The Reimagining adult learning in community-based contexts: A framework for social justice education in Australia

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Abstract

In Australia, there is no one cohesive program design or curriculum which provides a framework for adult learning in Adult Community Education (ACE) organisations, with the two major states New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria leading the most developed systems. Many adult learners who learn in these education settings return to study to find pathways to employment, or to re-train for a new role after losing their job. In addition, later-life learners may attend because they want to remain healthy, participate in leisure activities, build friendships and remain active and engaged in their later years. Many of the learners are 'second chance learners' who have had prior negative experiences with the neoliberal system which assesses, ranks, and categorises learners according to their academic abilities. In this paper, we propose a comprehensive framework for the delivery of pre-accredited training in Australia, founded on social constructivist theory, learner-centred pedagogy, and course design enhanced by Nussbaum's Capability Framework. We commence the article by delivering a context for adult education policy and social justice education in the development of the ACE system. What we mean by a socially just education is one in which all people access a critical and democratic curriculum with equity and access to resources at its core. In this paper, we argue for the importance of adult learning, which is holistic, flexible, and nimble to cater for diverse learners and learning needs.

Adult Learning Education in Australia – beyond the Cinderella report

Adult learning policy in Australia has a complex history, mostly because there is no national adult learning policy or lifelong learning framework (Devlin, 2020). Whilst the Australian government is a Federation comprised of six states and two territories, adult education policy is developed individually within each State (province) jurisdiction (Brown, 2018). The larger states NSW and Victoria have the most comprehensive and cohesive adult learning systems to date (Devlin, 2020). The recent Ministerial Statement on the Future of Adult and

Community Education in Victoria 2020-2025 (Tierney, 2019), noted the essential role of the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector in engaging adult learners who seek the core skills they need for work, further study, and to participate fully as members of the community. The Ministerial Statement acknowledged the life-changing impacts of adult community education which builds the confidence and aspirations of learners that can break the cycle of disadvantage. It acknowledges that Victoria leads Australia in the establishment of the largest and most well-funded national adult education system (Tierney, 2019).

In Australia, Adult Community Education (ACE) policy gained prominence after the release of the international Delors' report, *The Treasure Within*, a significant report on the value of lifelong learning (Delors, 1996). Before this, the Australian federal government completed its Australian Government Senate Standing Committee report on employment, education, and training in 1991, *Come In Cinderella*, which outlined the value of adult learning in the Australian context (Aulich, 1991). The broad aims of the Senate enquiry were to consider the impact of current demographic, economic, and social change on patterns of adult and community education, education providers, and education funding in the context of current economic and social conditions, including both State and Federal governments and identify barriers to adult learning (Aulich, 1991). In the foreword to the report, Senator Aulich – in the first comprehensive report on adult community education since 1944 – wrote:

Our conclusions on this all-party Committee are unanimous. The Government must grasp the opportunity to consolidate and nurture the vigorous, efficient and broadly-based enterprise which is adult and community education. Australia cannot afford to neglect and devalue a network of providers which touches the lives of six out of ten adult Australians.

The report recommended a national training policy and building a bureaucracy to support and enact adult education policy. These changes would ensure that Adult Community Education was enshrined in education policy and would have cooperation and coordination with the state and territory governments (Aulich, 1991). In the 30-plus years since the report was released, much has happened in education policy across Australia, including a rapid expansion of student places in Universities – now known as the massification of high education – and exponential growth in Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE). However, in recent years vocational education and training has faced funding cuts (Brown, 2018). However, ACE has continued to remain the poor cousin of higher education and vocational education and training policy, largely left to community-based not-for-profit organisations to deliver placed-based education in local communities. Here the paid workforce is often supplemented by volunteers in local communities. As Brown (2018, p. 11) notes government support for ACE had been inconsistent and sporadic and primarily left to community providers:

State support has been inconsistent and sporadic, at times rising and then falling away again. Provision has therefore needed to be self-sustaining, and, in the absence of government support, providers have found ways to be flexible, innovative and responsive to local needs. In the main, governments have left the education of adults to local providers.

