Bridges: linking the work of NSW neighbourhood centres to education

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Introduction

In New South Wales (NSW), 'social work' and 'adult community education' are understood as two different activities that operate from different sites (Flowers, 2005). In NSW, social work comes under the broad domain of a myriad of not-for-profit, faith-based and increasingly for-profit, organisations, or as an adjunct to the core business of state institutions (eg hospitals). On the other hand, adult community education is the largely understood as the responsibility of the state supported Adult Community Education (ACE) sector: a sector comprising 'sanctioned' sites of learning.

It is neighbourhood centres as *un*sanctioned sites of learning that are of central interest here. Neighbourhood centres are typically small, community owned and managed non-profit organisations that, as their name suggests, are located in both metropolitan and rural neighbourhoods. Unlike other Australian states, NSW centres are not considered to be providers of adult community education. Hence, an overarching aim of my professional doctoral project is to 'talk up' learning in neighbourhood centres—or as others suggest, 'discursify' (Petersen 2004:21) or 'word' (Richardson 1994:923) the provision of learning in NSW neighbourhood centres into existence. This is because centres first need to be drawn into the discourses of education, as legitimate sites of adult community education, before educational researchers, policy and decision makers (if not the centres themselves) consider them as potential sites of learning.

My doctoral research has focused on addressing this aim by producing three 'versions' of a 'learning provided by NSW neighbourhood centre' story. While the methodology for each *sub*-version differs (from a literature review to a quantitative survey to interviews), its important to stress that it was never meant as a triangulated fantasy to get me somehow closer to the truth—but that's another story (Rooney 2006). *This* paper is largely concerned with the third 'version' where my particular purpose is to link the work of neighbourhood centres with that of 'education', through analysis of a series of interviews with people involved with neighbourhood centres.

I begin this paper by briefly conceptualising the plight of centres in terms of Lyotard's notion of the *differend*—this serves to warrant a need for linking. Following this, I draw upon ideas manifest in 'lifelong learning' discourses, and in particular Delors' 'four pillars of learning' in effort to describe how to link the work of centres to education. While much data informs this discussion in my doctoral thesis, here I include only a small illustrative sample. I conclude by drawing attention to various 'bridges' that such linking enables.

Why link?

There are some 900 neighbourhood centres across Australia, of which 320 are located in NSW. Neighbourhood centres are advocates for community development practices and work within a social justice mandate. This means that they work with some of the NSW's most disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Centres describe themselves as generalist organisations because they do not focus on a specific issue, service, or activity type (like education). Rather, they work across issues and services and may focus on several simultaneously. While this includes using ACE-like activity (as a *tool* for community development), they are not understood as ACE providers nor do they typically understand themselves being in the business of adult learning (Rooney 2004, Flowers 2005).

In NSW, most ACE research (predominately produced *by* or *via* the ACE sector) positions the state's sixty odd sanctioned providers (community colleges) as the *sole* providers. References to other possible sites of (lower case) adult community education are typically non-existent. ACE (the activity) is defined by what ACE (the sector) does. This situation draws attention to the stakes for sanctioned ACE in producing accounts of adult community education with themselves as central players. Given that these organisations are resourced by the state to provide adult community education, it is in their interest not to draw attention to other sites that may be providing similar (or ACE-like) activity: to do so would surely trouble understandings that assure their ongoing support. ACE then are well positioned to put themselves forward for, and make use of, any limited support made available through the state to further develop adult community education—in doing so they maintain central position as 'the sector'. Meanwhile, organisations with less visible provision (like neighbourhood centres) are hindered from any further development that accessing public funding might enable.

Despite suggestions that adult education may occur in neighbourhood centres (Rooney 2004, Rule 2005), any provided by these organisations is not captured by the state's measuring mechanisms. This is because organisations not explicitly funded to provide adult education are not required to collect statistics—a catch 22. In order to be counted they must count, but those that already 'count' are the only ones doing the counting. Coincidently, in a *sub*-version of my thesis I *counted*—I counted some 35,000 enrolments (of predominately disadvantaged people) per week and over three million student contact hours per year. But for this version I talked with people involved in centres, including one centre user who told me:

> *Well, I always wanted to do quilting—I started doing that—so the women in the quilters group we all swap books and things—until I joined I hadn't read the sort of books that they're into though—so its picked up my—what I read now—and that's part of the quilters group.*

So how are these types of groups to be understood by onlookers? ...by funding institutions? ... by educational 'authorities'? What educational categories can capture them? What's at stake now… and for whom? How might 'education' attract this woman to a 'real' literacy class when a quilting

group in a neighbourhood centre is the site where she is already 'picking up her reading'?

