

Learning across work-life research

Knowing more fully what constitutes learning across working life and how negotiating occupational and workplace transitions might be best supported is salient for working age adults, their workplaces and communities.

Drawing on a current investigation of adult Australians' worklife learning, two concepts emerge as being explanatory for understanding and supporting that learning.

Firstly, there is are accounting for the range of educ support participation, and guide and augment that

Secondly, personally unique pathways of experience elaborate how these adults engage with work and l

Together, these explanatory bases offer ways to cap learning across working life as shaped by what is af



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Progression

- Lifelong learning and education
- The investigation
- Transitions in working life
- Kinds of worklife learning
- Educative experiences
- Personal curriculum
- Lifelong learning and education in prospect



Worklife learning and lifelong education

As working life get longer, subject to greater occupational and workplace changes, learning associated with employability becomes more salient for working age adults.

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 key premises and purposes.

Erroneously, 'lifelong education' and 'lifelong learning' are often used interchangeably.

The former is an institutional fact (Searle 1995), the latter is a social practice.

To understand further what constitutes worklife learning, we need to explore the sets of factors and constructs contribute and do so in different ways.

Opens up considerations of what constitutes lifelong learning and support learning across working lives.



Practices and policies for sustaining employability through worklife learning (an ARC funded project)

Research question

The research question guiding this project is: *What personal, educational and workplace practices can best sustain employability across working life?*



Overview of the investigation's three phases

Phase 1 – Identifying processes and outcomes of work-life learning

Over thirty informants from diverse occupational classifications, from across gender and ages each provided retrospective accounts of their work life history learning through two interviews (Salling-Olesen 2016). Captured over 200 instances of work life transitions.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of life history interview data.

Phase 2 – Elaborating processes and outcomes of learning, and learning support

Monitoring of 30 informants' work-life changes and learning through detailed progressive and analyses of their current work and learning activities over a 14-month period.
Varied procedures to accommodate changes brought about by COVID-19.

Phase 3 – Advancing policy and practice implications

Consolidating findings and addressing procedural questions about enhancing their learning activities (i.e., improving practice in workplaces and tertiary education) and policy recommendations. Survey data from over 670 respondents.

Reported and discussed here are findings and concepts from Phases 1 and 2



Vignette: Salim

Salim was born into a Bahà'í family in Iran. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he experienced religious persecution that restricted his education/worklife options and faced perilous conscription. He and his wife fled and came as refugees to Australia. He failed to have his university education recognized. Over the next 35 years, he worked in a range of jobs (e.g., factory work, spare parts, driving buses and taxis) before gaining skills in and becoming certified as a builder. He worked in that field for some years before a work injury required him to seek alternatives. He secured a coffee shop franchise, sometimes returning to bus and taxi driving, before selling it and becoming a project manager for a construction company.

Transitions

Salim has experienced many transitions across his adult life, each requiring significant progress. These include: i) becoming a husband and parent when religious persecution restricted his education and employment options; ii) fleeing his country of birth to establish a new life; iii) needing to be competent in English to participate in education and work; iv) working in various employment of different kinds (e.g., factory work, spare parts sales); v) becoming a builder; vi) coffee shop franchisee; and vii) project manager for a construction company.



Vignette: Shirley

Shirley is in her fifties and is currently a casual administrative worker. She was born with a learning disability (i.e., dyslexia). Living in an area of Australia where educational support was limited, she struggled through primary and secondary school and completed her schooling with limited literacy. Supported by her parents, she was found initial employment and then through vocational educational programs she learnt occupational skills. Later, as an adult she completing her tertiary preparation and graduated with a teaching degree. However, her teaching career was short, but she used her newly-developed literacy skills to secure employment in local government. Yet, she faced struggles and difficulties in some demanding aspects of her work roles that led to her early retirement from full-time work.



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s across her work life and to the present, including becoming a: i)
ii) receptionist, iv) high school teacher, v) a clerical worker
al government, before retiring early because of work-related ill-
ministrative worker.

