TRAINING AND ASSESSOR COURSES: FROM ‘GURU-LED’ TO ‘PARTICIPATORY’ LEARNING

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‘GURU-LED’ TO ‘PARTICIPATORY’ LEARNING

Whilst the movement away from ‘Teacher as Guru’ began early in the 70s in the Western world with the emphasis on adult learning andragogy exemplified by Malcolm Knowles (Chan, 2010), the Guru is still highly prevalent in Indonesia today. In a particularly influential article, Noel Jones (2006) articulated the nature of this movement away from lecturer/guru style of learning in his article on educational philosophy called From Sage on Stage to Guide on the Side. In this work, he describes the approach as involving teachers becoming mentors, coaches and guides for students, which is very much a return to the participatory nature of learning seen in the Socratic method of educational instruction (Jones, 2006). There are two important outcomes of this change to student-centred learning which are relevant to the current workplace situation of rapidly changing industries and educational processes. Firstly, a learner who is familiar with life-long learning techniques, will have a significant advantage when faced with the changing nature of the work environment, both in terms of the task to be performed and the tools which are available to achieve task completion. This is particularly so with the advances in information technology and computing. Secondly, with the almost inevitable changes of employment, which many people will face during their career, the application for a new position will be made more tractable, and this will include the ability to shift to another industry or the application for promotion within a changing area, both of which will require the accessing of new skills and workplace practices.

It is against this somewhat fluid background now prevalent in modern industries, that in a country that places a high ‘value’ on the role of teacher-centred learning, and which signifies this high-status role as ‘Guru’, there is a tendency for this reverence, and the consequent learning practices, to constrain individual learning opportunities. The view that the ‘Guru’ is the fountain of all knowledge and, to be successful learners, students just have to sit and listen (‘duduk dan dengar’) (Carolan, 2005), is widely present from primary schooling through to university-level education in Indonesia.

Abstract: Traditional Indonesian cultural mores have perpetuated and inculcated the role of the ‘Guru’ into the psyche of the educational landscape. The word ‘Guru’ is used quite uniformly in Indonesia to indicate a person who is both respected and honoured. This professional status and social position brings with it a culturally understood ‘teacher-centred’ approach to the classroom, where the guru is referred to, in Indonesian parlance, as ‘digugu dan ditiru’ - obeyed and imitated. However, in a world that is both rapidly changing and being open to external economic and developmental pressures, learners with a traditional education are being required to reskill at an increasing rate and they are found to have little ability to independently respond to these challenges.

In this changing work scenario, this paper examines the different impacts of ‘guru centered’ learning vis-à-vis ‘facilitated participatory’ learning, through the lens of ‘training and assessor’ courses in Indonesia. In addition, this paper tackles the simultaneous conundrum of assuring the introduction of high level skills development in Indonesia which includes (i) the generation of generic work place competencies (known as ‘key’ competencies) rather than a focus on specific skills, (ii) the development of whole-of-life employability skills, and (iii) an opportunity to acquire skills for life, rather than to only learn narrowly defined industry-focused competencies.

Keywords: Participatory learning, competency development, cultural awareness, human capability development.
As a consequence, there is a need to address this issue of teaching and learning style in Indonesia, particularly in light of the global changes which will inevitably impact upon the human resource capabilities of individual industries and the country in general. In asserting this change, we recognize that participatory education requires more from the learner in the form of engaging with the learning tasks and in the development of a personal style of learning which will provide a structure and foundation for life-long learning. In addition, there is the parallel issue of working with the teacher, since the loss of ‘Guru’ status will come as a personal slight for some of the more established teaching staff. We therefore see the importance of the introduction of ‘train the training’ courses, which urgently need to address the issues of altered pedagogical approaches during the change in status from ‘Guru’ to ‘Facilitator of learning’.

TRAINING AND ASSESSOR COURSES AND THEIR SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

As presaged above, the introduction of ‘training and assessor’ courses in Indonesia has challenged the place of traditional ‘Guru-led’ teacher-centered learning approaches, and has been designed to redefine the role of trainers as learning facilitators. The subsequent task of the trainer now becomes that of a guide to learning, and, as such, the trainer-created ‘opportunities’ for the training participants to ‘learn by doing’ will require a high level of active participation from all trainees.

