

The ACE Experience

Pedagogies for life and employability

Final Report
May, 2004

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And 22 teacher co-researchers

 Adult, Community
Further Education



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These teacher-researchers have documented their practice, their values, dilemmas, joys and struggles as teachers and managers in Adult and Community Education (ACE). They have provided vignettes, insightful reflections and detailed accounts of what they do and why, in teaching, supporting, coordinating and managing, within and beyond classrooms. They describe the myriad inter-related strategies, approaches, philosophies, activities, attitudes and ways of relating to learners within ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1996) in ACE centres.

The participants’ skills, commitment, creativity and passion for teaching have been a source of inspiration for the researchers, and we hope, for the readers of this report.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Over recent years there has been increasing interest by employers, policy-makers and researchers in ‘generic skills’, also known as ‘employability skills’, ‘life skills’, ‘key competencies’, ‘skills and attributes’ or ‘lifelong learning skills’. The research described in this report is an investigation of the pedagogies and contexts that are characteristic in ACE, and that foster and develop generic skills and attributes amongst ACE learners.

The ACE sector is frequently characterised in terms of educational outcomes that combine general cognitive and social capacities with technical and cultural development as individuals (Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). The positive outcomes of ACE programs (e.g., Golding and Rogers 2002) are often attributed to the holistic and flexible approaches to teaching and learning (that is, pedagogies) that are the norm within the sector (Clemans, Hartley and Macrae, 2003). ACE practitioners work with learners on several levels; developing their personal and social skills while teaching practical skills across a broad range of program areas. There is significant overlap between the personal and social skills (including work readiness skills) that have traditionally been a focus of ACE teaching, and the skills, competencies and attributes that are the focus of policy under the rubric of ‘generic skills’. As shown in this report, ACE teachers or practitioners draw on a wide range of strategies, approaches and pedagogies to foster and nurture generic skills development. These skills and approaches are intrinsic to and connect with the cultures that characterise ACE centres, ACE environments, and ACE places: what we have called, ‘the pedagogies of pLACE’. The unique educational and social contribution of the ACE sector can be found in the intersection and interaction between pedagogies of personal engagement, and pedagogies of ‘the pLACE’.

The purpose of this project was to research ACE pedagogies in order to gain a better understanding of the connection between pedagogical practices and generic skill outcomes; to tease out the ways in which the practices and the pedagogical culture of ACE interact to produce the ‘complex tangle’ of outcomes of which Clemans and her colleagues speak (2003).

Central to this purpose was the involvement, as co-researchers, of 22 ACE practitioners based in Melbourne and two regional/rural areas. These practitioners (including managers as well as teachers) collaborated to reflect upon, discuss, share their issues and analyse their practice in relation to generic skills. They each produced reports of their practice after a protracted period of individual and collective reflection on, and documentation of, their practice. These reports formed the core of the data that was then analysed by the three lead researchers to answer the key research questions and to identify the linkages between pedagogy and generic skills development. The participant co-researchers also contributed to the analysis and the key findings of this report.

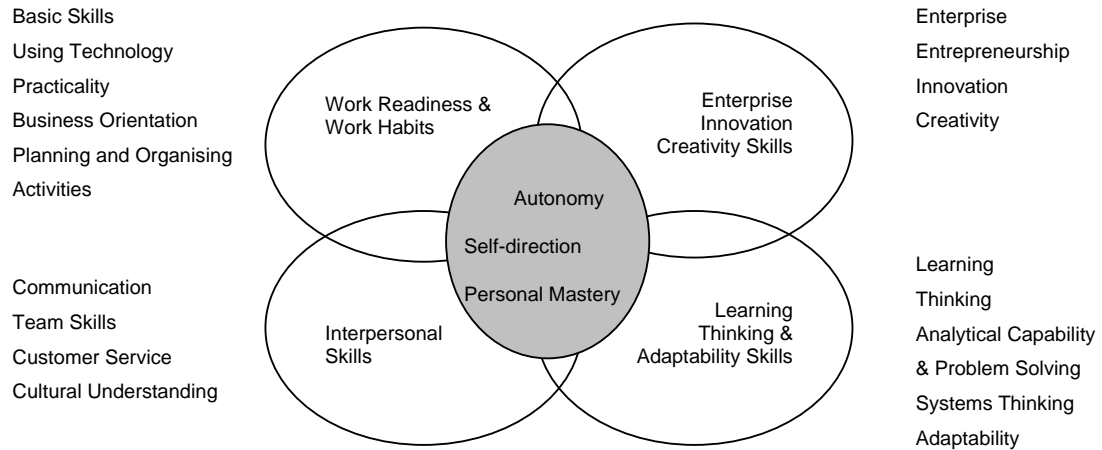
A definition and a framework of generic skills

The definition of generic skills that we have adopted as most appropriate to ACE is that of Kearns (2003) who writes of generic skills as “life and employability skills and attributes”. This definition ascribes equal value to both ‘life’ and ‘employability’ purposes and recognises that these two dimensions of human learning are ultimately inseparable. It also recognises that personal attributes and values underpin other skills.