ACE was formally recognised in legislation in Victoria with the establishment of the first *Adult, Community and Further Education Act 1991* (Victorian Legislation, 1991). The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education acknowledged the potential of the ACE sector to support the national agenda on skills and workforce development, because of its ability to respond to changes in the 'industrial, demographic and technological circumstances' (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education, 2008). The Declaration emphasised the importance of ACE in building the knowledge, skills, understanding, and values essential for an educated and socially just society. Significantly, it acknowledged ACE's contribution and provision of educational opportunities for second-chance learners (Borthwick et al., 2001). This Act provided a legislative framework for the coordination of the sector, and prioritised the provision of learning opportunities for adults, particularly women, who had not completed their secondary education, or who were

disadvantaged learners (Rooney, 2011). At the Federal level, the Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education recognised the importance of ACE for providing accessible education and training opportunities for second chance learners. The 2008 Declaration reiterated earlier statements about the benefits of ACE for furthering the government's social inclusion agenda and viewed ACE as a potential key contributor to the government's productivity agenda for skills and workforce development (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education, 2008).

Adult community education in Australia

The ACE sector has always played an important role in adult education, particularly for access and equity groups. ACE is renowned for its flexibility, inclusive pedagogy and curriculum that reflects adult learning principles and practices (Bowman, 2016; Golding et al., 2008; Rooney, 2011; Townsend, 2009). The ACE sector is sometimes referred to as the fourth education sector in Australia after schools, vocational education and training, and universities (Billet & Dimmock, 2020). Bowman (2016) argues ACE is a discreet sector of education in Australia with up to 2,500 providers nationally, all of which provide personal interest learning. Most ACE organisations provide some form of adult basic education or foundation studies in literacy, numeracy and technology skills, and a significant minority of these providers 300-500 also provide formal education training through Vocational Education and Training (VET). Most of these providers are from the two main states of NSW and Victoria (Bowman, 2016; Devlin, 2020).

A survey by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) noted students in VET in community-based education settings, of which Neighbourhood Houses are the majority providers, noted that graduate outcomes for VET students, who had participated in some form of pre-accredited training provided in Neighbourhood Houses, were more likely to complete their accredited training in VET (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017). These outcomes affirm the importance of pre-accredited training for adult learners in preparing students with the necessary academic literacy to complete formal education.

ACE providers are known for tailoring curriculum and pedagogy that is specific to adult learners' needs, for learner-centred practices, and for recognising the importance of learner agency (Foley et al. 2021). Furthermore, ACE offers applied and experiential learning opportunities and provides ongoing feedback to learners (Ollis et al., 2018b; Ollis, et al., 2017). ACE is more than an education provider or a local place of learning; rather, they are places of community that improve learners' health and well-being. A recent report on ACE in South Australia (Training and Skills Commission, 2017), has claimed: 'ACE providers are far more than a place of learning: they offer an environment that generates a sense of belonging and being part of a community and a place for personal enrichment.'

Billet & Dymock (2020, pp. 402-403) argue there are three key premises of the education of Australian adults in ACE:

i. Meeting the heterogeneous needs of adults as learners
ii. Educational objectives needing to be understood in the local context
iii. The enactment of adult education being shaped by local factors such as resources, accessibility, teachers' capacities and participants' readiness.

Bowman (2016) describes the focus of ACE as meeting local learning needs in community settings. The distinctive characteristics of ACE are summarised as the commitment to engaging learners in positive learning experiences by providing welcoming, friendly, non-judgemental, socially inclusive and accessible learning environments (Bowman, 2016). In Australia today, the ACE sector comprises community-based and managed not-for-profit organisations that vary in size and focus of activities. As well as Neighbourhood Houses and learning centres (including learning locals), other examples of ACE providers are Community Colleges, Men's Sheds, Adult migrant education, and second language learning and Universities of the Third Age. It is important to note the role that ACE plays in training and education for those who work in low-skilled

areas, are unemployed, or are retraining due to declining industries such as manufacturing. In Victoria a recent study on adult community education noted:

> … there are 650,000 adults at the lowest levels of literacy, including 265,000 workers with low educational attainment in low-skill jobs, and more than 17,000 15 to 19 year old's who are not engaged in employment, education or training (Deloitte Access Economics, 2017).

