THE PROGRESS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

OF LIFE-LONG LEARNING

This paper will address:

a) The ways in which technological developments, particularly the Internet, have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning since 1997;

b) Technological barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult and community education, and the ways and means by which these might be overcome;

c) The extent to which the training, professional development and role of adult educators has kept pace with or been influenced by technological and on-line developments since 1997; and

d) Re-training strategies as an element in life-long learning, especially for those living in rural and regional areas.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

How do we make a difference in the world of education? How does effective change take place? How does it re-direct the field or add significant contribution? How is the end result more than just many mastery words of conventions? It is too easy to let it lay dormant, for our teaching and writing and hard work to become a fist-full of words on paper in a library or on the gatekeepers desk? Where is the practice of living out this masterpiece in the community, with life-long learning for all ages, in the rural and regional areas of Australia?

This paper addresses the need of life-long learning through four sections. Firstly, the paper will speak of three main technological developments that have affected the nature and delivery of life-long learning. Education must embrace community, which should include face to face contact with any e-learning or Internet based programs. All three domains of learning must be present in the learning environment, these include affective, cognitive, and behavioral. I will also explore what effective teaching should look like.

Secondly, the paper will address the barriers to participation in life-long learning and ways to overcome them. The barriers which I have raised are common purpose, sense of belonging, and a fall in literacy.

Thirdly, the paper will look at the training, professional development and the role of the adult educator that has been influenced by technology. I have raised three important areas that relate to each other: reading, community, and listening.

Lastly, the paper will explore re-training strategies for life-long learning in the areas of literacy, mentoring, self-directed learning, and dialogue.

SENATE INQUIRY

Introduction

> 'Lifelong learning offers the opportunity for people to bring their knowledge up to date. It
> enables them to enjoy activities which they may have either long since laid aside or always
> wanted to do but were previously unable to. It allows them to try their hands at activities
> and pursuits that they had previously imagined were outside their available time or
> competence. It enables them to work consciously at extending their intellectual, vocational
> and personal horizons by seeking to understand and grasp some of the more significant
> advance of recent times, that have done so much to affect and transform their worlds.'
> (Chapman et al., 2003, ix-x)

If we want life-long learning to continue to make an impression on communities by extending their intellectual, vocational, and personal horizons, then we must address the important issues that I have raised in this paper. These include embracing more community based education programs, helping learners to have a sense of belonging and to feel valued, having common purpose, ensuring learners continue to have skills in reading, listening, literacy, dialogue, and providing effective teaching.

I am an adult educator, a pastoral carer, and an author. I am currently a casual lecturer at Morling College in pastoral care, a community educator developing curriculum and teaching seminars as part of my published book, a School Chaplain at Northcross Christian School, a Police Chaplain at Burwood, and I am also a doctoral candidate at UTS. I am also a member of Adult Learning Australia.

My doctoral thesis at UTS will be investigating, interviewing, participating, and observing life-long learning in community education in Australia. My thesis topic is – *Reflections on feeling valued in the learning environment.* I will compare e-learning to face to face contact in community education. I will be transforming the lived experiences of the learner's life into a textual expression that is reflective on the notion that feeling valued contributes to adult

learning and development. In my research, it will be important to identify the motivation of why people learn and how people perceive, experience, receive, and feel e-learning and traditional face to face contact as educational practices. When an educator understands the learner's world, develops strategies for them, and affirms and validates them as a learner, then meaningful learning will take place. My research will demonstrate whether feeling valued has an impact on student's learning; which technique of learning will help students to feel valued; ways in which adult learning and development can be improved; and the value of community. The research will be beneficial for community learning centres, educational institutions, workplace learning, and education in specific professions who use face to face and/or e-learning techniques.

a) Technological Developments (Internet and e-learning)

have affected nature and delivery of life-long learning

As technology changes, the technology of learning will change, and hence the role of the adult educator will also have significant changes. Currently there is an uncertainty concerning how technology will be taught and implemented. Some life-long learning organisations, such as *education.au limited*, see e-learning as very much the major learning of the future, whilst other organisations, like *Flexible Learning Australia*, sees learning to be never separated from classroom contact. This difference can certainly be attributed to their clientele and the communities with which they work. Investigation into this area is important, as well as, understanding how teachers see their role in the learning environment in today's world. Not only do teachers and organisations need to be understood and heard, but also the learners for the future. Each carry different expectations, purposes, and values.

