Chapter 34
Lifelong Learning as a Reference Framework for Technical and Further Education

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Introduction

Governments have often forwarded the proposition that education can be employed to address many of society's challenges: community development, skills shortages, unemployment, economic progress, health and lifestyle issues are just some of the more recent assignments. The concept of education as an institution having the potential to shape society, empower individuals or meet utilitarian ends, however, is not new. Aristotle previously identified this potential:

> All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth (BYU 2009).

What often follows from this proposition, however, is that the inherent demands placed on the institutions as a result are either marginal to their accepted charter or characterised by a multiplicity of objectives some of which are competing or contradictory in nature. With related policy planning, conflict also arises between the need to consider short-term, industry-specific skill requirements and the longer-term needs of the individual and state. Similar tensions arise as a result of the need to underpin economic growth against community needs, incorporating issues such as access and equity, while still operating within a model based on efficiency and market orientation (Gonczi 1996; Shann 1996). While the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission (EC) still continue to support a policy framework which recognises the interdependence of educational, labour market and economic policy as a primary issue, they have now increased the linkages with and widened the boundaries of existing policy, to include an emphasis on issues of social inclusiveness, personal fulfilment, equity, justice, citizenship and democracy.

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The concern for the future of the individual and society, in an environment of increasing international competition, economic, industrial and social change, has led to an ongoing re-evaluation of the traditional education policies and processes. Janssens (2002, p. 10) notes significant job enlargement in 'horizontal, vertical and social terms' and argues that the major investment in information and communication technologies (ICT) and globalisation of markets and manufacturing have changed traditional work organisation and production methods. Accordingly, employee skills now need to be constantly updated or adapted and new skills learnt.

In an ongoing review of the OECD 'Jobs Study' (1994), the Australian Treasury (2008) notes that amongst the original economic and structural reform recommendations to better address changing labour market requirements was the 'diffusion of technological know-how' (p. 28) and the call for reform in existing education and training systems. This review confirmed a strong link between employment and the ability of each of the member countries to embrace relevant reform and adapt to change. The impact of technology and the new employment demands are now considered to exceed the capacity of both the traditional teaching and learning patterns and the restricted time-scales of the existing 'front end' educational system. A lifespan approach to education is now considered essential to deal with the new and ever-changing demands.

This chapter examines how the lifelong learning concept can provide an organising framework for technical and further education (TAFE) provision while taking into account the context of existing systems, roles and service functions, as well as the various political and economic overlays impacting across the sector.

The Australian Concern Within the International Context

Policy Formation

The increasing interdependence of nations and the 'globalization of economic, cultural, political and intellectual institutions' (Morey 2004, p. 131) has been a major force for change in higher education, as well as in the operations and activities of the various related institutions. Marginson and Van Der Wende (2007, pp. 4, 13) note, however, that across the OECD the education sector has always remained open internationally to the exchange of ideas, to networking and policy borrowing, elements of which are key to the implementation of changes in economic, social and cultural life.

The nature of the policy borrowing that often occurs can vary from modelling through to mimicry and according to Ganderton (1999, p. 401) is commonly initially filtered at a federal level, then adapted through a number of state and local layers as part of implementation. Existing historical and cultural legacies, mixed with national imperatives, regulatory requirements and government funding models, ensure that the various institutions remain consistent with state and local area

needs; however, the OECD has remained a significant reference point for a number of member countries and beyond. This was exemplified by events in the middle and late 1980s when the Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training in Australia used both statistical information and policy recommendations obtained through the OECD to justify the restructuring and closer alignment of the Australian tertiary education sector, including TAFE, to the economy (Henry et al. 2001; Vickers 1994). On this, Ryan (1999b) also confirms that the OECD has played the role of the 'traditional legitimiser of foreign ideas for Australian governments' (p. 8) and notes that the nation's position on various OECD league tables has also been used to justify calls for change (see Bradley 2008). The more recent Australian interest in the 'Bologna Process' which in 2001 included lifelong learning on its manifest (Jakoby and Rusconi 2009, p. 51; DEST 2006, pp. 3, 7) further reflects the ongoing concern about remaining connected to OECD/European initiatives. Of particular interest have been recognition arrangements, student mobility and institutional interaction on a policy 'convergence'. Similarly, the OECD (2009) international review of Vocational Education and Training (VET) across 14 countries exhibits a significant contribution from Australia. While the accent in this report remains on the links between the economy, labour market, skills formation, employment, work-based training and related issues, an essential requirement of balancing industry-specific skills with generic, transferable and lifelong learning skills is confirmed.

The TAFE Heritage: A Lifespan Ethos

The origins of technical education in Australia can be traced to the events leading to the establishment of the original Mechanics Institutes and Schools of Arts (Hobart:1827 and Sydney:1833), where lectures were supplemented by access to libraries and reading rooms (Goozee 2001, p. 11). Originally developed to sponsor the cause of the non-matriculant through part-time opportunity, the TAFE/VOCED sector came to be characterised by the range of its provision, its diversity, accessibility and the achievement of more instrumental outcomes. In terms of being able to clearly articulate a lifelong learning ethos, Ryan (1999a) traces the development of the 1974 Kangan Report on which the new national TAFE system was established. Here the influence of UNESCO and the OECD are again clearly evident and while the initial discourse followed a recurrent education model, the inference is that it was largely from this point on that 'Lifelong education became a key ingredient in the new vision for TAFE' (p. 3).