Many of these adult and adolescent learners access ACE programs. For example, the 'Reconnect' program is aimed at early school leavers to provide pathways to the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). For adult learners with low levels of literacy skills, pre-accredited training in foundation skills prepares adults for further accredited training and employment. Education and training for adults who are reskilling or retraining and already have transferable skills from one industry to another can occur by accessing VET programs through ACE, TAFE and private RTOs (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education, 2008). ACE addresses national skills priority areas of increasing Australia's literacy levels, supporting an adaptable and highly skilled workforce through pre-accredited and accredited training. It offers opportunities for second-chance learners, reskilling workers and retraining migrants and refugees through English as a second language programs (ESL) (Rooney, 2011; Tennant & Morris, 2008; Townsend, 2006).

Throughout its history in Australia, adult education has largely operated without the benefit of legislation or policy enshrining its purposes. Presently, Australia still does not have a lifelong learning policy, and calls for a new national ministerial statement on ACE remain unheeded, although more recently the state of Victoria introduced a ministerial statement of ACE 2020-2025, which recognised the important role adult community education plays in terms of education and social inclusion in communities (Tierney, 2019). However, apart from some progress in the recognition and value of ACE learning in Victoria, successive governments believe that adult education is a good idea as long as the demand for public funding is relatively small (Tennant & Morris, 2008). With disparate funding arrangements across

the states and territories in Australia, and without a comprehensive commitment to adult learning by the federal government, ACE has never actualised its full potential to provide quality adult learning education with seamless transition pathways to VET or higher education.

As with other sectors of education in Australia, neoliberal policies of privatisation and managerialism have impacted the provision of adult learning and ACE (McKenzie & Coulson, 2015; Wheelahan, 2009). The VET sector in Australia has changed dramatically through privatisation programmes and agendas with the growth of private registered training organisations (RTO). Opening the VET system to privatisation created a new market with unfettered demands in a largely unregulated system. Those ACE services now providing accredited VET training are not removed from the impact of the privatisation of VET:

> As a result, education and training policies throughout the developed world have increasingly subsumed economistic imperatives to achieve national objectives. Therefore, current education and training policies are heavily influenced by the needs, values and underlying philosophy of global market economics and attendant neoliberal political agendas (Ollis et al., 2016).

A neoliberal policy environment has been perpetuated in Australia nationally and across the states by governments to the left and right of politics, with concomitant effects: privatisation (including the introduction of for-profit organisations within the sector), funding mechanisms, institutional and leadership accountabilities, competition within the ACE and VET sectors, and expectations regarding governance and decision-making (Ollis et al., 2018a). Registered training organisations that are private businesses providing education and training accessing government funding are now in competition with publicly funded TAFE.

Much has been said about the failure of the privatisation of the Vocational Education and training system, with the reporting of many disreputable businesses and education services that were not provided to some of the most vulnerable learners

across the country. The rapid expansion of the private vocational education and training system was a failure of competition policy. The state Labour government ordered a review of the Vocational education system due to widely reported misappropriations of funds, and students left without courses as some private colleges collapsed. The recent McKenzie review of the VET system noted the unscrupulous practices of some private providers that have placed the VET system and its students at risk. It is also noted that the ACE sector is nimble and flexible and can readily provide programs for vulnerable learners (McKenzie & Coulson, 2015). Despite these tensions and discontinuities between policy and legislative frameworks, ACE has been continuing to provide place-based adult education to learners across Australia.

The learners in Australian adult community education

As noted, the ACE sector is comprised of mainly community place-based education and training in Victoria delivered through Learn local organisations and Neighbourhood Houses, and centres in Victoria and New South Wales through Community and Evening colleges, Workers' Education Associations (WEA) and Community Adult Learning Centres (Rooney, 2011). Other spaces of adult community education include Universities of the Third Age, Men's sheds, adult migrant education services (AMES) and public libraries.

ACE organisations are not-for-profit providers of accessible learning for adults; they provide place-based learner-centred education with linkages to Australian workplaces and further education such as TAFE. Some provide accredited training, but most education provisions in these learning spaces are personal interest learning (Bowman, 2016). The offered programmes vary from foundation skills in numeracy and literacy to digital learning skills, English as a second language learning for migrants and refugees and some accredited training programmes. ACE often has developed partnerships and links with work and industries and pathways to further education and training such as TAFE. Many of the learners are access and equity learners some have

had chequered histories of secondary schooling, and some have not completed secondary school.

