

Practices and policies for sustaining employability through work-life learning

A project funded by the Australian Research Council



EDUCATIVE EXPERIENCES AND PERSONAL PATHWAYS

Supporting, guiding and enacting learning across working life

As working life gets longer and occupational and workplace changes more frequent, working age adults' learning associated with employability is ever more important. Realising economic, social and personal goals is reliant on worklife learning (i.e., that associated with participating in working life). Informed approaches and practices are needed to understand and support this learning including clarity in the key premises and purposes. Erroneously, 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' are often conflated. The former is the provision of experience for educational purposes and is an institutional fact (Searle, 1995), the latter is a personal fact as it pertains to change in individuals, but in person-specific ways (Billett, 2009). To understand further what constitutes worklife learning requires elaborating how both sets of factors and constructs contribute and do so relationally. Such an understanding opens up considerations of what constitutes lifelong education and how to acknowledge and support learning across working lives. Knowing more fully what constitutes that learning and its contributions to negotiating occupational and workplace transitions might be best supported is salient for working age adults, their workplaces and communities, and educational efforts.

In this investigation of adult Australians' worklife learning, two concepts emerge as being explanatory for understanding and supporting that learning. Firstly, there is accounting for the range of educative experiences that afford opportunities, support participation, and guide and augment that learning. These experiences are more inclusive than those afforded through (lifelong) educational programs. Secondly, personally unique pathways of experiences or personal curriculums illuminate and elaborate how adults engage with work and learning across their working lives. Together, these explanatory bases offer ways to capture and understand what constitutes learning across working life as shaped by what is afforded adults and their mediation of it. These concepts can also assist reshape what constitutes 'lifelong education' to be broader and inclusive, and instantiates and elaborates what is taken as worklife learning.

The project

This is the second bulletin presenting the findings from the first phase of a project - *Practices and policies for sustaining employability through work-life learning* - funded by the Australian Research Council (DP 190101519). The project aims to generate evidence-based policies and informed practices supporting work-life learning arrangements to promote Australian workers' employability.

Research questions

The key research question guiding this proposed project is:

What social, personal, educational and workplace practices can best sustain employability across working life?

The informing sub-questions are:

What kinds of learning are required to sustain employability across working life?

What kinds and combinations of workplace experiences and educational provisions can support and guide that learning?

What societal, workplace, educational and personal practices will most likely secure that learning across working life?

Phases of project

Figure 1 summarises the processes from the three phases of the project, comprising: i) interviews with Australian working-age adults about their worklife histories in Phase 1, ii) descriptive analyses and interpretation of the survey in Phase 2, and iii) consolidations of findings and drawing out deductions, followed by dialogue forums and discussions with invited stakeholders, workplace representatives, and government representatives to advance policy recommendations.

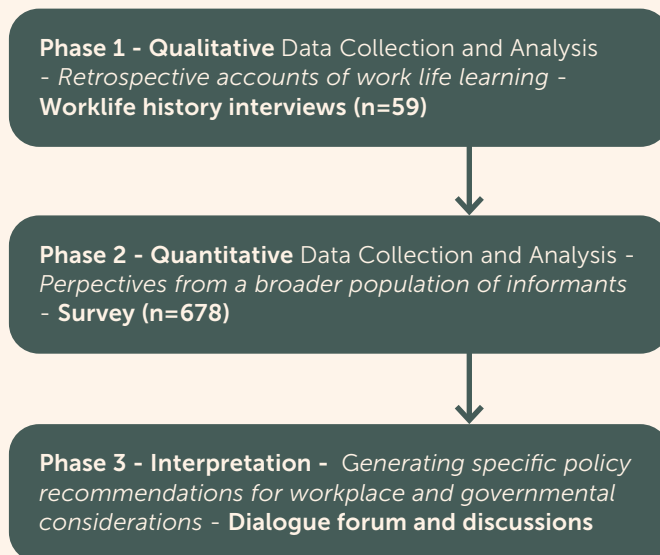


Figure 1. Research design across the three phases

Presented and discussed in this bulletin are the findings from retrospective accounts from Phase 1, providing fuller understanding of adults' learning and developmental pathways across working lives, i.e., worklife transitions presented and discussed in Bulletin 1.