The methodology employed in relation to the development of the training and assessor course involves a number of student/learner-centered activities including: Case studies; Role-plays; Problem-solving activities in small groups; Peer support and Reviewing; Coaching and Mentoring in work places; Small group work; Problem identification; Action planning; and Ownership of Learning. The crucial element here is the introduction of strategies appropriate for developing individual responsibilities for learning. This will need to be reflected in the presentation, engagement and assessment of experiences by the trainers, which are consistent with these objectives.

In this respect, the introductory seminars for the Certificates in Training and Assessment with which the authors were associated, provided Indonesian training participants with some of the necessary skills to make the training room more ‘participatory and engaging’ for those accustomed to traditional Indonesian processes. This involved a clear movement away from past practices, and in the seminars, it appeared that it was generally accepted that this approach to learning was generally valued and appreciated. A participating trainer explained an insight which had come from his experience of the Training and Assessment course to us as: ‘The good way is to let the students think by themselves; you just give suggestions, and let the people select and choose which ones they want to learn’ (Fairman, 2017).

In the main, participants in these training and assessment courses commented very favorably on the unfamiliar participatory and learner-centred methodologies, and the experience of being in the seminars was a useful vehicle to show them that this was a very effective way for people to learn (Fairman, 2017). Many participants were surprised to discover that, when acting as trainee students in the course, their ideas and opinions were valued, and they were being encouraged to share them. This was particularly encouraging since these participants had never experienced a ‘learner-centred’ approach in their previous educational experience, and were expecting a situation where, as students, they would have to ‘sit and listen’.

We were aware that previously in Indonesia, adult learning principles were promoted and encouraged across current and previous Australian Government aid programs without a detailed examination of the impost of these ‘values’ in this particular cultural context. As a consequence, the introduction of Training and Assessor courses, with their Australian content which was packaged and designed for Australian workplaces, was directly transposed into an Indonesian context. The problems which resulted from this somewhat cavalier approach, highlighted the dilemmas involved in cross-cultural policy borrowings of this manner (Malloch, 2005).

LEARNING BY DOING

Jones (2006) argues that the ‘learn by doing’ approach to learning was successful when we ‘do’ or perform the task. It is in this situation that we truly ‘know’ the task, and many western cultures have now begun to apply this practice (Jones, 2006). In our experience, a Timorese trainer, who was part of an earlier training experience, described the approach as, ‘I do, you do, then we do it together, then you can do it too’ (Fairman, 2017). However, we are cognizant that this approach carries with it the potential for a participant to learn ‘flawed’ practices, and an unmonitored sharing experience can therefore perpetuate mistakes. Nevertheless, individuals
who are not given the ‘opportunity’ to learn by doing (and inevitably make mistakes in the course of doing so) will have their learning restricted, and therefore the best intentions of skills development will not be realized (Quisumbing & Apniew, 2005).

An Indonesian senior government official recently reflected that the Indonesian school system was not responding well to the needs of the ‘world of work’. He noted that, ‘It's a quite wide gap between the ‘schools’ and the ‘world of work’ so there must be a transition here; a bridge, that is what we call training’ (Fairman 2017). This important bridge requires both ‘form and structure’; and this combination was the contribution which was made by the Training and Assessor courses, as these courses encouraged the application of skills, modeled in the training room, to be employed in respective workplaces. However, whilst it is unarguably true that Training and Assessor courses should emphasize appropriate workplace learning and be involved in designing training relative to workplace competencies, we expect that participants involved in this training will necessarily develop skills to design and implement this type of learning in their respective organisations and educational institutions.

LEARNING STYLES AND THE SKILLS DILEMMA

This discussion now focuses on concerns regarding the emerging importance of the development of a blend of generic and specific skills training in vocational education, and comments on the integration of these areas in Training and Assessor courses. In particular, it considers the implications and difficulties of implementing this type of training in Indonesia, placing specific emphasis on the impact of ‘learning by doing’ methodologies in an environment hitherto unused to this style of learning.