Transitions in working life

Why focus on transitions across working life?

Learning required to negotiate them; their personal significance and impact, offer bases for understanding learning across working life.

Provide bases to capture processes of learning and its outcomes (development).

Most accounts of development across lifespan emphasise maturation (e.g. Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Baltes, Levinson) and whether and how transitions are related to these processes.

Some accounts emphasise i) maturation ('brute facts'), ii) institutional facts - Searle's 'brute facts' and societal contributions (i.e., institutional facts - Searle 1996).

All three seem relevant to understand and inform career development (Scribner 1993), with individuals' development (Valsiner 1998).

Considerations of transitions seem pertinent now with working life constantly in flux and subject to frequent transformations.



Adults' transitions and worklife changes (Billett, Le, Choy & Smith 2021)

From the life history interviews, the transitions these informants negotiated were found to be initiated by six categories of worklife changes:

1. Stages of life changes (i.e., maturation)
2. Changes of employment status
3. Change in occupations
 - 3a Change in occupations or occupational focus
 - 3b Change in skills and capacities
 - 3c Changes in employment through restructuring or change
4. Changes in location (i.e., geographical and or societal)
5. Changes in physical and psychological health changes –
 - 5a Changes in personal health and well-being
 - 5b Changes in family health and well-being
6. Change in personal/lifestyle (i.e., personal facts)
 - 6a Change in personal preferences and values
 - 6b Change in subjectivity



Changes that initiate and comprise transitions (Phase 1)

Variable	Value	N	%
Changes that initiate, shape and represent worklife transitions	Personal/lifestyle (voluntary/involuntary -7)	193	94.1
	Occupational (continuity/discontinuity-5)	188	91.7
	Employment status (advance/discontinuity)	123	60.0
	Stages of life (maturation)	45	22.0
	Location (national/international)	38	18.5
	Physical and psychological health (self/family)	15	7.3

Personal/lifestyle and occupational changes most frequently mentioned (both voluntary and non-voluntary)

Occupation change mainly about continuity

Employment status – advancement and discontinuity

So, issues of 'self' emphasised in this patterning.



Kinds of worklife learning required

- 1 Language & Literacy – language skills and capacities, both spoken and written were evident in informants' trajectories, albeit in different ways.
- 2 Cultural practices – the norms, forms and practices associated with a nation's political, social or educational systems, institutional mores, occupational requirements, and those associated with the individuals (e.g., family tradition, faith).
- 3 World of work – involves awareness of requirements productive, punctual, reliable, solving problems and being in workforces and those who are served. Extends to understanding career pathways.
- 4 Worklife engagement – Learning about worklife involvement and engagement in work as their circumstance change or are working life in with other priorities.
- 5 Occupational skills – associated with the occupations seeking to be employed.



Worklife learning and lifelong education

Much incremental learning between transitions arises through personal agency and engagement (OECD 2015), and external support can be minimal or unnecessary (i.e., mimetic learning) (Billett 2014).

Learning knowledge not able to be secured by 'discovery' efforts often requires: i) access to and guidance within a domain of socially-generated knowledge (e.g., language, occupation), ii) effortful engagement and iii) support from outside the person (i.e., education, family, co-workers).

Intentionality for learning across working life not always singularly focused, long-term strategic and coherent, but usually goal-directed (i.e., purposeful) (Malle et al 2000).

Individuals' 'education' across working life is a personally-shaped, outcomes can only be judged individually (Pinar 1980).