Adoption of the lifelong terminology was in a way a restatement of the sector's original mission: from inception the technical/vocational education service has traditionally had a key role in providing an opportunity for self-improvement, re-entry and recurrent education. The provision is also substantial and representative, services a wide community sector and has often been the instrument for delivery of specific/targeted government programmes. Powles and Anderson

(1996, p. 107) argue that, although there is a large variation between streams, the socio-economic profile of vocational streams in TAFE parallels that of the total population. It has also been shown that the sector is one of the few that consistently deals with the needs of individual groups (e.g. literacy) and so also plays an important role for a wide cross section of people in permanent and continuing education. Government bodies which argue that TAFE should maintain its diversity (Moran 1995) seem to confirm that TAFE has a significant educational role, not only due to its present activity level, accessibility, links to enterprise and the range of sectors which it currently serves, but also because its lifelong learning ethos is appropriate and could lead to a more effective role in a wider, coherent framework.

Integrating Lifelong Learning Principles into Existing Provision

Traditional systems and processes commonly come under scrutiny during periods of change. Cropley (1977), Cross-Durant (1987) and Sutton (1994) argue that it is now not feasible to provide education for life in the few years of compulsory provision, and they raise two major issues regarding the present education system. First, that the existing approach during the compulsory years does not adequately address the essential lifelong learning skills and abilities. On this the OECD (2004, p. 12) indicates that preparation should now include knowledge-related tools, including language and technology, working with others and exercising personal autonomy (taking responsibility for one's learning). The focus then shifts onto the ability to access information – think in the abstract and have the ability to adapt (Reis 1990, p. 14). Second, that the traditional/compulsory school-based educational system developed to prepare individuals for their future is now increasingly being seen as having a limited capacity to adequately service the continuous and diverse learning needs of a society in change. The stocks of knowledge gained during the compulsory period are hence considered to have a limited utility, since technological change demands constant skills' updates and there is no longer an expectation that people will have the same job for life.

The spectrum of issues which can inhibit effective ongoing learning go beyond the activities of the education and training institutions and can also be found in the attitudes and operations exhibited within the workplace, labour and product markets and industrial relations policy (CEDEFOP 2004). Here, Fernandes (2010) outlines the particular challenges faced by teaching staff involved in work-based training, both in the nature of the skills-based delivery and in balancing individual needs with client requirements. The new and increasing demands on the individual and society then have major implications for the design of future educational systems, particularly if they are to facilitate the provision of lifelong learning skills and attitudes and produce self-directed learners (Candy 1991). Linked to this are the teaching and learning strategies, consideration of individual differences, curriculum design and the institutional approach to these issues.

An Assessment of the Current Approach to Provision: Developing Lifelong Learning Attributes

Education, as described by Sanderson (1993, p. 1) has previously been seen as being self justifying, an end in itself (liberal), or a means to achieve an end (utilitarian). While there are a number of variations on this divide, a major issue which falls out of this relates to the liberal/specific approach and the debate on how best to prepare individuals for ongoing study, for work and their future as effective citizens. Others argue that events have now overtaken this divide and that the content debate often subsumes other important issues such as the learning experience itself. On this theme and as part of his argument for a 'generalist' strategy Wilkinson (2006) argues that 'it does not matter nearly as much what subject matter our undergraduates study, as it does how they study it' (p. 6).

The associated discourse confirms the need to now consider a wider more encompassing educational approach. One example is forwarded by Shepherd (2009, p. 2) who calls for a more integrated schools curriculum in the UK and claims that schools are stifling motivation and creative thinking by having linear and rigid subject, course and assessment structures; elevating some disciplines above others; remaining isolated in their community and being removed from local enterprise. Issues of rigidity in Australian schools are echoed by Ryan (1999a), who also argues for a more integrated teaching strategy: 'theoretical, technological and practical at the same time' (p. 2).

On this theme, Loos (2002, p. 64) argues that the most important innovations in learning have incorporated alternative strategies, using problem-solving exercises though project work linked with local enterprise. Hayes et al. (2009) report on inequalities across regional areas in Australia where often there is still limited interaction in disadvantaged schools. While the inequities reported may not be representative of the entire system, the classroom issues were most familiar. Here teaching was described as 'being to the script, involving teacher centered, passive styles of learning' (p. 4), whereas collaboration, interaction, problem solving and constructive dialogue between teachers and students were missing.

In reference to undergraduate programmes, Wilkinson (2006) and Candy (2000) argue that too often discussion tends to be dominated by discipline content rather than the learning process or experience gained, with only a thin veneer of broader contextual studies, generic or 'learning to learn' skills being included or even considered. Narrow curriculum also remains an issue and on a related theme Wilkinson (2006) argues that 'early specialization results in learning that soon will have to be unlearned' (p. 5) and that the quarantine effect (on such a cohort) also limits their opportunity to interact with learners in other disciplines.

Commenting on lifelong learning in Australia, the National Board of Employment Education and Training (NBEET 1994) observed that lifelong principles were not well integrated into existing education and training provision and indeed, that much of the current curricular, structural and assessment practices in post-compulsory education 'actively militate against the development of lifelong learning attributes

in graduates' (pp. 7–12). A more tactical approach was recommended within the report, where effective lifelong learning systems are considered to have five basic characteristics: the incorporation of a suitable introduction to learning; for this to be conducted in a contextual framework; the provision of generic skills and flexibility; a structure for incremental development and the opportunity for self-directed learning. The more recent strategies listed by the OECD (2004) are complementary in nature, reinforcing the notion of the learner being central to the process and further, including consideration of those factors which enhance the motivation to learn.

Lifelong Learning Skills and Abilities: A Flexible Approach

Curriculum, teaching and the institutional approach to learning encompass a number of structural, environmental and process issues, but often the literature does not clearly identify aspects of learning theory as distinct from those related matters that facilitate or support learning. Candy (2000) developed a taxonomy of the types of learning to be encountered by those leaving university and then used aspects of learning theory to identify the personal attributes essential for the individual's lifelong learning armoury.

