INDUSTRY, EDUCATION, AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES: CAN THE PRINCIPLES OF LIFELONG LEARNING BRIDGE THE GAPS?

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ABSTRACT

The Faculty of Business and Law at Central Queensland University (CQU) is carrying out a re-evaluation of its programs. The questions under investigation are as follows. 1) What are the principles of lifelong learning? 2) What mixes of academic studies, professional competencies, and industry-base learning (IBL) are available and may be used in the Faculty of Business and Law to provide useful, valid outcomes for graduates? 3) How are the defined principles of lifelong learning being implemented from first-year in marketing?

INTRODUCTION

"When I was your age I was already working 15 hours a day and had to walk to and from work 3 miles each way…." Stories like these defined our grandparents' generation. They learned from the life experiences offered by their work, they were defined by what job they did, and they started their working life much earlier than today's generation. The work skills that were needed were learned on the job, and the worker grew with the position and stayed with the same company until retirement.

Today's workforce is structured very differently. It is not enough just to get a job. To keep the job, employees must continue to study. As demonstrated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), participation rates in education for 15-24 year-olds went from 23 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 1999, with two thirds of all students working and some 40 percent of these working 35 hours per week or more (full-time equivalent) (ABS, 2000). Most importantly, in 2002, 43 percent of all employees in the workforce studied or attended some formal education while working (ABS, 2003).

The workforce of today is also very mobile. According to ABS labour-mobility research for the year ending February 2002, there were 9.86 million people in the workforce. Of those, some 15 percent were job mobile in that year – they had changed positions or occupations at sometime during the year. Less than a quarter of the people employed had been in their jobs for more than 10 years, with the majority of the "stable" occupations being in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and the utilities industries (ABS, 2002).

The implication here is that employees in most occupations will need to continue learning within new contexts throughout their working lives, and people in general will need to have skills to enable them to actively engage in learning throughout their lives. The workplace of today demands that staff be versatile, mobile, and able to study continually in order to keep up with the changing environments (both national and global) which impact on business.

This paper is a result of the program re-evaluation that is being carried out in the Faculty of Business and Law at Central Queensland University (CQU). The faculty teaches across a number of disciplines including marketing, tourism, commerce and management, human resource management, and business administration. In the School of Marketing and Tourism, there has been much discussion about introducing online teaching and courses, new developments in conceptual areas, and the proposed introduction of a work-placement or industry-based learning (IBL) model. The questions under investigation for this paper are as follows. 1) What are the principles of lifelong learning? 2) What mixes of academic studies, professional competencies and IBL are available and may be used in the Faculty of Business and Law to provide useful, valid outcomes for graduates? 3) How are the defined principles of lifelong learning being implemented from first-year in marketing?

LIFELONG LEARNING

During the late 1990s, UNESCO established the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century which predicted that

> …the coming century, dominated by globalization, will bring enduring tensions to be overcome, tensions between the local and the global, competition and equality of opportunity, the unlimited expansion of knowledge and the limited capacity of human beings to assimilate it. (Power, 2000)

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also conducted research into the education levels of its 12 member nations and found that up to one quarter of the adult population had not acquired a minimum literacy standard necessary to function on a day-to-day basis. Such individuals cannot cope with the rapid changes in social, technological, and economic environments (Johnston, 1998). The capacity for a workforce to develop through educational opportunities then takes on a much greater significance. Individual members of the workforce must be able to constantly change and grow in their understanding and knowledge to be able to remain relevant in the technological and competitive environments in which they operate.

Lifelong learning, "…the comprehensive phenomenon including traditional school learning and vocational learning, but going beyond learning as it is traditionally understood in formal education systems, and including learning leading to self-development or self-actualization" (Cropley, 1980, p. 2), then must necessarily become a key feature of government policy and educational strategy. Many nations are developing policies which recognise the need for lifelong learning either for "competence advantage" of their labour force or as a development tool for adults seeking quality-of-life (National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET, 1996)).

Based on his analysis of the OECD discussion, McKenzie (1999) suggests that there are three central principles of lifelong learning that differentiate it from earlier educational concepts:

- the centrality of the learner and the learner needs, reflected in an orientation towards the demand side of education and training;
- an emphasis on self-directed learning, and the associated requirement of "learning to learn" as an essential foundation for learning that continues throughout life; and
- a long-term view that encompasses the life cycle. (p. 2)

These principles demonstrate a depth to society's educational needs which present problems of operationalisation for any educational institution or government body. Perhaps a key to these issues may be to develop a variety of ways of teaching and learning which together provide students with a range of skills and knowledge to motivate them to competently progress towards their own economic and social independence.