A range of experiences and support assisted informants' participat
'educative experiences' afforded and suggested by the social work

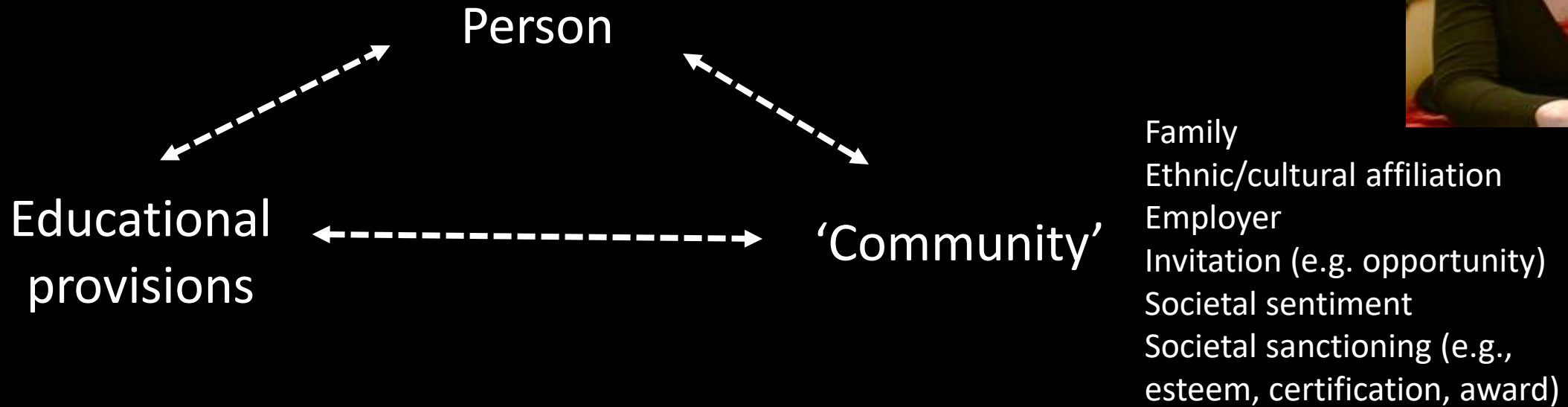
The education process has no end, beyond itself; its own end. It is

Need to account for continuities and discontinuities across transiti
and 'lack of success', which important to capture (Levinson 1986) f



Securing transitions: Person + education + 'community' (Billett, Choy & Le 2022)

Securing transitions to achieve desired significant outcomes from transitions appears to be premised on contributions of three mediating factors:



Educative experiences more than lifelong educational provisions

Shades of the 'practices of communities' (Gherardi 2009)

Educative experiences

Educative experiences assisting, guiding and supporting lifelong learning were found to be those that:

- guide towards and provide opportunities for individuals to engage in work activities which they learn and would have otherwise been unavailable;
- invitation to engage in activities and interactions that they would not learn through disc
- support and mediate access to knowledge required for those activities and interactions that they would not learn through disc
- guide the development of those capacities either directly through their own interventions; and
- acknowledge, capture, reward and certify their learning and progress that they would otherwise be unable.



Educative experiences	n	Examples
guide towards and provide opportunities for individuals to engage in activities and interactions otherwise unavailable to them;	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 International Harvester in Rocklea 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 (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>
acknowledge, capture, reward and certify their learning that allow them to progress in ways that would otherwise not be able.	125	<p>Parker - <i>Moving to Cairns and becoming a first officer then Captain</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did further aviation qualifications to fly in instrument conditions, which also built up 1500 hours to apply for the air transport licence • Got a job with Metro jet craft, flying turboprop; 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; 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; 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
support and mediate access to the knowledge required for engaging in those	123	<p>Dave - <i>Returning to university to complete his first degree (Bachelor of Arts doing German) (1971) and becoming a high school teacher in Rockhampton – 1 year (in 1972)</i></p>



ished those two years, there was an arrangement that you could go back into paid full-time study if you had missed because you'd been in the army. And the Bachelor of Arts, majoring in German. So he came back to Queensland after finishing his study, he went back to the Queensland high school teacher. And his second child was a musician and grocery business

the restaurant, the family moved back to Queensland to start an Asian grocery store. This coincided with the opening of a new store. They combined the selling of cigars with the grocery store. So, this transition managed to stay within the family business. It was in this role that she moved from an central fruit and vegetable market and purchasing to contracted research and career coaching. She had the same role from her previous boss



Personal curriculum

Orthodox view of curriculum aligns '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 (in press).