It is relevant to note that the debate being conducted in many educational institutions around the nature of the role of ‘industry’ involvement in education, continues unabated. In this paper, we examine employer requirements for training in Indonesia, suggesting that local employers have indicated that they want broader ‘life skills’ such as ‘the preparedness to work regularly’, ‘the ability to communicate in the workplace’, ‘willingness to show initiative’ and ‘advanced language skills’ in conjunction with the previous focus on narrow industry-specific skills training and familiarity with technical trades, hospitality and service programs. In this respect, and of central importance to this discussion, the World Bank report on ‘Education Training and the Labor Market’ has identified a suite of desired ‘generic’ and ‘life’ skills needed in the modern workplace, and includes abilities such as problem solving, effective communication, and the ability to work with others and in teams. It specifically notes that development of these ‘soft skills’ often depend on factors developed external to the school system (The World Bank, 2010).

Andrew Gonczi (2004) notes in The New Professionalism and Vocational Education in Dimensions of Adult Learning (Foley, 2004), that the significant challenge for many educationalists is to find the appropriate balance between preparing individuals for competency in the workplace and for developing ‘life’ skills, the latter being required to preparing people to be competent, resourceful, adroit individuals. We note here that this is a tacit and somewhat instinctive list of abilities, and is therefore quite difficult to provide in an educational mainstream setting (Foley, 2004).

During the decade-long delivery of Indonesian/Australian IASTP training programs, the Kirkpatrick models (Kirkpatrick, 1993) of designing and developing training programs were directly employed. Whilst these models are generally accepted to be the dominant model of training program implementation and evaluation for adult learning (Lockheed, 2009), during the training programs the critical missing issues described by Gonczi (2004) were not addressed. As highlighted by Gonczi, while the workplace is a valuable learning resource and an important site for experiential learning, managing learning contracts and work-related projects require the input of a skilled educationalist. Careful consideration and management of these ‘soft’ learning outcomes, within the construction of training programs, will determine the overall success of training programs, integrating them along with the transfer of learning to practices to ‘on the job’ situations, which impact on visible corporate outcomes and learning gains (Lockheed, 2009).

Powell (2001) notes that, in a study of 19 technical vocational education and training projects in Jamaica and Gambia, attempts by donors to replicate conditions in the ‘First World’ have failed to achieve their stated objectives. This suggests that similar attempts to implement ‘First World’ TVET systems in Indonesia may also fail to meet their anticipated aims, as debates between ‘employability vs key competencies’, particularly within the vocational education and training.
sector, are still largely unresolved. However, it is noted that the Indonesian vocational training sector is currently undergoing examination and reflection on the competencies needed for work, and in an important recent study undertaken by Hadi et al. (2015) of engineering students, the relationship between the applications of thinking skills (generic) and engineering skills (functional) was explored.

As indicated earlier, in this conversation which examines contemporary skills development, it is essential that we explore in detail the nexus between generic life skills and narrowly directed industry-focused skills training. It has been asserted that, notwithstanding the importance of focused trade skills, vocational education and training needs to be grounded in; life-long learning pedagogy, citizenship and generic skills development. Technical skills training often misses the importance of teaching broader pillars of learning ‘skills for life’, which includes ‘learning to do’, ‘learning to be’, ‘learning to know’ and ‘learning to live together’ (Quisumbing & Apnieve, 2005). It is significant that UNESCO, working with the Asia-Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education, has produced a formidable work book for the teaching the values for learning and working in a global world environment (Quisumbing & Apnieve, 2005), and cognisance will be required to be given to this compilation of values by Asian countries if they are to compete in the open market.

There nevertheless remains a difficulty of smoothly incorporating lifelong learning into the vocational training experience. An example of this approach is the Indonesia-Australia Specialised Training Projects (IASTP), where industry experience was woven into the fabric of skills development and training. While the logic of this approach has never been questioned, it has been assumed that: (i) of course, industry placement makes the learning real, (ii) of course, what is relevant in Indonesia and Australia must be relevant in other countries, and (iii) of course, engaging in an ‘industry placement’ prepares a student for the world of work. It is our contention that these ‘assumptions’ are, indeed, just assumptions. In 1983, Stuart Hall in a public address on 'Ideology in the Modern World' at Latrobe University (Hall, 1983), reminded us that when we declare ‘of course’ in our common everyday speech, we are being at our most ideological. Hall posited that what is seemingly obvious and 'common sense’ to us in our environment connects directly with our interpretation of the world, because we share with our close acquaintances, common understandings of the way things ‘ought to be’. Thus, in our own cultures, with our own ideologies, things naturally make sense, but we are required to ‘challenge’ these assumptions when we move into an unfamiliar setting.