Conceptual framework

Conceptually, the epistemology for the paper is framed around social justice education, and what it means to provide education that is socially just in ACE in the Australian context. Australian adult education policy in recent years has been largely focused on neoliberal education imperatives, primarily framed on skills for employment, and pathways from ACE to work or further education and training through VET (Borthwick et al., 2001; Brown, 2018). Various ideas about the ethical and philosophical approaches to the proposition of 'what makes a good education" abound. Yet the diversity of ACE learners, and the systemic barriers they face in terms of access to education, has prohibited the great promise of adult education espoused in the important Federal Government Senate report, *Come in Cinderella* (Aulich, 1991). The report noted changes in policy settings were needed to ensure some of the most vulnerable learners in Australia were able to access quality education and training. This social justice premise of access and equity in adult education, that is affordable and responsive to the diverse requirements of adult learners, has not, we argue, been met on a national level, despite considerable research noting the importance of adult learning practices in ACE (Borthwick et al., 2001; Brown, 2018; Clemans, 2005; Foley, 1993; Golding et al., 2009; Golding et al., 2008). As noted in this paper, we draw on adult education theory and social justice education as a conceptual framework (Freire, 1970/2000). Central to this is Freire's important critique of the banking system of education which regards learning as a didactic proposition where the teacher largely controls the curriculum and content, and learners are passive recipients of knowledge. As noted, many of the learners in ACE have had negative past experiences with the formal education system in Australia, which assesses, ranks and categorised students based on their performance (Ollis et al., 2017). Several recent studies by Ollis et al. (2018a, 2018b) on learning in Neighbourhood Houses, one of the largest education providers of ACE in Australia, found that these learners sometimes referred to as second chance learners, needed time, care, social

interaction and the building of learning relationships, supports and networks to enable them to overcome their past negative experiences of education, usually in secondary schooling. Duckworth and Smith (2017), in their study of further education in the United Kingdom, found that adult learners' lives were transformed by returning to study through feminist bonds of care and support. Ollis, et al.'s (2017) study on adult learning in Neighbourhood Houses and Centres[1] revealed many of the learners had struggled academically in school. Some had left school early due to a crisis, a disruption in the family, or economic reasons, and had to work to support the family. Others had not flourished in the formal confines of a performative education system; some had experienced bullying, and others had left early to enter the manufacturing system to work in factories or unskilled work. Some were returning to study after these manufacturing industries had declined and were studying to find employment in new emerging industries such as hospitality and technology fields (Ollis et al., 2016). Similarly, studies on young people accessing intergenerational learning and mentoring opportunities, revealed that the Men's Shed[2] environment, was perceived as a key feature of the success of school-based partnership programmes for boys who were reluctant learners and disengaged from mainstream schooling through the mentorship available to them from the men (Foley and Golding, (2014).

The concept of learner-centred pedagogy and practice is central to the philosophy that underpins the ACE program delivery (DET, 2000). Yet it is an amorphous term; its interpretation varied although frequently used to define adult learning in these spaces. The ACE sector refers to adult learning principles specifically, but there is not a theoretically cohesive body of work that informs learner-centred practices and pedagogies in ACE. Broad reference is made in the pre-accredited training framework in Victoria to knowing the learners, tailoring pedagogy