Kearns' definition leads to the conceptualisation of generic skills and attributes within a developmental framework that in turn can be linked with the pedagogies and teaching strategies which nurture their development.

The Kearns' framework (see Figure 1 below) provides a holistic view of 'skills and attributes'. It enables connections to be made between the five 'key skills clusters' and the pedagogies that are directed towards their development in teaching and learning situations.

Figure 1. Clusters of key generic skills



- The Interpersonal (or social) Clusters with underpinning personal attributes and values

eg emotional intelligence
self-understanding

- The Cognitive Clusters with underpinning personal attributes

eg willingness to learn
positive attitude to change
and complexity mastery of mental models

From Kearns' Developmental Framework for Generic Skills, *Generic Skills For The New Economy – review of research*, NCVET, Adelaide, 2001

A definition of pedagogy

Pedagogy is a complex notion that takes different meanings within different discourses and theoretical traditions in education. The notion of 'pedagogy' often refers to the intangible aspects and processes of teaching and learning and to the social and political dynamics that are enacted in teaching and learning situations. For the purposes of this project, we have used the following somewhat eclectic definition that takes account of several major pedagogical theories and traditions.

Pedagogy is about the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning, including the purposes, relationships, environment, management and social context of learning.

Methodology

The project adopted a participatory action research approach that values the practitioners as the expert 'knowers' about their own pedagogy. It incorporates cycles of action, individual reflection and documentation, consideration of theory, and collective reflection and identification of issues and practices. This continuous process of action, reflection, consideration of theory leading to further action and reflection is also known as 'praxis'. The process has enabled documentation and distillation of a 'slice' of the collective wisdom and experience within the field in Victoria at this time.

A one-day seminar was held on April 4, 2003 to introduce the project and invite the participation of teachers, tutors and managers. From this meeting and subsequent notices disseminated through the ACE regions, 28 people were recruited, of whom 22 participated until the completion of the project.

A reference group was established at the Office of Training and Tertiary Education to advise the researchers and oversee the project.

A one-day orientation and training program was provided for the participants / co-researchers. This focused on action research theory and methodology, the notion of, and research about, generic skills and an overview of pedagogical theories. A strategy for the project was developed with the participants, who formed three separate research groups: one in Melbourne, and two in regional Victoria. Each group was facilitated by one of the three lead researchers.

At the orientation workshop, the participants agreed to document their practice. They kept journals about daily teaching experiences and challenges, critical incidents and ideas about their pedagogies, in relation to the generic skills development of learners.

Each of the three small groups met 3 or 4 times with their facilitator to discuss their journals, and issues emerging in relation to their teaching. In the course of these discussions, a picture began to unfold of common practices and collective understandings of ACE pedagogy. These meetings were tape recorded and transcribed.

Where possible, each of the three lead researchers also visited the participants at their places of work, observed lessons and entered into further discussion about how each one practises. At the end of a twelve-week period, the participants each submitted a report and/or their journals and other documentation of their programs.

The data that were analysed for this report consists of the 22 practitioner reports, the transcribed small group meetings, and records of follow-up and one-to-one discussions.

A draft report was prepared by the lead researchers and presented to the participants at a final one-day workshop. The findings were discussed in detail and there were some amendments. The participants unanimously endorsed the draft findings and the Framework for ACE Pedagogy.

ACE pedagogy in context

The picture of ACE experience that emerges within this report is of the synergistic relationship between pedagogies and places: of multi-faceted, person-centred pedagogies sustained within supportive, community-based learning environments. It is this combination which is unique to ACE and which provides ideal conditions for generic learning and transformation to take place. We do not claim that ACE teachers are necessarily better than other teachers, but that the ACE context stimulates and enables particular kinds of practices and relationships. Traditional institutional contexts, on the other hand, often constrain the degree to which teachers can engage with students on a personal level and the degree to which learning activities can be customised to suit particular needs.