The focus of my research is to look at community education as a learning environment. Consideration of these issues above will be explored, along with whether feeling valued through e-learning and/or face to face contact will be explored. These will be identified through the interpretive perspective with qualitative methodology. Drawing from relevant research literatures will provide a number of key constructs in the area of research. My research is important because it will determine whether feeling valued has an impact on students learning, which technique of learning will help students to feel valued, ways in which adult learning and development can be improved, and the value of community.

I believe that e-learning environments need to embrace a similar outlook of community education, as they cannot exist isolated from community. Tennant (1997) states that learning takes place in the social context. Any e-learning program that does not embrace a social

community, will likely mean that true learning will not take place. If we view that learning takes place through three different domains: behavioural, cognitive, and affective, then we can understand that all three need to be included in a learning program, no matter how technologically advanced it is. (The following diagram shows the three domains working in the learning context and it demonstrates where my research will sit, ie. mainly in the affective domain (A).)

A: affective; B: behavioural; C: cognitive domains
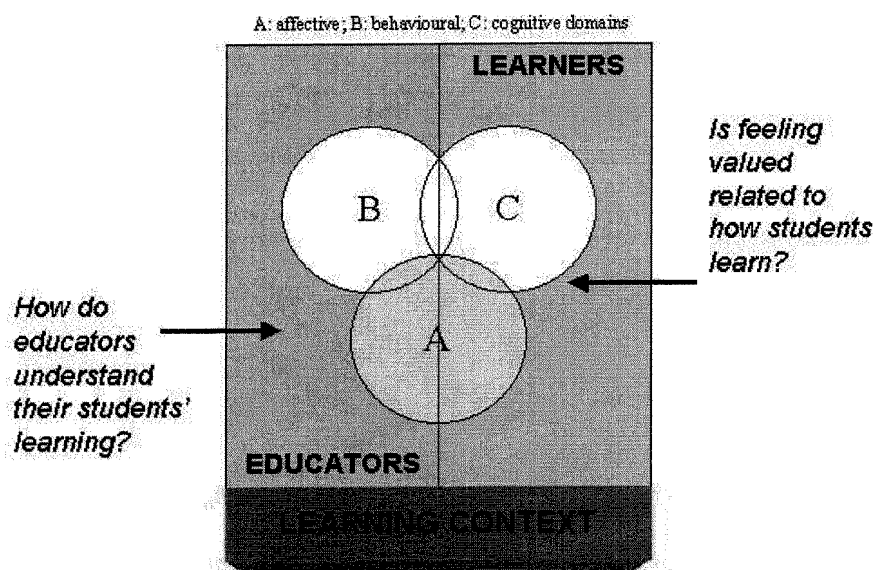
The affective domain is often misunderstood or overlooked in adult education. (Rompelman, 2002) Within the learning context, educators and learners sit side by side. The educators bring a wealth of knowledge, theory, and direction to help the learners to learn. Most educators will put time and effort into the behavioural and cognitive areas. This means they will bring focus in class to the curriculum and the delivery. Whilst these are imperative, they may miss one important aspect that is needed for students to feel valued, encouraged, and motivated in their learning experiences. This is known as the affective domain.

In this environment what does a 'real teacher' look like? They are committed to the task and to their students. They think and act strategically. They allow movement and participation in

community. They are aware of their technique and powerfully demonstrate it to their students through strategy and visionary thinking. They are true to their values as adult educators and facilitators of learning. (Foley, 2000) Do these things provide a framework for teaching successfully and do they relate to learning in technological developments?

Foley (2000) states there are no formulas. What other adult educators may see as a failure could be someone else's success. Even effective teachers and practitioners of the field of education could disagree on learning outcomes, roles teachers should play, social dynamics in the classroom or on the Internet, and technological advancements. However, there have been some areas within psychology that have proven effective learning. This usually occurs when educators have understood learning from the learners' point of view. Thus, if we looked at the role the Internet has already occurred in the life of the learner, then we would have more of an understanding of how much learning has been affected by technological development. If adult educators learn more about the learners' world and what is most effective for them, then this will in turn help to validate and affirm students and understand what the best way forward is in regards to technology.

In summary, technological developments will affect the nature and delivery of life-long learning, if community is lost within the process. Delivery needs to include face to face contact for the belonging and community aspect of learning (affective domain) as well as e-learning or Internet use for the keeping up with technological advancements and ease of teaching (cognitive domain).

b) Technological barriers to participation in life-long learning

and adult community education

There are three barriers to participation in life-long learning and adult community education to which I would like to identify and provide an outcome.

Firstly, when learners gather together to learn, whether in a classroom, in e-learning, or on the Internet, and there is no common purpose, then this will place a barrier to participate in learning.

