book Is Australia an Asian Country? Can Australia Survive in an East Asian Future?, Stephen Fitzgerald has rightly argued that '[u]ntil quite recently ... our education from kindergarten to the end of university assumed that there was but one world of learning, one universe of intellectual activity ... and that was the world of Europe and its derivatives'.

The reality of globalisation the rise of multinational companies larger than many nation-states, and trans-national political entities such as the European Community or the emerging Asia-Pacific bloc means that in the future, Australians will interact far more with people from an even wider range of cultural traditions.

Given Australia's cultural diversity, our (relatively recent) history of racial tolerance and our self-image as a people committed to a fair go, some foundations of such wider interaction are sound. But confident Australian engagement with other cultures will be a major challenge and will depend on two pre-conditions.

First, as Australians we will need to have a clear sense of our own identity. A key part of this will inevitably involve reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As Patrick Dodson has reminded us, 'we must look back on the past as a way to the future, not wearing black armbands but neither wearing white blindfolds'. We need to evolve the Australian identity in ways that offer a respected place for all the cultural traditions here, not just the dominant Anglo-Western culture. The evolving Australian culture will necessarily be pluralist, recognising that individuals and groups are interdependent and that conflicts are best managed in an open-minded, constructive way.

Second, we need to understand our geographic neighbours, even where we disagree with their values or practices. In this post-Cold War world, the quest for identity and community is a driving political force, a reaction

to the globalisation of capital and communications. Many argue that the most important distinctions among peoples are no longer ideological, political, or economic, but cultural. The danger here is that in the quest for cultural identity, science and reason will be replaced by unquestioned tradition, religious zealotry or romanticism. Two practical issues stand out here.

Adults as well as children need to become 'Asia literate', to learn about and understand traditions in our own Asia-Pacific region. Progress towards democracy in Indonesia and the likely economic and political influence of China, for example, will make our engagement with those nations a necessity for our own cultural and economic development. The bonds of trade are insufficient. As Alison Broinowski suggests, we may need to distance ourselves from the Western identity that all Asian observers ascribe to us.

Australians need a far better understanding of the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions both within Australia and throughout the world, and how those traditions shape social and political practice and inter-cultural relations. In our own region, apart from Indigenous spirituality and its relationship with land, the strongest and most complex tradition is Islam. Islam is on the rise throughout the world and is likely to prove a major force in the 21st century. Indonesia is the largest Islamic nation in the world and several other South-East Asian nations are Islamic, most notably Malaysia. Research shows that those educated in the Judeo-Christian tradition generally fear Muslims. Moreover, our political system is based on a secular state and our education system generally separates secular and religious knowledge – liberal democratic principles rejected by Islam.

What might all this mean for adult education? All of us will need to play a role in further evolving the Australian cultural identity, becoming more secure in a new sense of Australian-ness. This identity will come through an understanding of our cultural origins, reconciliation with our past, understanding our neighbours and drawing strength from our cultural diversity. We will need communication and inter-cultural skills and moral reasoning to enable us to make judgements about different cultural practices as well as to work in diverse cultural environments at home and abroad.

This is to my mind an urgent challenge for adult education.

Eating, drinking and adult learning: a letter from England

Alan Tuckett

This weekend a group of adult educators from Australia, South Africa, Uruguay, Jamaica and a clutch of European countries, backed by staff from UNESCO's adult education institute, have been at NIACE in England, wrestling with the following question. What kind of document would be helpful in support of the first International Adult Learners Week, which will be launched at EXPO 2000 in Hanover, Germany on 8 September?

We all agreed that there is no prescription or formula for success – other than that there is no paradigm. We agreed too, that we did not want to produce a guide, but to capture conversations and experiences of how people have explored using a festival to highlight adults' learning experience in literacy, and in lifelong learning more widely.

Still, as soon as we said that, Joe Samuels from South Africa argued that there needed to be celebration, eating, drinking and fun. They at least transcend cultural boundaries. So too does the power of good storytelling, and the effect of existing students on other people's motivation to learn.

As the weekend rolled on, there was a sharp sense of common goals shining through different practices – the literacy bus that toured the communities of Benin for a month in the run up to International Literacy Day performed a comparable function to the learning train that travelled across Russia last September. Not quite the same as the pensioners water-skiing on the River Mersey as part of Liverpool's Growing Old Disgracefully campaign, the Swiss one hour a day learning tram, or the church service that launches Jamaica's Adult Education Week. All shared the displacement of adult learning from private and invisible spaces to public and visible ones.

Everyone agreed that visual images were important, but few had such an eye for design as the Australian campaign, with its coordinated images on posters, pamphlets and television programs. Our financial circumstances were different, and we debated long and hard about how much needs to be planned, how far a Week or festival should be top-down with state support, and how far it should grow bottom up.

We were all pleased to have UNESCO's endorsement of Adult Learners Week as an enrichment of International Literacy Day – yet we wanted to nurture

the practice of mutual visits, shared experiences, and the evolution of activities fit for the purposes of new participants. We recognised that whilst Adult Learners Week is more than a Eurocentric or Anglophone initiative, it had not yet succeeded in firing the imagination of many in the south.

The results of our discussions are posted on the International Adult Learners Week email group hosted by Adult Learning Australia, which represents the beginning of a global dialogue on these issues. Educational innovations are notoriously difficult to transfer from one context to another. But there are now 30 or more countries organising weeks, days or festivals to promote lifelong learning in this way. The weekend gave way to the UK's Adult Learners Week and our politicians' speeches reminded me how much we have borrowed of Keating's 'clever country' policies… and we don't have an election until next year.

Sunday on the bridge

Jennie Della

As I waited with my son at Mortdale Railway Station at 7am on Sunday morning I wondered where all the people were. I had expected the platform to be crowded, not deserted. But at each successive station, the numbers gradually grew and by the time we changed trains at Town Hall, there was no doubt what was in the minds and hearts of we commuters. On arrival at North Sydney Station, we all walked slowly up the crowded staircase: young children, young adults, parents with prams, baby-boomers, older people. The day held such promise and we all wanted to be part of it: the Reconciliation Walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The morning was charged with emotions: there was so much positive energy, so much joy and anticipation. But there was also sadness – for indigenous people who were not walking that day because public health did not exist in their communities when they grew up; because they did not reach school age or see their fathers live to be 40. Western culture has robbed many indigenous people of their self-esteem, thrown many others into prison, and taken many others away from their families and their land.

I wanted to remember and record this day: the emotions, the colours and the people. I wanted my son to realise he was witnessing a powerful solidarity among the Australian people. I was taking photographs to record this historic event and I asked one Aboriginal woman to allow me take her photograph. She was holding an image and I asked her to tell me about the woman in her photograph. She told me, fighting back her tears, that it was a picture of her mother – part of the stolen generation. This woman was walking for herself and for her mother and, no doubt, for many others. I, too, was walking for others: family and friends who could not be there.

"I wanted my son to realise he was witnessing a powerful solidarity among the Australian people."

There were many more indigenous people who were feeling the hurts of the past: they walked for others and they walked in silence. And then there were those who chanted: people – both black and white – were calling for an apology and a treaty and they wanted them now! Above us in the sky, a plane was writing that most elusive word 'Sorry'. The banners showed that people had come from long distances to take part in this empowering journey. And the people kept on walking: this was community – a vibrant community that grew with each step.

As someone said to my sister "You'll never look at the Bridge in the same way again." For my sister living in North Sydney, she will be reminded daily of her walk as she crosses the Bridge to work.

For me in Canberra, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is a more distant icon but it has always been a striking symbol of Australia. On 28 May 2000 it became much more: the Bridge was given to the people. It became a meeting place for white and black, where the Aboriginal flag was in constant procession across it and waved proudly above it.

For the cynical, Sunday's walk across the Bridge will be seen simply as a feel-good exercise that will achieve nothing and soon be forgotten. For me and for many others it was community education at its most powerful.

What did I learn? I learned that 'sorry' is a word many non-indigenous Australians are prepared to carry across a bridge on a banner and are prepared to say. I learned that the Aboriginal flag took on a strong sense of identity on that Sunday. But most importantly, I learned that reconciliation is a joyous process and one that can unite us if we are open to it.

An adult educator in the grains industry

Alastair Crombie

Just six months after the colony's establishment, Governor Philip wrote: "…very little of the English wheat had vegetated and a very considerable quantity of the barley and many seeds had rotted in the ground... All the barley and wheat likewise which had been put on board the 'Supply' at the Cape were destroyed by the weevil". A pitiful crop of about a bushel was produced from the first plot at Farm Cove.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics has just released its winter crop estimate of 34.4 million tonnes of grain. The Australian grains industry accounts for 25 per cent of the value of farm production, and around 34 000 farmers make a significant part of their income from grain production. While grain growers still have to battle the poor soils, insect attacks, and adverse climate that made life hard for the settlers, there has clearly been some learning!

Farmers have achieved annual productivity growth of around three per cent a year for the past two decades, despite seriously lacking 'educational attainment'. They lack formal qualifications, and are in general averse or indifferent to the institutions and practices of formal education and training. Farmers adapt to enormous complexity and uncertainty to make a living. Like other small business people, they have to constantly learn by doing. Their learning projects are highly pragmatic, and are most likely to involve trusted colleagues or peers in 'real life' settings that fit the rhythm of the farm day and the cropping seasons.

'How farmers learn' needs no further study in my view. What does bear further examination is why education and training providers find it so hard to become genuinely 'learner focused', in the case of farmers in particular. Among farmers faced with a growing array of commercial providers – company representatives, farm consultants, electronic information suppliers, and so forth – a common complaint is the difficulty of choosing from such a bewildering array of options.

"A raft of new players is moving into the learning business."

To overcome this problem I strongly advocate development of the role of learning brokers. A good broker helps create, and then maintains a strong position in two networks – of supply and of demand. The Grains Industry Training Network based in Horsham, Victoria, has some of these characteristics for grain growers in that region. There is both satisfaction and revenue to be gained from helping members of farm management teams identify the right learning choice for their business development needs. Good adult educators have sound brokering instincts, and could make this a valuable service.

The yield and productivity of the grains industry have increased dramatically over two centuries, mainly as a result of technological innovations. While there will always be more to learn about plant breeding, crop growing and harvesting, the key drivers of future productivity improvement will be consumers, and those who process grains into food and beverages for them.

The Dutch are world leaders in this emerging discipline of supply chain management. Their government invests around $5 million a year in the Netherlands Agri Chain Competence Foundation – funding that is matched by industry and the research community. Australian farming history, of bulk commodity exports and marketing monopolies, is completely different to the Netherlands, and we are relative beginners in the global supply chain management business. 'Supply chain thinking' requires a perspective transformation for much of Australian agribusiness, before the hard grind of building globally competitive supply chains can get underway. This represents a major, industry-scale learning challenge.