CORE CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE – ACADEMIC STUDIES

"Traditional" higher education consists of those skills acquired through tertiary studies including critical and rational or logical thinking, analysis of problems and data, problem-solving skills, research skills, and communication skills – both verbal and written (Martin, 1997). Educational institutions also have the primary function of providing conceptual knowledge such as content that is subject or course specific.

The "traditional" higher-education model has been developed around the framework of producing graduates who are "management ready" – with the capacity to step into the workforce and contribute meaningfully to employers and society. However, in traditional educational activities, teachers and institutions may barely acknowledge the relationship that should exist between the teaching activities of the institution, and the work and economic environments in which students will have to operate in the future. Lengrand (1975) proposes two major points where traditional educational practices do not meet human needs and expectations.

First, except in the few cases of vocational training which constitute a small percentage of the higher-education sector, adults are not typically prepared by education to cope with the "real" world of work. As Lengrand (1975) suggests, "There is no continuity between the world of formal education and that of the everyday existence of most human beings; any communication between the two is merely fortuitous and intermittent" (p. 125). While this may appear to be a dated and somewhat cynical philosophy, and that the conceptualisation of teaching and university activity may have moved on, the reality is that many of our students still feel a gap between the concepts learned in university and what they actually need to know when they enter the work force.

Lengrand's second point is that, where higher education does aim to provide students with a vocational training perspective, the institutions tend to operate outside of contact with the workplace and, until recently, government policy was constructed without identifying required skill sets or future job openings. Formal education in the traditional sense has often distanced itself from the real world and held itself as an institution separate from and above the world of the average person. This presents an interesting paradox considering most students are working and studying at the same time and then finding little or no crossover between the two fields.

In the Faculty of Business and Law at CQU, individual lecturers have endeavoured to develop materials to provide the best advantage for their students and, wherever possible, to give some relativity to the workplace. However, there has not been an organized faculty-wide approach to developing relationships with employers and government which may provide students with better pathways to work. Our graduates are still feeling the 'gap' between the world of education and the world of work. The linkages between what companies want and what the university provides is not perhaps as strong as it should or could be in some cases. The principles of lifelong learning would suggest that what is needed is to teach the students to learn rather than teaching the students to study. As such, courses in the faculty are now aiming to map (and teach) professional competencies within the degree programs – as well as to teach content – in an attempt to fill this gap. This fits with the second lifelong learning principle as suggested by McKenzie (1999); however, there are issues with this approach, as discussed below.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

The area of professional competencies has received much investigation and research in the past decade or so. Governments and universities worldwide have developed comprehensive studies on generic professional skill sets which employers require of university graduates. Much of the research has not been industry specific as such, though some authors have recently undertaken research into areas including retailing, information technology (IT), and law (Monash University, 2003; Christensen & Cuffe, 2002; Gush, 1996).

Professional competencies are fundamentally defined as those enduring skills possessed by an individual which, when demonstrated, can result in superior job performance (Burchell, Hodges, & Rainsbury, 2001; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). That is, the individual's job performance is causally linked to gaining or having a level of aptitude and/or proficiency in the task or skills required to perform that task. An individual's competencies generally consist of a mix of technical knowledge (including their skills and abilities) and personal characteristics such as an individual's principles, attitudes, values, and motivations (Burchell et al., 2001).

The majority of research into professional competencies has taken the form of research into cognitive development as a result of university study. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, as cited in Boylan, 2002) suggest that, overwhelmingly, students gain verbal and written communication skills throughout their university years. Other skills include scientific-reasoning, reading, and those mentioned earlier such as critical and rational or logical thinking, analysis of problems and data, and problem-solving skills (Boylan, 2002; Martin, 1997).

Students also gain "affective development" through higher education and benefit from such environmental factors as liberalising ideologies. There are demonstrable impacts on the orientation towards themselves and others and the recognition of the interdependence of individuals. They also exhibit an increased sense of responsibility toward society and an increased level of intellectual self-confidence. Graduates also report a generalized improvement in self-esteem (Boylan, 2002).