These are listed as: an enquiring mind, 'helicopter vision', information literacy, a repertoire of learning skills and a sense of personal agency (p. 109). Interpersonal/group skills were added later and this is consistent with the need for individuals to be able to work in teams and with others.

Central to this theory is the consideration of such pedagogical issues as the most appropriate learning styles and delivery strategies to suit individual needs. MacKerarcher and Tuijnman (1994, p. 343) indicate that adults exhibit diverse learning styles, and that learning abilities are determined more by previous experiences of education and work, than by age. The associated theory on learning styles is then presented in a two-way matrix, which along one dimension includes concrete versus abstract learning and on the other includes active versus reflective learning. It is argued that according to context, adults proceed through the four stages of this learning circle and accordingly, the four abilities required for learning lie in the domains of experience, reflective observation, abstract concept formation and experimentation.

The level of participation and achievement during the compulsory and early post-compulsory period is also particularly important, since as Sutton (1994) notes, the level of initial education is also normally an indicator to subsequent participation. Cross-Durant (1987) notes that Dewey indicated that positive adult learning would continue throughout life if the earlier education had sown the seeds for a desire to continue the learning process. Similarly, Sweet (2008) argues that it is clear that educational achievement and competence at an early age is a 'very important correlate and determinant of educational and labour outcomes' (p. 9). Social and family environments are also significant factors and Sticht (2008) notes that as the parents' educational levels increase, so do the educational levels and achievements

of the children – 'this intergenerational relationship persists into adulthood' (p. 29). Accordingly, notions of learning through enquiry, the motivation to learn and exposure to a variety of learning and teaching styles all require attention at the earliest possible stage to facilitate the development of lifelong learning skills.

The implication of this theory is the notion that effective learning can take place within a range of transmission modes which can vary according to life cycle, context and environment, hence calling for a more flexible approach to teaching and learning. Lifelong learning proposals therefore have major policy implications for the educational institutions, indicating the need for a revised approach to teaching and learning, curriculum design, assessment and articulation structures. Opportunities can also be increased through access to a range of networked providers – formal, non-formal, public and private – where the provision is linked through recognition of prior learning or credit transfer arrangements. With the inclusion of a revised pedagogical approach, TAFE with its diversity, accessibility, range of programmes, articulation arrangements and varied funding sources is in a pivotal position to provide an enhanced lifelong learning framework.

Literacy, the Basic Skills and Transition

Throughout the literature, there is a recurrent theme which identifies literacy as one of the key enabling tools in lifelong learning. The EC (2001) describes literacy as one of the essential basic skills and similarly, Benavot (2008) states 'Literacy is the foundation for all learning. It carries benefits running from the deeply personal to the political, the social and economic spheres of life' (p. 1). The interpretation of literacy in this case is not restricted purely to language acquisition, since in a broader sense it also includes technological and information literacy. The latter is more fully described by Bruce (2003, p. 37) as including the effective use of information processes and IT, finding and controlling information independently, using information wisely and then working with knowledge to build a foundation or personal inventory to gain new insights.

Literacy skills are often also seen as a subset of the essential learning skills inventory: the ability to access information independently, organise, critically evaluate and utilise evidence to inform and enhance existing foundation knowledge or understanding. These basic important elements are often still missing during the transition to higher education or work, thereby limiting the individual's potential to progress effectively in ongoing learning opportunity. Whilst some of the related issues can be sheeted back to an often disparate approach in the secondary school system, Sweet (2008) observes that successful transition from school to work is a result of a number of factors, and indicates that too often those who enter the labour market at an early age are poorly qualified and inadequately prepared. The claim that students often lack the broader capabilities of critical thinking and related development is also argued by Wilkinson (2006) who notes that 40% of students who arrive on American College campuses need remedial work: 'they arrive hungry

to learn, but poorly prepared' (p. 4). The development of independent learners who are adequately prepared with the required skills is addressed by writers such as Taylor (2001, p. 180), who calls for a more transformational approach to learning using a 'task-oriented problem-solving strategy' and Candy (2000, p. 109), who argues for the appropriate curriculum to support lifelong learning in an integrated approach, a contextualised framework and for the development of generic skills.

An extension to these strategies is described by Hultberg et al. (2008), who outline a dual programme to facilitate the student transition and adjustment process. Here students moving into higher education undergo an introductory/induction programme, which is held in parallel and integrated with a course in higher education pedagogy for teachers to enhance their delivery. Transition programmes are not new and their effectiveness can vary, but one example is provided by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where such programmes are considered critical to ensure success for those entering tertiary education (HCT Directors 2009). Here students are challenged not only by the new intellectual demands and the mature learning environment, but also by the requirement that this be done in English – this in a country where literacy rates have traditionally been depressed.

The reported literacy rate amongst Arab States in the 1970 is quoted by Hammoud (2006, p. 2) as having been around 40%. Although there are wide variations quoted in the different sources, Hammoud claims that a rate of over 90% has now been achieved for the 15–24-year-old age group. The focus here is not on the rates themselves (which are contestable), as much as on the rapid change experienced in a community which retains a high premium on existing culture and traditions, and yet operates a unique system offering free government funded tertiary education to UAE nationals in English, the medium of instruction. At these institutions, foundation (transition) programmes are considered essential for later academic success and this rests as much on the need to remediate deficiencies in parts of the high school sector as the need for English proficiency, effective literacy and improved study skills.