Paulo Freire (Freire, 1993) in his seminal text on educational pedagogy, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, articulated the concept of the ‘Banking Model of Education’. This described a situation of a cross-class education system in South America where the poor (the 'oppressed', in Freire’s terms) were being ‘topped up’ by a conservative elitist educational pedagogy (Boughton, 2013). Indeed, it has been abundantly made clear by a number of studies that this approach does not serve the interests of oppressed people, and appropriate literacy and vocational training programs in a contested social context should provide explicit consciousness raising and emancipation opportunities. Freire’s contribution to raising the consciousness of the poor and promoting participatory and indigenous skills development, impacts in many ways on common issues that we see with the vocational training sector. There is a familiar issue involved here related to the designing and managing of appropriate rather than pre-determined skills training, and supplying resources for the poor to help themselves rather than providing 'outside' knowledge experts (Bennell, 1999; Foley, 2004).

IMPLICATIONS OF ‘GENERIC VERSUS SPECIFIC’ TRAINING

A World Bank study into education and training for youth in Indonesia, noted that such things as problem solving, communication and team-work, were important preparation skills for work, and were skills that are increasingly in demand (The World Bank, 2010). In addition, being ‘proud’ and ‘motivated for work’ were considered additional and important competencies, and some respondents to our investigations claimed that ‘how to make people proud in their work, like motivation, this is what we call soft competencies’ (Fairman, 2017). However, finding ways of developing these skills in Indonesia was difficult for training managers, and it has been noted that ‘these are hard skills to transfer’. In this situation, they are not alone in searching for an answer, as the academic literature and studies in other countries has commonly revealed similarly challenging problems (Foley, 2004; Hadi et al., 2015; Keating, 2009).

Finding the balance between ‘technical skills’ and ‘soft life-skills’ is clearly the greatest contemporary challenge for most vocational training institutes. Employers want exiting...
vocational students to be equipped with the technical skills to perform work in industry-specific areas such as building, carpentry, plumbing, automotive repairs and car maintenance, whilst, at the same time, they want students prepared to have the correct ‘Attitudes to work’, including: behavior; taking orders; discipline; loyalty; motivation; and punctuality (Fairman, 2017). As one training manager has lamented, ‘We have to be honest about this; we can transfer knowledge and skills but soft capacity is very hard to identify. Discipline or loyalty, attitude to work, these are hard skills to transfer’ (Fairman, 2017). Adding to the dilemma faced in introducing ‘soft skills’ into the curriculum, Tikly et al. (2003) noted that the central importance of ‘citizenship’ skills in an agrarian society going through social and political reconstruction, making the task of selecting appropriate skills even more challenging.

CLOSING REMARKS

When charged with the responsibility of developing a vocational training system which is suitable for building a nationally and culturally appropriate learning platform, the uncritical importing of foreign models of excellence is of limited value since these models carry their own imbedded values and ‘learned’ history of engagement. As a consequence, pressures mount on local vocational training institutes to ‘respond to the needs of local industry’ in order to provide a workforce that is culturally fitted and able to be work ready. However, it is often the case that these needs are not made entirely explicit, and industry needs are often loosely articulated simply as ‘technical skills’, when in actual fact the ones deemed increasingly important are ‘soft skills’ which are relevant to the learners’ future life-long learning needs.

What this discussion has highlighted is that the building of these ‘soft skills’ requires a significant ‘shift’ in the teaching and learning paradigm. It recommends that the role of the teacher ‘guru’ is modified to that of teacher as ‘facilitator of learning’. This task is not simple, as it is compounded by the dependent social mores of the culture, and a shift to an independent learner role is a significant challenge for many learners who have become familiar with traditional teaching systems.

REFERENCES