What I had previously counted in a quantitative survey was that which resembled ACE (courses, participants, SCHs etc)—only that which could be framed in categories borrowed and adapted from educational discourses—and this neglected *other* important activity. A quilting group is unlikely to fit the 'important' category of literacy class—yet for this woman the quilting group doubles as a reading group—a group where she is learning to learn. Moreover, during our talk she also spoke of meeting people in the centre who are different from her, and how she has come to know difference differently. Furthermore, a coordinator tells me later that these groups are typically provided to reduce social isolation.

It seems obvious then that the categories of a narrowly conceived ACE sector are inadequate to account for centre learning. Moreover, a narrowly conceived ACE sector can also be cause for anguish for centres. Drawing from Lyotard's (1988) concept of *the differend* the complexities of this can be conceptualised. In his terms, a *differend*:

> would be the case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgement to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (or both of them if neither side admits this rule) (Lyotard 1988:xi).

In regard to centres this means for them to argue that they are legitimate players in the field of education, they need to frame their case in very particular 'educational' terms. However, given that centres' case rests on social justice and community development, to argue in these terms would annul the argument. In this sense the relationship between neighbourhood centres and ACE is characterised by a *differend* as the centres' become victimised by the dominant education discourse. By implication, there is no position that centres might take up without further suffering (Lyotard 1988). Centres are at once silenced from making any claims, *and* are caused damage from both the silencing and from having no means to articulate their damage.

Calling a third party as arbitrator would require taking such a claim to the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education (BACE) who hold the legislative authority to decide in matters of ACE (BACE 1996:6). But convincing BACE that neighbourhood centres are providing adult community education suggests 'educational discourses' are amenable to both the 'rules' of NSW neighbourhood centres *and* the ACE sector. A *sub*-version of my thesis attempted this—the result was a version that inhibits the social justiceness of centres and in doing so does further injustice. Although serving to bear witness to a *differend* and demonstrating that claims were *not* transferable to a third party*, c*entres were silenced and were caused damage from the silencing, *and* had no means to articulate such damage (Lyotard

1988:30). With 'refutation useless' (Lyotard 1988:23) a possibility lays in developing ruses, or in making, "experimental moves within the language games that situate us [...] and in this way to generate new effects throughout the social network' (Barron 1992:39). Thus to link is essential, but *how* to link is another story (Lyotard 1988:29).

Indeed, linking is necessary so as not to engage in the 'gladiator' strategy (Rojeck 1998:12) of overthrowing an educational frame for a learning one, but to argue for the inclusion of learning in education – and *vice versa*. If one starts with an 'education' then what is learning is limited, conversely if one starts with a 'learning' then what can be conceived as educational is broadened significantly. A learning landscape framing does this because it does not outright deny 'education', but acknowledges educational institutions being one of many possible sites of learning. Hence linking 'learning' to 'education' retains the category of education (and differences are kept in play).

How I linked
The inadequacy of educational categories is evident when attempting to contain the provision of learning in NSW centres. 'Education' has not served NSW neighbourhood centres well. The 'field of education' has been a closed one for centres, not to mention being a closed one for many of the people that use centres. With that said, the 'field of education' remains a popular metaphor that produces understandings and makes visible particular practices and organisations—hence not entirely dispensable either.

Conceptualising a 'field' not only establishes it boundaries but also inscribes organisations and practices in policy which then becomes 'deterministic in making decisions about who/what is (and is not) to be included in 'the field' (Edwards 1997:68).   Framing neighbourhood centre accounts within the 'field of education' alone works to constitute and maintain its borders—not to mention providing a distorted view of what is deemed educational. Moreover, continuing to play by these rules maintains neighbourhood centres' peripheral position. However, when learning is also understood to be located beyond educational institutions, 'a greater multiplicity of activities is seen as involving learning and hence can be deemed educational' (Edwards and Usher 2001:276).

To link and accommodate differences, I set out to frame neighbourhood centre activity by employing a 'learning landscape' lens. Against the learning monopoly of education, lifelong learning advocates recognise that learning takes place in a variety of sites (OECD 2004, Harrison 2003). A learning landscape is a fluid metaphor that conjures up unpredictability, hybridity (the possibility that almost anything might be included), variance, and an acceptance of diversity—a fluidity that resonates with the unpredictability of centres' practices. The learning landscape is a 'horizontal' concept and therefore pays less reverence to hierarchy (both in terms of the organisations involved *and* learning provided). This horizontality is important for eschewing categories of vocational or otherwise, formal and informal etc that can haunt educational researchers.

Learning landscape is useful because it acknowledges the de-differentiation of boundaries/identities locked into a 'field' view, as well as accounting for the shifts in organisational identities that appear less apparent in 'education field' stories. The landscape also has connotations with art, which draws attention to the pleasure in noticing details that might otherwise go unnoticed. Furthermore, it draws attention to texture and contribution to the overall work a contributor in the landscape might make, rather than simply on size and prominence. Moreover, the notion of landscape draws attention to place and specificities, which helps develop a regional view rather than a universal focus.