Related issues, which are universal and not quarantined to the region, refer to sections of a school system (undergoing continuous improvement) that have relied on rote learning and a restricted curriculum. Students commonly lack critical thinking and problem-solving skills and remain reluctant to ask questions, possibly due to a lack of interaction in class previously. Resulting from a teacher centred, passive 'pay attention' didactic environment, students have often been observed to be initially uncomfortable when asked to work independently, when challenged to think for themselves or in working with others. Both Shepherd (2009, p. 3) and Wilkinson (2006, p. 11) raise the importance of students being able to ask questions, test and take risks as part of learning, the accent on conformity being seen as an anathema to creativity and risk taking. There is also little evidence to show an awareness of the wider world, self-management in learning, or the most limited basic research skills necessary in searching for information and knowledge (HCT Directors 2009). Here, the foundations programme, which normally lasts 12 months, comprises a major component of English, with mathematics, computing and a professional development unit (designed with project work to aid critical thinking, self-management and

autonomy, teamwork and study skills). Science, a career awareness unit and Arabic can also be included in a programme, which is conducted in an integrated manner, commonly with dedicated staff. A significant aim of the programme relates to the enhancement of learner confidence, competence and self-management/independent learning skills. HCT Directors (2009) argue that the remarkable progress achieved during the 1-year programme by the greater part of the cohort shows how students can benefit from and respond in a short period of time to a well-developed curriculum incorporating an integrated approach, good quality teaching and a supportive environment.

On being immersed for a period in the new academic climate and having successfully undergone the demands and rigour of tertiary study, the students who progress are transformed, demonstrating increased confidence, motivation and autonomy. Through experience they then willingly articulate those needs that would further enhance their progress. When surveyed by the writer (2005) on those issues that new incoming teachers undergoing staff induction should be made aware of, sample groups of graduating female degree students gave a range of responses which they grouped under three headings:

1. 'Don't judge my natural ability by my proficiency in English'.
2. 'Give us credit for having the ability to think for ourselves'.
3. 'Please exercise some patience and understanding'.

The first matter relates directly to the range of literacy issues discussed above and also highlights the students' own perception that their cognitive abilities are often judged to a large extent on their literacy proficiency, expression, written work and ability to communicate in class. The second issue addresses their frustration with the didactic approach and calls for a fair chance to be able to express themselves or give their opinion, for increased class interaction, for opportunity in problem solving, risk taking and group work. Included in this was their observation that because they were all similarly covered in national dress, teaching staff (invariably of English-speaking Western origin) often had difficulty in recognising and exploiting individual attributes and differences. The third issue in part referred to cultural matters, but the focus here was also on the plea to be given to the 'time and space' for reflective thinking: time 'to connect', to adapt, to build, adjust or renew concepts. Here, the issue of staff exercising patience and providing effective feedback and encouragement through positive interaction was critical to students and reinforces the theory of Taylor (2001), whereby critical reflection incorporating feedback, and moving back and forth, is considered an essential part of effective learning. This is also coincident with Broad (2006) who outlines the need for individuals to have the ability and capacity to manage and organise their own learning, in a way that can be incorporated in both a personal sense and in a wider context. A significant outcome of this informal survey was the similarity in theme between the three student issues and the elements of the OECD's DeSeCo (2005) education and life-skill competencies: the use of interactive tools (language and technology); personal autonomy (taking responsibility) and interacting with others (an essential part of the feedback cycle mentioned).

Policy Outcomes: Assessing Progress

Since the initial UNESCO and OECD declarations on lifelong learning, a series of member countries and others have incorporated many of the concepts, values and principles in their own policy announcements. The ongoing assessment of tangible outcomes against the various statements, however, has led to the view by a number of writers that there has been little progress and that generally the limited projects have been associated with utilitarian outcomes, without any acceptance or application of the broader ideals. Further, an examination of the various impediments to implementation and the related complexities has led to a closer scrutiny of the feasibility of progressing some of the principles outlined. Accordingly, we now have a range of articles on lifelong learning which reflect a 'rhetoric or reality?' type of scepticism on intent: 'Mere platitudes or realistically achievable?' (Cornford 2009), 'The theory and rhetoric of the learning society' (Smith 2000), 'Governing the ungovernable' (Field 2002) and 'Who wants to learn forever? Hyperbole and difficulty with lifelong learning' (Halliday 2003).

Against this theme is the argument that the incorporation of the 'lifelong learning' terminology and principles in the various strategic plans and policy documents now demonstrate a broader perspective, a valuable added dimension and that these are in themselves a catalyst for reflection and change. On this, the generation of a number of initiatives (including blended learning, e-learning, online delivery and integrated work-based project work) are seen to be tangible outcomes of related review processes. Apart from the Marxist interpretation that the true (hidden) function of any structured educational initiative (lifelong learning included) is for capitalist control and suppression of workers, generally the issues raised seem to fall into four categories: First, the feasibility of converting policy statements into action; second, the source and application of funds; third, the apparent lack of research principles and relevant learning theory being incorporated within the various strategies; fourth, the inability to coordinate the players effectively, or to structure effective networks between the various institutions, agencies and stakeholders.

On the policy issue, Cornford (2009, p. 1) highlights a recent quote attributed to government, which states that Australia does not have a lifelong learning policy because it has the highest post-compulsory participation rate in the OECD and therefore it does not need one. Seemingly, there is little evidence of, or much genuine interest in, establishing an effective framework and so 'no major initiatives in rectifying lifelong learning policy deficiencies have yet occurred' (p. 3). The challenges to implementation are seen to be significant: Field (2002) notes that 'lifelong learning is much more of an amorphous policy goal, delivery of which lies beyond the capacity of any government' (p. 202). Others argue that the effects of change attributed to globalisation and the impact of technology have been overstated, that for many people everyday activities at home and work have altered only marginally, therefore not providing any motivation to change their normal routine (CEDEFOP 2004, p. 14).