My experience in the grains industry has affirmed an important general observation about learning and education. Constant multi-dimensional change has made learning a core survival activity – for people, communities, organisations, and industries. Learning – conceived as the way people solve problems, and close the gap between where they are and where they want to be – is all pervasive. Educational institutions have been slow to understand and respond to this socio-cultural shift, as though they have a trained incapacity when it comes to catalysing learning, and helping people learn for themselves. In general they are still too introverted, too rule-bound, and too smug about what can be classed as worthwhile knowledge. Whatever the merit of this judgement, it is incontestable that a raft of new players is moving into the learning business – including in the grains industry.

Solidarity forever

Griff Foley

David Head begins his account of his work with doss house dwellers in 1970's London by confronting educators with an unpalatable fact – 'Education is invasion'. The invasion may be well meant but education, especially with disadvantaged and disempowered groups, is at best action from outside (intervention) and at worst a hostile inroad, a cultural imposition. So, should we choose to do nothing? No, says Head. The educator has a social purpose, she seeks to improve the lot of the learner, otherwise why is she there at all?

Drawing our attention to this tension, Head connects us with the tradition of education and learning that is embedded in popular movements rather than dominant institutions. He refers us to Raymond Williams' discussion of solidarity. In his first major work, Culture and Society, 1780–1950, Williams examines the development of key ideas in English culture during the industrial revolution. He explores whether there is a distinctive English working class culture. He concludes that there is not, at least in the narrow sense of culture as artistic and intellectual expression – much of this was annihilated or fragmented by industrialisation. But in the broader sense of culture as a whole way of life, there is a distinctive working class culture, crucially different from bourgeois culture, centring on alternative conceptions of the nature of social relationship

The bourgeois notion of social relationship is based on individualism. Society is seen as neutral, each person is free to pursue her own interests. If natural and inherited advantage generate inequality, these can be ameliorated by social reforms and by individual service. One impetus for publicly provided universal education from the late 19th century was the hope that it would modify social inequality by giving opportunity to the brightest students from any social class. Such social engineering was supported by the idea of service, 'the great achievement of the Victorian middle class'. This idea also underpinned the view that properly educated professionals and civil servants would subordinate their own interests to the larger good, in England and throughout the Empire.

Williams, coming from the working class yet encountering people who had been formed by the idea of service, tried to understand it. He respected the altruism of the devoted 'servants' he encountered, yet rejected their conception of service because it maintained the status quo and denied equity to the people who he had grown up with, 'whose lives were governed by the existing distributions of property, remuneration, education and respect'. The 'real personal unselfishness' of those trained to serve existed within an unjust 'larger selfishness' which presented itself as the natural order. Williams found that he could not in conscience, when invited by means of his education and position (he became a professor in English literature at Cambridge University), join an establishment of which he radically disapproved.

And so we come to the contrasting notion of solidarity, which as Williams notes, in the English context was forged in the actions and institutions of the working class. We can add now, fifty years later, that this idea also came alive in other social movements, – in the women's movement, and in struggles for national liberation, for example. To be in solidarity with others is to stand with them, to feel, and act on, a sense of mutual responsibility. Working class culture is social, it is about relationship. At its heart is what Williams called 'the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this'.

"To be in solidarity with others is to stand with them, to feel, and act on, a sense of mutual responsibility."

Which notion one subscribes to, service or solidarity, is partly a result of experience. But it is also a choice. As the old union song puts it, 'Whose side are you on?' Williams could have repressed his conscience and joined the academic establishment. Or in a radically different context, at roughly the same time in history, Amilcar Cabral, an agronomist in Guinea-Bissau, could have enjoyed the benefits which accrued to him as an indigenous civil servant in a Portuguese colony. Instead, Cabral and other educated middle class indigenes chose to, as he graphically put it, 'commit suicide as a class' and stand with their people against the coloniser, first going to gaol for their commitment, then fighting a successful war of liberation.

It is this popular tradition of solidarity that many adult educators continue to articulate, some in inchoate and indirect ways, others more explicitly and coherently.

Community in education; education in community

Kate Lawrence

What do we mean when we speak of community education and community-based education? Are community and public education in opposition? Rick Flowers' commentary suggested that a discourse of community education is feeding into anti-public sector sentiment, and that advocates of a deregulated adult education market use it to undermine TAFE.

To some extent I agree. The discourse of community is used within public policy (and not simply in the arena of adult and vocational education) as a justification for reducing direct state provision, and for contracting out of public goods and services. Dr Kemp, Minister for the commodification of education, speaks of regional communities as clients disadvantaged by their former reliance on TAFE and empowered through the choice, diversity and flexibility of the competitive training market.

As adult and community educators we are involved with the way in which people learn together, and learn about themselves in relation to their social, economic and political contexts. And to varying degrees, we are all part of the way in which community is constructed through public policy systems such as ACE and VET, and policy discourses such as lifelong learning and social capital. Within market management of vocational education, policy texts increasingly identify and construct community in economic terms, as client (local or niche market), as resource (providing information and facilitating provider access to clients), and as enterprise (eg as ACE providers).

However community advocacy and community based provision is more complex than the problematic dichotomy of 'community' versus 'public' education. Communities are more than interest groups, concerned with their economic and positional advantage. Community identity and interests are constructed and represented differently according to individual, local, organisational, institutional or governmental perspectives. Community is a dynamic process, with social relationships and forms of organisation continually being constructed (and re- and de-constructed).

Community need not be oppositional to equity, inclusivity nor public provision; indeed, community-based approaches are integral to the achievement of equitable and inclusive provision, and to the effectiveness of public provision. My interest is in the possibilities and problems for local and regional communities in negotiating to get their vocational education needs met, and in how community is constructed and represented in relation to VET policy.

I note with some alarm an underlying chord of disappointment in TAFE among regional communities I have worked with, a perception that TAFE regional institutes are increasingly governed by economic imperatives and that the adult learning needs within small towns and areas outside the major regional centres are neglected or marginalised. This disappointment has two strands. One is the perception that accredited VET programs (to which public funding applies) are not necessarily relevant to learners' needs but are all that is available through TAFE. The other is that as TAFE colleges have been rationalised and merged into giant institutes across several regions their planning and decision-making processes are increasingly remote from local communities.

"Community need not be oppositional to equity, inclusivity nor public provision."

Flowers questions whether, and to what extent, community-based education providers can fill the gaps left by the reduction in public provision of education. In 'thin markets' (lacking sufficient learner/client numbers and education infrastructure to enable providers to establish themselves) outside major regional centres, the answer seems to depend not upon the type of provider but on the presence of local or locally accessible mediators between community, provider and regulatory and funding contexts. Where local or regional networks, organisations (or determined individuals) are able to effectively identify community learning needs, negotiate with providers, promote the courses and thus gather a critical mass of participants, providers can profitably offer adult and vocational education courses. In some regions TAFE still funds local part-time staff to fulfil this function. In many others it depends upon the voluntary effort and passion of 'locals'.

It is unproductive to interpret an increase in community-based engagement (as mediator or provider) as an attack on TAFE, or on the value of the public sector, when in my observation a major impetus for this has been the commercialisation of TAFE and the consequent neglect of the mediation role of public provider. Increased community mediation of adult and vocational education is in many ways a positive development, enabling increased relevance of provision to community contexts, and providing an emerging site for policy activism. If such community engagement is to be sustainable, community mediation needs to be recognised and supported as part of the public good of vocational education provision.

(Re)Presentations

Elaine Butler

'What an extraordinary few weeks it has been.

Last Friday night, I watched the Opening Ceremony of the 27th Olympiad, quite alone, yet conscious of being a very small digit in this MVE (mass viewing event). I was hooked. In this choreographed package was a huge group of community and performing arts members, volunteers, paid performers, technicians from a vast range of specialisations, children, community groups, stars and idols, a few animals performing representations that 'said' all the things our government has either refused to, fudged or belittled in so many ways. Public/global acknowledgment of indigenous histories and cultures; of a prevailing ethos for reconciliation; depictions of 'place'; Captain Cook on his bike, at last. Of industrialisation and of labour; of parochialism and larrikinism; of multiculturalism, and of possible futures. A metaphoric and embodied celebration of women. A fragile and fleeting coming together of a divided and fractious world through sports and spectacle, daring us to make of it what we would.

Almost concurrently, there was another MVE – the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne. This MVE was preceded by a media and politically orchestrated frenzy different from that of the Olympics. Here were speculations of 'trouble' and 'un-Australian' behaviour, stories of social movements and school children (young adults) being seduced into a polyglot mysterious non-located protest movement (S11), alongside considered stories of the 'world leaders' and 'global visionaries' visiting Australia, and the benefits to flow from this gathering (at the Crown Casino). The MVE held few surprises, and many disappointments – clashes between (brave/brutalising) police and (unruly/peaceful) protestors, as the powerful few were temporarily disrupted in their attempts for a seamless transition from vehicles(public space) to casino security (private space). Suits and ties; casuals and masks, both jostled by cameras and also separated by uniforms and self-interests. The spectacle of two worlds, lacking any kind of shared language or values – those 'inside' the Casino, and those outside, was evident, in the televised coming together of both, and in on-going print and radio media commentaries.

Though the two events appear disassociated, there are connections. Both are about global power, individual privilege and very big money. Both brought together individual passions and commitments, of competing ideological frameworks. Both were major public 'education' events, of high interest to local/global media consortiums, governments and big business and also to individuals and communities. Both challenge our ideas of what it means to 'be' Australian, and how, why and by whom Australia is (re)presented globally. Both events involved education and training, specifically and generally. The place and time of the WEF meeting was no coincidence. The size (and predominant skin colours) of the various national teams as they marched into the Homebush Olympic Stadium represented vividly the politics associated with access to wealth and privilege, histories of colonialism and migration, opportunity, stability, and so local-global positionings. Sponsorship, not just of the Olympics, but of individual athletes and selected sports, is a story of transnational capitalism. Both events brought the (electronic) world into two Australian cities, and took the cities to 'the world'. Both (re)presented 'Australia'.

"Here were speculations of 'trouble' and 'un-Australian' behaviour."

Paradoxically, it was expatriate Australian President of the World Bank (and previous Olympic athlete) James Wolfensohn's challenge for education and educators, that links both MVEs overtly with education and training. As reported in The Age, Wolfensohn, in Sydney for the Olympics, 'urged Australia to take the initiative in setting up a global education network' as 'a revolutionary foreign aid network to develop programs that would offer millions of people in developing countries education and wide ranging skills training', using a community focused approach.

This (oh so familiar) twist in the story takes me back to something I've been musing on for quite some time. My own unsettled understandings about what it means, to 'learn', and to be an 'educator' are continually being challenged by the fluidity, pace, instabilities, in-your-face demands and brashness of this late modern era and its contradictory mass of selective opportunities and opportunistic politics. Ironically, I think that it is the many versions of these hybridising neo-liberal politics that also 'connect' those of us engaged in education activities, whether as teachers or learners.

And further back, to so much of my own educative work. It highlights the continuity of old stories in new guises, of the possibility for a transformed local/global politics of ethics and pedagogies. But – individually and in our own communities, we are the ones who can shape our own (re)presentations and so realities of what it means to educate, to learn, to teach. Or we can let others do it for us.

Heroes and villains

Scott Burchill

In his first lecture on Indonesian soil after being banished for 26 years, Benedict Anderson spoke about the bewildered expression on the faces of his Indonesian students over the years at Cornell University whenever he asked them "who in Indonesia today do you admire and look up to?"