Finally, a learning landscape also draw attention to learning as a process—thus to possibilities. This is unlike the term 'ACE' because, for the most part, process has been nominalised to the point where ACE is now viewed as either a program, a product or an organisation (McIntyre 2001). A learning landscape implies a breadth that makes possible the reinstatement of processes of learning—ideas about learning that can also serve the interests of social justice—ideas that have become even more complex in recent histories (Armstrong and Miller 2006).

Importantly this metaphor does not seek to substitute for education, but to take account of it—to link is not to subsume. Hence this is not a 'gladiator strategy' (Rojeck 1998) of annihilating 'education' in favour of 'learning'. Rather through framing the work of centres with such a lens, both specificities of ACE *and* of neighbourhood centres provision can be acknowledged and accounted for. Not to mention the possibility that ACE will learn something about providing learning for disadvantaged communities.

It is for these reasons that I employ Delors' pillars (1996) as a heuristic for describing the provision of learning in NSW neighbourhood centres. These pillars cannot be conceived independently though—and it is this inter-relatedness that serves to link learning to education—yet like a bridge, differences are retained.

Delors' pillars
The Delors' Report (1996), is the commonly used name for the 'Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century', which was formally established by UNESCO at the beginning of 1993. The resulting report, 'Learning: The Treasure Within' was delivered in 1996. Chaired by former European Commission President Jacques Delors, the Commission proposed, building on the four pillars that are the foundations of all education and that all societies should aim to move towards a world, in which none of the talents hidden within every person are left untapped. This report built on what was known as 'the Faure Report' of 1972, which was one of the first international attempts to influence educational policies along a lifelong learning perspective (Medel-Anonuevo 2002:xv). A central concept in the Faure Report was the idea of 'learning to be', and twenty four years later Delors' added three more such concepts. The concepts central to Delors'

report were four interrelated 'pillars of learning'; learning *to know;* learning *to do*; learning *to be; and,* learning *to live together* (Delors 1996:37*).*

These pillars, along with the rest of what has come to be known as 'the Delors' Report', have had both its critics and champions (eg Forrester 1998, Teasdale 1999, de Leo 2006). Moreover, some view the Delors' report as both 'visionary *and* flawed' for example Teasdale (1999) who critiques it on the grounds of it being Euro-centric, and also for promoting learner centred school education. However, despite his critique he also calls the report 'inspirational' and 'challenging' (1999:1). One of the challenges, as he sees it, is the tension *between the* pillars. Although, he sees this as a necessary tension:

> ...between preparation for work and preparation for life: between learning to know and do, and learning to be and to live together. But its very difficult to get the tensions right...in Australia the balance is far from right. We're putting too much emphasis on knowing and doing, and not enough on being and living together (1999:5).

Teasdale's latter point about an emphasis on learning concerned with 'knowing and doing' over other concerns (like a social purpose), is shared by many (Johnston 2000; Armstrong and Miller 2006). Interestingly it is also one that is currently reclaiming ground in high-level policy. For example the OECD have re-thought human capital as an independent 'be all and end all', rather there is now some agreement that human capital has an intimate and interdependent relationship with *social* capital. So while emphasis for OECD is on the development of stocks of *human* capital, this development is increasingly seen alongside the development of the *social* variety too:

> Human and social capital enable individuals, communities, firms and societies to cope with the demands of rapid social and economic change ... reskilling adults for new types of work and providing the trust and sense of common purpose on which most social and economic activities depend. Such capital represents a key resource for sustainable development (OECD 2001:65).

Learning *to know*

In a general sense the idea of *learning to know* is about knowledge acquisition. Educational institutions are founded on this idea and the 'knowledges' they disseminate often appear as discrete disciplines. An earlier chapter presented neighbourhood centre provision in neat disciplinary areas. Provision was presented as a list of broad areas that included *learning to know* about; society and culture; information technology; management and commerce; and, the environment etc. It is safe to say then that in around two thousand and thirty neighbourhood centre activities a week people *learn to know* about a range of broad fields of study. Hence *learning to know* can be said to be a pillar in the provision of NSW neighbourhood centres because people are 'acquiring knowledge' from a number of legitimate educational categories:

> *The most interesting thing I learned was the Chinese medicine – that wasn't formal learning it was just a lady who practiced it here* (Centre user).

> *We sit together and we talk – we talk about anything – fishing – going to the doctors – dancing – I think I always learn something new* (Volunteer)

Yet a list of broad areas of study (itself, a legacy of education) does not adequately describe the extent of *learning to know* inherent in neighbourhood centres' community development work. It eschews adequate acknowledgment of the knowledge 'acquired' in relation to *learning to know* about the world, the local world of neighbourhood, *and* the people that occupy these worlds.