Research in New Zealand into the desirable graduate competencies included surveying the top 500 New Zealand companies, major NZ recruitment organizations, and academic staff and students (Burchell et al., 2001). Similar research has also been conducted nationally in Australia – commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs [DEETYA] (ACNielsen, 2000), and institutionally through Griffith University (Crebert, 2002). The following table demonstrates a range of competencies which have been collated from these previous studies. The categories are based largely on those developed by the ACNielsen (2000) research though I have included competencies, skills, and attributes from the other studies under the four

groupings. Interestingly, the Basic Competencies and Academic Skills categories can be grouped under the area of core conceptual knowledge as identified in this paper. The Basic Skills category seems to overlap between the core conceptual knowledge and the professional competencies areas, and the category for Other Attributes tends to be based on the students' individual traits and characteristics rather than the knowledge or skills that can be learned. It must be noted that these are my interpretations of the categories as they are not well defined in the literature and there seems to be some overlap of what constitutes a skill, a competency, and an attribute.

Basic Competencies	Basic Skills	Academic Skills	Other Attributes
1. Literacy	1. Organizational awareness (aware of organisational culture)	1. Academic learning and ability and willingness to learn	1. Directiveness (assertiveness, decisiveness, use of power, group control)
2. Time Management Skills	2. Leadership qualities, aware of impact and influence on others	2. Written business communication skills	2. Developing others (mentoring, coaching and providing support)
3. Numeracy	3. Oral business communication skills	3. Problem-solving skills and information seeking	3. Self control and resistance to stress
4. Basic Computer Skills	4. Comprehension of business practices	4. Logical and orderly thinking	4. Personal presentation and grooming
	5. Teamwork	5. Project management skills	5. Maturity and self confidence
	6. Achievement orientation/task accomplishment	6. Creativity and flair	6. Ability to benefit from on-the-job training
	7. Inter-personal skills with other staff	7. Capacity for independent and critical thinking	7. Flexibility and adaptability
		8. Conceptual thinking, pattern recognition and insight	8. Customer/client/patient focus and orientation
			9. Capacity to handle pressure
			10. Organisational commitment
			11. Enthusiasm
			12. Motivation
			13. Initiative

Table 1. Core competencies, skills, and attributes.

The Faculty of Business and Law (CQU) is at present working to chart the progress of students through their business programs to determine what competencies are being covered; if they are assessed or not; and where, when, and through what courses and at what stage of the students' development they occur. The intention is to eventually instigate a diploma of core competencies which will be awarded along with the regular testamur in an attempt to make students more attractive to employers and to provide students with greater differentiation in the employment marketplace. At issue here are the definitions of "competency" itself and how they are applied. Questions arise as to whether graduates have indeed gained a level of proficiency in the academic competencies and whether the faculty has the capacity to actively "teach" many of the other attributes listed in the table. How does one instill and/or measure creativity and flair, directiveness, leadership qualities, motivation, self control, enthusiasm, or mentoring skills, and are universities even equipped to do so? Besides the issue of how to measure these competencies, questions must be asked about how the faculty will ensure quality control across all offerings and modes of all degree programs to provide graduates and employers with a standardised outcome.

On their own, or even if integrated, the traditional higher-education model and the more recent university push for core competencies and graduate differentiation do not seem to provide a strong enough case for employability in the wider, globalized environment. Here again it seems that the principles of lifelong learning which act to instil a motivation to learn would be the link between the need to teach and assess a skill or competency and the need for students to develop self-awareness of their skills, competencies, and attributes and to take responsibility for that development.

INDUSTRY-BASED LEARNING (IBL)

In the Faculty of Business and Law at CQU, there is currently one formalised program which provides students with industry experience as an integral part of their degree. The Human Resources Management program offers a limited number of students the opportunity of a work placement (or industry-based learning placement) which they complete in conjunction with their degree program. Within CQU there are other IBL programs, and many other universities in Australia and overseas also offer IBL programs.

IBL within a university context has been defined as,

> That learning which … [utilises] opportunities, resources and experience in the workplace. It will, in general, have outcomes relevant to the nature and purpose of the workplace … the learning achieved will include appropriate underpinning knowledge and will be tailored to meet the needs of the student and the placement. (Margham, 1997 as cited in Hunt, 2000)

This definition of IBL differentiates between work placements that relates to university theoretical content and work experience which may not be integrated with such content. IBL (under this definition) also seems to provide some of the answers to the questions of operationalisation which the principles of lifelong learning raise.