For Anderson the inability of his young Indonesian students to name their national heroes is a terrifying indictment of a deformed political culture, dominated in recent years by monsters such as Suharto, Murdani and Wiranto.

However, the same question posed to young Americans or Australians would have elicited a similar response. In the media of both countries, Indonesia has been a regular source of bad news. This is not entirely surprising, given the brutality and corruption of the Suharto dictatorship and the occupation of East Timor.

But why have we not heard about the inspiring and courageous dissenters who, at great personal risk, resisted the New Order regime and everything that it stood for? Why did they remain anonymous when their counterparts in Eastern Europe – the 'refuseniks' – were so publicly lauded in the West? The answers to these questions tell us much about our own diplomatic culture.

While Alexander Solzhenitsyn was feted in the West for his personal indictment of Stalin's gulags, Indonesia's Pramoedya Ananta Toer never appeared on the radar screens of Western political elites. The author of the acclaimed Buru Quartet and The Mute's Soliloquy, which recounts his horrific experiences while incarcerated on Buru Island from 1969 to 1979, wasn't the kind of political prisoner that interested Washington or Canberra during the Cold War – he was a man of the left.

No-one who has read Pramoedya's memoirs would be under any misapprehensions about the true nature of the Suharto regime, which probably explains why his books never found their way onto the shelves of the Jakarta lobby in Australia: for them, Suharto's crimes were always a case of see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.

Similarly, Carmel Budiardjo's detention without trial (1968–71) and her efforts to free her fellow political prisoners, detailed in Surviving Indonesia's Gulag, was unlikely to be reviewed by those promoting the closest possible relationship between Canberra and the dictatorship in Jakarta.

Budiardjo also founded TAPOL to campaign on behalf of Indonesia's prisoners of conscience, remarkably an organisation and a cause almost unknown in Australia and the US. Given his predilection for quoting the number of human rights representations he made while Australia's foreign minister, it would be interesting to know how many Gareth Evans made on behalf of tapols (Indonesian political prisoners) during his term. One suspects not many, and possibly none.

There are hundreds of others with even lower profiles, such as the elderly sisters who run the Research Institute for Victims of the '65–'66 Killings outside Jakarta while under constant harassment and the threat of attack. They work quietly with extraordinary courage to account for the crimes of their country's leaders. These remarkable people deserve the support of Australia and the United States, but are unlikely to ever receive it.

"Suharto was not only anti-communist, he was also admired for bringing 'stability'."

Pramoedya, Budiardjo, Colonel Abdul Latief and thousands more were not only the victims of a cruel and sadistic regime, they shared another unfortunate fate. They had the misfortune to be the political prisoners of a government ideologically allied to the West. By definition they became invisible.

Suharto was not only anti-communist, he was also admired in Australia for bringing "stability" to the region. According to Opposition leader Kim Beazley, "Australians pay far too little attention to the value ... of the stability" which he "brought to the Indonesian archipelago" – without detailing just what was being "stabilised" there, such as political repression, the denial of basic human rights, endemic corruption, sadistic cruelty, torture and mass murder. Over 32 years Suharto's "stability" took a minimum of 800,000 lives and possibly as many as 2 million in both Indonesia proper and East Timor, a record as vile as Pol Pot's and infinitely worse than Saddam's or Milosevic's.

A reckoning is due, if not immediately. An editorial in The Jakarta Post last April puts this and Suharto's forthcoming corruption trial in their proper perspective: "If the goal is to show that justice will be upheld in this country, then surely corruption, as bad as it is, is the least sinful misdeed that Suharto committed during his 32 years of tyrannical rule. What about the atrocities, from the summary executions of suspected communists to the killing of people in East Timor, Irian Jaya, Aceh and Tanjung Priok? If the government wants to show that justice the rule of law prevail in this country, then these and other heinous crimes committed during his reign should be the reasons for the prosecution of Suharto. Not corruption."

Even if Gough Whitlam still believes that "Suharto is a reasonable and honourable man" and the foreign editor of *The Australian* thinks that "in human rights there is a case for Suharto" (Greg Sheridan), a growing number of courageous Indonesians are no longer frightened of speaking and confronting the truth. They are the real heroes of their country. To find them, however, our leaders will need to stop consorting with "the elite...that implemented fascism and ran the country by terror" (Pramoedya Ananta Toer) and focus their attention on those Indonesians struggling against enormous odds to restore pride and honour to their country.

Transforming students into self-directed, independent adult learners

Angela Carbone

Many tutors and lecturers admired the 'self-directed, independent learner', according to an investigation of programming education at Monash University, in 1995. The way to make a student self-directed, ie able to work alone without direction or supervision, was to remove support structures, make them 'sink or swim'. But creating self-directed, independent learners takes greater initial input rather than less. It must be well directed informed assistance. The following four strategies have been employed in the tertiary setting, to provide people with the capacity to make decisions, reflect, manage and extend their learning beyond the classroom, into everyday life

Social capital is recognised in adult and community education circles (see earlier commentaries). It requires building of trust between business, government and community. In the classroom, many educators including myself, have applied culture changing tools, such as the Reciprocal Feedback System (RFS), that follow adult learning principles, learning theory and group theory to create a collaborative learning culture.
The idea of RFS is to develop a culture that will minimise fear in students to communicate effectively with academics and build respect and trust amongst themselves. The role of trust is important in the first steps towards learning and building a collaborative learning culture. It focuses on what the lecturer can do to improve their own teaching and student learning. The RFS is applied at strategic points throughout the series of lectures to gather student feedback, which enables the lecturer to assess the students' needs, understanding and satisfaction. The lecturer reflects on how to make use of the information, so as to build social capital and foster the development of a collaborative learning culture. Key issues are communicated to the students during a "Backchat" session. The lecturer takes five minutes to create a 'moment of truth' for the group, and when skilfully delivered, the Backchat builds trust and respect and opens the whole group up to learning. Successively students adopt more collaborative behaviours towards each other and the lecturer. The students form and extend networks.

An earlier commentary suggested that society's trend is towards informal learning. Students want flexibility of time, place, entry points and exit points. Access to resources and technology allows for this, yet requires greater initial input for setting up online interactive packages, threaded discussion groups, electronically available notes, computer aided dynamic assessment. The Internet carries these learning opportunities straight into the home. The Federal Government also has a role to play in sponsoring the development of sophisticated software, and resourcing of municipal libraries, post offices, schools and other public buildings to create a national grid of Internet access points.

"creating self-directed, independent learners takes greater initial input rather than less".

A conducive learning environment
Studies show that students have a stronger motivation to learn in environments where they feel at ease. They can turn positive attitudes to learning into practical results. It helps them to build the confidence to pursue further studies. This year, the School of Information Management and Systems, at Monash University piloted studio-based teaching and learning in its first year in the Bachelor of Information Management and Systems. It aspires to be an international benchmark for best practice. The studio required a radical re-thinking of elements of the teaching program, including: layout and design of the physical laboratory, tutorial rooms and facilities; content and method; and the Web-based and multimedia teaching tools employed to develop virtual communities. The studio aims to place the students in the centre of the learning process and to facilitate a collaborative/co-operative model of learning. It provides a holistic, integrating, practical counterpoint – simulating the workplace, and preparing students for practice as employees, team members, contractors, or self-employed professionals. The environment encourages learning by doing. By selecting items for their portfolios, students can demonstrate themselves as self-directed, independent learners.

Appropriate learning activities
Many tasks are designed with the best intentions, yet can cause above

average students to adopt poor learning approaches. An investigation by Baird and Northfield, in 1995 into student processing habits began to develop guiding principles for designing programming tasks to enhance self-direction and independence. Baird identified a series of processing habits that he called Poor Learning Tendencies (PLTs), characterised by a passive, dependent, uniform approach to learning. Some processing habits act as barriers to achieving quality learning. The design of tasks can gear students in different learning directions. It is important to think of how to frame tasks to provide self-direction for students so they can focus on the right concept, and adopt good learning patterns.

The limits of parliamentary democracy

Don Sutherland

The Peter Reith Telstra Card affair, the Tripodi affair in NSW, and the enquiry into electoral rorting in the Queensland ALP. These are a few of the 'fiascos' involving politicians which undermine confidence in parliamentary politics. Politicians' performance in parliament doesn't help.

Aren't we all just a little sick of them – the cliché image of their snouts in the public trough?

It's not acceptable is it? It is my strong sense that the people's confidence in the parliamentary process is at a dangerous low.
Alongside this are the regular incidences of commercial and corporate 'misbehaviour', some of which reach the public domain eg the cash for comments affair, the despicable Bondy and Skase, the outrageous salary packages in return for incompetence and destructiveness.

But, the message for public consumption is different isn't it? The commercial and corporate 'misbehaviours' are just that, the rotten apples caught out in an otherwise good system. Whereas we are steadily being taught that rotten politicians are integral to parliamentary democracy.
This is dangerous. Should we not wonder who gains and who loses if a collective consciousness of cynicism and distrust dominates the practice of democracy? It can create conditions for a lazy and weak acceptance of serious assaults on democratic practice, the successful transference, because it is accepted by the majority, of even greater power to the rich and powerful and those who can be commanded to act on their behalf. Two perfect incidents: changes to the defence forces act make it easier for the military to be used in civil protests and, the Victorian Premier encouraged escalation of vicious police behaviour against overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrators at the S11 actions against the World Economic Forum.

The only beneficiaries of this steady erosion in confidence in what we understand as parliamentary democracy are the main drivers of the capitalist system – that is, those who were inside the WEF, the powerful transnational corporations, for whom parliamentary democracy is either a hindrance to their exercise of power or on other occasions a necessary bastion to facilitate it and defend it.

"rotten politicians are integral to parliamentary democracy."

Amidst the dross of the Mal Colstons and the Peter Reiths, the growing cynicism, is there not also a deep yearning for a better form and practice of democracy, than that based only on elections and representation?

How can we as educators intervene to construct public debate and action about what a 'better' parliamentary practice might be and, what a richer more active democracy in general might entail? What is it about parliamentary democracy that marks its pretense as the ultimate form of democracy? If we challenge what is so damned ordinary in these times with a democratic process of a public defining and fighting for precise characteristics of democratic practice which steps across national borders (values, procedures, titles, roles, accountabilities etc) and these become a public 'log of claims', what will it mean for those who undemocratically rule the roost in the economic sphere? There, decisions are made in closed board rooms, money markets, or in unelected institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation about how many people will live in poverty, how many of the world's population will starve, survive or thrive, how many will have a real say and control over the conditions of their existence. What should be the connection between true democracy in the parliamentary sphere and decision-making in the currently undemocratic (except for the limited role of unions) economic sphere?

I think the impact can only be positive for the overwhelming majority, although it won't be much chop for those who benefit by the status quo. But is this the business of adult education, to explore, define, test and change the limits of parliamentary and general democracy, to promote this type of learning? Will it fill the dangerous void? Should it extend from what we don't like, from cynicism and modest complaint, to defining what we want instead; and even further to learning together about how to confront those who make the decisions

in parliaments, boardrooms and editorial offices; to hurt them with our democratic pressure so they are forced to negotiate changes with us on the basis of respect?