The perceived bias towards employment and related skills remains and is reflected by Cornford (2009), who argues that successive Australian federal governments

have shown 'very narrow conceptions of education and training values' (p. 14). Similarly, Field (2002, p. 202) notes that lifelong learning has been driven by economic considerations with the more humanistic components being only a recent consideration. On this, Taylor (2001, p. 180) presents one view of lifelong learning, which operates in the same manner as banking, where learners simply 'top up' the required labour market skills and abilities on a 'just in time' basis.

Member states of the OECD are not exempt from scrutiny. Dehmel (2006) notes that it can be reasonably concluded that little progress has been made since the consultation process, even though it was the EU which took the lifelong learning concept seriously by translating it into policy statements, programmes and projects. Unfortunately, a number of the core statements associated with the original intent have also become clichés, diluting the impact of some of the concepts. Hence learning from the 'cradle to the grave', which was part of the early OECD documentation describing the lifespan approach, has become learning from 'womb to tomb' or 'basket to casket', lessening the impact and adding to the notion that there is more rhetoric here than real intent to achieve anything tangible.

Funding the necessary framework remains a contested issue and seems to remain a hurdle to progress and implementation. In the present structure where funding is shared in a complex arrangement between state and federal authorities with very few effective cross-sectoral partnerships, a government spokesman is quoted in Cornford (2009, p. 6) as declaring that due to a lack of funds, the lifelong learning concept is not viable in policy terms. That the current funding processes do not support lifelong learning needs is also argued by McNair (2009, p. 2), who indicates that educational disbursements are uneven and unbalanced across one's life course, between different parties and different purposes of learning. Sweet (2009, pp. 1–2) registers a similar observation on the discontinuities in current funding priorities and notes that to effectively address universal access issues, new government funding models may be required to create a more even and efficient balance between sectors. Of relevance here is the adult education sector which has long been seen as having a viable role in any integrated learning framework. Although universally identified by some as the key to the 'survival of mankind', Field (2002) argues, almost everywhere it remains a 'widely neglected and feeble part' (p. 205) of the educational landscape – what has been retained has often focused on work-related matters. Traditionally, further education provision in Australia has to a certain extent featured a 'user pays' and market system where private, enterprise and alternative funding sources, such as loans, have played an important part. Costly state interference in an activity or provision, which normally results in individual benefit, is then viewed as having limited electoral support. Government is thus seen as being reluctant to enter into what may become an open-ended obligation, when matters such as the compulsory education component, health, housing and welfare are also pressing.

The focus on developing appropriate frameworks to support lifelong learning has led to a debate on the perceived lack of relevant learning theory within the various reform proposals and strategies. Alheit and Dausien (2002) argue that the lifelong learning perspective looks at the 'science of education' rather than some of the related functions or structures and that the system should move away from didactic

strategies, formal curriculum, measures of efficiency and accountability and look at the learning process itself, including quality in the classroom. The accent on recent institutional reform in education, however, has generally been on quality, accountability, performance indicators, accreditation and registration, with less regard to curriculum reform, learning styles, training teachers for adult learning or developing student support (Field 2002, p. 212). Introducing 'lifelong learning' into this mix can then be problematic, particularly since the term lacks clarity and can be broad in concept, leading to different interpretations on scope, intent and desired outcomes. Within the general discussion, issues of learning theory have thus become mixed and confused with providing planned learning opportunities (Taylor 2001), or related system matters. The main argument here can be compared to human capital theory: simply providing increased learning opportunity will not necessarily raise productivity. The learning objectives, quality, content, the delivery strategies and the learning experience itself, all require attention in a planned, integrated approach.

Effective coordination of the various stakeholders has been considered essential to underpin an agreed, systematic approach to lifelong learning. On this Cornford (2009) examines the work of Kearns (2005), Karmel (2004) and Watson (2004) and claims that there is no overarching policy mechanism or framework linking schools, higher education, (ACE) Adult Community Education and VET; also that current federal/state relationships are seen to hinder any prospect of an agreed, cooperative or integrated approach to policy/implementation. Cornford (2009) goes on to note that lifelong learning is seen to be poorly understood in Australia and 'this acts as a barrier to concerted action by all stakeholders in progressing opportunities for learning throughout life for all Australians' (p. 5). National policy frameworks of 'a more inclusive kind' (p. 3) are seen as essential to progress the wider aspects of any common or integrated proposal in a system where currently the state and federal bodies are often seen to be fragmented in their strategies, their purpose and direction. Valuable and creative projects have been undertaken on an individual basis, but they remain in isolation due to a 'lack of coordination and a framework' (p. 6) to interrelate the elements. This then leads to the conclusion that overall, the likelihood of a national framework or a serious agreed policy being developed by federal government 'is not great at present' (p. 1).

In summary, the general tenor running through the various assessments is typically reflected by the OECD (2001), which admits that despite the importance of the lifelong initiative, it is 'matched by agreement that it is far from easy to achieve in practice' (p. 2). However, despite the various hurdles and issues that are highlighted, the overall interpretation on the assessment of outcomes is that progress is slow, not that the lifelong learning concept does not have merit.

Invariably the various problems and issues which are identified as affecting implementation are then complemented by observations or recommendations to facilitate progress. In Australia there is a call to reform the curriculum, teaching and learning processes (Candy 2000, p. 109) and similarly, Kearns (2005, p. 6) identifies the need to empower individuals as self-directed learners; for action against deficiencies in literacy; on the utilisation of technology; for effective collaboration between institutions and, engagement by industry. In considering the long-term

contribution that the VET system could make, Sweet (2009) calls for the need to reconfigure the institutional types and relationships to one which 'reflects a wider and more integrated view of human capability than that which characterizes the system at present' (p. 2). This concept also supports in part the argument put forward by Halliday (2003, p. 208), who notes that learning can occur formally and informally, at work, in society (community initiatives) and in everyday life: the facility is there. Any funding directed towards lifelong learning should then be directed in a manner that provides new opportunities or integrated frameworks and does not simply duplicate existing provision.