and curriculum to meet learners' current education needs (Foley, A; Ollis, T; Rossiter,T & Harrison, U, 2021). This echoes Knowles' (1970) theory of adult learning principles and learner-teacher Freirean-inspired co-construction of the curriculum (Freire, 1970/2000). It is notable that since Malcolm Knowles's seminal work on adult learning there has been rapid advancement, and a broadening of knowledge, about the epistemological and theoretical foundations of understanding how adults learn (Edwards & Usher, 2007; Freire, 1970/2000; Illeris, 2007; Jarvis, 2010). However, many of the key tenets of Knowles's theory can be found in the work of Vygotsky, who believed learning is mediated and negotiated between the individual, and their cultural environment, that problem-solving is at the heart of any learning process, and that knowledge is developed by reflection on past and present learning experiences (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Further, in adult education theory, we now know that learners learn most of their lives, they learn both informally and incidentally (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), and that a great deal of this learning occurs in our daily business of being in the world around us (Ollis, 2012). Workplaces are also major sites of informal, incidental and nonformal learning that transpires as workers problem-solve together and build their expertise by working collaboratively and in teams (Billet, 2004; Boud & Garrrik, 1999; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). We also know that learning is social and relational, we learn with and from others and through practising this learning, we develop new knowledge and expertise (Lave, 1991). We also know adults learn holistically, and there is a need to take into account learners' cognitive abilities, and their emotional agency, including opportunities to learn from others (Jarvis, 2009, 2010). Such a holistic pedagogy of this kind must also account for difficulties associated with adult learners' prior learning experiences (learner biographies) which may inhibit or impede their progress in education (Ollis et

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[1] First founded in the 1970's, Neighbourhood Houses and Centres are community, placed based adult community education (ACE) providers, who provide adult and lifelong learning and other services to local communities (see Ollis, Ryan & Harrison 2018 for example).

[2] Men's Sheds provide place based Adult Community Learning for older Men. Founded in the 1990's in Australia, Men's Sheds are an international adult education movement. The sheds provide largely personal interest learning in craft and building (See Golding and Foley, 2014 for example).

al., 2017). What we do know is that adult learning can transform and change learners' lives and communities, people are changed in some way because of their learning (Duckworth & Smith, 2017).

For some adult learners, the reconstruction of this negative learner identity due to past experiences and/or trauma associated with education needs to occur before formal learning can commence (Ollis et al., 2017). Adult learners such as those outlined here have struggled in western education systems, and have been impacted by access and equity issues around income and access to employment, education and training, some are migrants and refugees, and others are people with disabilities or Indigenous learners who face the barriers of learning a new language and culture (Ollis et al., 2016).

Social justice education endeavours to level access and equity impediments to education, work, and life, enabling the capacity for these adult learners to flourish in society. As Griffiths (2003) notes it requires 'recognition' that inequality is occurring and a 'redistribution' of resources to rectify the problem. Social justice concepts can draw on a range of philosophical and theoretical traditions such as feminism, Marxism, and critical pedagogy, particularly in the writing of Paulo Freire (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019). Sen and Nusbaum's 'capability framework' is often used as a social justice measure of the basic resources humans need to flourish. At its core, the capabilities approach is centred on the development of an individual's agency: that is what an individual 'can or cannot actually do' (Sen, 2010, p. 261). People's agency and capacity to be able to do things can be hindered by factors or barriers such as social and environmental conditions, access to resources, sense of identity, age, gender and so on. Sen also acknowledges the external barriers that impede an individual from converting resources, or commodities (Sen, 2010). These resources and commodities can come in the form of education for disadvantaged groups, such as the learners we highlighted earlier in our paper.

Sen's capabilities approach has been criticised by some for failing to supplement his framework with a coherent set of capabilities (Nussbaum, 1988; Williams, 1987). Nussbaum's version of, or extension

to, Sen's capabilities approach involve her developing a list of capabilities that she argues 'isolates those human capabilities that can be convincingly argued to be of central importance in any human life, whatever else the person pursues and chooses' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 74). These capabilities involve ten principles enumerated under the following headings: (1) Life; (2) Bodily health; (3) Bodily integrity; (4) Senses, imagination and thought; (5) Emotions; (6) Practical reason; (7) Affiliation; (8) Other species; (9) Play and (10) Political material control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2000). Both Sen's capabilities approach and Nussbaum's framework have developed momentum in recent years to be used to investigate poverty, inequity, wellbeing, social justice, gender, social exclusion, health, disability, ageing, child poverty and identity, human needs, rights and security and education (Clark, 2007). The approach can be used as a framework to theorise the well-being and agency gained through learner-centred practices in teaching that take into consideration learners' prior learning experiences, sometimes referred to as a learner biography.