Accommodates the brute fact of maturation, as well as institutional (e.g. Tyler 1949, Bobbit 1918, 2009) factors.

Distances curriculum from being constituted, largely, as an institution (e.g. Tyler 1949, Bobbit 1918, 2009) enacted by social institutions).

Early theorising positioned curriculum in these ways (e.g. Bobbit 1918, 2009) dominant discourse of 'schooling' (e.g., Tyler 1949).



Transition	Description	Changes that initiate, shape and represent worklife challenges	Mediation: Person + Education + 'Community' (+/-)
1- Left school at grade 10 and did a 5-year mechanical apprenticeship	Grew up on a farm up in Brookfield, went to local state school until grade 8 , then to XXX state high for 2 years in 1959-1960. Left school at grade 10, and secured an apprenticeship as a mechanic in 1961. Just to get an interview there was street-long queue for three positions. Not his first choice, but had to take it. Completed a 5-year apprenticeship, then did an extra year or so for diesel and auto electrics that weren't part of the mechanic's curriculum.	Stages of life; Changes of employment status; Change in occupations or occupational focus; Change in skills and capacities; Change in Subjectivity	person + education
2- Became a mechanic in two different transport companies	On completing his apprenticeship, he got a job with International Harvester in xxx 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 manufactured in Queensland. He worked for another company, but found their standards of repair were low so he left after about 10 months. It was a learning experience in itself for him.	Changes of employment status; Change in Subjectivity	person + education + opportunity (i.e., a learning experience although they were not worthwhile companies)
3- Got a job working on boat engines and did a second apprenticeship	He worked as a diesel mechanic on boats. It was interesting, but he injured his back and was told he never walk for a while . In 1969-1970, he put himself through a second electrical apprenticeship at xxxx TAFE doing instrumentation and process control for his job on the boats, until the end of 1977, when was made redundant . After finishing his second apprenticeship, he couldn't find a job because of the introduction of electronics and even TV electronics technicians couldn't secure jobs .	Changes of employment status; Change in occupations or occupational focus; Change in location; Change in skills and capacities; Personal Physical health/well-being; Change in Subjectivity	person + education + restructuring (i.e., the introduction of electronics limited the opportunity to secure electrical work) (--)
4- Became redundant after the second apprenticeship and did casual painting job	He then started working with his next-door neighbor doing some painting such as buildings in the city and interior painting of the City Hall.	Changes of employment status; Change in occupations or occupational focus; Change in skills and capacities; Change in Subjectivity	person + education + community
5- Became a breakdown mechanic at RACQ for 30 years and retired at the age of 64	Then he secured a job as a breakdown mechanic with RACQ and was in the job for over 30 years and retired at the age of 63 in 2008 due to his long service accrued leave and Global Financial Crisis hitting his superannuation. The only way to get his superannuation was to leave .	Changes of employment status; Change in occupations or occupational focus; Change in skills and capacities; Change in Subjectivity	person + education + opportunity (i.e., opening for a job as a breakdown patrolman with RACQ)
6- Post-retirement: Did some casual maintenance work	Worked in maintenance in the factory where his son-in-law worked until he was 67. Was told he couldn't work fast enough and had to give up the job. Joined the Men's Shed in 2012 while doing some freelance maintenance work which he found too demanding too petty: A friend working in a childcare centre advised him of need for maintenance and repair, so he got the job, then had a similar job with another centre.	Stages of life; Changes of employment status; Change in occupations or occupational focus; Personal physical health/well-being ; Change in Subjectivity	person + education + family (i.e., son-in-law), familiar (i.e., a female friend of his ex-wife)

Lifelong learning and education in prospect

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 relationships interdependently with what is afforded by educative practices of the 'community'.

Beyond the lifelong education discourse, educative environments provide advice, opportunities, support learning, guide transitions.

Beyond individual agency and intentionality and education these adults engage in variously sanctioned, supported learning and development.

So lifelong educative experiences and personal pathways

