Attracting and retaining Indigenous school students to university for nursing education

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Introduction

The Centre for Learning Research at Griffith University has a website (http://www.gu.edu.au/centre/clr/) which dedicates a page to this journal and provides a facility to review the articles and authors of previous editions of the Journal.

This edition of the journal contains two articles on indigenous education in the Australian context. The first is by a group of researchers from Griffith University who have been piloting a program to encourage indigenous High School students to enrol in University courses. They report on their success to date and conclude that a multimodal approach has been successful in the both the recruitment and retention of indigenous students. The second article is by Boni Roberston, a well know indigenous academic and Director of Griffith University's GUMURRII Centre which administers one of Australia's most successful equity programs for Indigenous Australian Peoples, and some of her colleagues. This article discusses a range of critical issues associated with vocational education and training for indigenous peoples.

Mehmet Taspinar a Turkish academic provides an insight into the struggle that Turkey, as a nation, faces in its efforts to eliminate child labour. He argues that Turkey’s European Union membership requires further and ongoing change to its employment and primary education systems. Moreover, he argues that action is also required from both government and industry to lift the status of Turkey’s vocational education system along with changes to, and expansion of, the country’s apprenticeship system. He closes with some recommendations for action.

Tara Fenwick’s article addresses the issue of sustainability in the globalised economy. She argues that despite the general acceptance of sustainability rhetoric there has only been minimal impact in achieving its overall goals. Tara contends that a persistent problem has been a lack of attention to the learning dimension. In particular, a lack of systemic support for learning processes that can sustain change for a more healthy, life-giving work. Her article discusses some of the challenges for learning ecological sustainability in organisations as well as some of what she terms “hopeful examples”. In closing she presents and discusses an ecological learning model

Fred Beven,
Editor, May 2006
Attracting and retaining Indigenous school students to university for nursing education

Judy Wollin, Cheryl Cannon, Heather Douglas, Carrie Fairweather, Sharon Perrett, Ann Ingamells, Chris Purcell, and Debra Creedy
Griffith University

Abstract

Objective: Including Indigenous students in health related courses can potentially significantly improve health in Indigenous communities. Griffith University Logan campus piloted a program to encourage Indigenous High School students from its immediate community, which is predominantly a low socioeconomic area, to enrol in university. Methods: Internal University funding provided bus transport and food. Indigenous academics outlined the benefits of university education and provided examples of their successes. Practical nursing related activities and access to Indigenous role models were popular, and students were given a show bag of university information. A range of strategies implemented by the School of Nursing aim to increase student’s sense of belonging and reduce alienation. Results: Enquiries from the promotional event resulted in 2 students enrolling mid year. Conclusions and implications: Multimodal strategies assist recruitment and retention of Indigenous students. This successful model could be used to increase Indigenous student’s participation in a range of university courses.

Objective

Participation of Indigenous Australians in health courses is proportionally well below the general Australian population (Sibthorpe, Becking, & Humes, 1998; Usher, Lindsay, & Mackay, 2005) despite a well established relationship between education levels and health status (Department of Health and Ageing, 2002) and knowing that involving Indigenous health workers improves health in their communities (Biddle, 2005). Encouraging Indigenous students to work as health professions offers long term benefits for both urban and rural Indigenous communities by increasing sensitivity to culture and improving understanding of ‘traditional’ Aboriginal health beliefs (Haaland & Vlassoff, 2001; Maher, 1999). As health professional courses, such as Bachelor of Nursing, are provided at university, successfully attracting and retaining Indigenous students into university is important (MCEETYA. Ministerial Council on Education, 2001). Since nursing addresses most of the current health agendas in primary health care, public health and health promotion, increasing the number of qualified Indigenous nurses will improve Indigenous health, but currently only 0.05% of registered nurses are Indigenous, well below the proportion of the Australian population 2.6% (Goold, 1995).

Indigenous students often attend the most socioeconomically disadvantaged schools and this is recognised as a significant factor in lowering engagement in post school study (Young, 2004). Young (2004) found students from low socioeconomic areas had little information about university or the future value of a degree, and few role models from family or community for completed university education. Role models are important for young people to envision a different future, set higher expectations
and develop resilience despite environmental stresses (Aronowitz, 2005). Logan campus of Griffith University is situated in a socioeconomically disadvantaged region of Brisbane. Education Queensland statistics show approximately 400 Indigenous students are enrolled in high schools in the Logan catchment area of Griffith University, but in 2005 only five Indigenous students were enrolled in Bachelor of Nursing. The School of Nursing and Midwifery Logan campus, Griffith University, set out to engage local Indigenous students as the Commonwealth Government’s recent initiative to create university places for nursing and education offered opportunities for Indigenous enrolments. The aims were to promote university courses, particularly Nursing, as a post-high school option, to increase familiarity with the local campus and reduce the sense of alienation and intimidation Indigenous students feel when small numbers are enrolled (Eltchelebi, 1999).