Pedagogical practices of this kind draw on mediated and negotiated pedagogy acknowledge learner past experience and scaffold the learning to build on knowledge until the learner can build their own agency and become empowered (Foley et al. 2021). This is recognised by popular educators such as Freire in their writing on learning and oppression, where he points out the importance of understanding systems and structures that shape and reproduce inequality. Social justice education espoused by Freire moves beyond didactic forms of pedagogy to 'problem-posing education where both learners and teacher are mutually engaged in dialogical conversation, enabling a process of empowerment and agency for the learner. Freire termed this 'conscientisation', where people open up to their own and others' humanity. They become conscious of the world around them and the political, economic and social issues that may have contributed to their past educational experiences (Freire, 1970/2000). A socially just education of this kind enables learners to flourish not only in the education system but also in the world around them.

A framework for Adult Community Education (ACE)

A learner-centred approach has its foundation in inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy is a response to the needs of individual differences of learners which aims to mitigate the marginalisation of learners and cater for specific and diverse adult learner needs. The principle of culture and context in the milieu of inclusive and student-centred practices situates inclusive education within the culture and context of the individual. At its core, learner-centred, inclusive pedagogy is relational and requires a teacher-learner relationship that develops learner capability and agency by building upon a process of social constructivist pedagogies (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). These pedagogies and practices build on knowledge through scaffolding learning. This form of learning supports the learner by determining what they know, and then building on that knowledge for the learner to become independent and capable with skills for study, work and life. As mentioned earlier, our paper is framed around social justice education and the role of social justice in adult community education in the Australian context. We argue that social justice education has the learner at the centre and provides capabilities to afford the learner agency in and through their learning experiences.

Learner capabilities

In this paper, learner capabilities have been introduced to enhance the current focus on employability skills in Australia, demonstrate the attainment of transferable skills for life, prepare learners for further study, and help learners attain and retain employment. We argue governments' tendency to focus on employability skills as a measure of student performance, does not account for the diversity of students in ACE, some of whom have a disability and have never been in the workforce. We argue Nussbaum's Capabilities Framework encapsulates the key antecedents of human flourishing, which can account for the diversity of the learners in ACE. For example, a measure of success for some students who have been alienated from formal schooling may be that they continued to attend class. Others may have completed their qualifications and gone on to further study in VET. What may or may not determine success in ACE is varied because learner agency and aspirations are diverse.

To determine learner capabilities, adult community education in the Australian context has been debating how to identify and measure learner gain to include a measure into teaching and learning practices, pedagogies, and student outcomes. The capabilities approach provides a useful theoretical lens to identify what capabilities are key for learners in the ACE context to gain over time. These learner gain measurers, like the measures Nussbaum (2000) describes in her 10 Principal Capabilities for life, we argue are key to a social justice form of education in ACE. They empower the learner and provide them with the essential agency for study, work and life.

A conceptual framework for learner gain, developed for the higher education sector (Vermin, J et al., 2018) and adapted here for adult community education, has four key components and three dimensions. For each of the components and dimensions, the attributes are articulated. Taking the principles of the conceptual framework into account, like that of Nussbaum's Capabilities, the process of measuring learner gain is aligned with formative assessment principles, that is, it is cyclical and ongoing throughout the learner journey. Effective learner-centred formative assessment in the context of adult learning is designed to obtain particular learner objectives (aligned with adult learning theory) as they move through their learner journey. The process enables the teacher to adjust teaching strategies and pedagogies to guide and lead students' achievements and success (Trumbull & Lash, 2013).

The tool below (Figure 2) has been developed to demonstrate the learning cycle, measure the learners' intentions, *where they want to be*, and measure the learner progress and learner gain by asking questions such as what learners are *doing, saying and making (producing)* that would reveal the learner is making progress in their learner cycle, hence developing essential capabilities (Foley & Ollis, 2022). The final step of the tool provides a summative assessment of gain against the identified current knowledge to determine the level of learner gain

Figure 1. (Adapted from Vermunt, Ilie, & Vignoles, 2018)