Learning across working life: educative experiences and personal pathways

From the life history data, it was found that securing transitions to achieve the desired significant learning and developmental outcomes required to secure those transitions is premised on three mediating factors: (a) person (e.g., capacities, personal needs, ambitions, trajectories), (b) educative support (e.g., experiences intentionally supporting that learning), and (c) “community” (i.e., affordances outside of the person such as family and familiars, ethnic/cultural affiliates, workplaces, opportunity, societal sentiment, or happenstance) (see Figure 2). However, relations amongst and mediation of person, education, and community are complex and varied, depending on the different forms of work and industry sectors in which individuals engaged.

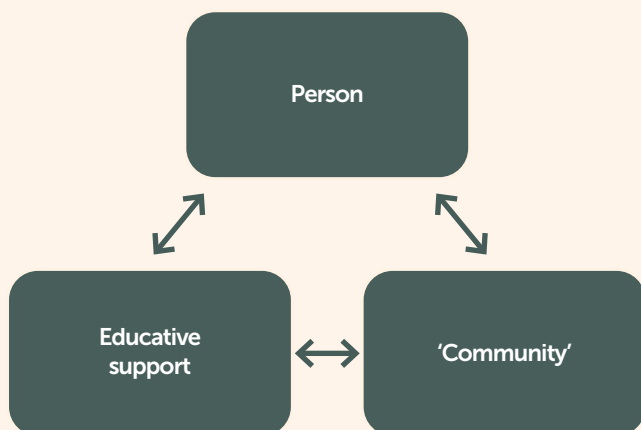


Figure 2. Securing transitions: Person + educative support + community

It was evidenced from the worklife history interviews that most informants could secure the continuity of their trajectories. In some cases, there was a mix of continuity and discontinuity of their career trajectories. In many cases, there was occupational continuity, whilst in others a mix of continuity and discontinuity of their career and personal trajectories. In all, it seems that individual effort and educational provisions alone are insufficient, and that support and guidance from beyond them was necessitated and secured in their communities.

Educative experiences

Educative experiences are those that guide, assist and support participation in activities and interactions through which individuals learn how to achieve their goals. They comprise those that:

1. guide towards and provide opportunities for individuals to engage in activities and interactions from which they learn and would have otherwise been unavailable;
2. invite to engage in activities and interactions that would be otherwise unavailable;
3. support and mediate access to the knowledge required for engaging in those activities and interactions that they would not learn through discovery alone;
4. guide the development of those capacities either directly or indirectly through their interventions; and
5. acknowledge, capture, reward and certify their learning in ways that allow them to progress that they would otherwise be unable.

They do so in ways that Gherardi (2009) describes as the ‘practices of communities’ and goes beyond what comprises lifelong education. An illustration of these kinds of educative experiences and the frequency with which they arise is presented in Table 1.

As indicated in the data presented, adults’ worklife learning arises through experiences via workplaces, community affiliations and As indicated in the data presented, adults’ worklife learning arises through experiences via workplaces, community affiliations and social groupings and educational institutions. Evident here are direct support, opportunities, guidance and even pathways that are inherently educative in their organisation and structure. Yet, these contributions would be denied by accounts of curriculum focused only upon the provision of intentional educational experiences. Hence, conceptions of curriculum advanced through the educational discourse and that from engagement in specific cultural practices are only explanatory in terms of the moments when individuals engage in those kinds of educative experiences, important though they are. However, for working age adults, these are relatively infrequent and as such, they represent an insufficient basis to describe, inform and explain the pathway across individuals’ lives.