Analysis of findings

A common coding system for the pedagogical ‘practices’, ‘relationships’ or ‘approaches’ reflected within the data and relevant to the chosen definition, was agreed on, and the data were coded accordingly. This yielded a list of over 20 pedagogical approaches or practices that we called ‘elements’. We divided the list of pedagogical ‘elements’ into four broad pedagogical ‘dimensions’. These were:

- ✧ The teacher (the personal, social, and attitudinal values and characteristics of ACE teachers),
- ✧ The teaching (i.e. the practices, approaches, methods, strategies and purposes),
- ✧ The pLACE (the geographical, social and institutional contexts of ACE), and,
- ✧ The curriculum (including content, purposes and approaches to assessment).

With a little re-organisation, the elements could then be arranged according to five ‘pedagogical principles’, along a vertical axis. Thus a ‘descriptive framework of ACE pedagogy’ was produced.

The framework (see Table 1 below) is a distillation of the pedagogical practices and understandings that were expressed and reflected in the data provided by the participants. As such, it is a kind of snapshot of ACE pedagogy as it is being practised in these settings at this time. It is not a definitive framework and should be seen as one way of describing a complex and ever-changing field of educational practice. While the notion of a framework can have the discursive effect of ‘capturing’ (and perhaps ‘freezing’) a set of understandings, we hope that this framework will continue to grow and develop as pedagogy in different contexts continues to evolve and be described.

Table 1. Principles and dimensions of ACE pedagogy

Principles of ACE pedagogy	Dimensions of ACE pedagogy			
	The Teacher	The Teaching	The Place	The Curriculum
Focus on learners and their needs	Is engaged with learners and their learning on a personal level	Is developmental (starting from where learners are at and consciously helping them to progress)	Embodies collective values: commitment to education, to community service and to the ACE sector itself	Prioritises learner needs through creative assessment for accredited curricula
Continuous learning for work and life	Is reflective and open about her/his own practice and professional learning journey	Is largely (but not exclusively) experiential	Is a strongly networked community of teaching and learning practice	Is oriented towards generic skills for employment, life and further study
Building learning on and within real-life contexts	Is able to improvise and take risks	Fosters skills of critical literacy	Is community-owned and is engaged in community building locally	Is contextualised (in terms of local, community and individual issues, interests and needs)
Sharing power - empowering people & communities	Is aware of relations of power	Includes various strategies to empower learners	Is led by management committed to enabling learning processes and staff needs	Is negotiated wherever possible (i.e., learner respected as key player and partner in the learning)
Many roads to learning	Is patient and able to put trust in the learning process	Is multi-layered and eclectic	Creates a sense of belonging	Opens pathways through accredited, non-accredited and enrichment programs

Generic skills development and ACE pedagogy

In making the connection between pedagogies of ACE and generic skill and attribute outcomes, we refer back to the Kearns developmental framework (Figure 1) and to the research literature, both of which suggest that what are referred to as ‘generic skills and attributes’ are composite and inter-related and underpin the overall development and education of individuals. Hence, the development of ‘autonomy’, ‘self-mastery’ and ‘self-direction’ underpins the development of all the other skills. Likewise, the development of ‘interpersonal skills’ will feed into ‘work readiness and work habits’, ‘enterprise, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation’, and ‘learning, thinking and adaptability skills’, and so forth.

It can be seen that all of Kearns’ five skills clusters are encouraged, fostered and strengthened by practices that implement the elements, dimensions and principles of ACE pedagogy as described throughout this report (and formalised in Table 1 above), and the opportunities and affordances provided by ACE centres as ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1996).

The pedagogical elements in the ‘ACE Pedagogy Framework’ correspond to the five ‘key skills clusters’ on the Kearns framework. For example, the central cluster of ‘autonomy, personal mastery and self direction’ would (at least theoretically) result from practices that reflect or enact the pedagogical elements within each of the dimensions as shown on the following page. There is a commonsense link between the pedagogical elements and the attributes described by Kearns in his Developmental Framework. Further research could help to clarify the linkages between outcomes and pedagogy.

ACE pedagogy and young people

Over the last decade there has been an influx into ACE providers of youth ‘at risk’. Unemployed, sometimes homeless, youth (including large numbers of early school leavers) who are at risk of long-term marginalisation from work and mainstream society have found their way into ACE programs. The role of ACE has changed accordingly, and there has been much research in recent years identifying ACE’s new role in relation to young people and related issues.

More than half of the participants in this project were involved in programs for youth, and much of the data was about the particular strategies and approaches they employ when working with young people. These included: finding ways to support young people while managing challenging behaviours, democratic ways of developing and enforcing behaviour guidelines, ‘behaviour modification’ (with disabled young people), offering genuine adult relationships, engaging young people creatively (such as with drama and performance art) and engaging them politically, by teaching skills of critical literacy and social theory.