There has been a growth in interest in IBL courses worldwide in the past 2-5 years. Scotland, Ireland, England, and the European Union (EU) have conducted in-depth research into the prevalence of IBL and its economic benefits to both graduates and employers, and the skills base that has resulted from this method of learning. In Scotland, research indicates that employers tend to cite increased competitiveness as the major benefit of IBL, and employees feel that it helps them to do better quality work and that it increases their self-confidence (Glass, Higgins, & McGregor, 2002).

On the work-experience front, the United States of America has for many years encouraged students to attend internships in their chosen industries during annual holiday periods. This is so that, for example, students of tourism and hospitality can gain hospitality experience at major resorts and hotels while still studying, thus providing graduates with a more rounded education and work experiences which benefit their long-term career goals.

In other areas, such as engineering and medicine degree programs, industry-based learning has been developed alongside problem-based learning (PBL). These have been combined to produce graduates with an "employment-based education" (Canty, nd.; Grant & Dickson, 2002). PBL tests students' capacity to gain knowledge by working through simulated problems, and develops a number of key skills required by graduates including group and team work, problem solving skills, critical thinking and reasoning, and effective communication skills. This, when combined with IBL, gives graduates a mixture of simulated problem-solving experiences along with work placements, so that students graduate with the understanding that there are many things they do not know about their field and that they need to maintain the skills to find the information and ask questions of others in the area.

The difficulty here is attaining a balance between content provision (traditional education) and practical application such as PBL and IBL. How much do you give students and how much should they 'discover' for themselves? CQU also has a number of unique problems which must be taken into account when developing IBL placements as part of any degree program. In the Faculty of Business and Law we have flexible modes of study including internal placements, distance education, and online education. There are also a number of campuses, including domestic regional campuses, on-shore international campuses, and off-shore international campuses which utilise a range of teaching and class formats and have a range of access issues with regard to student facilities including computers and the Internet. Clearly, it is easier to manage and administer a PBL or IBL program when there are only 30 students at one campus in a face-to-face environment, as opposed to 1,300 students in various locations and using various modes of study. However, the combination of PBL and IBL with core concepts and professional competencies would seem to provide students with the best coverage of teaching and learning strategies to engender the development of lifelong learning.

LIFELONG LEARNING & THE CASE FOR FIRST-YEAR MARKETING

If we as a faculty are to fulfil our mission as well as the implicit expectations of students (that they will, eventually, get out of university and into meaningful employment) we need to be teaching skills which help the individual to achieve his or her self-actualisation as much as we teach content knowledge. As demonstrated in the DEETYA study on graduate attributes, the top five responses of companies were, 1) "Creativity and flair", 2) "Enthusiasm", 3) "Capacity for independent and critical thinking", 4) "Flexibility and adaptability", and 5) "Personal presentation and grooming" (ACNielsen, 2000); not content. The lifelong learning concept is important to the higher-education mix to develop students with the "capacity to respond flexibly to changing circumstances, to learn throughout a career, and to integrate theory and practice by generalising from a theoretical knowledge base to deal capably with previously unmet situations" (Bligh, 1982, as cited in Tempone & Martin, 2000).

In my position with the Faculty of Business and Law I coordinate and teach the first-year marketing core course which involves over 1200 students on 11 different campuses (both on-shore and off-shore) and internal, distance/flexible education, and online modes of study. The course must necessarily provide students with the core concepts of marketing and core operational skills to allow them to function in the university environment as it is one of the first courses they enter on starting a business degree. Enmeshed with these needs are the Faculty's requirements of explicitly exposing and tracking generic skills and attributes to demonstrate "real" gains in skills development.

A further aim in the redevelopment of this course has been to take it from "the standard" form (three pieces of written assessment including a formal end-of-term examination), into a variety of teaching and learning approaches and assessment methods. These allow students to develop both conceptual knowledge and intrinsic, self-directed, learning-to-learn foundations (OECD, 1998, as cited in McKenzie, 1999). As such, online discussion lists are being used to develop relationships between students who are using the flexible-learning mode of study. Students are encouraged to "get online" through assessment rewards, and are then organizing their own study groups (both in virtual and real environments) and teams to solve problems and generate questions around the conceptual material and practical marketing experiences.