Any adult educator can get the ball rolling with some simple but powerful (possibly familiar) discussion questions:
– What are the 5–6 characteristics of current parliamentary democracy practice which most need to be changed?
– What specifically should be the more democratic values and practices which replace them?
– What should be the relationship between parliamentary and economic decision-making?
– How, specifically, can public support for these proposals be developed?

Is this so naïve and impossible? If you think so, go to the story of the South African Freedom Charter, for example in Nelson Mandela's biography, a story of activists and representative democracy entwined in a mass process, not just in inspirational content. Let's connect these discussions to the struggle for a just and more democratic republic (not just a republic).

The alternative – not doing things like this – ultimately is the practice of right wing politics and is, I repeat, too bloody dangerous.

Finding our many founders: Seeking the oral history of Australian adult and community education

Barbara Pamphilon

The Australian adult and community education sector has been a quiet achiever across the last century. Australians from many walks of life have developed education services outside of school settings as one way of contributing to the development of their community. And yet we know very little about this rich and diverse group and what drove them to begin a service or provide a new perspective within an existing service – they are what Sheila Rowbotham has called "hidden from history".

Last weekend, at the ALA national conference held in Canberra, a small group of people who share an interest in reclaiming this history came together to plan an oral history project that will capture the lives and stories of the women and men who have been significant in some way in their support of adult learning. We believe that many ALA members around the country will know of at least one person whose work deserves to be recorded. They may be an Indigenous educator, a first generation Australian educator, a neighbourhood house founder, a prison educator, a literacy worker, an evening college provider, a youth worker – the list is almost endless. They will not necessarily be famous but they will be ordinary people who have done extraordinary things.

Collecting oral history can be understood as part of a wider egalitarian movement in which the voice of the ordinary person gains its rightful place. The stories of every man/every woman provide a challenge to the elite famous man histories and have been described as 'celebratory' history. Alternatively oral history can be seen as a form of 'revisionist' history in which we collect stories in order to correct a flawed version of the past that has written certain groups out of our history books. For example the work of women educators here is often categorised as simply an extension of their 'natural' nurturing role. This is how their work has at times been seen. However oral history holds further radical potential as it can reveal how we compose or construct our memories, using the meaning frameworks available from a particular place in time and culture. Over time, we may 're-member' our experiences as public meanings change, illustrating that there is a constant negotiation between public and private memory. Thus oral histories are rich in a number of ways.

So what exactly will be involved in the collection of an oral history? The project team will develop a set of protocols for permission, taping, transcribing and the like, and the National Library of Australia has agreed to house and catalogue the transcripts that are produced. The actual style of oral history interview will primarily depend on the person who is to be interviewed. Some people are most comfortable telling their story as a narrative account which begins at a certain point and unfolds from there; others will prefer a series of questions whilst another group will prefer a dialogue in which they share their memories in response to the interviewer's own experiences. As a base-line we will be interested in the how, what, where and, most importantly, why of the experience of adult and community education in another time and place.

We hope that many ALA members will consider joining this project. Is there someone that you believe has been 'hidden from history'? Is there a service in your area that is significant and you have a passion to seek out its founders? Do you have a story to tell yourself? If the answer is yes, please feel free to email me at the address below. In the longer term hope to have a page on the ALA website, so watch that space –

but most of all do consider how you might contribute to the important project of "finding our founders".

THE SYSTEM

Is a good adult education worker a Christian?

Merilyn Childs

During January, while many of us were on holidays, a furore broke out in the national press. Some Christian charitable organisations, which have taken over much of the provision of employment services to the unemployed, were insisting on recruiting employees who are Christians, or willing to support Christian values. A spokesman for Wesley Mission went as far as asserting that the best workers are Christian workers. The Minister for Employment, Tony Abbott, himself a Christian, supported the right to choose employees on the basis of religious orientation.

"Where do we draw the line in the educational sands of change?"

The furore has important implications for those of us involved in the professional development of adult education workers. Many students enrolled in the Bachelor of Adult Education work in the employment services sector. Such a connection was established in the late 1980s during the period of the Accord. At that time the Federal Labor Government focused on training. This was seen as a long-term solution for rising unemployment and labour market dislocation caused by the restructure of the Australian economy. Training services were provided at first by public TAFE providers, and then increasingly, as competitive tendering was aggressively pursued, by so-called 'private providers'. A large pool of workers, often without educational qualifications, was attracted to contract employment in the newly created employment services sector. Adult education qualifications were established as the appropriate professional standard. (This has since been eroded to vocational qualifications, but that is another story). Approximately two thirds of our students work at least part of their working hours in this industry.

Adult education degree programs are focused on responding to the adult education labour market, and all our students are mature-aged. At the same time, we are passionate about developing students' critical capabilities. How this is pursued varies across degree programs in Australia, but it invariably involves advocating access and equity, contesting disadvantage and promoting social justice. It commonly includes a critical examination of race, class and gender. Such commitments clash with the notion that a particular religious orientation makes for a better kind of worker. The 'development of Christian values' is nowhere to be found amongst our subject outcomes.

Our degree program has responded to other changes in the employment services sector, and in education and training more generally. Corporatisation, the notion of the entrepreneurial educator, outcomes-based funding, competency-based training and IT, have all shaped what we teach, as well as how we speak and think about what we teach. How far do we go in ensuring our student's employability? Where do we draw the line in the educational sands of change?

In reality, employment discrimination on the grounds of religion joins a long list of other forms of workplace problems faced by adult education workers. Lack of security, poor wages and conditions, ever-changing government policy, unimaginative and at times exploitative management practices and poor access to on-the-job training, have placed considerable pressure on educational work.

This much is clear. At UWS, Nepean, we will not be amending our course to advocate Christian ethics for educators as an essential competency for employment. We will continue to adopt broad and critical approaches to the question of ethical praxis. Asking educators to be critical practitioners in this climate is a challenge, but it continues to be a worthy one. We must also examine religious intolerance, assumptions and stereotyping. The dismantling of public institutions has occurred at the same time that unions have failed to respond to casualisation, and governments have eroded union power. Educational workers face unprecedented and dynamic tensions between the threats and opportunities that characterise educational work. This is the case whether they work in classrooms, employment service programs and training departments, or in TAFEs and community colleges. It is now essential for university and professional development programs to include dialogue about the rights of educational workers, wherever they work.

When will it all end? Restructuring higher education – again

Regine Wagner

Our university is being restructured – again! I'm mentioning this here because the earlier restructure of the University of Western Sydney Nepean (1998–2000) can be defined as an experiment in good adult education practice and organisational management based on visions of equity, accessibility and shared responsibility, visions that are dear to the hearts of quite a few adult educators. Driven by a well-known adult educator in the role of University President, the last restructure reflected principles of adult education, learning organisations and a commitment to the development of human potential. For two years we were in institutional heaven (by comparison with the pre-1998 era).

We were able to make decisions about our work environment, the development of new programs and of partnerships with non-academic organisations. We opened up access to higher education by taking seriously the recognition of prior learning, formal and informal. We were committed to a notion of social accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the communities in Western Sydney and we actually made collective decisions of self-management (shock, horror). Instead of discipline-based faculties we worked in decentralised small units, some multi-disciplinary, with some control over our budgets. Individuals had a choice of the unit they joined, and the power to achieve collectively and individually. Obviously there is no revolution here and as the performance indicators soared, we thought we were on to a good thing. However, such changes were achieved at the cost of disempowering traditional seats of decision-making, power and influence, and the success of the new structure was never going to pacify the old guard, who clung to sandstone ideals, and waited on the sidelines.

Somewhat predictably, in our current restructure, the empire strikes back. We now stand to lose a number of important aspects of our emerging culture, including newly found notions and experiences of a democratic academic workplace, downward as well as upward accountability by senior managers, and consultation and inclusiveness. We appear to be to moving backwards into the traditional spaces of hierarchical decision-making, the unchallenged position of the professoriate, an approach to leadership based on rank and formal qualifications, and discipline-focused schools. In short the old is back, out with the new, both in concepts and personnel. The lucky ones who can, will escape.

What does it all mean? It is somewhat ironic that institutions whose role it is to 'produce' individuals capable of critical thinking, rational argument and debate, considered action and reflection, deny the majority of their own institutional actors any meaningful, ongoing participation and organisational decision-making. Restructure documents explicitly devalue democratic processes. Does our short-lived experience of genuine workplace participation mean that visions of worker empowerment offer poor combat to hierarchy, elitism and exclusion? Why is it that democracy has such poor value placed on it in the very institutions that are supposed to encourage vigorous and robust debate? Is the university as a learning organisation a trendy, superficial notion of inclusive workplace change, and only acceptable when the outcomes are controlled and controllable by some form of appointed leadership? The restructure embodies a broader struggle over what a university is, and what it aims to achieve – and within that broad struggle, how workers and managers are involved in change processes, or in change rhetoric. Our aspirations and our potential have been thwarted in the new restructure. Once again, sound principles of adult education have momentarily transformed an organisation's possibilities, but in the end have had to surrender to traditional vested interests. What a waste!

Coming to grips with ANTA's lifelong learning strategy

Jill Sanguinetti

I am trying to come to terms with ANTA's 'Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning'. I want to get a feel for its politics and strategic significance in terms of our common goal of building and strengthening Australian adult education. I've felt inspired, depressed, confused and irritated by the strategy. What follows are some questions and problems that it raises for me.

First, a source of irritation: 'lifelong learning' is used loosely throughout the document. It's constructed variously as 'commodity', 'product', a 'habit of learning throughout life', a 'core value' and a 'system'. Can it be all of these at once? Of course, there is no such 'thing' as 'lifelong learning': it's an idea with many facets. But the semantic sliding makes it difficult to grasp what is actually being proposed.

By contrast, the three European policy documents reproduced in ALA's booklet

Lifelong Learning: Making it Work construct the notion of lifelong learning in a more straightforward way: as a rubric of education policies and strategies that promote a rich, comprehensive education system with opportunities for people to learn throughout life and to adapt to rapidly changing global economic and social conditions.

In Moira Scollay's words, such strategies would be directed towards "a 'learning society' ... that deeply values skills, knowledge and lifelong learning". This is a marvellous objective, but to what extent do the proposals in the ANTA document for the social marketing of learning promise to fulfil it?

Here, 'lifelong learning' attempts to serve both right and left politics. A kind of missionary zeal exudes from the idea that lifelong learning will solve the individual, national, economic and social problems of our time. ANTA claims that "only lifelong learning can guarantee our standard of living" and that "only lifelong learning can guarantee that individual Australians will be prepared for change". Such claims are surely an exaggeration.

A more sober prediction of Australia's future standard of living might take into account political and economic factors. Australians who are employed, financially secure and optimistic about the future are the ones most likely to adapt to change and to take advantage of learning opportunities.

The social marketing strategy's primary aim is to encourage a passion and a desire for learning and skills acquisition amongst all sections of the community. But is it a lack of passion preventing people undertaking further community or vocational education? Would a marketing campaign with slick advertisements touch the hearts of those most in need of continuing educational opportunities?