Learning to know the neighbourhood

To work towards the idea of social justice, centres engage in several practices that come under the broad heading of community development. Part of this work is providing information and referral (LCSA 1998a; LCSA 2004a). Both these practices can be understood as ones where *learning to know* is occurring because knowledge is being 'acquired'. Take 'providing information' as a first example:

> *They're learning about life – you know, things that can help them get through their daily life – yeah you can go to TAFE – and yeah you can go to ACE – and you can go to all those things – but if you can't get through your everyday life then its difficult to even put your name down to do a course – and I think this centre is especially good at this – they can come and get a combination of information that helps them get through their daily lives and so they can think outside the box – and what else is available for them – and now I'm feeling a bit happier about myself – I have a roof over my head – I have somewhere to live – and maybe I got some help with my welfare and maybe now I can do something else – but if you haven't got those basic needs met then its difficult to think about other things* (a neighbourhood centre worker talking about a group of women attending a group).

> *If you want your lawn mowed – if you want a handyman – its all there for you to find out – its just a hive of information that you can tap into – are you bored? come with me* (Volunteer).

> *I learn at the centre just because I'm here – through osmosis a lot of the time I think – you learn what's going on* (Centre user).

Providing referral is also a community development practice and this too can be understood as *learning to know* through acquiring (local) knowledge. Basically, referral is about providing a metaphorical compass or map to help people find their own solution/s to any number of possible problems. Hence, referral can also be conceived as a practice where people acquire knowledge, this time about how they find their own solutions:

> *We have a really good saying here – we say come down to the centre and we can tell you 'where to go' – so we use this around all our advertising – basically its what we do – if you need to know something about the town – or you need a service – we can tell them or refer them on to other services* (Neighbourhood centre volunteer).

> *We have a network here where we can refer people to the right people* (Volunteer).

Both sets of comments suggest that providing information and referral, as part of neighbourhood centre work, constitutes knowledge acquisition - hence, *learning to know*. And while it is a particular type of 'knowledge' that is acquired, it is evident that people acquiring it are *learning to know* something.

Others *learning to know*

It is not only centre users that are *learning to know* in NSW neighbourhood centres. Workers, volunteers and others in various relationships with centres also suggest that they acquire knowledge through their association:

> *Well, just working on that constitution was an interesting one – the legal problems I had no idea how difficult the legal problems were until we began to put that document together* (Centre management committee member).

This management committee member has learned about the 'legal problems' of the wider environment in which the organisation operates, and in doing so has increased what he 'knows'. Moreover the types of 'problems' are not limited to those experienced by the organisation:

> *The centre has opened up a new world for me – to social problems we have* (Volunteer).

> *You've got different groups coming in and you go to different sessions and things you find out – what's going on in the area- you're always learning* (Volunteer).

Learning to know others
Aside from legitimate categories, people are *learning to know* others as result of their association with neighbourhood centres. While it is known that working with clients in the human service sector facilitates *learning to know* others (Eraut 2004:267), it is not learning that is limited to paid workers. As a volunteer suggests, she is *learning to know* - not only about others, but also inside knowledge about 'the industry' itself:

> *I was in marketing – but coming here was just a – a huge learning curve – how people live – what can be done – what can't be done – and how many people fall through the cracks – extraordinary extraordinary – and it happens without anybody knowing except those in the industry – which is extraordinary* (Volunteer).

A volunteer in another centre further exemplifies this point. The users of this centre include prisoners and their families. In the process of his work, the volunteer is also *learning to know* others differently:

> *I thought that was just something that happened to other people – it happened in the news – and then all of a sudden you have contact with these people – its not just the person in jail that suffer – you have the family and its not their fault either – makes you ask why they did it – the circumstances – there's always two sides to every story – you only ever get – news – the criminal – the police side...* (Volunteer).

For this volunteer his new knowledge about the other has led him to question previous beliefs that may have hindered his capacity to empathise. His work in the centre has not only brought him in contact with 'the other' but also challenged what he 'knows' about them. Yet it is not only the workers (paid or otherwise) that are *learning to know* others through their work. Centre users are also learning to know others differently:

> *What I found was – all along the way I mix with so many different cultures – we stop and have a cup of tea – and in the morning tea we talk about all sorts of things – like sometimes we talk about our countries – what happened to people - and then you learn too – cause I suppose every culture has different ideas* (Centre user).

Not only do these comments describe *learning to know* but they also flag a good first example of linking pillars. While there is evidence of *learning to know*, it is not simply 'legitimate' knowledge categories, but also knowledge about the world and about others in the world that is being acquired. Knowing about others can also be associated with the pillar concerned with *learning to live together*. Further examples of linking are forthcoming but for the moment there is more to be said about *learning to know*.

***Learning to know* how to know (learning to learn)**
As pointed out, the pillar of *learning to know* is not only about gaining knowledge but also incorporates the idea of *learning to learn* (Delors 1996:37; UNESCO ny-a)*. Learning to learn* is a popular mantra in education, and perhaps for good reason. The argument usually goes something like this: it is important for people to continually learn because of a complex and rapidly changing society. Literacy is a prime example of *learning to learn* because it is through literacy that people are able to navigate textualised knowledges. For this reason adult literacy classes are embedded in the field of education. Yet while the provision of literacy classes is most commonly associated with educational institutions there is also similar provision in NSW neighbourhood centres.