In Europe the 'Nordic model' (Rubenson 2006) is often quoted as a reference point on achievement, since a substantial institutional framework to support learning across a lifespan has been a tradition here, albeit under a welfare state. While the 29 member states can point towards the Bologna Declaration (1999) and various targeted initiatives against lifelong learning such as 'Erasmus' and 'Leonardo Da Vinci' (EC 2007a, p. 3), the general observation is that progress on the establishment of a lifelong system, either through funding or established frameworks, is slow. There also remains a universal theme that government needs to remain as the driver in policy formulation (Cornford 2009), as well as in developing funding models, where a redirection could facilitate a more equitable access for all (Sweet 2009, p. 1).

Issues Impacting on TAFE Delivery in Australia

The Role of TAFE in the Education and Training Environment

The TAFE system reflects a large government investment evidenced through the provision and maintenance of its infrastructure; an extensive national/urban/regional network and a diverse, well-trained workforce. This is an educational environment with state and federal funding sources, where base infrastructure grants to address issues such as employment, the disadvantaged, literacy and various community service obligations are matched against industry-specific funding allocated through market mechanisms. While Goozee (2001) indicates that TAFE has also had a role in filling the various 'education and training gaps' (p. 10), Burke and Noonan (2008, p. 1) confirm that the key objectives for VET remain related to industry and skills development, which are then balanced by consideration of social inclusion and equity issues.

The traditional TAFE strengths as Byrne (1995, p. 5) and Moran (1995, p. 7) indicate have included its diversity, accessibility and multifaceted services, whilst also assisting those unable to pay, those requiring basic skills or those wishing to train in areas of little interest to private training providers. To a certain extent these 'strengths' have worked against the clarification of the perceived role and function of TAFE in post-compulsory provision. The diversity aspect is a case in point, where TAFE has often been described as trying to be 'everything to everybody' including

as an agency of democratic experience, or as a 'handmaiden' to the concept of material advancement in the industrial field (Sweet 1994, p. 32).

As a result, enterprise, government, the community and individuals all expect a service response, seek partnerships or compete for a place in provision. These series of overlays have led to competing demands as well as some confusion on the function, charter, identity and status of the service. TAFE's heritage is another related issue, since although the institutions now deliver higher-level qualifications including degrees, due to the banausic origin of the service the institutions remain well aware of the difficulties they face in their 'parity of esteem' when compared to the university sector (TDA 2009a, pp. 8–9). So there are issues in addition to its image and status: Where does it fit? Who is it for? What are the boundaries of its provision? (Summerfield and Evans 1990, p. 17).

Implications for Policy Development

While the lifelong learning concept may provide the organising framework against which an effective strategic response for the future can be developed, the research has indicated that for TAFE there are historical, political and contextual factors that should be taken into account in the development of any new proposal or change in policy direction. These include consideration of the following:

- The implications of policy transport: Whether this involves direct borrowing, adaptation, or the utilisation of overseas data, both the context and the rationale for the original work need to be examined, because any new developments need to consider existing political constraints and then commonly build on, or be consistent with, established values and practice. For TAFE the historical antecedents also need to be considered/incorporated, as these still impact on present operations, systems and structures.
- Existing strategies: Governments have traditionally used TAFE as an instrument to implement various policies and priorities, particularly with skills training at employment level. Arguably, these programmes commonly also reflect 'new right' philosophies in their implementation, since they have incorporated a demand-driven, industry-led model, utilising user choice, competition and market principles. This, when more recent OECD policy initiatives go beyond the instrumental/economic dimension to one which considers the development of society as a whole and emphasises the importance of the complete individual (encompassing social justice, personal development and citizenship needs).
- The more contemporary issues impacting on TAFE: These have resulted from such factors as globalisation, internationalisation, rapid changes in technology and the economic rationalist approach to both economics and education. There is the call for merging the vocational with the general and for recognition of the multiple objectives of education. Allied to this is the call for a fresh approach to education beyond the 'front end' strategy, enabling individuals to better respond

to issues of workplace change, the need for flexible skills and the new and emerging occupations in the 'knowledge-based economy' (ABS 2002, Ch.1).

- Recognition of the need for learning that now has to occur throughout life: The revised framework now places the learner as being central to the process. Provision which is developed to address specific skills formation requirements should also engage in developing self-directed independent learners. Here, learning-to-learn, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, information literacy and the ability to adapt are also critical. The proposal calls for a strategy where empowered, independent learners have the ability to make significant educational choices in a self-regulating environment which includes learning alternatives, articulation and access to the various formal and informal networks and providers.
- The claim that lifelong learning principles are not well integrated into current teaching and learning strategies: Issues such as learning through enquiry, exposure to a variety of learning styles and the motivation to learn all require attention at the earliest stage. Inherent in this is consideration of the appropriate learning theory, lifelong learning competencies, the curriculum, an integrated approach and requirements of adult learning. On this, the relevant aspects of learning theory should not be conflated with those issues such as the institutional approach to facilitate or support learning.
- Equity issues: Within the existing educational response structure, government goals for education are seen to remain as highly job related and economic policy dependent. Access, equity and social justice objectives should be maintained and this requires strategies to ensure that the provision for literacy and numeracy, socialisation to competence, community service obligations and general education are balanced against industry-specific funding allocated through various market mechanisms.
- Placing due emphasis on the provision of a minimum level of educational survival skills: On this, a universal entitlement should enable the individual to achieve effective literacy, numeracy and learning skills to facilitate effective access to, and participation in, ongoing lifelong learning opportunity. Literacy has been described as a fundamental human right (UNESCO 1996 Declaration 11) and accordingly an effective government provision should remain in a number of key areas to ensure the 'public good'.
- Funding issues: These remain central to the lifelong learning implementation debate. A redistribution of existing post-compulsory funding arrangements to better address adult requirements has been proposed. Consideration of both the public and private benefits to education has increasingly led to the notion that co-investment beyond the compulsory period may be essential to any future framework. Accordingly, the merit of both the 'learning entitlement' and the 'drawing rights' funding model should be assessed. Since any change will likely have significant wider implications, proposals need to remain compatible with, or build on, the prevailing government ideology.
- The framework or integrated pathways structure necessary to underpin an effective ongoing learning opportunity: Here the role of government as either