"Australians who are employed, financially secure and optimistic are the ones most likely to take advantage of learning opportunities."

Implicitly, the proposed social marketing strategy blames people for not being passionate enough about learning. But with adequate resources and intelligent planning, Australia's educational infrastructure (school, TAFE, tertiary, community, private provider and industry-based) could be developed into the 'seamless' system of programs and opportunities which Moira Scollay calls for. Perhaps this should be the central focus of the lifelong learning strategy. Public promotion of learning and learning opportunities has a role, but should "effective marketing" be the main focus at this time?

Another concern about the strategy is that it assumes that the market is the only or the best possible mechanism for developing and distributing lifelong learning, understood in this case as a product or as a commodity. Learners and potential learners are 'customers', and the strategy includes such phrases as 'competitive position of learning', 'product differentiation', 'image branding and re-branding' and 'market discipline'. Beneath the discourse of the market is a discourse of commercial, rather than human, transaction. It constructs us as atomised individual customers rather than as members of communities. In this discourse, learning is a commercial enterprise rather than a project of an equitable, democratic public sector. The market discourse, when examined, is deeply at odds with the discourse of 'social capital', 'social cohesion' and 'prosperity for all'. Who might get left out, if lifelong learning is promoted and funded as a product on the open market?

The ANTA paper draws on an abundant and progressive literature about learning as necessarily complex and holistic; about the importance of flexibility, fun, informal learning and personal growth; and about the role of learning in building social capital and a fair, tolerant and open society. I would like to see more research and debate about strategies for developing our current system more in line with those ideas.

The lifelong learning movement presents a great opportunity for the field to advocate anew for a well-resourced, flexible, adult education sector that would include integrated pathways, articulations between the sectors and a wide range of affordable online, community, TAFE and industry-based learning programs. In working towards lifelong learning (understood as a policy rubric) we need to be wary of the market fundamentalism that underlies the current strategy.

We already have the components of a system capable of offering learning opportunities throughout life. What is needed is the political will and the resources to go further: to build (and promote) an integrated and innovative system that offers unending opportunities for learning and re-skilling accessible at every stage of life. In such a system, social marketing would be one of many strategies in the long-term project of building a commitment to learning throughout the community.

Librarians in the information revolution

Marie Murphy and Sharon Greenshields

Library and information professionals – librarians and library technicians – are in the business of connecting their clients with the information they need and want, whether it is for work, study, or leisure. To ensure that they continue to meet the needs of their clients, library and information professionals must update and develop their knowledge and skills in the face of workplace and technological change.

Just think about some of the changes that have happened in libraries over the last years. In the past, a visit to the library was to consult mainly print-based materials – look up an encyclopedia or atlas, check the catalogue to learn what materials the library held on a particular topic, and so on. Asking the librarian for help we were often amazed at the speed with which we were directed to the most appropriate sources of information available – books, newspaper articles, journals and occasionally perhaps a sound or video cassette.

Your local library is now a vastly different place. The technological developments that enable us to store and access information electronically have impacted on libraries and the way their staff work. In a library that offers access to online resources as well as physical resources, clients expect the library and information professionals to have the skills and knowledge to connect them with the information that best meets their needs in whatever form it is available.

In an environment where new technologies are changing the ways we access information, how do library and information professionals ensure they can provide the best service to clients? As in other professions, 21st-century library and information professionals need to commit to lifelong learning so they can adapt to the changes occurring in their profession, and continue to hone their skills and develop their knowledge to meet client expectations.

What encouragement do library and information professionals receive to remain lifelong learners? The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has always recognised that library and information professionals have a responsibility to continue to grow and develop in their profession. It has encouraged members to undertake a program of continuing professional development (CPD) to demonstrate their commitment to lifelong learning. At local levels in particular, ALIA divisions have been supported in offering developmental activities to meet the continuing education needs of members.

But members of ALIA have increasingly sought recognition for CPD from the Association. This, they say, will provide evidence for employers, beyond initial qualifications and work experience, that they are committed to lifelong learning and development.

In January 2000 ALIA introduced a new CPD subcategory of membership for librarians and library technicians. Members that choose to participate in the scheme need to provide records indicating a total of 80 weighted hours of CPD completed over a three-year reporting period. Activities that count include a range of generic and library- and information-specific activities including professional reading, formal education and training, conference presentations, publications and the like. To maintain the credibility of the scheme, ALIA has developed a system to effectively monitor how members observe the guidelines on CPD.

An advantage of offering a formal CPD scheme is that library and information professionals know they can gain a document to show employers evidence of their learning. They are therefore more likely to want to identify and plan their professional development. In other words they will want to make their CPD count. ALIA's Career Development Kit is a planning document that has been designed to do just this. Available to members of the Association it enables them to set career objectives and to systematically plan and review their professional development priorities to enhance career opportunities.

But just signing up for a CPD scheme or filling in a planning document does not make a lifelong learner. Rather, these are tools that the Association has developed to assist library and information professionals to commit to lifelong learning. Systems of accessing information may change, but these professionals will maintain the skills and knowledge to connect their clients to the information they need.

ACE is not education

Tony Brown

If ACE isn't training then it isn't education. This unfortunate conclusion arises from the Federal Government's stand on the GST and ACE. For the past 12 months it has asserted that education will be a GST-free supply. But if parts of ACE are to be taxed because they do not meet the conditions of the ATO Ruling, the Government must believe that the learning activity of 250 000 adults is not education.

From now on, adult and community education centre directors will have

to assess each of their courses to see if they meet the test of 'adding to the employment-related skills' of participants.

If a course is accredited, or is a literacy or numeracy course, or explicitly states that its intention is to impart employment-related skills, then it is GST-free. But if the tax office identifies it as a hobby or recreational course, or concerned with delivering education on civic, environmental, political, social or cultural content, then it will be taxed. From now on, courses on reconciliation, history, or philosophy, those specifically aimed at older people, and numerous others, will be assessed on whether they add to 'employability'.

Even if students use a course to acquire or improve their employment skills, unless the course sets that out as its intention it will be taxed. Neither the intention of the learner nor the actual benefits gained matter. The stated purpose of the course instead dictates its tax status.

Providers are therefore confronted by a number of dilemmas. Should they re-write their courses to fit the tax criteria? If they do will it alienate existing and potential students? Should a currently popular 'Knitting Techniques and Design' course be rewritten to become 'Garment Manufacture (Knitted Fabrics)' in order to match an industry Training Package? The women who enrol in the course will save the additional GST fee but is it the course they want to do? Will rewriting corrupt the educational integrity of the course? Should ACE centres strive to bring new courses within the ATO Ruling to avoid the tax?

Representatives from the largest ACE providers met on 30 June to consider these and other issues arising from the ATO Ruling. In their assessment, around a half of existing courses will be exempt. Between 20 and 40 per cent of courses will fall outside the ATO guidelines. Another 10–15 per cent will be borderline.

"It is a sad reflection on education when study for civic, environmental, cultural or social purposes is taxed."

One principal estimated that taking out GST-free courses and discounting concession fees, the likely GST income raised at her centre would be around $10 000 but that the compliance costs would equal around $50 000. For the sector as a whole, the rough early estimate is that the national GST income on ACE might be $1 million, and that the costs of collecting that amount will be far more.

NCVER will soon announce that around 580 000 adults are officially recorded as ACE participants, and another 700 000 are unofficially participating. At a time when many governments are extolling the virtues of lifelong learning and looking for ways to encourage adults to take up or continue their learning, the decisions around the GST are confusing to say the least. ANTA's important research on attitudes to education and learning is the first step in an expensive campaign aimed at marketing lifelong learning and skills acquisition. What sense does it make to tax learning activities?

The meeting in Canberra concluded that the impact of the GST would not be known until the beginning of 2001. In the meantime it will be important to track changes in participation, in enrolment patterns, and in courses on offer. There is already a trend identified by NCVER since 1996 for a shift in participation from 'recreational' courses to accredited programs. Will the GST accelerate this trend? Is it a trend with which Australian policy-makers and educators should feel comfortable?

In his message to ALA, opposition leader Kim Beazley states that the ATO Ruling is 'a padlock on the front door of lifelong learning', conjuring a new image of the tax on learning. ALA originally identified the tax as 'toll on the learning pathway'. Beazley's message is welcome but falls short of saying whether the ALP will remove the padlock.

It is a sad reflection on education priorities when study for a job is tax free but study for civic, environmental, cultural or social purposes is taxed.

Public or community education?

Rick Flowers

I think there is a need to re-invigorate struggles to build a strong public education system for adults. It would be a pity if parts of the adult learning sector did not align with these struggles and championed only community education. I counterpose community and public education for the purpose of my argument although the terms have diverse meanings and can intersect. Many people say they do not champion community education, but learning in the community.

Public education stands for concern with equality, access and an inclusive curriculum embracing all classes and cultures. Community education stands for locality, diverse interest groups, choice and flexibility. (I'm being a devil's advocate).

In late 19th century NSW Henry Parkes fought for and won more

public education. If it was apparent then that government provision would increase equality in formal education, today's arguments about creating greater equality in education are more complex. The relative contributions of community, private and public education are contested. Many community educators and workers see the role of government negatively. Many activists think education is best controlled by community organisations rather than government agencies. Some youth workers perceive schools as institutions that alienate and oppress young people. In this vein, the State is portrayed as being against the people's interests. There is a complex and dangerous collusion between 'progressive' activists and free market advocates who argue that public education is a sheltered workshop and more support should be given to private providers.

TAFE Outreach in NSW is one example of a public education provider for adults. It has a long and proud tradition of working with people and 'communities' who are poor, disadvantaged, 'at risk', and working class. As taxpayer support for public education and in particular for providers like TAFE Outreach declines, some percieve that community-based education providers can fill the growing gaps. But to what extent?

Who is championing public education? Who is championing community education? There are diverse interests at play. Many educators draw on the notion of 'community' when explaining why it is important to address inequalities, advocate for the interests of 'disadvantaged' people and work for community development. But as many or more draw on the notion of 'community' to advocate de-regulating the education market and providing more freedom of choice.

In my street in Sydney there are six families with children of school age going to six different schools; a mixture of public, private and systemic. I suggested to my neighbours it was a pity we weren't all attending and supporting the one school. The response was: choice and diversity enriches our community and what a great democratic tradition Australia has to enable this.

A belief in choice (but for whom?) is one value that drives and shapes community education. A belief in partnerships and cooperation is another. The current and prominent interest in concepts such as 'learning communities' and 'learning cities' arguably reflects this. What assumptions and ideologies underpin these beliefs and values? Is it simplistic to suggest that community education is being used to foster a community consciousness that disguises conflicts of interest and distracts people from considering the material causes of conflict, poverty and inequality? It probably is.

Think of the Federation of Independent, Community Controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Providers (FICCAITSE) who intentionally set up community based programs as an alternative to the public education system. FICCAITSE could hardly be accused of fostering a community consciousness that distracted people from engaging in struggles for native title and land rights.