However, there is also evidence of other provision where people are *learning to learn*. Take for example …a quilting group:

> *Well, I always wanted to do quilting – I started doing that – so the women in the quilters group we all swap books and things – until I joined I hadn't read the sort of books that they're into though – so its picked up my – what I read now – and that's part of the quilters group* (Centre user).

For this participant the quilting group doubles as a reading group ... a reading group where the participant has 'picked up' her reading. She is *learning to learn*. But how are these groups to be understood by onlookers? ...by funding organisations? ...and by educational 'authorities'? What educational categories can contain it? In previous chapters these groups and other neighbourhood centre activities have been categorised in ways that make them appear clear-cut. But what's at stake now … and for whom? How might 'education' attract this woman to a 'real' literacy class when a quilting group in a neighbourhood centre is the site where she is already *learning to learn*?

These questions aside, it is clear that *learning to know* and the associated notion of *learning to learn* are evident in the work of NSW neighbourhood centres. This is so in the traditional provision of courses as well as in other activities that are generally purged from 'educational' categories: community development and volunteering practices being only two examples, and a seemingly unremarkable quilting group being another. Furthermore, this seemingly unremarkable craft group provides a second example where one pillar (*learning to learn*) is linked to a pillar concerned with acquiring skills (*learning to do*).

Learning *to do*
Learning to do is the second of Delors' pillars to be discussed here. Just as the idea of gaining knowledge is prominent within education, so too is the idea of gaining skills. In other words *learning to do* is also a feature of education. For the most part these are generally skills presumed necessary for paid work: that is, vocational skills. That educational institutions provide for the development of vocational skills is not in dispute, but neighbourhood centres also provide activities where people are engaged in this type of *learning to do*.

Learning to do 'it' for work
Earlier (in chapter seven) I reported not only the existence of VET/Pre-VET provision in neighbourhood centres but also noted a sixty-five percent increase over the past five years. In a typical week there can be almost four hundred VET/Pre-VET activities provided in centres. These range from resume writing, senior first aid or introductory computers to 'start your own small business'. This itself might be evidence enough to suggest that a pillar of *learning to do* applies to the work of neighbourhood centres.

It is not only however the people enrolled in VET/Pre-VET courses that are *learning to do* 'work' in NSW neighbourhood centres. Volunteers are learning to do a range of things that can easily be described as work skills too, and these can also lead to paid work:

> *I answer the phone – emails - send faxes – all those office things* (Volunteer).

> *The fact that I did volunteering here helped me get the job in the first place* (paid NC worker – former Volunteer).

> *I've actually seen changes in people that come in and work for me – I've seen a lot of changes in them - and a lot of them have gone on to get paid work* (Centre coordinator talking about Volunteers).

This is in accord with those who have already noted the vast learning opportunities inherent in volunteer work (Hayward-Brown, Bragg, Leonard and Onyx 2003). However learning work skills is only part of the story – people *learn to do* for purposes other than work.

Learning to do for other purposes

A privileged view of *learning to do* concerned with 'doing work' is not the only possibility. People are learning to do a range of things in NSW centres:

> *We have other groups that aren't so crafty sort of thing – like look at the board and see what's on it – from like prophecy seminars through to tarot card reading - I think [name] said once we had 500 to 600 people a month – and they had life writing – that was good* (Volunteer).

Another volunteer from the same Centre (and in the same focus group) adds:

> *Let's not forget the harmonica group – they're here on Friday – you've got seniors and juniors and you learn how to play the harmonica - $2 – our group they did a gig and had the spoons and the harmonicas and they were good – some of them are a bit rough – but you've gotta learn* [laughs] (Volunteer).

Both these comments describe learning skills other than those that are perceived as relevant to work. Some would argue that learning to read tarot cards or play the harmonica contributes little to one's human capital. Education's potential to contribute to the nation's economy by increasing stocks of human capital remains foremost in economist's mindset (Marginson 1993). With this view it is little wonder that *non*-vocational courses have come under fire in the last decades. While categories like formal and informal, VET and non-VET these have been well-troubled (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcom 2003) there is little doubt that they remain influential organising principles for policy makers and funding bodies in regard to education. These categories often emphasise the acquisition of skills that will enable learners in a presumed quest for paid work, but this can be to the detriment of other possibilities ... and again I pose the question of how a quilting group might be categorised.