Table 1 Frequency and instances of educative experiences (Billett, 2022)

Educative experiences	N	Examples
<u>guide towards and provide opportunities</u> for individuals to engage in work activities which they learn and would have otherwise been unavailable	224	<p>Alex - <i>Became a mechanic in two different transport companies</i></p> <p>After he finished his apprenticeship, he got a job with an agricultural company in 1967 and worked there for less than a year due to the company having no business [...] because of a new government regulation about registration of trucks being manufactured in Queensland. Then he went to work for another company, Hunter Brothers (a carting company). He found their standards of repair were low, so he left after about 10 months. He said it was a learning experience in itself for him.</p>
provide <u>invitations to engage in activities and interactions</u> that would be otherwise unavailable	27	<p>Ann - <i>Returning to contracted research and career consultancy work in higher education sector</i></p> <p>Being offered the same role from her previous boss at the Mercy Hospital for Women</p>
<u>support and mediate access to knowledge</u> required for engaging in those activities and interactions that they would not learn through discovery alone	123	<p>Dave - <i>Returning to university to complete his first degree</i> (Bachelor of Arts doing German) (1971) and becoming a high school teacher in Rockhampton – 1 year (in 1972)</p> <p>When he finished those two years, there was an arrangement where he could go back into paid full-time study if he had missed out on study because he had been in the army. And that gave him a chance to actually go back and finish his first degree, Bachelor of Arts, majoring in German. So, he came back to Brisbane in 1971.</p> <p>After he finished his study, he went back to the Queensland Education Department and was posted to Rockhampton for 12 months as a high school teacher.</p>
guide the <u>development of those capacities</u> either directly or indirectly through their interventions	101	<p>Danim - <i>tobacconist and grocery business</i></p> <p>Having sold the restaurant, the family moved back to Brisbane and Danim and his family purchased a tobacconist and then shortly after, an Asian grocery store. This coincided with Danim completing his year 12 schooling and working in the tobacconist and grocery store. They combined the selling of cigarettes with the grocery store activities which included doubling the extent of the stock in the grocery store. So, this transition marked Danim's movement into adult life beyond schooling, and also working extensively within the family business. It was in this work that Danim learnt how to go to the fish market and purchase fish, and also to the central fruit and vegetable market and purchase wholesale vegetables to be sold in the grocery store.</p>
<u>acknowledge, capture, reward and certify</u> their learning in ways that allow them to progress that they would otherwise be unable	125	<p>Parker - <i>Moving to Cairns and becoming a first officer then Captain</i></p> <p>Did further aviation qualifications to fly using instruments only, which also built up 1500 hours to apply for the air transport licence.</p> <p>Got a job with Metro jet craft, flying turboprop.</p> <p>Got the job as a first officer on 36 or 50 seat turboprop aircraft with national airline, then promoted to Captain. Was in the job for 2 years.</p> <p>Became the First Officer on a 146 jet with Air Link, a contractor of Qantas - training provided for this position. Was in the role for 12/13 months.</p> <p>Became a 737 First Officer for Virgin. Had to pay \$20,000 for his rating on the 737 and one-week training and simulator of the classic model of 737 in the US.</p>



Personal curriculum

An orthodox view of curriculum associates 'the pathway to progress along or course to follow' with institutional goals, processes and practices (i.e., educational institutions, workplaces).

Personal curriculum offers bases to capture individuals' personally unique set of experiences across their life course, including, but not defined by those provided through intentional educational experiences.

- ... defined as personal pathways of activities and interactions across the lifespan as shaped interdependently by what is afforded by the social world, mediated by maturation and engaged with intentionally (i.e., consciously, effortfully and directedly) and un-intentionally (i.e., habitual and societally sanctioned) by individuals that shapes and is shaped by their (ontogenetic) development (Billett, 2022).
- accommodates the brute fact of maturation, as well as institutional (Searle, 1995) and personal (Billett, 2009) factors.
- distances curriculum from being constituted, largely, as an institutional fact (i.e., something intended and enacted by social institutions).

Early theorising positioned curriculum in these ways (e.g., Bobbitt, 1918) before being captured by the dominant discourse of 'schooling' (e.g., Tyler, 1949).