In the main however, the pedagogies for young people were not fundamentally different from ACE pedagogies as a whole. It seems therefore that the successes that the ACE sector has achieved in dealing with young people and bringing them back in to the educational system are at least in part because of their learning experiences in ACE settings (the pedagogies of ACE).

Vignettes and case studies scattered throughout this report illustrate the various approaches to teaching and interacting with young people.

However, the participants also spoke of the pressures that the youth programs place on the providers, the practitioners and resources. The participants spoke strongly about the additional burden being placed on ACE of working with young people in the context of casual part-time employment. They also discussed strategies that worked and noted that the ACE sector had much to offer other sectors concerned about the development of generic skills.

While it is clear that a number of our participants had success with disadvantaged young people, others found that it is difficult to manage and change some challenging behaviours, given the short-term nature of many programs. Pinkney (2002) suggested that few ACE providers are likely to be well-equipped to deliver effective programs for ‘at-risk’ young people. Bradshaw, (2002) also warned, “an influx of young people would put an intolerable burden on ACE... it is best that only a few ACE agencies work with young people”.

Clearly, the pedagogical skills and knowledge within the ACE sector, as demonstrated by this research, have potential application beyond ACE to schools and to the TAFE and VET sectors. However, partnerships between ACE and schools, TAFE, and VET, which are aimed at creative solutions to the educational needs of young people, should be properly resourced and seen as long-term undertakings.

The ACE generic skills action research project as professional development

One of the aims of this project was to trial a process of professional development with teacher-based participatory action research. The principles of action research were followed in all stages of the project, with the teachers acknowledged as participants and co-researchers. As a result, this report is the result of a genuine collaboration between the lead researchers (two of whom had been ACE teachers in the past) and the participant co-researchers (who were also teachers). While there is great diversity in the practices and approaches documented here, the findings of this report have been unanimously endorsed by the participants.

The feedback from participants about the personal and professional significance of participating in the project was extremely positive. According to them the project has been an outstanding success as a professional development undertaking. Written feedback and follow-up emails referred to the following aspects in particular:

- ✧ the benefits of reflection and keeping a teaching journal;
- ✧ the value of sharing ideas and concerns with one’s peers in a collective process;
- ✧ the development of awareness and self-validation from this process;
- ✧ the instances of personal and professional transformation;
- ✧ the contribution to the quality of their teaching, especially in ways of embedding a focus on generic skills in every day teaching;
- ✧ the project as a model for continuous improvement;
- ✧ the importance of skilled and experienced facilitation;
- ✧ the growth in their awareness and understanding of the sector and its importance; and
- ✧ the significance of learning about and integrating new theory into one’s own personal theories of teaching.

All the participants thought the project should be continued or replicated in some way.

Conclusions

ACE pedagogy is holistic and learner-centred by intention and in action (as shown by this report). It is geared to fostering and nurturing the development of generic life and employability skills amongst learners. This report demonstrates the many ways in which ACE practitioners are able to engage marginalised ‘second chance’ learners of all ages and ethnicities in explicit learning

while attending to implicit processes of their personal, intellectual and social development. However, ACE pedagogy is as much the product of the shared culture and values, enabling management, community orientation and community linkages that characterise ACE learning centres.

ACE pedagogies contribute indirectly to the development of attributes such as 'autonomy, personal mastery and self-direction'. Such attributes cannot be taught directly through explicit curriculum-based activities. 'The ACE experience' therefore has important implications for current thinking about how generic skills and attributes can best be developed throughout the educational system.

The Framework of ACE Pedagogy that has come out of this research demonstrates the diversity of strategies and theoretical perspectives that ACE teachers incorporate into their work, and the dynamic interaction between practice and context in ACE. The teachers' personal skills, attributes and values are an intrinsic part of their pedagogical 'good practice'. How they teach is inseparable from their personalities, their aspirations and their commitments to learners and to community education as part of building a better world. Individually and collectively they are practising what bell hooks calls 'engaged pedagogy' (hooks 1994 b), which according to her, is more demanding than conventional pedagogy because of its focus on reflectivity and mutual well-being: "This means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualisation that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner which empowers students" (p 15). There are many instances of engaged pedagogy in which the all-round wellbeing of students is the major concern, and a balance is constantly being struck between personal and professional modes of relating to learners. The teachers are reflecting individually and collectively upon their 'teaching selves'; they are actively pursuing their own personal and professional growth as ACE teachers, community members and citizens of the world. The managers, volunteers and other staff at ACE centres also practise 'engaged pedagogy' in their relationships with learners and kinds of supports that they offer.