Regardless, the state has reneged its funding of what might have been described as liberal education in the past but more recently has been termed even less favourably as 'cappuccino courses'(Rundle 2004). Yet a commonly stated importance among centres providing courses that might be 'cappuccino courses' is the social purposes of such provision: as demonstrated below, provision that might be described as contributing to the nation's stocks of *social* capital. Drawing only from what might be collectively considered craft courses are some examples of why centres choose to provide them:

> *An opportunity for women to get together [and] exchange ideas, share skills* (Sewing).
>
> *A social group for working women to share skills, ideas and support* (Folk Art).
>
> *To provide a fun and supportive environment for women* (Scrap Booking).
>
> *To reduce social isolation* (Art).
>
> *To eliminate loneliness, provide sound activities at low or no cost* (Craft).

Each of these craft groups can be understood as people *learning to do*, but *learning to do* 'craft' is not the prime intent of the providing centre. A broader definition of *learning to do* fits with the one subscribed to by UNESCO and can include activities that extend beyond training in occupational skills (UNESCO ny) (read 'economic' outcomes). Despite not overtly contributing to paid work these can serve an important societal purpose. While it *is* possible to make a convoluted argument about how *learning to do* craft might also contribute to paid work, these examples draw attention to another point besides. That is, they begin to demonstrate that for those doing the provision the *learning to do* component of a non-vocational course is of less importance than learning *to be* or learning *to live together*. Thus providing another example of the potential of linking pillars and in doing so linking education and learning.

Learning to do 'it' in teams

Thinking about groups draws attention to another facet of *learning to do* evident in neighbourhood centre provision: this is *learning to do* 'it' in teams (Delors 1996:37). Call it teamwork, group work or working in groups, the point is that it is a skill that is transferable into paid work because it is viewed as a valuable skill in its own right (Rychen and Salganik 2004).

Centre activities are ripe with examples of people working in teams – thus developing this important workforce skill:

> *I think that people that are involved in groups are learning a lot about what being in a group involves – they learn from those groups – more about people's lives – as well as more about what's available to them* (Centre coordinator).

But what this further suggests is that the 'provider' and 'provided for' distinction does not hold for NSW neighbourhood centres. This is seen in the many leaderless groups held in centres as the participants below explains:

> *We talk about things – we begin the group and if you've got a problem - sharing is very important part of the group I belong to – because we've got others – and we teach each other* (Garden group participant).

And paid workers reiterate the point:

> *There's huge amounts of learning happening in groups... parents learning from each other – they're learning from each other – they're learning from the mums sitting next to them's grandmother – there's huge amount of collective women in the room – and there's no 'teaching' to be done by a worker as such - its not a strictly student/teacher environment – but it works like this in all the groups we run – and workers learn about themselves – and the people that come learn about themselves – and like we're saying, people learn to get a more broader view on life* (Centre worker talking about supported playgroup).

> *The younger women were learning from the older women and the older women from the young* (Associated worker talking about supported playgroup).

In education the teacher/learner positions are clearly demarcated, in the examples above the positions of provider and provided for are more ambiguous. In neighbourhood centres people are *learning to do* as well as *teaching others to do* and those 'doing the teaching' are not always those typically associated with a 'teaching' role. Similar instances of people learning *(to do)* in the absence of a 'teacher' are acknowledged in other non-educational sites (Hughes 1997; Boud and Middleton 2003). In other words, the privileged version of *learning to do*, a view monopolised by education, is not the only one.

Learning *to be*

Learning to be is the third pillar to be explored here in relation to the work of NSW neighbourhood centres. While some educators struggle with questions about whether or not their role actually includes encouraging personal growth, others simply accept that the nature of learning inherently involves this type of work (Connole 1992:274). Personal growth is defined as expanding horizons and 'our consciousness of both self and others and opens us to more choices in beliefs, emotional reactions and behaviour than were previously available to us' (Connole 1992:273). Those with humanistic intentions advocate for 'whole person learning' (Heron 1999).

More recently education and learning have been acknowledged as sites of *self* work and the concept of identity has become central to much of this discussion (Usher and Edwards 1994; Stuart 1995; du Gay 1996; Hall 1996; Wenger 1998; Gore 2001; Paechter, Edwards, Harrison and Twinning 2001; Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates 2003). Whether personal development or self work is a marginal activity in education is not the issue, the suggestion here is that it is an explicit part of neighbourhood centre provision.

Learning to be in a neighbourhood centre

A glance down a list of courses and groups provided by centres makes clear the existence of a *learning to be* pillar associated with personal development. This extensive list includes but is not limited to; *playgroups, family groups, spirituality groups, weight watchers, exercise, ethno-specific support groups, various health condition support groups, breastfeeding, yoga, pilates, self esteem, stress management, laughing workshops etc...* Each of these can be described as activities where people are *learning to be*.

Learning to be(come)

An example of self-work is seen in the 'Life Experience Counts' program offered in a number of centres across NSW. The objective of this program is to assist participants to 're-write their selfs' from that of 'a housewife' to 'a skilled capable woman' (LCSA 1999a; LCSA 2000; LCSA 2001b). While the overt intention of external funders of this program may be to facilitate the recognition of prior learning (RPL) process in efforts to get participants moving along education or employment pathways – the centres appear less insistent on these types of outcomes.