Intentions of personal curriculum

What is discernible is a key set of intentions or purposes that direct and engage adults' learning efforts, on the one hand, but, on the other that these are engaged with in different ways, intensities and at specific points across these adults' working lives. For instance, the life history interviews identified a set of imperatives that motivate and direct working age adults' learning efforts. These are delineated as: i) their specific life stages; ii) goals related to their employment status; iii) goals related to their occupational capacities, including changes in occupations; iv) relocation from one geographical place to another; v) health-related imperatives; and vi) personal preferences and interests (Billett et al., 2021). In those interviews, there was evidence of intentionality associated with achieving goals around those six sets of imperatives. In Table 2, examples of each of these kinds of imperatives are presented. In the left column are the six imperatives, and in the centre column a description of the kinds of changes or learning required to respond to those imperatives and in the right column examples of individuals' learning related responses to those imperatives.

Table 2 Imperatives directing learning and shaping personal pathways

Imperative	Description	Examples
Particular life stages	Response to different stages of life, which might include physiological maturity or societal roles and expectation	<i>Tiana</i> needing to secure more stable and well remunerated work when becoming parent; <i>Susan</i> once completing her responsibilities as primary caregiver to her children seeking employment through which her subjectivity can shift from being a caregiver to having defined occupation
Employment status	Response to or product of a change in individuals' employment status	<i>Sarah</i> moving from being a teacher to a deputy principal; <i>Nathan</i> seeking to own businesses rather than being an employee in somebody else's business.
Occupational capacities	Learning that allows the individual to engage in different kinds and forms of work, that previously they would not have been able	<i>Danim</i> moving from running a grocery store to engaging in the NBN rollout; <i>Tim</i> moving from being a travel consultant into a role within the public service
Relocation	Mainly through voluntary means or sometimes through involuntary acts	<i>Olivia</i> moving to Brisbane to find more employment opportunities; <i>Freda</i> migrating to Switzerland and needing to learn French and become a teacher in Geneva
Health-related	Impact of physical and mental maturation on individuals' choices about working life, or ability to practice occupations	<i>Alex</i> having a career disruption as a diesel mechanic working on small boats because of a back injury; <i>Shirley</i> having restricted occupational opportunities due to her limited literacy
Personal preferences and trajectories	Being based on existing or emerging beliefs (religious, political or ethical) which define individuals' values and subjectivity (i.e., sense of self)	<i>James</i> leaving the Air Force because of a religious conflict about the death of civilians in war, and essentially retiring from paid work, having sufficient wealth for a living, and a desire to live elsewhere; <i>Salim</i> going from being a Bahai and an Iranian citizen, to being a refugee migrant, to intentionally become an Australian, and also to form the occupational subjectivity of a builder



Enactment of personal curriculum

Referring to their transitions, the informants reported the salience of the guidance, support and assistance by the communities in which they inhabit or engage. For instance, an airline captain who had lost his job because of restricted travel, began studying a law degree. However, it was other members of his golf club who were lawyers and barristers who provided specific advice about a career change and paid part-time legal work while he was studying. In these ways, those community members facilitated his learning and development. Combinations of i) personal initiative, ii) an educational provision providing specific learning experiences not accessible elsewhere and iii) engagement with community providing guidance, support and opportunities typically were central to the successful progression across worklife pathway. Table 3 indicates how these contributions were evident in the 313 transitions that the 59 informants negotiated and indications of when contributions of the person, education and community were evident. Most transitions (i.e., 80.2%) were supported by combinations of individual initiative, educational provisions and community facilitation. In the minority were education provisions and community or individual initiative and education provisions alone.

Table 3 Contributions to negotiating worklife transitions

Contributions	n	%
Person + Education + Community	251	80.2
Person + Community	55	17.6
Person + Education	7	2.2

Of course, those exceptions are noteworthy, and examples are presented in Table 4. In this table, the informants, the contributions and the description of the informants' transitions are presented. Many combinations of individual and education (P + E) are about necessary and immediate educational pathways to progress towards unintended worklife outcome. The combinations of person and community alone (P + C) are often associated with pathways that sit outside of educational provisions.