Yet it is possible to identify competing traditions behind community versus public education. Broadly speaking there is a tradition of advocacy for special interest groups in community education versus a tradition of seeking to engage with and include diverse groups in an inclusive and equitable curriculum in public education. There is a challenge to build stronger and closer alliances between those who are working in public education and those in community education and who share a common desire to work more effectively with people and groups who are poor or marginalised.

'It's life Jim, but not as we know it'

Dorothy Lucardie

'It's life Jim, but not as we know it' – Spock to Captain Kirk

Just as industrialisation swept away the lifestyle and concepts of the agricultural society, technology is currently beckoning the advent of the knowledge economy. As our attention is caught by this current fascination a quiet revolution, indeed a powerful evolution, is taking place.

Current estimates indicate that developed nations will have from 40–50% of their population aged 50 and over by the years 2010 and 2020. In developing nations the percentages will be smaller but in absolute numbers China will pass Europe in 2015.

By 2020 there will be more people in the world aged 85 and above, than in any other 10 year age bracket. Recent research has indicated that those below the age of 85 will retain the physical and mental health of a 55 year old. In Wodonga where I live, the fastest growing regional city in Victoria, 30% of the population is forecast to be over 60 by 2005.

Forecasts on the 'aging' of the population have led to a scurry of activity associated with economics (how can we pay for this?), health (how can we care for these people?) and politics (who will they vote for?). What has not happened to date is a radical review and widespread discussion on the place

of education and learning in the 21st Century for the growing majority of the population.

We are the first generation of human beings to face the likely prospect of living routinely to one hundred years of age. For 85 of these years we will have a reasonable physical and mental health, with the option of a further 15 years if we have looked after ourselves. How does our current education system and learning opportunities fit into this societal landscape?

From 5 years of age or younger we enter 12 years of formal education preparing for the world of adulthood. The years 18–22 are most likely undertaken in low skilled employment or tertiary study preparing for work. For the next 33 years, if we are lucky, we are in paid employment. Our society and government currently sanctions learning for work through funding, GST exemptions and tax deductibility. Learning for other reasons and applications has been labeled 'hobby and recreation'. Upon reaching 55 society no longer views us as contributors to the economic arena and learning becomes 'user pays'.

How do we view the remaining 45 years of our life, in particular the 30 plus years of peak physical and mental health currently predicted for the majority of the Australian population in 2020? What preparation has been made for individual and collective quality of life in our early formal education?

What paths have been supported to increase skills and knowledge during our employment phase to assist a positive contribution to the community in later life? Adult learning has never been more important and we must as organizations, professionals and policy makers take action to redevelop both systems and opportunities.

Where will you be when the revolution happens?

Olympic dream; education nightmare

Peter Kell

Sports writer Jeff Wells has referred to Australia as the "biggest little sporting nation in the world". In the hysteria that is part of the 2000 Olympics the Australian love affair with sport has obscured other important issues. The jingoistic hype associated with Australia's hosting and participation in the Olympics has displaced crucial questions about Australia's future. An endless stream of media trivia about athlete's injuries and the predicted Gold medal "avalanches" have relegated issues like the shrinkage of funds to education and research to the margins of public debate.

The hype about sport has a hypnotic effect that justifies the price tag of $40m for an Olympic gold medal as a sign of national achievement when the spending on education in Australia is at the lower end of the international league table. Australia's investment in research and development is 1.68% of GDP well below Asian neighbours like Japan (2.83), Korea (2.79) and the US (2.62). Total expenditure in the past decade has dropped from 1.1 % of GDP to 0.8%. In reality Australia's spending in education wouldn't get it into the qualifying rounds of OECD performance.

Government largesse for sport has hit record breaking levels with the last government handout to rescue the debt ridden Games totalling $144m. This stands in stark contrast with the mood of rigid budget restraint applied to funding education by the NSW government. As the sports Czars go into the home straight and put the final touches to the Games venues, the NSW TAFE system is being subject to yet another restructuring which threatens to systematically dilute its effectiveness as the major public provider of adult training.

This sports madness has infected schools where principals who are aware of the powerful marketing potential of the images of sport are shifting resources out of areas like vocational education into glamour sports 'excellence' programs.

While the image makers urge us to share the Olympic dream there is an amnesia about the social and political sacrifices that are made in the race for Olympic glory

The Olympics with its fascist, euro-centric, racist, sexist and homophobic tradition is a strange organisation to select to showcase Australia's future. The Olympics have been accompanied by an anti-democratic political culture of secrecy and subservience to the corporate greed of a remote and unaccountable Olympic clique. The self interest exhibited by some members of the organising committees give the

Australian notion 'mateship' a whole new meaning.

The sporting contest has a media coverage which thrives on demonisation and racialisation. The media unnecessarily refers to sprinter Matt Shirvington as the 'best white sprinter in the world'! Why would the race for gold need to be reduced to an issue of colour ? Stories repackage racist stereotypes which present Greek-Italian/Australian Mark Phillippoussis as unreliable and disloyal and Cathy Freeman's business dealings as proof of racist myths about the business acumen of Aborigines. The Australian sporting press feels that the thrill contest allows them to resort to the 'race card' unrestrained.

These toxic effects of the sporting culture are running into top form in the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Games and challenge many of the social norms around the fair go about educational opportunity, democratic principles and racial equality.

Putting the political back into community education

Michael Law

In a rash moment, I agreed to run a workshop on this topic during Adult Learners' Week. As it draws closer, I struggle to reconcile a philosophical outlook honed in the 1960s and 1970s with the realities of New Zealand community education today. This contribution, therefore, can be seen as 'thoughts in progress;' this week I am trying to clarify in my own thinking why it is community education is so apolitical. I'd certainly appreciate any insights Australian or New Zealand colleagues can offer.

The first and very positive observation is that there is heaps of political education taking place at the community level in both Australia and New Zealand. In Australia it seems, on the basis of attending 'Popular Education' conferences at UTS, that such education embraces quite a broad agenda and groups.

In New Zealand, however, the nature and scope of grass/flaxroots political education is more narrow. The major site, which is largely invisible to pakeha (European) New Zealanders, is within Maoridom. There, structural analysis and issues of sovereignty are systematically examined and debated by adults in a host of settings from language nests through to popular schools rediscovering traditional Maori weaponry. Elsewhere there are pockets of political education rooted in the community: green, free trade, human rights, and other traditional issues. But by and large such efforts are localised and relatively small.

Mainstream community education, from that offered by community houses through high school night classes through to what's left of university extension, has long been sanitised. The origins of this extend well beyond the arrival of neo-liberal (New Right) thinking and practices. One of the ironies of the establishment of the welfare state era is that while it helped bring adult education in from the cold, it also cultivated a notion or set a tone that implied that while the struggle for social justice was not over, it now was more institutionalised. Labour parties and trade unions, along with recognised representative groups (eg The Maori Council) and churches would look after all that through structured systems of political consultation around the social wage and through industrial relations mechanisms that dealt with the earned wage. In this climate, the role of community education was often seen as therapeutic: occupying adults in their spare time, or helping them adapt to a new environment or some social change, or helping them cope with some personal trauma.

"The challenge now is to try and climb out of this hole."

What I think we often lose sight of, is that underpinning this tone, as I call it, was the notion cultivated in the McCarthy era and sustained throughout the Cold War that oppositional politics was 'communistic' or even 'treason.' And often, certainly in New Zealand's case, this was underscored by political bullying.

Neo-liberalism has further complicated this. The fashionable cult of Hayekian individual responsibility claptrap certainly sets a new tone while at the structural level the market model has radically transformed the ways in which organisations and agencies view themselves and people. Once we start thinking about community education agencies as 'service providers' in competition with each other; once we start thinking of learners as 'customers' or 'clients' we are a long way down a very slippery road.

The challenge now is to try and climb out of this hole. What I hope to do in my workshop is latch on to some of the more positive ideas that are coming out of an emerging debate in New Zealand about the purposes of post-secondary education. The Minister of Tertiary Education, Steve Maharey, is into so-called 'Third Way' thinking, although with a stronger social tinge than Tony Blair. Maharey is actually talking about education's responsibility

to cultivate democracy and about the 'knowledge society' rather than the 'knowledge economy.' Elsewhere, our Prime Minister, Helen Clark, is emphasising 'closing the gaps,' especially between Maori and Pacific Islanders on one hand and the rest of us on the other.

There is no space here to debate the strengths and weaknesses of these ideas. For the moment what is important, I believe, is working with the concepts. It seems to me that community educators in New Zealand are uniquely placed to work the new debates. To promote educational activities that encourage adults to explore what it means to be democratic; what are the characteristics of a 'knowledge society;' what it requires structurally to 'close gaps.'

Being critical: inside and/or alongside VET

Mike Brown

I work in the field of vocational education and training or VET. VET looks at work and learning. Curriculum design within VET involves analysing work. The strengths and weaknesses of VET are part of a discussion questioning the contradictions of VET as empowerment and/or entrapment.

Recently I have begun to argue that a new conceptualisation with a broader scope than contemporary VET is required. Viewing the democratic potential, I suggest the more general and inclusive notion of 'work-related learning'.

I am reluctant to say that VET involves analysing work, because it does so in a very specific and selective way. The approach is extremely selective in what it examines and with what it finds. It ignores a whole range of important issues amongst which are the dynamics of work and workplaces that go beyond productive skills and performativity. It needs to include the dynamics of work associated with ethnicity, class, gender, age, able-bodiedness and location.

Throughout my working life, in factories as a metal worker, then in a college as a TAFE teacher and now as a University lecturer, I have been interested in work more broadly, including such things as pay, working conditions and work organisation. I am aware of many debates about work but yet notice that working people are so often excluded. It is as if it is said, no, this is not for you, it is about you!

It is probably more accurate to say that VET analyses specific jobs and breaks these down into the main components according to VET convention. The breaking down of the job takes the form of identifying competencies. These become the basis for teaching, training and assessing.

For a number of years I have engaged with questions about curriculum and in particular, 'what can, and should, we teach to whom, when, where, and how?' What does this mean for VET curriculum development and what does it mean for me working 'inside and/or alongside VET'?

VET is based on three principles: relevance, responsiveness and uniqueness. VET courses are relevant in that they are based on the current requirements identified and agreed to by employers. Employers as the purchasers of labour in the exchange transaction made in the labour market are presented as the major stakeholders in VET. VET courses set out with the primary aim of developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes that employers want and are therefore prepared to purchase and reward through wages. VET programs then, are about imparting 'market driven knowledge' or 'valuable knowledge'.

VET is responsive in that it addresses the skills and knowledge demands of the employers (and therefore of the market) and produces graduates to fit the existing job. The relevance and responsiveness of VET courses gives them utility and usefulness. The third principle is that VET is unique. This has become more problematic since these principles were first articulated. No other sector of education systematically hands over such important determinations about knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy to employers and corporate interests.