Method
A Nursing academic experienced with similar Indigenous recruitment programs organised a promotional event in conjunction with GUMURRI, Griffith University’s Indigenous student centre, the School of Human Services and several university student support facilities. Seven local High Schools with high Indigenous enrolments were contacted. In recognition that post school choices are influenced before Year 12 Indigenous students from Year 8 – 12 were invited to attend Logan Campus for one day (Hesketh, 1998). Internal university funding of $11,000 was used to provide catering, transportation, resource material and nursing demonstration staff, factors previously identified as important (Goold, Turale, Miller, & Usher, 2002). Transportation was a crucial part of the program as schools were unable to provide buses. Schools with larger groups of students sent a parental consent form home twice, made the activity mandatory and reminded the students of the coming activity. Non-return of parental consent forms over a holiday period resulted in two schools cancelling participation at the last minute.

Students were welcomed to the university by a local Aboriginal elder, Indigenous academics, local nurses and community members. Morning tea followed. Food was provided early in recognition that some students may not have eaten. To ascertain available supports to Indigenous students, current Bachelor of Nursing students guided small groups first to the GUMURRI Centre and then to Student Services. Practical nursing related experiences followed: a visit to the science laboratories to examine tissue specimens under the microscope; hand washing activities with ‘germ’ highlighter paint; checking blood pressure and pulse with a teaching stethoscope; and performing mock wound dressings. After a sausage sizzle lunch a panel of Indigenous students, academics, graduates and health professionals outlined the opportunities of university education. They presented their achievements as evidence that Indigenous people can be successful at universities. Students were given a show bag with information on all courses available at the Logan campus as well as a Griffith University promotional item.

Results
One hundred and fifty students visited Logan Campus and subsequently 75 completed evaluations. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive: only 5% stated they would not consider attending university on completing high school. The Indigenous role models were respected and the practical activities were very popular. This pilot program highlighted the need to engage students early in High School as many of the older
students who visited Logan Campus had not selected school subjects that would increase the likelihood of university success. This single promotional event resulted in several inquiries from Indigenous students interested to enrol in Bachelor of Nursing. As a result of the increased university profile two Indigenous students enrolled mid year.

Table 1: Evaluation of the Griffith University promotional day for Indigenous students (n=75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Missing data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The visit to Griffith University Logan Campus was enjoyable</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I might like to go to university when I finish high school</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked visiting the science lab</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked visiting the hospital ward in nursing</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned lots about GUMURRI</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned lots about student services</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bar-be-que was good</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruiting students to university is only half the story. Successful completion of study programs requires considerable effort (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000) as the attrition rate for Indigenous students in universities is high: 62% do not complete their studies compared with 34% non-Indigenous students (MCEETYA. Ministerial Council on Education, 2001). The challenges relate to culture, health paradigms and community (Brady, 1997), cultural insensitivity (Sonn et al., 2000) and are not improved by the limited number of Indigenous people teaching university health courses (Main, Nichol, & Fennell, 2000). Advice and support from the GUMURRI Centre for students and academics contributes to successful student retention. Griffith Nursing academics note poor student attendance or results and address issues hindering student progress (Meiklejohn, Wollin, & Cadet-James, 2003). Student support includes mentoring and modifying course delivery, assignment planning and proof reading, exam preparation, planning strategies to manage workload and other commitments, and referrals to appropriate university services. Since developing networks facilitates successful adaptation to university (Sonn et al., 2000) the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Logan Campus arranges a voluntary ‘house system’ for students, academics and administrative staff to promote an holistic view of university life that integrates social, community and scholarly activities. Nursing academics coordinate induction ceremonies, ‘pep rallies’, peer teaching, extra tutorials, sport and International Nurses Day activities to assist students to feel welcome, promote group interactions, a sense of community and belonging (Meiklejohn et al., 2003). These activities contribute to self-efficacy and improve the sense of community and citizenship in line with Griffith Graduate characteristics.
**Conclusions and implications:**

Universities aiming to improve Indigenous student’s access to university need to consider long-term strategies to build effective relationships across the university and with local schools. The early introduction of Indigenous high school students to university to develop familiarity with the local university campus should be viewed as only one of a suite of strategies to facilitate enrolment into courses such as the Bachelor of Nursing. This innovative pilot program at the Logan campus of Griffith University has been successful in profiling opportunities for university education to local Indigenous students. The program demonstrates important factors. A coordinated approach by university staff ensures consistent messages to schools. Building a long term collaborative relationship between academics and schools with high Indigenous enrolments is essential. Contact with Indigenous people who have successfully completed tertiary studies offers positive role models. Funding is necessary for transportation, food and resources. Food and practical activities engage younger students. Active monitoring of student progress and creative activities to connect students beyond academic courses improves student retention. The collaborative relationship between academics, GUMURRI, Indigenous students and Logan schools is an integral part of the program. Enrolments and retention of Indigenous students will continue to be monitored to aid successful completion of university programs in this low socioeconomic area. This study provides a successful team based model which could be used to increase Indigenous student enrolment and completion of a range of university courses.