As Kearns and others (e.g. Gonczi, 2000) have claimed, the key to developing the generic skills of learners lies in complex and multidimensional pedagogies, rather than in one-dimensional instructional methods. It is about attending simultaneously to the personal, the relational, the social, the practical and the moral dynamics of teaching and learning. Those pedagogies may be conscious teaching strategies, or they may be implicit within the culture and daily interactions within centres.

The participants in this study were self-selected and most were experienced ACE practitioners. One would therefore expect the demonstration of higher levels of pedagogical skill and commitment than would be expected with a random sample of teachers. Nevertheless, the pedagogical excellence displayed by all of the participants in this project speaks volumes about what the ACE sector is providing and could potentially provide. For ACE to continue to grow and make its unique contribution, it is important that politicians, policy-makers and members of the general public are well informed about the unique educational, training, social and community development work that is being carried out by the ACE sector.

The experience of this project also demonstrates the value of the action research approach as a form of professional development in ACE. The key features of this project which were particularly helpful as professional development, included the: protracted period of journaling, the opportunities for reflection, the small group discussions, large group meetings, the focus on a product (a text in this case) and the fact that they were involved in genuine and significant research.

One of the features of this project has been the fact that the professional development was carried out in the context of real research, and vice versa. The synergies between research and teachers' experiential learning were a key ingredient in the success of this project. That is, the

research has a genuine purpose in contributing to public policy, and is therefore taken seriously. The combination of personal reflection and documentation and collective reflection and analysis creates a dynamism in the exchange of experiences and development of ideas. The materials that are generated in these processes are valuable resources, documenting the details of classroom practices and providing a base for future professional development purposes.

Recommendations

Recommendations

1. **That the Board use the ‘Framework of ACE Pedagogy’ to promote the pedagogical and developmental culture that characterises the ACE sector.** The potential of the ACE sector to contribute further to adult education and training in local areas, and more broadly, in building social cohesion and social capital within disadvantaged communities needs to be constantly highlighted. There are many instances in this report of how ACE pedagogy is making a direct contribution to the lives of individuals who are at risk of long-term unemployment and social marginalisation. ACE providers, teachers, managers and coordinators provide a first step into education, training and community networks that may and do make a significant difference to a person’s life trajectory. Empowering people by welcoming and inducting them into ‘communities of practice’ in the context of genuine, respectful relationships and making community linkages, is to create optimum environments for the development of skills and personal attributes. This report may contribute to building greater recognition and respect for the work that ACE does in bringing together personal, social and community development in the context of teaching and learning. The report suggests that future policy directions should be geared to nurturing and enhancing the unique qualities of ACE and furthering its special contributions to education and community life in Victoria.
2. **That the findings of this report in relation to how ACE pedagogy fosters generic skills be taken up with a view to the sector offering partnerships and professional development to other sectors.** Other sectors are becoming aware of the centrality of generic skills and attributes in educational and training provision. Sharing the pedagogical culture of ACE with other sectors, if it is done sensitively, would be a way of raising the profile of ACE and extending its influence and its role in partnerships with other sectors. While ‘good practice’ pedagogy is not unique to ACE, it is in the ACE sector that the optimum conditions prevail for excellent pedagogy to flourish. While it might not be possible to replicate ACE pedagogy in other sectors that do not share the same structures and conditions, the principles of adult education and skills developed by ACE practitioners could be promoted through partnerships and other forms of collaboration.
3. **That the researchers in this project (including the participant researchers) provide a series of professional development workshops based on the findings of this report.** The issues that have been researched in the course of this project, the theoretical under-pinnings and the ‘Framework for ACE’ pedagogy have created a high level of interest amongst participants and others. We therefore propose that the research team, including some of the participant teacher researchers, offer a series of professional development workshops as a follow-up to this research. The aim would be to embed the ideas and pedagogies of generic skills development in the discourse of the field of practice and to further develop ‘good practice’ pedagogical and management skills. Each workshop would consist of two half-day sessions approximately a month apart so that the ideas and frameworks introduced in the first workshop could be followed by a period of reflection and documentation by individual participants. The final session would include collective reflections and consideration of current practice in the light of *Framework for ACE Pedagogy* and other findings of this report. In this way a participatory process of action and reflection would be built into the workshops.