'funder', provider, regulator or purchaser needs to be made clear. With regard to system issues, the most responsive model is arguably one that is able to fund at the delivery level (guarantee of a place), or to fund the user. Once government could ensure that the equity, access and community service obligations were met, its main role could be to pay for outcomes, not to be directly involved in provision or in determining process. The requirement would be to provide the effective framework, coordinating and enabling structures, as well as information to aid informed choice, thereby allowing individuals to self-manage their own learning.

A Lifelong Learning Approach: Implications for TAFE

A review of the lifelong learning principles, the related literature, as well as the related policy issues has indicated at least six themes that have the potential to provide a series of reference points to underpin a lifelong approach in TAFE. These are forwarded with due consideration of some of the current challenges to the sector which include: existing economic and political overlays; diminishing funding (Long 2010); its charter (which then links to the boundaries and balance of its programme delivery) and, the status and future role of the sector in the mosaic of provision which is becoming increasingly market led.

The first issue concerns the nature of TAFE, its heritage and the possible congruence with any proposed lifelong learning framework. As indicated previously, among the traditional strengths of TAFE have been its affordability, accessibility and diversity, these being the result of a series of developmental changes, which have underpinned technical education since first settlement. Following the 'Kangan' reform era and events during the 1970s, which saw the formation of TAFE nationally (Ryan 1999a), the focus swung briefly towards the needs of the individual and the intrinsic outcomes to education. More recent philosophies, however, have established an economic rationalist approach to education, linking the desired outcomes to employment, the improvement of international competitiveness and the economy. Despite these overlays, history demonstrates that TAFE has a strong heritage and culture in providing varied opportunity across the community spectrum and also in servicing learning needs across a lifespan. TAFE has the potential, structure and facility to address the triadic principles inherent in the lifelong learning concept, namely, learning for economic progress, personal development and democratic participation (Chapman and Aspin 2001, p. 3). Field (2002, p. 212) also confirms that government commonly resorts to VET for action because it is safe in political terms, has a heritage in human capital formation and a diversity of services. Because it has this legitimacy, with strong links to industry and the community, the sector is then also easily utilised for intervention purposes and as such has an unrivalled potential as an agency for change.

Second, the educational aims and priorities resulting from the current focus on economic imperatives need to be examined in light of the changing needs of enterprise/

industry, individuals and the community as a whole. TAFE Directors Australia (TDA 2009a, b) in their response to the 'Review of Australian Education' (Bradley 2008) confirm that 'TAFE is distinguished by the centrality of its relationship with industry…' (p. 8). However they also highlight the role of TAFE in community development and present a 'Three Pillars Model: which informs the broad sense of direction and action of TDA' (TDA 2009a, b, pp. 7–8). The pillars include contestability, quality and social inclusion, the latter focusing on social justice issues, the unemployed, 'thin' markets and specific target groups. Noonan (2002, p. 18) in his review of TAFE in Victoria similarly identifies education for citizenship, building social cohesion, enhancing cultural life and identity as important partners to the employment priorities. Clearly, the aims of education have now progressed beyond the narrow utilitarian and instrumental view and this raises the issue of a broader curriculum (encompassing a wider range of the more relevant theories, addressing underpinning knowledge and practices), as well as the balance in provision. The objectives have now broadened to assist in the development of the complete individual and to provide a more effective foundation for the changing needs of society and the workplace. Accordingly, these themes need to be incorporated in TAFE provision. There is increasing recognition that a healthy society is necessary for a thriving economy or, to put it another way, the achievement of economic goals and social cohesion are intertwined (Kennedy 1997, p. 16).

The third theme concerns funding, including the consideration of a revised model essential to support a lifelong framework and where the responsibility for financing such an approach should lie. The existing government response is to focus on youth, the unemployed and school to work transition, even though new entrants represent only a small percentage of the overall workforce. A long-held view by senior TAFE educators (W.A. sample) is that the current political focus on the young and on entry-level training is unbalanced and quite discriminatory against adults, as well as those who have not enjoyed the benefits normally accrued through access to tertiary study (the non-matriculants). While there is also strong argument that a minimum entitlement (the minimum remains undefined) should be supported through the public purse, there is also a submission that all education to the end of the year 12 equivalent should be fully subsidised (OECD 2009, p. 12). Any change in emphasis in this regard, however, will depend on a change in values and the subsequent reappraisal of existing priorities. The latest federal policy recommendations for higher education (DEEWR 2009, pp. 9, 17) where 'funding follows the student' is not an entitlement as such, rather a 'guarantee of a place' for those eligible and initially only services the university sector. Extending the benefits currently being enjoyed by higher education participants to a more universal entitlement could then follow. For the individual, further and higher education has traditionally been characterised by a notion of co-investment. This approach is also consistent with the OECD policy on funding lifelong learning opportunity, where the cost burden is shared between the individual, enterprise and the public purse (OECD Jobs Study 1994, p. 137). On this, Curtain (2001) similarly notes that since there are benefits to employers, society and the nation as a whole, the onus should not be entirely on the individual.