Table 4 Dual contributions to pathways of experiences (Billett, 2022)

Informants	Contribution	Examples of transitions
Alex	PE	Left school at grade 10 and did a 5-year mechanical apprenticeship
Anastacia	PE	Pursuing a career in data science through enrolment into Master of Data Science
Annita	PE	Back in Australia from Saudi Arabia and the beginning of her work in the Disability Support Sector (i.e., starting with voluntary work in the sector)
Damien	PE	Left school and becoming an apprentice in manual arts
Felicia	PC	To adulthood in a time of change – becoming a partner and parent when she was experiencing religious persecution which limited her educational options
Ingrid	PE	Working in an architectural company in Australia while studying English (which impacted her career choice, instead of becoming a doctor, she became an architect)
Ingrid	PE	Deciding on a career change by starting a law degree
Joshua	PC	Left school at 14 and helped on sheep and cattle properties, Vic and NSW
	PC	Moved to Queensland and became a share farmer, and helping on dairy farm
Paul	PE	Completed Year 10 high school in Sydney, then 5-year toolmaking apprenticeship
	PC	Started own one-person mechanical underground consultancy, until forced retirement.



It is noteworthy that even in circumstances where engagement in educational programs and provisions (i.e., the enacted curriculum) occurred, on its own it was rarely sufficient to support these informants' progression along their working life pathways. Hence, this emphasises again what Bobbitt argued long since that we need to account for the entire set of experiences that supports learning when conceptualising what constitutes curriculum. Moreover, both within and between these key transitions were also identified sets of educative experiences that included those within educational institutions but were far from the only source of these kinds of experiences.

Representing personal curriculums

Capturing and representing working age adults' personal curriculums:

- is helpful to understand entire developmental journeys across working lives;
- allows transitions to be identified and illuminates how they were initiated, negotiated and mediated through combinations of personal, brute and institutional factors;
- provides means to elaborate specific educative experiences supporting worklife learning;
- permits evaluating what constitutes lifelong education and how it can support worklife learning of the different kinds and what constitutes learning goals and how they have been achieved and by what means and identify what was not.

An explanatory account places persons' learning and change centrally in the analysis. However, finding ways of representing these life histories for scientific publication comprises a challenge.

Reconstituting lifelong education and worklife learning

These explanatory concepts offer ways of capturing what constitutes worklife learning: what is afforded to adults and its mediation by them. They position and elaborate worklife learning as socio-personal processes shaped by institutional, personal and brute facts. The personal journeys comprising curriculums or pathways that are person-particular, understood on their own terms (Pinar, 1975) are pertinent to worklife learning. This reconstitutes 'lifelong education' far more broadly than experiences provided by intentional educational programs and institutions to be inclusive of wider accounting of educative experiences. In particular, the practices of communities (Gherardi, 2009) stand to be salient. As with Gherardi's conception, this more encompassing set of contributions extends the duality of participatory practices that were used to illuminate learning in work settings (Billett, 2004). This raises the need to open up policy and practice options beyond taught programs to consider personal pathways, community engagement and assistance to negotiate worklife transitions.

The discussion in this bulletin makes important distinctions between 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong education'. These adults' worklife learning is personally defined, societally shaped and framed by brute facts of maturation (e.g., ageing) emphasising

their complex interdependency. Transitions they encountered and needed to negotiate are personally distinct in kind, scope and frequency across working lives, as evidenced by their diverse personal curriculums. Their learning and development mediated by relations amongst personal agency and intentionality, interdependently with what is afforded by educative experiences in intentional education programs and practices of the 'community'. Beyond the lifelong education discourse, educative experiences cast broadly to include provisions and what is afforded experiences that provide advice, opportunities, support learning, guide access and assist negotiate transitions. Beyond individual agency and intentionality and education provisions, what is afforded by 'communities', these adults engage in variously sanctioned support that provide access to opportunities and augment adults' learning and development. So lifelong educative experiences and personal pathways are facilitated by practices of their communities.

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RESEARCH TEAM

Professor Stephen Billett (Project Director);

Professor Henning Salling Olesen (Roskilde University);

Professor Laurent Filliettaz (University of Geneva);

Professor Sarojni Choy;

Dr Raymond Smith;

Dr Anh Hai Le; and

Dr Debbie Bargallie

*School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University (Mt Gravatt campus)*

For queries about this research or Research Bulletin, please contact Professor Stephen Billett (s.billett@griffith.edu.au)

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