4. That in addition, individual ACE providers or clusters consider conducting similar participatory action research projects as a powerful means of professional development.

As in this project, the teacher-researchers would be central in planning, producing reflective reports and developing and giving feedback on the findings. Such participatory action research projects have the potential for strengthening the sector through developing research and writing skills at the grass roots level, and training a new generation of practitioners who may take on leadership, advocacy and research training roles themselves. Funding could be attracted from the 'Reframing the Future' program to support such projects.

5. That Victoria University investigate the possibility of developing partnerships for postgraduate study with ACE. There is a need, identified by the participants in this project, for postgraduate study programs in adult education and in ACE to be made accessible for ACE teachers, coordinators and managers. Access to such programs would provide accreditation as well as exposure to a broader spectrum of educational and policy knowledge and knowledge of ACE. An appropriate course work subject could be negotiated within the context of current postgraduate courses such as the Master of Experiential Learning. ACFE personnel may assist in developing a specialist subject about the history, policies, funding and administration of the ACE sector.

6. That ACFEB and Victoria University collaborate to submit for an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant for further research into the nexus between teaching, learning and communities of practice in ACE. This report demonstrates what is unique about the ACE sector: how the development of generic skills is fostered through the interaction of pedagogy and context – the pedagogy of pLACE. We now need to understand more about how ACE centres operate as 'communities of practice' and what is meant by the term 'community of practice' in the ACE context. What are the essential linkages and relationships in 'communities of practice'? What are the shared beliefs, practices and value bases? How does the acquisition of generic skills in classroom activities flow into the informal learning that takes place within the wider community of practice? What do ACE practitioners and planners need to do, in order to cultivate and sustain their centres as communities of practice? In what ways is learning in ACE an individual activity, and in what ways is it a collective, social process, and what does this mean for our pedagogy? Such knowledge could be fed into popular discourse in ACE to bring about more conscious and theoretically informed approaches to furthering ACE's unique contribution to people, education and communities. We therefore recommend that the Victoria University School of Education continue its collaboration with ACFEB in developing a proposal to seek ARC funding for a further research project that would build on the findings of this project. Two additional partners would also be sought to make financial and in-kind contributions to support the ARC submission from Victoria University.

1. Background and Methodology

1.1 Background

This is the report of the project titled “*There’s More to the Person than Learning Outcomes*” - *The Development of Skills for Life and Employability in Adult and Community Education: An Action Research Study of Pedagogy*. The project was funded by the Adult Community and Further Education Board in partnership with Victoria University.

The project arose from the collective involvement of its three authors in adult and community education, adult literacy, youth issues, and in researching the new movement in Australia for the inclusion of ‘generic skills’ in education and training curricula. In the recently concluded NCVET research into the generic skills of older unemployed workers (Virgona, Waterhouse, Sefton and Sanguinetti, 2003) we came to the conclusion that ‘generic’ or ‘life’ skills develop as the result of complex interactions involving multiple factors. These factors include one’s personal and psychological attributes, life experiences, work experiences, formal training, mentoring or other models provided and the opportunities, fortunes or misfortunes that impact on all of us.

To some extent, generic skills can be taught explicitly, but their acquisition is often more about the processes of personal development, processes that ‘quick fix’ training programs are unlikely to address. The acquisition of generic skills depends on context, relationships, experiences and the dynamics of personal growth. The pedagogical challenges of working with these processes are complex and are not adequately encompassed by formalised competencies, instruction manuals and training programs.

We felt that the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector has much to contribute to debates about generic skills. The development of generic skills has always been an important part of non-formal community education and in this sector teachers have always attended to the intangible developmental aspects of their learners’ progress (Clemans et al, 2003).

We therefore conceived a participatory action research project that would engage adult literacy and adult and community education (ACE) teachers in reflecting upon, sharing and documenting their practice with a view to making the connection between their pedagogies (understood as complex, situated teaching practices) and the ‘intangible’ processes of learners becoming more confident, self-directed and developing better social, and cognitive skills¹.

Research has shown that the ACE sector has been quite successful in engaging with and providing education and training to youth and other potentially marginalised groups in the community (Golding and Rogers 2002, Clemans et al 2003). Government acceptance of its effectiveness in supporting 15-19 years old who had not been well served by schools was reflected in the decision to direct funds to students under 15 “who are experiencing extreme difficulties in engagement with learning”, who enrol in an ACE provider (Department of Education and Training, 2003). This project sought to document the reasons for ACE being able to operate successfully in this context.