The source of funding to facilitate such proposals is raised as the fourth related issue. The OECD (1996) indicates that governments generally tend to adequately fund a basic level of education due to the high rate of social return to such an investment. Beyond this point, however, spending between countries varies considerably and if further education is to expand, new sources of funding will generally need to be found. Sources identified have included parafiscal (training guarantee) proposals, a redirection of funds from the social security account, or a more equitable allocation of the funding principles that are currently applied against higher education. While the recent 'West Report' on financing higher education raises as many questions as it answers, it proposes an 'entitlement' plan underpinned by a loans system, which includes a significant individual contribution. Here it is claimed that substantial savings could be achieved by combining the regulatory and financial frameworks for universities and the VET sector, which could then be diverted to students rather than institutions. Under such a scheme: 'no additional public funds would be required to ensure equitable access for all … access to approximately 5 years of subsidised post secondary education appears to be within the bounds of fiscal possibility' (West 1997, pp. 30–31). It is important to note that the proposed 5 years (equivalent) post-secondary education stipend would still rely on a significant student contribution (60:40% or 50:50%) through universal access to HECS-style income contingent loans (Osmond 1997, p. 1). All students would be able to defer repayment until they achieved a certain income level.

The fifth issue concerns the future role of TAFE within a wider training environment where learning now has to occur across a lifespan. Here, enabled self-directed learners who have a repertoire of appropriate learning skills then make informed choices through a series of linked pathways to access ongoing learning opportunity. This leads to the understanding that it is becoming a necessity for individuals to have the essential learning skills and abilities (and key competencies), a minimum post-compulsory entitlement and the facility to access the ongoing learning opportunity. This concept has implications for initial education; the compulsory period; entry-level training or school-to-work transition, and then the continuing investment in education and training. Within this, TAFE is currently seen to have a significant role regarding the last two components, for those not attending university and as a viable post-compulsory option. TAFE is also one of the few organisations that consistently responds to particular skills requirements, the needs of individual/community groups or as a provider of the 'last resort' (TDA 2009b). As such it has an important role to play for a wide cross section in recurrent, permanent and continuing education opportunity. It could fulfil this role through diversity in delivery and supporting systems; a seamless opportunity which incorporates recognition and articulation; as well as targeted programmes against specific need. This includes working with industry, employers and individuals to facilitate transition or re-entry to the workforce and provide second chance or bridging opportunity, re-skilling or advanced technological 'updates'. TAFE also has a clear role in 'general' education, in meeting various community service obligations, as well as in equity and access provision to the disadvantaged groups in society. This is a large public investment, which has in the past been able to service a variety of

demands and due to its multi-faceted services the sector is now well placed to play a major role in lifelong learning.

The sixth and final theme arising from the analysis is consideration of the overarching framework necessary to support the essential components of a coordinated lifelong learning system. When considering how best to provide an integrated opportunity through the variety of providers, TAFE Directors (TDA 2009a) have previously noted the necessity to develop 'a genuinely integrated post-secondary education structure' (p. 6). Apart from those skills, characteristics and higher order abilities, which define the individual as an effective lifelong learner, the learning opportunity/pathway needs to be coherent, ongoing and accessible. A recent Australian contribution to an international review of vocational education (OECD 2009) reported that one of the major local challenges to effective coordination of the stakeholders related to the division in responsibilities between Commonwealth and state. Other matters referred to inconsistent funding principles, the implications associated with the use of skills forecasting as a principal planning tool, teacher training and restricted curriculum. If cross-sectoral collaboration in education remains at times problematic (Christie 2009, p. 9) and if various departments of state remain in conflict, then this makes the possibility of any synergy on the establishment of a lifelong educational framework difficult. Recommendations in the OECD (2009) report also confirm that a common administrative framework is necessary to effectively address uniform funding principles.

Conclusion

The lack of a consistent administrative framework; balanced funding; an acceptance of a broader view of educational purpose which rests on a strong school system and a community culture that values learning (Cornford 2009) remain amongst the greatest barriers to the implementation of lifelong learning. To a certain extent the matter of the inconsistent administrative framework was addressed in part by a recent federal announcement (DEEWR 2009), where although the terms of reference were not given, under the heading of pathways improvement, a single ministerial council was to oversee the coordination of higher education, VET, adult community and international education. Quality issues are also to be monitored by a new national authority. Again this is consistent with the Bologna Declaration where to address student mobility: 29 countries are to create a convergence on issues such as comparable qualifications, study structures and recognition.

While TAFE has both the ethos and the structure to be a viable partner in a lifelong educational system there are particular challenges, since apart from targeted programmes and specific skills grants, Long (2010, p. 3) reports that recurrent funding has fallen in the recent 5-year period. Recent funding allocations for higher education have also omitted the TAFE sector; this, when the education targets set by The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) have set increased targets for those aged 20–64 without Certificate 3 level qualifications and a doubling

of the numbers at the higher level (Long 2010, p. 3). Further, Burke and Noonan (2008, p. 17) indicate that private and employer contributions to VET over the last decade have increased only marginally and that an increase here with access to loans may be necessary to meet future needs. The COAG targets and the government response to the Bradley (2008) review indicate that there is recognition of the need for an enhanced investment in education and training, including an effective coordinating framework. The incumbent government now indicates additional funds for training in the May 2010 federal budget, and while the priorities relate to skills formation programmes, language, literacy and numeracy are also addressed. This may, however, also provide the opportunity for review, to also consider coordinated learner pathways and facilitate a more collaborative approach between the stakeholders to achieve the effective framework required. TAFE and the 'lifelong learning' concept can provide a useful reference point for such a response and instead of delaying implementation on the basis of hidden or unknown costs, it may be more useful to consider the social and economic cost of not preparing a nation to embrace change and meet the challenges associated with participating effectively in the global community.

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