For many centres an important outcome for this sort of re-writing of the self is that of empowerment – the empowerment of women in this case. Empowerment remains a catchcry for centres because of their humanist traditions – and again while this idea is might be debated, it is a pursuit underpinning much centre activity. Moreover, it seems that a general concept akin to empowerment is recognised even beyond the confines of centres' workers:

> *One of the barriers would-be volunteers have to go through is convincing their families that the neighbourhood centre won't corrupt them or empower them too much* (Centre coordinator).

While *learning to be* (empowered) is another way this pillar is mobilised in centre provision, there are others still. Another is exemplified in the story of a volunteer who notes how her association with the neighbourhood centre contributes to her *learning to be* ... 'kinder':

> [I've learned about] *big families with no money – usually no husbands there to give any support – well, that's opened my eyes - not that I can do all that much – but I can be kinder in my attitude to people – if you do have a problem its not always your fault* (Volunteer: responding to a question about what she gets from her volunteer work).

It seems that *learning to be* 'kinder' comes about by *learning to know* about others, and so acquiring knowledge of others might reasonably also contribute to *learning to live together* as well. Furthermore, if this is understood as 'empathy' then she might also be learning an important skill (*learning to do*) that can be used in employment*.*

However, people are *learning to be* many other things besides 'kinder':

> *I found that I had to become involved in the local community because I just wanted a life after work* (Volunteer).

> *I was a very shy person – and people can't believe – but I was – and I really have changed* (Group participant).

> *The lady who works with me on Tuesdays – she's what? – 80? Lets say 70 – she only comes up and sits there all day on the computer playing card games – just to get away from the family – she's been doing it for what? – ever since [name]'s been here* (Volunteer).

> *Yeah – gives her a break – she's a volunteer – well I think a sort of volunteer and she gets away from the kids or grandkids* (another Volunteer following on from previous one)

> *I was facing massive marital problems and I think it was like my escape and I didn't know how to cope – and so it wasn't the thing to talk about – but the neighbourhood centre gave me an understanding about these things too* (Centre user).

Learning to be <<insert any number of possibilities here>> is clearly an important pillar in centres. However, the list does not stop with attitudes – people in centres are *learning to be* everything from active citizens, to a family and/or community member, to a gendered, older, and/or healthier person:

> *I got involved in calling the first public meeting as part of [name] neighbourhood centre – and I just totally got involved – I don't know why I was so driven – but I was so driven – I never was that sort of person before* (Volunteer involved in a local social action campaign).

> *We have volunteers who go out and visit the elderly and the disabled in their home – people that are in danger of being socially isolated – people that mightn't see anyone from week to week – just to have someone call is so important – we do that* (Centre Coordinator).

> *They're meeting other families and making new connections – its meeting people and creating networks and also learning what's available here – its really important – and it's a combination of all of us working together to provide that* (Worker from organisation partnering with a Centre).

And to conclude this discussion on *learning to be* - importantly, people are *learning (not) to be* as well:

We don't assume deficit (Centre Worker).

Learning *to live together*

Learning to live together is the final pillar to be presented here. Ironically even though it has been suggested that this pillar resides predominately in the domain of neighbourhood centre provision, much evidence of its existence has been provided already within discussions of the pillars hitherto: *learning to know* others and *learning to do* things in the company of others being two examples. Yet while examples of people coming in contact with difference have already been alluded to, there are more still:

> *There's a group that learns English and they're all different nationalities – you get to know them – and sometimes they're a bit difficult to understand but its nice to make that contact* (Centre user).

> *In our gardening club have some young members – so they range from mid 30s to about 82* (Participant).

Another example is one of a volunteer who describes her understanding of people with disabilities - a woman with a niece with an intellectual disability – a niece she said that she had avoided physical contact with:

> *I don't think I saw them as real people – that they have needs like we all have – I knew a couple of shop owners who would not want them in their establishment because they were not the type of people – not complete human beings – and they look down on them – they look down on them – they didn't want them in their shops – and I understand to a certain degree ... but volunteering has given me – I just want to hug [name] now – it affects me – I think I am a nicer person for having come in contact – I hope I don't have that problem anymore – I can give [name] a hug when she wants to – and I don't feel uncomfortable – I've learned a lot* (Volunteer).

Learning to live together requires learning to know difference differently. This can require moving out of the safety of ones own community and coming in contact with an other – or as Bauman suggests the 'alien' (2001b). Coming face to face with the alien is a daily occurrence in neighbourhood centre. Take for instance the older women in a 'teddy-bear making group' that meets in a centre every Wednesday. In another room of the same centre, every Wednesday, is another meeting. The men in this other meeting call themselves the 'ACON boys' (ACON is a group primarily concerned with meeting the needs of gay men, with a particular concern for those living with HIV AIDS). For both groups, it is customary to break mid-morning in order to seek sustenance. One of the teddy-bear makers tells me how both groups chat in the kitchen. She doesn't think she's met a gay man before these encounters.