The Adult Community and Further Education Division (ACFED) vision statement, ‘Taking ACE to the Year 2000’, draws on the Delors Report (1996) in stating that educational opportunities should be created which assist learners to:

¹ Throughout the report we refer to ACE teachers or practitioners. We include centre/program coordinators and managers in our references to ‘ACE teachers’.

- ✧ combine a broad general education with specialised knowledge and skills (to know);
- ✧ develop the capacities needed to undertake work (to do);
- ✧ learn to live interdependently (to live); and
- ✧ take on the responsibility for the development of their own potential (to be).

Clearly, there is much overlap between these educational aims and values and the generic 'life skills' that have been identified by the OECD process and by authors such as Kearns (2001). The aspiration to teach in ways that contribute to greater levels of autonomy, self-confidence and self-awareness on the part of students is widespread within the adult literacy and basic education sector.

Adult learning principles (eg, Knowles 1990), involving active, co-operative learner-centred strategies, are part of everyday teaching in the ACE sector. This project has tapped into teachers' pedagogical 'knowing-in-action' (Schön 1983), in order to advance our understanding of what teachers do to contribute to the development of generic skills (defined in the broadest sense), and to develop new frameworks for the kind of 'tacit' pedagogies that we believe underpin and enhance the development of such skills.

This project, therefore, has taken up the notion of 'generic skills and attributes for employability and for life' (Kearns 2003). Through a participatory action research process, expert practitioners of adult education pedagogy have been able to speak about, document and bring into research and policy discourse, the art and craft of their teaching of adult (and young adult) learners.

1.2 Methodology

Aims

This project had four inter-linked aims.

The first was to investigate teaching and learning practices in Adult and Community Education (ACE) classrooms in order to learn whether and in what ways the pedagogies and the 'pedagogical culture' of teaching in that sector might support the development of generic skills amongst learners.

The second was to document and analyse cases of 'good practice' pedagogy in order to develop a theoretical framework which would make sense of the kind of 'good practice' pedagogy with ACE (Golding and Rogers 2002, Bradshaw 1997).

The third was to make an analysis of the professional development needs of teachers in ACE in relation to the development of learners' generic skills in ACE programs, including cognitive, interpersonal, creative and work-readiness skills.

The fourth was to model within the sector a form of professional development that empowers practitioners by engaging them directly as participant-researchers in self- and collective reflection on practice, taking action to improve practice, developing research skills and a theoretical discourse for ACE pedagogy.

We set out to:

- ✧ 'capture' the incidents, interactions and learning activities that reflect the development of generic skills amongst learners,
- ✧ document teachers' interventions or approaches that appear to contribute to the development of particular generic skills,
- ✧ analyse the relationship between learning environments and generic skills development,

- ✧ investigate whether and in what ways problem-based or experiential learning may lead to generic skills development, and
- ✧ document the whole project as a model of professional development within the sector.

Participatory action research was an appropriate research methodology for this project as it corresponds to the culture of collaboration and empowerment within the ACE sector (Reason and Bradbury 2001, Zuber-Skerritt 1996, McTaggart 1991, Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) and usefully framed the cycles of planning, action, reflection and documentation and, finally, because it posited the teachers as full partners in the research.

Action research has other spin-offs in that it contributes to building the culture of ACE (the 'community of practice' of Lave and Wenger, 1991) and contributes to professional development processes and programs for teachers and the field at large.

The research process

The first reference group meeting for the project was held on March 6, 2003 with the principal researchers as well as representatives from ACFE, Victoria University and the ACE sector.

On April 4th the project was launched at a forum held at the William Angliss Conference Centre entitled '*Generic Skills' and 'Learning to Be': how do practitioners in Adult and Community Education foster the all-round development of learners?* Teachers, tutors and coordinators from all ACFE regions were invited, and 50 people attended. It was a very lively meeting and the discussion of issues indicated a high level of interest in and support for the project. A number of participants in the forum decided to join the project as action research participants.

Over the next few weeks, 28 people from 19 different providers were recruited through ACFE networks and word of mouth. They agreed to be named as a group, but not to be named in a way that would connect them with any of the data. In this reports pseudonyms are used in presenting direct quotes from the participants.

The second reference committee meeting was held on April 8 at ACFE in Treasury Place.

The first (all day) workshop for practitioner researchers was held on May 22 at Workplace Learning Initiatives in Northcote. The aim of this meeting was to provide some basic training in participatory action research, to introduce the participants to concepts and resources in relation to generic skills and notions of pedagogy. The 28 participants formed into three groups – two in regional Victoria and one in Melbourne. Each group of researchers discussed the issues and planned how they would meet and maintain contact with each other. The participants began to keep reflective journals and to document critical incidents and descriptions of practice following this meeting. An official contract between ACFE and Victoria University was signed on May 27, and funds began to flow shortly after that.