Problem-based learning has also been included which combines explicit teaching, definition of expectations and learning outcomes, and collaborative self-directed study. Students complete assessment tasks in teams and individually. This encourages them to take the concepts and to apply them to real situations where student observation of, and participation in, "reality" is their learning vehicle.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, two further programs have been developed to provide activities and opportunities to immerse students in the idea of active participation in their own education and learning – the key to acquiring lifelong learning skills.

Throughout 2003, students were encouraged to develop and participate in the Student Marketing Group (SMG). Membership was open to all business students (rather than just marketing students) and the group's directive was to approach businesses in the local area and to develop marketing and/or business strategies for them. This was designed as a structured form of work experience that allowed students to gain some commercial contact, allowed businesses in the local area to participate in the education of their student population, and helped to create greater ties between industry and the faculty – reminiscent of the "academic pact" proposed by Power (2000). Last year (2003) saw the pilot of the SMG program on the Rockhampton campus. To say it was not as successful as hoped would be a slight understatement. Of the nearly 30 students who sat at the first meeting only 5 remained by the end of the first term. The students were initially enthusiastic about the projects and chose to help the student association's student newspaper and the on-campus bar. The reception by both organizations' management was not enthusiastic, and all of the students' ideas were summarily dismissed. Work remains to be done with regard to smoothing the flow between students and businesses.

The second program was more successful. Arrangements were made with careers counsellors on campus to provide information sessions at the start of four of the lectures spaced

throughout the term. These sessions included information about participation in work-experience programs, programs run by the careers department, resume and application writing, and employer requirements of graduates. One of the sessions included two guest speakers who discussed general work experiences as well as their career development in marketing-specific areas. The aim of the program was to get students to think about where they were and where they were going, as soon as possible. It is not acceptable for students to reach their final year of study only to discover that they do not really like what they are doing or that they cannot get employment in their field because they did not complete the right courses. The careers sector has also implemented a number of work-experience programs with major companies, thereby creating better university-industry linkages. The outcome from this collaboration has been (hopefully) to create positive attitudes towards education, employment, and lifelong learning; though further research of these pilot programs is now necessary.

CONCLUSION

The traditional model of higher education and the traditional graduates that this model creates cannot hope to survive in the increasingly complex world of the global economy and knowledge society. It is also imperative to develop a model of teaching and learning which enables students of CQU engaged in all modes of study and from all locations to participate in lifelong-learning development. Students require a mix of teaching and learning activities and assessments that emphasise individual development rather than focusing on conceptual study. We need to be teaching skills which help the individual to achieve their self-actualisation as much as we teach content knowledge.

Also, a recommendation can be made for further research as well as ongoing interaction with the business community and government agencies. There is a need for faculty-wide research into the small-business requirements of graduates within regional areas – given that one of CQU's primary markets is in regional Queensland – to ensure that the faculty develops and maintains closer ties with local employers and government over the long-term.

Finally, this paper has examined a range of teaching and learning strategies including teaching core academic content, developing professional competencies, the pros and cons of industry, and problem-based learning, and has determined that the principles of lifelong learning need to be operationalised to better fill the "gaps" (perceived or otherwise) that each of these areas may leave in the graduate's education.

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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: BUILDING BRIDGES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative learning has become a key strategy in the teaching and learning environment of higher education and, indeed, at all levels of education. The potential of collaborative learning to develop a deep approach to learning and lifelong learning skills such as problem-solving, team work, negotiation, and interpersonal communication is explored in this paper through the lens of a research project involving a group made up of second year university students and older adults from retirement homes in the local community.

INTRODUCTION

Research into the student experience of collaborative learning was initiated by a project undertaken by staff in the School of Human Services at Griffith University, Logan Campus. This project, *Linking Seniors and Juniors at Logan*, funded by the Queensland Department of Families, was designed to promote a positive understanding of ageing through collaborative activities involving second year human services students and a group of older people from retirement homes in the community surrounding the Logan Campus.

Students studying the course, *Health, Ageing and Disability*, in the Bachelor of Human Services, participated in the project by designing, developing, conducting, and evaluating an Internet training session for older people who came on campus for the day during Seniors Week 2003. This event is an annual state-wide celebration which has the overall aim of promoting a positive understanding of ageing and of encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle.

Within their small groups, students were asked to develop resources for the workshop that were aligned to agreed learning objectives and learning outcomes. Students were allocated to