On the one hand, the strengths of VET are that it is a form of empowerment for the participant learners in that they engage with courses that have currency in the labour market. Course participants will achieve competencies with assured utility and value. Achieving these competencies provides working people with potential for employment opportunities, for access to higher wages, more money. So what can be wrong with that? It constitutes a form of empowerment limited within existing relations of work

The turning over of the selection and determination of knowledge to employers, managerial prerogative and the market also constitutes a major weakness. The major objection is that it subordinates the interests of the worker/learners to the interests of employers. This can be considered contrary to the longer term and broader interests of many of the learners. In this light VET can become a form of entrapment rather than empowerment. The strengths and power of VET can evaporate and simultaneously become weaknesses. This allows a critique that suggests that VET programs are narrowly focused, instrumental, technicist, corporate,

undemocratic and hegemonic. So what happens when working people want a real education and not one that keeps them dumb? Who do they turn to, educators? . . . or themselves?

In contrast then, it is hoped that a more general and inclusive notion of 'work-related learning' could spark the process where working people can engage with the issues, themes and debates and learn about work, workplace dynamics, political economy, and how these impact upon society. It might be possible for work-related learning to become a space to analyse work and consider the role and function of work in our lives and our society. A space to develop visions of alternative arrangements and possibilities and a space to work out how the best of these visions can become reality. How might this occur? Who would be involved?

What are your thoughts?

The business of education

Garry John Traynor

What is this the Business of Education? And, should education be a business? Just unpack some of the language that follows in an Internet marketing spin that came my way recently.

"As the digital economy evolves and technology redefines the economic playing field, companies' most important and strategic investments no longer take the form of fixed assets. Instead, human capital has become the foundation of the New Economy. This trend is driving the need for more effective education at all levels, including a dramatic increase in the need for continued re-training at the corporate level"

Is this how Life Long Learning will be incorporated into the new speak of 2001? None of the above statement seems to be embedded with the celebration of what learning is all about. Is this the kind of education business we as ACE providers want to be in? Is our charter to help supply fully franked human capital to the corporate world?

When I came to my current position at Sydney Community College, one of the things that excited and drove me, was that of the fantastically empowering and liberating aspect of education. All education has the potential of this little surprise. We as educators often use the metaphorical terms for it such as 'keys' 'doors' and 'to unlock'. Each of these terms is used within a deeper context of liberation. We are all prisoners of our own limited experience and learning opens doors we did not know existed. Yet the statement above says nothing to me of liberation. In fact it implies the opposite. That of a store-hold of resources that can be moved about, added to, taken from, bought, sold or discarded. The statement also is silent in implication about the fundamental worth of education. Education is a good in itself as it contributes to the fabric of society making its attainment a worthwhile life long pursuit. It should not be pursued for narrow corporate utility alone.

"We are all prisoners of our own limited experience and learning opens doors we did not know existed. "

Recently, Vice Chancellor of the University of Canberra, Professor Don Aitkin asserted that the business of education was to invest in our nation's people and that if institutions such as universities were to act as businesses, then their balance sheets must be read quite unlike those of the corporate world. I am not at all questioning Professor Aitkin's argument. Indeed, I support it, but there is a danger in utilising the discourse of the corporate world. Arguments couched with such language inevitably add to the importance of that discourse. Fiscal measures become appropriate in settings that were previously inappropriate. Should education be viewed with the same gaze as any other business?. Education is (to employ a term from economics) a 'public good', like roads, hospitals & defence. If the market is left to its own devices, we would have few, if any, public goods. Economists have developed 'cost -benefit' analysis to deal with situations where applying the balance sheet approach is wrong headed as is the case with public goods & services such as education.

Of course the management of an educational organisation should be in line with accepted principles of good governance. We are by now all aware of the value of Mission Statements, Strategic Plans, Business Plans, Management Plans and Budgets. But these are devices used only to support the real activity of the organisation. The difficulty to be dealt with, is in the tension created by the appropriation of the management device into the discourse of the educational activity. Example; implicit in the term Business Plan is the idea of profit. It is particularly difficult to explain a business plan that does not have a black bottom line. It becomes more difficult when the outcome of the business activity is not to be measured in dollars at all, but rather in social well being. Much simpler to ask how much the program cost against how much it made.

In NSW, the trend towards the measure of success of an ACE organisation is by way of factors such as turn over, size

and bottom line (preferably a black one). The tighter an organisation is managed the better the overall outcome. Clearly, the tension here will be in the delivery equity or in socially beneficial programs. To deliver such activities will always be costly and the long-term benefits will not be readily measured. Outcomes such as lower hospitalisation rates, lower crime rates, healthier neighbourhoods, community well being are not easily traceable to an educational activity. Yet most policy makers understand that good social policy is enhanced by educational programs.

Once wholly the language of Adult Education, Life Long Learning as a term is being appropriated by many differing sectors. K to 12, TAFE and Universities and of course the corporate sector. The challenge for us as educators is to ensure that the discourse, in which this terms is used, does not sully the term itself. Life Long Learning is about social well being and not corporate bottom line. This statement should also remain true for education itself. Education is not business.

TECHNOLOGIES FOR LEARNING

Demolishing the silos

Geoff Heriot

There are many learning needs and many education providers throughout Australia striving to come to terms with the rapidity of change and the force of competition for scarce resources.

Social and political discourse is peppered with related concerns about globalisation, regional disadvantage, citizenship and political alienation, public versus private interest, the consequences of workforce restructuring, an ageing population and manifestations of community 'change fatigue'.

More than ever, in this fluid and complex environment, the well-being of individuals and the community depends on their confidence and their competence: their confidence of identity, access to opportunity, and 'voice' in community affairs; and their competence to deal with work, civic obligations and relationships.

The underlying message from people in diverse circumstances throughout metropolitan and regional Australia is simple and stark: don't exclude us and don't leave us behind. It is the same message we've heard for a decade or more via social commentators, market research reports, attitudinal studies, the emotive talk-back agendas of commercial radio 'shock-jocks', and election outcomes.

Yet I find, with notable exceptions, much policy development in Australia still tends to occur in intellectual or political silos. It is a matter of direct relevance to my role with the ABC in developing a new generation of lifelong learning services.

"The message from people throughout Australia is simple and stark: don't exclude us, and don't leave us behind. "

Emerging digital media platforms – including multi-channel television services, datacasting, narrowband and broadband internet – offer tantalising opportunities for commerce, entertainment and communities of interest for those Australians wishing to connect with one another and the world around them. They will be more user-friendly and navigable than existing computer-based services.

Significantly – though not inevitably – the new media may be used to engage a critical mass of Australian society in the adventure of lifelong discovery, creative recreation and re-skilling.
People already access and create knowledge for themselves by using diverse sources that extend beyond formal institutions to the media, libraries, friendship and community groups.

The challenge will be to communicate in meaningful ways that offer relevant forms of knowledge. These may be simulations, self-help and advisory resources, 'starter-kit' courses and virtual communities of interest as much as they may be more highly structured learning programs.

Indeed, education and training providers need to re-think the way they structure and bundle learning resources, whether for accredited training or not, as much as media organisations need to come to terms with the interactive relationships they must develop with audiences.

Next year, the ABC plans to launch a lifelong learning service – ABC Knowledge – which will be broadcast as part of a new digital television channel, called ABC Plus (ABC+). It will address the needs of adult audiences and young people making the transition from school to the adult environment.

In its early form, ABC Knowledge will bring together the broad reach of television and the individual convenience of the internet, providing learning pathways. Over time, as digital services develop, audiences will be offered interactive functions through their television receivers as well as their PCs.

ABC Knowledge will grow to be a safe space, in which people may confidently explore, play and use tool-boxes for the mind. It may help to break down some of the fears and some of the barriers perceived by major segments of the Australian community to their participation in learning. But it will not do so alone.

In this new and uncertain world, a major priority for the ABC is to work with education providers, community organisations, public agencies and industry groups to link the potential of national public broadcasting with the expertise and local infrastructure of Australia's learning communities.

It is no time for a silo mentality.

Hidden assets in community radio

Nicky Page

Continuing the metaphoric feast of the discussion around Social Capital I would like to promote the idea of joint ventures and investment in the community media sector.

The ACE sector has long had incidental relationships with community media. People use local radio to promote their courses on air. Others – maybe the same people – are participants, presenting a jazz show or doing their own interviews. But the full potential is often not realised.

Arguably, the more than 300 community radio stations around the country, and the TV stations in every capital city, are the most active sites of adult learning in the country. At the very least, volunteers acquire management, technical and presentation skillls. The learning process can be rough justice at times, but it is happening.

Programming on community media is often educational too – not always in the Radio National style, but, for example, you'll hear interviews with the local people, different types of music from that on any other station, and networked documentaries.

Where are the investment possibilities then? The opportunities to consolidate social capital, earn an extra return on the resources of people, equipment, networks and knowledge? A good way to answer this is through the story of how one station – 5UV Radio Adelaide – has used these resources to maintain its strength while its traditional funding from the University of Adelaide has been steadily wound back. The station has had to find income to pay and train station workers and maintain running expenses in a rapidly changing technological environment. High quality adult education, on and off air, has played a critical role.

Since the 70s, the station has presented 'educational' radio. Fully paid staff once did the job, with little thought about how the bills were paid. Now it's done by a small core staff, working with well-trained volunteers. Some of these go on to paid work in this skilled and resourced station. Client groups will invest in the production of radio programs as a way of promoting their message. The station attracts a very diverse audience, built around the range of its own on-air programming and membership of the community radio network.

The investment in training has been small enough. A half-time training coordinator and a budget for hourly paid trainers. Over time, the dividends show. Basic training for broadcasters is mandatory, and the reputation of the 12-week course is such that the fees charged cover most of the running costs. 5UV invests in volunteers who earn some income and develop their skills as trainers. The station has now achieved RTO status and attracts outside clients, mostly school groups, ready to pay for the accredited training. Overseas students are also keen to acquire this kind of training and on-air experience.

Just as importantly, the skills base of the station is being built. Project funding can be confidently sought and won, knowing that it can produce interesting and entertaining programs. These are now produced digitally, and often distributed on CD to the statewide network of stations or on the national Community Radio Satellite. Productions in the last couple of years have covered topics such as basic legal information, parenting, arts and disability and youth suicide. 5UV and other stations around the country regularly record and network material from music festivals such as Womad and the Byron Bay Blues festival. Professional bodies, community and advocacy groups have all been prepared to pay, or to make joint applications for public funds at realistic levels covering salaries and equipment.

A lot of satisfied customers, a lot of value adding to community cultural and educational events and resources. And probably, better radio. 5UV Radio Adelaide is in some ways unique, but no more so than any of those other 300 stations. Why not explore the possibilities? Your nearest station will be listed on the website for the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia at ‹http://www.cbaa.org.au›.

Radio through the internet for ALW

Tony Ryan

Interested in lifelong learning? Try some adult education for yourself in early September, by learning to access a radio program through the internet, and joining in the discussion. Consider the educational uses of the medium of radio (an old technology?) in conjunction with the internet.

Lifelong Learning is the major focus for the Adult Learners Week conference in Adelaide. This conference will build on national and international initiatives to understand and promote acceptance of the importance of lifelong learning.

A special one hour live to air radio program will be broadcast from Adelaide on Friday 8 September as part of this conference. The broadcast for Adelaide listeners will be heard through 5UV Radio Adelaide (531 on the AM band) Yet no matter where you are in Australia, or indeed the world, you can join in.