Five of the original 28 people discontinued at an early date due to other commitments. During June and July, the members of each of the three groups met at least twice to share their journal writing and their experiences issues in relation to the main research topic. These meetings have all been tape-recorded and form part of the data. One of the meetings was held by teleconference.

At the end of the twelve week period, the teacher-researchers each finalised their account of their observations and insights and submitted these to the researchers.

The 22 participants were each paid an honorarium for their participation. The honorarium was important in acknowledging the voluntary contribution of time and skills by sessional teachers who are not well remunerated.

The lead researchers visited some of the participants in their classrooms as participant observers or visited the teachers at their centres. This was a means of gaining a sense, at first hand, of the classroom interactions, offering support to the participants, and triangulating the findings by adding another layer of data and analysis.

The 22 participants sent in their reflections and journal writing by mid August.

The project subsidised three participants to go to the ACAL (Australian Council of Adult Literacy) conference in Alice Springs in September to present the research then in process.

A final all-day meeting with the project participants was held on October 10, 2003. At this meeting the principal researchers shared with practitioner-researchers the draft findings and there was lively discussion and critical feedback. After this, the report was further developed and the current draft was written. Notes were taken of these sessions and the participants did written evaluations of the project as a whole.

A draft of the evolving 'Framework for ACE Pedagogy' was then sent to the participants, and additional feedback and suggestions were received and incorporated into the final draft.

At a reference group meeting on November 10, the draft was accepted with some suggestions for revisions and recommendations.

Data analysis

The data consisted of the 22 written reports submitted by the participants at the end of the period of action and reflection. The written reports included background information on providers, courses offered, and other publications that threw light on programs and pedagogies. The researchers' notes and transcriptions of the small group meetings were also included as data. Notes of the participants' meeting on October 10 and follow-up phone calls and email messages have also been included.

A 'grounded analysis' approach (Patton, 1990) was employed. The researchers agreed upon a common coding system after an initial period of analysis. The categories of analysis grouped together the practices and approaches that the teachers reported on. The categories of analysis were then grouped according to four 'dimensions' of ACE pedagogy ('the teacher', 'the teaching', 'the pedagogy of the pLACE', and 'the curriculum'). Sub-categories under each of these dimensions were then regarded as 'elements' of pedagogy. A considerable degree of over-lap and duplication was reduced through repeated cycles of reorganization and simplification. The researchers focused on developing an accessible and logical analysis and presentation of the data whilst not losing the complexity and subtlety of the pedagogical elements that were identified.

Constructing a framework of ACE pedagogy

A framework of four *dimensions* of ACE pedagogy was constructed by the above process. This framework listed the pedagogical elements under the four dimensions of pedagogy noted above. As the analysis continued it became evident that the elements within each dimension could be arranged so as to create five horizontal axes that were meaningful as *principles* of ACE pedagogy.

These were identified as follows:

- ✧ Focus on learners and their needs,
- ✧ Continuous learning for work and life,
- ✧ Building learning on and within real-life contexts,
- ✧ Sharing power- empowering people and communities, and
- ✧ Many roads to learning.

The dimensions, principles and elements of the framework

Hence, a framework consisting of four *dimensions*, five *principles* and 20 *elements* finally emerged from the data (see Table 1). This framework is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

From ‘ACE pedagogy’ to ‘generic skills’

The next level of analysis involved re-examining the Kearns’ ‘developmental framework of generic skills’ – consisting of five skill ‘clusters’ – and cross-referencing the central skills cluster with the elements and practices identified in the framework. The connection between Kearns’ central generic skills (autonomy, personal mastery and self-direction) and ACE pedagogy is discussed in Chapter 8.

ACE pedagogy and young people

More than half of the participant researchers were working with groups of young people in different kinds of programs. The pedagogies that they described were thus of particular interest in terms of provision for young people and ‘youth at risk’. An overview of the issues and presentation of data in relation to young people is in Chapter 9.

A model for professional development in ACE based on participatory action research of teachers’ pedagogy

The written feedback of the practitioners was analysed in order to draw out themes from their perceptions of the current project and their views about the value of such an approach generally. Analysis of their feedback and suggestions are in Chapter 10.

1.3 Conclusion and recommendations

In the final chapter we briefly discuss the significance of the findings and make six recommendations about how these findings may be used. These include further developing the action research framework and a small follow-up project.