When people have a common purpose, they draw together. E-learning works when there is a common purpose. E-communities that start out with a common purpose will succeed, like many of the e-communities that have run under EdNA. For example, interaction in a community café will work, if people come with a common purpose. That may occur in the topic that I teach or through people gathering out of a sense of isolation: they know they will be heard and therefore feel valued.

However, common purpose cannot be isolated. A transport unit, such as a bus, train, or a plane, holds people with a common purpose: to go to a common destination. People typically do not participate unless they know each other. Participation cannot stand isolated either.

I interviewed two possible research sites recently for my doctoral studies. One site sees the purpose of e-learning as a means to build knowledge and skills so people can operate effectively in their community. Learning collaboratively and individually is key to being an empowered learner. The other site would agree with this, but they would add that e-learning is a tool that operates alongside normal face to face classroom activities. Therefore, they state that the two cannot live independently from each other. Whilst *education.au limited* states 'e-

learning offers less reliance on face to face contact and more emphasis on guided independent learning', they see the latter as more important. They hold onto the belief that e-learning will one day be the major dimension of education and training, and if they raise the level of e-learning as a service, then it will provide more effective learning outcomes.

Regardless of whether life-long learning and adult community education are e-learning based or classroom based, either needs to draw people together out of common purpose. This can be done by stating the aims, strategies, achievements, and purposes of the course provided. Alone, this does not necessarily mean that people will participate.

Secondly, linked to the above thought and part of my doctoral thesis, is the notion that people need to feel they belong. Without a sense of belonging in a learning environment, people will not participate. Regardless of how much technology an educational facility has, how much knowledge one has, or the most effective teacher on the planet, people will not engage educational services unless there is a surety that they will belong.

Building and strengthening a learner to be independent through e-learning or classroom activity will build their capacity as a citizen of a community. The benefits of ensuring that learners will feel a sense of belonging or feel valued will be three fold: learning becomes something for all no matter where you are; information becomes readily available instantly; and skills will be developed and acquired for many different tasks, as either a learner or trainer. The whole ethos of community education is that every learner is valued for who they are and is encouraged to develop their unique interests and abilities. Further investigation is required into these areas raised; especially looking at the various understanding of what is community education.

Thirdly, I am concerned for two generations, the elderly and the youth, as both have different barriers to face in terms of literacy. The elderly are generally computer illiterate and as technology advances, there learning declines. Many youth are becoming less literate in reading and writing, and more advanced in computer literacy, this in turn for the future will mean that our literacy level as a western nation will decline.

The writings of Lankshear et al. (2000), Nixon (2003b), and Lee (1998) all state that literacy has changed due to the change in technology. As the two-thirds world continues to embrace reading and writing for the first time, reading and writing skills here are being demolished due to technology advancement. Many children and teenagers (particularly) do not understand the need to read books and articles, and analyse texts, as information is given to them in forms of visual pictures on the television, through the internet, and in playing games. Their operating system exists only in technology and in a new form of language only they understand. Their idea of socialising is through cyberspace and interacting with each other over text messages (SMS on mobile phones; emails; and chat rooms). Nixon (2003a) states that this is producing new issues of relevance and forging a more dynamic and creative understanding of literacy. Certainly the change in technology has changed the way we not only view and apply literacy, but also the way we speak it and think it.

The more socialising is done on the internet, critical approaches to reading and analysing this information is needed now more than ever before. Previously, what we read in the majority of published books and journals we can view them as reasonable pieces of literature in alignment with the production of knowledge on a certain topic. Currently, the varied forms of literacy that are available on the Internet can be contested as adequate or reliable sources of use in research.

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There is no doubt in my mind or those written on the topic that new technologies need to be integrated into the context of learning and that we need to build on the notion of strategies for reading and writing in research. The more we recognise the language and technology systems and see this participating in the form of social practice and meaning[1], the more we will be able to access and evaluate software and technology resources[2]. (Lankshear et. al., 2000) Critiquing and judging the resources and then eventually contributing to the transforming social practices has been and will always be the form literacy takes in the western world.

In summary, if learning facilities included in their programs common purpose for learners, a place where people can belong, and we ensure all community members learn both forms of literacy (traditional and computer), then more people will likely participate in life-long learning and community adult education.

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[1] This includes use of texts and technologies to do and achieve our purposes, and to build on well-informed understandings of social practice.
[2] This means to use the resources, but also to participate effectively and creatively in them.

c) Training, professional development, and role of the adult educator,

been influenced by technology and on-line development

Unfortunately, many of the younger adult educators and trainers are becoming more literate in technology and on-line development, than the more traditional education mode. I believe that Australians need to keep a balance between traditional methods and new methods of learning. We cannot become an all-computer technology on-line society. Whilst I would be more than happy to throw away the more traditional European-Liberalism mode of teaching from universities, we do need to hold onto the simple concepts of reading a book, exploring ideas with each other face to face, and holding lectures on certain topics.