Some dismiss single-issue groups (like teddy-bear making?) as being potential sites for building long-term and meaningful relationships (Bauman 2001b), meanwhile others recognise their societal potential (OECD 2001:49). Either way, a neighbourhood centre provides a site where different groups *are* coming in contact with one another and finding similarities despite differences. Moreover relationships established in centres endure beyond the scope of these sites:

> *It came out of a parenting 'being a dad' course – and they wanted to keep meeting – and they have about a dozen guys who get together for over two years now* (Coordinator talking about a group of men who continue to meet after completing a course).

> *When I first started we had a group of about 8 women who were coming regularly – and then they started meeting regularly on Tuesdays and they'd rotate it at different peoples' homes – so they were getting together Tuesdays and Thursdays – and then they stopped coming because they*

> *were meeting twice a week in peoples' homes – they didn't need it anymore but they were introduced to each other through the ante-natal group* (Health Worker who runs groups in a Centre).

These last vignettes, along with the many examples provided through discussions of earlier pillars are indicative of how centres are providing opportunities for people to *learn to live together*. In a world that is increasingly becoming even more suspicious of difference (Bauman 2001b), the provision of learning in centres is not only able to build 'communities' but also build a complex network of bridges *across* communities.

Bridging discussion

An apt description of a pillar in paper called 'bridges' is one of pillars being part of a connecting structure. Like the Sydney Harbour Bridge, a bridge can make use of four pillars—two on each side of the expanse. In general two of these pillars appear familiar in educational settings (learning *to know* and *to do*) whereas the later two (learning *to be* and *to live together*) are more familiar in other settings (like neighbourhood centres).

While education categories like formal and informal, VET and non-VET have been well-troubled (Colley et al. 2003) there is little doubt that they remain influential organising principles for policy makers and funding bodies in regard to education. These categories often emphasise the acquisition of skills that will enable learners in a presumed quest for paid work, but this can be to the detriment of other possibilities. Learning includes education, but education does not include all learning. The earlier example of a *quilters* group might first suggest that participants will learn the various techniques of quilting (*to do*), whereas the participant indicates otherwise (*to learn*), meanwhile the centre coordinator might suggest something else again (*to live together*). Hence this example demonstrates a bridge between education and learning—and visa versa.

The title of this paper is intentionally plural though. The process of bridging pillars is primarily to link education and learning, and in doing so to link the work of neighbourhood centres to that of sanctioned educational providers. But linking pillars themselves draws attention to the possibility of other bridges besides. While it is not the intention to do the intellectual work to construct all possible bridges, in concluding I am urged to point to their possibilities.

One such bridge is that between *economic* and *social* outcomes. Contemporary ideas of education in Australia abound with notions of learning *to know* and *to do:* the first two pillars. The transferring of knowledge and skills is said to promote a healthy economy through the individual citizen/student's investment in *human* capital. On the other hand the later two pillars (*to be* and *to live together*) can promote *social capital and* are familiar within the work of neighbourhood centres. Even if unfamiliar or strange in educational settings, this does preclude them from them being present in ACE but with outcomes measured in economic terms (with *human* capital central), *social* outcomes (the potential for building *social* capital) are overlooked. Linking human and social capital via a discussion of pillars offers other possibilities for sustainable development—making this an increasingly desirable 'bridge' to construct (OECD 2001:65).

Next, thinking about *learning to know* and *do* in regard to education draws attention to both the site of transference (education) as well as the products acquired (skills and knowledge). Education is product centred. On the other hand *being* and *living together* are processes (community development practices are processes too). Exploring the provision of learning in NSW neighbourhood centres through these pillars begins to highlight the potential of constructing bridges between products and processes—and while possibilities are largely imagined here in regard to neighbourhood centres, the bridges offer possibilities for rethinking education as well.

In conclusion then, using the four pillars as an organizing device draws attention to the ways in which the activities of the neighborhood centers in NSW are contributing to both social *and* human capital. It is helpful to the overall project of education to construct the concept of learning differently and more broadly. Ironically, the centres' programs, by not being obviously educational, are better able to provide for those persons, who are not traditionally represented in "education", yet, who are widely perceived as being in need of it. More broadly, it reminds us that learning should not only be lifelong, it should also be life wide. In practical (and political) terms, it points out to the NSW educational bureaucracy that adult learning does not only occur in those community education providers that it formally sanctions (and funds). Last but not least, Delors' pillars prompt us to think about how our educational work can build bridges *between* communities—some might say (and I would agree) that the need to construct such bridges has never been more urgent. In closing then, I suggest that the possibilities inherent in linking education and learning have only been at glimpsed here.

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