5UV broadcasts live on the internet, so you can listen and participate (see below for how). Worldwide there are hundreds of radio stations with continuous internet access. This means that from my office or home in Adelaide, I can listen to radio programs from Europe, Asia or the Americas. Radio 5UV receives an increasing flow of emails from our listeners from all quarters of the globe.

This is fine for general programming. But does radio still have a role to play in education? The first educational radio programs in Australia were trialled in the late 1920s.

The fledgling Australian Broadcasting Commission commenced regular educational programming in 1933. For the next 50 years the prevailing paradigm was that an ABC education program broadcast on radio (and later on TV) was specifically directed at young people in schools. These programs complemented a curriculum and provided teachers with a classroom resource, supported by an extensive range of publications for students and teachers

A different form of educational broadcasting has been undertaken by 5UV since its inception in 1972: not for schools, but for listeners who – whether they knew the term or not – were lifelong learners. The format of these programs has changed, from those first very formal and earnest series on 5UV, such as Effective Management, or Advanced German. The printing and mailing of comprehensive background notes, and the enrolment requirements, were all labour intensive and costly.

Several current 5UV series are educational in the very best sense of the word. The Law Spot (20 programs) The Federation Files (50 programs) and the as yet unnamed 10-part Gambling series are good practice examples of educational programming. A special one hour program on gambling will be widely publicised in Europe and North America through specialist email networks, to bring this topic to the attention of listeners Australia-wide and worldwide. 5UV is very proud of this initiative.

With most Australians still committed to the medium of radio, the future for radio is possibly very secure, in spite of the new technologies. What are its advantages?

· Radio is a daily companion – we listen at home, in the car, in the garden shed on a Saturday afternoon, or whilst exercising.

· Radio can be complemented by the provision of program details on the internet, without the cost of printing and postage. As an example, see 5UV's website for details of the fifty radio programs in the series The Federation Files.

· The local – and usually ephemeral – nature of radio is being overcome. Internet radio services such as audio on demand are becoming more common for key programs. Whether or not for a fee, selected programs can be downloaded weeks or months after broadcast. The educational applications are only just beginning to be identified.

It is becoming accepted that learning occurs throughout life. ABC Education programming is no longer just for schools. We can re-examine radio as an educational medium – for all ages – in this age of cyber communications. It means that educational programming – whether about education, or with content structured and presented with the needs of adult learners in mind – has a new dimension.

I hope that you will take the opportunity to extend your own thinking about the medium of radio – by using the internet to join in 5UVs special radio program about adult learning, and email this commentary to your friends worldwide.

LEARNING TOWNS & CITIES

The challenge of change: The lifeline of learning

Philip Candy

As we enter the new millennium, the pace of change seems to be forever increasing. Whether socially, culturally, technologically, environmentally or in other ways, our lives are constantly changing and there seems to be more and more to learn. This challenge applies in virtually every aspect of our lives: in the home, at work, in the community, even in leisure pursuits. The amount of new information, the complexity of systems, and the range of new technologies all require continuous updating and new learning. And no one is exempt from these pressures: From the oldest to the youngest, from the city to the bush, in every walk of life, people have to become lifelong learners simply to survive, much less to advance.

"People are coming to realise that cities are places which revolve around learning. "

Throughout the world, but particularly in OECD countries like Australia, people are coming to realise that cities are more than simply places where large numbers of people live. They are also places where people work, study, relax and interact with others: in short, places which revolve around learning. As a result, many cities in Europe, Scandinavia, Britain and North America have designated themselves as Learning Cities or Learning Communities. Although no two learning cities are identical, in each case the basic approach to their development and evolution has been the same; namely, to use learning explicitly as a key source of economic regeneration, of democratic participation and of social inclusiveness.

With the increasing impact of globalisation, Australia can't afford to ignore such a significant international movement, and it seems inevitable that if we want to be a prosperous, competitive, economically viable and socially inclusive society, we need to pay more attention to providing greater opportunities for everyone to learn, irrespective of who they are, where they live, what they do, or their previous educational attainments.

In July 1998, after attending the First European Conference on Learning Cities held in Southampton, Phil Candy from the University of Ballarat gave a public presentation in the Ballarat Town Hall. The presentation, was jointly sponsored by Business Ballarat and the Ballarat Education Network, and subsequently led to the establishment of the 'Learning City Taskforce,' a loose and fairly representative consortium of about twelve people with an inner core of five. Throughout the past year and a half, every attempt has been made to include four distinct groups of stakeholders in the discussions and negotiations about becoming a learning city. These are:

1. the community generally, including churches, service clubs, social action groups and those associated especially with youth and senior citizens;
2. the education and training providers – public and private;
3. the business community, including manufacturing, services and retail; and
4. local government (principally through economic development, but including social planning).

The Taskforce has sponsored a number of events, including a visit by the Mayor of Wodonga (Councillor Graham Crapp) which has formally declared itself to be a learning city; public lectures and presentations in Ballarat by noted futurist (the late) Robert Theobald; and an extended visit (including presentations, seminars and meetings) by staff from the Learning and Business Link Company from Kent ‹http://www.lbl.co.uk›. The concept of Ballarat as a Learning City has been repeatedly mentioned in articles and editorials in the local newspaper – *The Courier* – and there is now reasonably widespread interest in and support for the idea. Not unexpectedly, this support comes from a diverse range of perspectives including business development and job creation, civic participation and social inclusion, and personal empowerment and enhanced employability. Certainly the concept of the Learning City is broad and flexible enough to encompass all these dimensions, and Ballarat is now moving towards becoming a Learning City as a means of focusing interest, energy and resources on creating and promoting these opportunities.

Learning communities

Mark Latham

One of the crucial questions in education policy is: how can we extend the reach of learning beyond the classroom and into every life, in every part of society? The answer lies in learning communities.

Learning is a complex process that cannot be understood simply in terms of formal education and training. Most people go about their daily lives committed to self-improvement and informal ways of learning. They develop new insights and skills from practical experiences and the challenge of changed circumstances.

Indeed, one of society's trends is towards informal modes of learning. Under the time pressures of modern work and home life, people are looking for more flexible and casual ways of improving their skills. They want education to fit into their lifestyle and schedule, not the other way round. This reflects the new politics of personal sovereignty. A growing number of self-reliant citizens are looking beyond the formal institutions of government to satisfy their interests.

This trend can be seen in the findings of ANTA's lifelong learning project, based on a nation-wide survey of attitudes to adult education. It has identified an enormous gap between public preferences and public policy. While governments talk up the importance of qualifications and the formal institutions of education, the public is reluctant to go down this path. In the words of the project:

"People have told us how much they like on-the-job and informal learning experiences, learning from mentors and learning through practical experience, but they feel they've had enough of classrooms and exams to last a lifetime. The problem comes when you try and translate their passion for learning into a similar enthusiasm for the products and experiences of formal education and training".

Time has become the chief enemy of lifelong learning. For most Australians, educational opportunities fade away as they move further into the adult years. Learning loses out to the demands of work, family and social life. Education starts to look less relevant and more threatening. This is a structural problem for the effectiveness of the education system. It is not meeting the public's demand for flexibility and easy access.

Australians are in search of educational opportunities of a more casual kind. They want the potential for education and self-improvement to be realised in everyday situations: in the home, in the workplace, in pubs and clubs, in the places where people gather for a common purpose. They want civil society to be the natural habitat for lifelong learning. This reflects a key part of the virtuous circle: the close connection between human capital and social capital.

Self-improvement comes not just from mastering new concepts and information; it arises from the social experience of education. Adult learning centres, public libraries and Third Age universities are places where people can learn and practice the habits of social capital. They can learn from each other, as well as from the curriculum.

"A number of public issues won't be resolved without a more intense level of dialogue and information sharing. "

Governments should seek to foster lifelong learning by activating the potential of learning partnerships in civil society. Fortunately, policy makers do not need to reinvent the wheel. Civil society is based on networking principles. It functions as a diffuse web of inter-connected associations and informal relationships.

Governments need to support these relationships through partnership funding. The aim should be to establish a dense network of learning opportunities throughout civil society.

To give one example of this policy in practice: governments should offer funding to licensed clubs for the on-site provision of short courses and other forms of flexible learning. The clubs would need to provide matching funds, with further contributions drawn from participating students. This approach reflects a genuine partnership, with shared interests and funding among the stakeholders.

The public sector needs to be more pro-active in collaborative learning. There is a high level of interest and enthusiasm for this approach among community groups. This is one of the characteristics of a learning society: it changes the traditional role of organisations, introducing them to the benefits of education. The NSW Clubs Association, for instance, recently recognised the potential use of club facilities for lifelong learning. It hopes to establish a number of internet cafes and learning programs for people in active retirement. Government support would realise this potential throughout the clubs system.

Such a policy has the potential to create opportunities in non-traditional places of learning, such as shopping centres, sporting clubs and other community associations. Each of the learning partners would benefit. Host

organisations would be able to offer new and attractive services for their members and customers. For the general public, many of the institutional barriers to lifelong learning would be broken down.

People have a stronger motivation to learn in places where they feel at ease. In such environments, they can turn positive attitudes to learning into practical results. In many cases, it helps them to build the confidence to pursue further studies in vocational and higher education.

Partnership funding aims to turn everyday situations into everyday opportunities for learning. However, a number of related reforms are also necessary. I have space enough to outline just two:

1. Many learning opportunities can be delivered online through interactive education packages. The Federal Government has a role to play in sponsoring the development of sophisticated software, plus a network of electronic learning facilities. The resources of municipal libraries, post offices, schools and other public buildings should be used to create a national grid of computer and Internet access points. The growth of digital television also needs to be fostered as a way of carrying these learning opportunities into Australian homes.
2. The Federal Government should draw on the Scandinavian experience to commission the adult education sector to establish a national program of Learning Circles. These involve meetings of small groups of people, often in homes and community centres, to discuss a range of civic issues such as local governance, crime prevention and environmental management. They are self-managed groups, where people can join and participate on their own terms and at their own level. They reflect a distinctive style of learning: through shared inquiry and dialogue, without regular teachers or fixed subjects.

Such programs should be a prominent part of lifelong learning in Australia. As a nation, our commitment to civic education has been weak. A number of public issues – such as Aboriginal reconciliation, multiculturalism and the Republic – will not be resolved without a more intense level of public dialogue and information sharing.

Governments must increase their emphasis on the development of learning communities, rather than simply focusing on individuals and formal qualifications. This means using civil society as the primary agent of reform, embedding the habits of learning in the everyday habits of life. This is not just a matter of good policy; it makes for good politics.
The ANTA research helps to unravel one of the great paradoxes of Australian electoral behaviour. Even though education is a major issue for most Australians, no political party has been able to turn it into a major vote-switcher. In an act of folly, state educationalists have promoted the wrong kind of learning institutions. They have backed formal structures and qualifications, even though the public has a preference for flexibility and informality. It is only a matter of time before the major parties and their pollsters twig to this reality. Ultimately, the education revolution will not only transform the nature of learning policies; it will change the nature of Australian politics.

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