Capability 1	Capability 2	Capability 3	Capability 4
Critical Thinking	**Learning to Learn**	**Motivation to Learn**	**Communication skills**
Cognitive component	*Meta Learning*	*Affective component*	*Socio-communicative component*
Analytical thinking Cognitive abilities Synthesising Analysing Evaluating Problem-solving	Self-regulation Lifelong learning attitudes Learner biography Need to seek information Prior knowledge, skills & life experience	Attitudes towards work, study and learning Engagement in Study and work interests	Belonging in social learning networks Social embeddedness in community Knowledge of difference and diversity Communities of practice

Formative Assessment

View of knowledge:
interest in learning; learner curiosity; open mindedness; world view
Knowing the learner:
Learner efficacy / learner agency / motivation to learn / measuring learners' existing knowledge, skills & life experience
Learner Gain:
What are learners saying, doing, making that would infer learning is occurring?

Figure 1. (Adapted from Vermunt, Ilie, & Vignoles, 2018)

obtained in that cycle. This pedagogical process would ensure that learning has taken place and that in turn, the learner is developing essential capabilities.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that a social justice education informed by the Capability Approach provides a theoretical framework from which to identify and develop key capabilities for adult
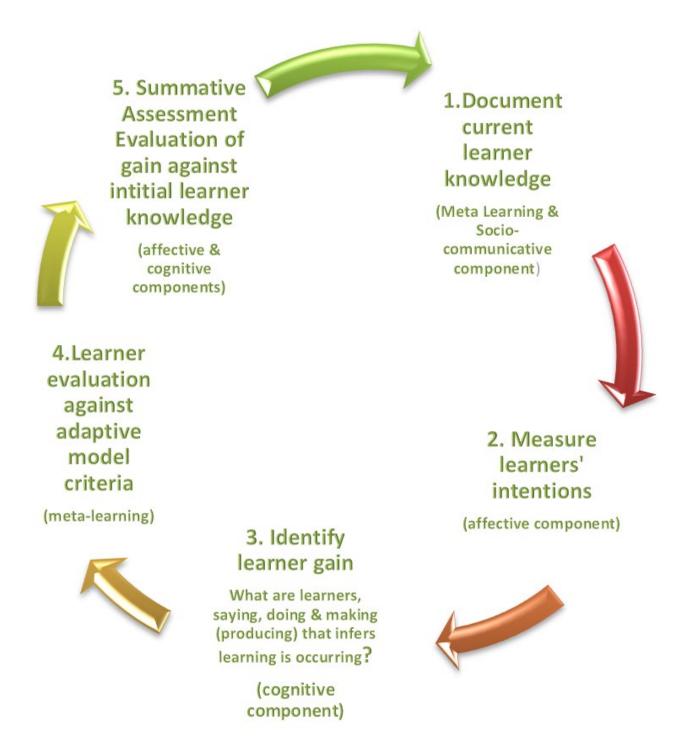
5. Summative Assessment Evaluation of gain against intitial learner knowledge
(affective & cognitive components)

1. Document current learner knowledge
(Meta Learning & Socio-communicative component)

4. Learner evaluation against adaptive model criteria
(meta-learning)

2. Measure learners' intentions
(affective component)

3. Identify learner gain
What are learners, saying, doing & making (producing) that infers learning is occurring?
(cognitive component)

Figure 2. **Tool for Measuring Learner Gain** (Foley &

Ollis, 2022)

learning, through which to conceptualise and evaluate the essential capabilities and pedagogies that provide learning opportunities for the diverse ACE learner.

The four capabilities identified in Figure 1, and the pedagogical measure used in Figure 2, locate the Capabilities Approach within a framework of social

justice Adult Community Education through its learner-centred approaches and its pedagogies that build knowledge. Adult educators consistently emphasise the importance of the relational aspect of learning. For Smyth et, al (2013, p. 311) 'nurturing a hospitable and student-centred approach to teaching and learning…is crucial in motivating students to re-engage.' Rethinking learning that is focused on the

relational through gathering resources for capabilities (Field, 2009), such as resilience, social and community connectedness and civic engagement is what Sen (1979) describes as involving essential human capabilities. For Sen, agency and well-being are intrinsically connected, it follows, then, that if access to a form of relational education that engages diverse learners and develops their well-being and creates opportunities, then this form of education is essential for a socially just education and needs serious policy consideration that recognises the value of relational adult community learning capabilities and approaches.

Disclosure statement

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