If society stopped reading a book, then we would lose the art of reading. If we lost the art of reading, then education and literacy levels will fall dramatically. In the previous section I have already raised a concern on this matter to do with our young people today. If society stopped meeting face to face, then we would lose the art of communicating to each other in relationships. We have already seen the decline of this since the introduction of television, cinema, video, computers, and now e-learning. If community no longer happened, then people will no longer feel valued, no longer have a sense of purpose, and people will lose their identity. If educational facilities stopped providing lectures on certain topics, then we will lose the art of listening. We need to listen in order to function in our society, we need to listen in order to communicate with other another, we need to listen in order to keep our marriages sane.

Each of these areas are tied in together – reading, community, and listening. Any form of training for future adult educators must include these three things.

In my research, I will be identifying the motivation of why people learn and how people perceive, experience, receive, and feel e-learning as an educational practice. English et al. (2003) argues for the need of common language and understandings in the area of adult learning and development. They raise the issue of the importance to reflect upon personal story within the research from people of various backgrounds in community education.

d) Re-training strategies in life-long learning, especially in rural and regional areas

In the last two sections (particularly b), I raised an important point about literacy. Literacy training needs to be high on the agenda for re-training strategies. Literacy is the ability to read and write, skim and scan texts, and collect information. Further to this, during the process of reading and writing, a researcher produces text and knowledge. This brings literacy to the next stage of meaning: the acquiring of technical competence, learning a variety of practices for communicating and action in social and cultural contexts; making meaning, expressing and communicating with new media in multi-dimensions; applying decoding and encoding skills; and reporting on information. (Lankshear et al., 2000; Nixon, 2003b) Literacy is indeed changing. It is becoming more technological and new media and IT is providing new ways. An educator continues to teach the old methods of literacy, but the application of it is new.

Literacy was once understood as only cognitive. If we view literacy from a sociocultural point of view, as Lankshear et al. (2000) has, it states that literacy is expressed through reading and writing; speaking and holding certain attitudes and values, which can be different for everyone; and being socially engaged, that is interacting with others and living out those experiences. Therefore literacy seen as a sociocultural perspective has three overlapping, intersecting and interdependent dimensions of learning and practice – operational, cultural, and critical. Green brought together language, meaning and context. He believed that they cannot exist separate from each other, so therefore they need to be simultaneous. This principle is seen to exist in both formal and informal settings. (Lankshear et al., 2000; Nixon, 2003a, 2003b)

Re-training strategies also need to include: mentoring, self-directed learning (SDL) and dialogue. Each of these integrates three areas of adult learning and development – awareness of self-understanding, the ability to learn and construct their own knowledge, and feeling valued and affirmed as a human being living in community.

Mentoring allows learners to express oneself through the act of speaking out, engaging with self, and promoting growth and change. Mentoring itself builds confidence, helps the learner to make meaning of their experiences, and it fosters and affirms informal learning.

SDL fosters self-development and provides a means to reflect things critically. The learner can choose to be responsible for his or her own learning and through this it will increase their knowledge. SDL is a reflective concept that can be utilized through various tools, such as journal writing, support networks, and self-assessments. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are learned through the SDL process. (English & Gillen, 2000)

Dialogue is a participatory approach that makes meaning of the learner's world and through story-telling it can make the learner more aware of themselves. Dialogue is about sharing and owning knowledge. It promotes collaboration, partnership, connection, and community. Through this the learner is valued in and through their experiences. (English & Gillen, 2000)

Each of these three key concepts is intricately related to each other and others and is particularly important to my own research from an interpretive framework. Each of them foster spiritual development, which is essentially people-centred opportunities creating meaningful connection to personal and social fulfilment, which is the essential learning outcome of any learner.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, life-long learning must include a wide variety of learning activities, undertaken by different goals, facilitated in different ways, and embraced by a community of learners. There is a need to clearly articulate national policy on life-long learning and this should acknowledge the potential value of different forms of learning, in the classroom, face to face, e-learning, and by the Internet. Life-long learning programs should acknowledge the potential value of learning for all Australians, regardless of age, income, gender, ability, locality, or attainment of formal education.

If the Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Senate Committee would like to have further clarification and/or wish for me to speak about any of the points I have raised, I would be more than happy to do so. If the Senate Committee is interested in the outcomes of any part or my entire doctoral thesis, then I would be honored to send you a copy when that section has been completed and/or speak to it. (My contact details are found on the first page.)

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