**Acknowledgements**

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**References**


The European Union Membership of Turkey: Apprenticeship Training and Child labor

Mehmet Taspinar, Fırat University, Turkey
Fred Beven, Griffith University

Abstract
For Turkey, becoming a member of the European Union (EU) depends on the harmonization of Community law and its implementation. Therefore, it is a must for Turkey to go through a harmonization process in apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship training in Turkey is based on Law No: 3308 and 4702. According to these laws, those reaching the age of 14 can receive apprenticeship training for 2 - 4 years. Students receive theoretical training once in a week in Vocational Training Centers and perform practical training at workplaces, where they work during the training. Despite the international conventions prohibiting children under the age of 14 years who have not completed compulsory primary education being employed, the number of registered working children in Turkey between the ages of 12 and 14 is 470,000 (June 2004 survey by the Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security). Although there has been a fall in the number of working children following the introduction of eight years of compulsory primary education, the problem of child labor still persists and the actual number of unregistered working children is not known. The first part of this paper discusses child labor within the framework of Turkey’s attempts at harmonization with the EU and amendments introduced in its national legislation in 2004. Next, the impact of these changes, drawn from recent studies, are discussed suggesting that in spite of all these efforts a great number of children still work in unacceptable conditions in Turkey. In the final part, the issue of child labor is evaluated within the concept of apprenticeship training.

Introduction
Apprenticeship training is generally provided within a framework of cooperation between the workplace and school. In the western world students tend to participate in apprenticeship training after completing at least a primary education. While in the west this training usually takes place after the age of fourteen years, many children, particularly in under-developed and developing countries, work illegally under harsh conditions and without receiving any kind of formal training before the reach the age of fourteen. In the developing world there is a large number of children working before the age of fourteen years and considered to be “Child labor”. “Child labor” is a significant problem in Turkey despite the fact that it is aiming to be a full member of the European Union, and it has ratified several international agreements on this matter. This article looks firstly at the issue of “child labor” in Turkey and in the world more generally. Secondly, apprenticeship training as an option/alternative to vocational training is discussed as an important strategy towards the elimination of “child labor” in both Turkey and the developing world more generally.
The concept of “child labor”

“Child labor” can be defined in various ways in various societies; however, there is often commonality particularly about the age criteria. In contrast, the level of development of a society and its economic and socio-cultural specifications are significant variables in these definitions. In Turkey, according to the Article 173 of the General Hygiene Law, it is prohibited to employ children under age of twelve years. Further, the Labor Law states that children below the age of fifteen years shall not be employed, however, children completing the age of fourteen years can be employed in light works (The Official Gazette, 1930; The Official Gazette, 2003). The age is taken as a basis for the definition in both laws.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) considers the age group 15 - 24 as young workers, and the ILO recommendation concerning the “Minimum Age for Admission to Employment” (No: 146) recommends a minimum age, fifteen years. According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Turkey, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. In Civil Law, every human being below the age of eighteen years is called as “juvenile” (Karabulut, 1996: 2). In the light of these definitions, while young persons below the age of eighteen years are defined as “children”, children mainly below the age of fifteen years who work for an economic profit are defined as “child labor” or “child workers”. The grounds of working and the field of working for “child labor” or “child workers” can be summarized as follows.

The grounds for working children and child labor

The idea of providing an income and leading a life lies at the core the concept of “working”. Therefore in developing nations it is clear that economic concerns are the main reasons why individuals start to work at an early age. In other words, the economic conditions of societies are significant factors in this matter. The concept of globalization with its impact on all societies has brought about important economic changes. Increasing competition and market share force manufacturers to reduce the price of goods and services and as a consequence to seek a cheap labor force. Furthermore, within societies certain elements, namely population structure, population growth rate, level of education and development, imbalances in education, employment structures, and changes in production systems, are significant factors driving the need for child labor.

In Turkey, individuals emigrating from the rural areas to the ghettos in urban locations have become unemployed due to the recent economic downturn. Recent Government policies have also played a role in the increase in the level of unemployment. Consequently, several forms of unregistered and temporary/seasonal employment have become more prominent. A recent study has shown that mainly women and children have been affected by this downturn (Fazlıoğlu and Dersan, 2004: 6). Children have started to work in order to make a contribution to the family budget; a problem which needs to be addressed and for which urgent solutions found. The current status of child labor in Turkey and the world is discussed next..

Statistical data for the child labor in Turkey and in the world

Child labor is a pervasive problem throughout the world. Millions of children work in the worst conditions, which violate national legislations and international standards, and which are detrimental to their physical, mental, educational, social, emotional and
cultural development. The Working conditions of one of every six children in the world are especially severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper mental, physical, and emotional development. The majority of these children work in the agriculture sector, which involves the use of dangerous chemical substances and electrical equipment and mechanical devices.

According to the latest estimates of the ILO (ILO, 2004), there are around 250 million children in the age group 5-14 working in the world. A further 283 million children between the ages of 12 and 17 years are unable to attend school because they work. Twenty-five percent of the children in the age group 5-14 work out of economic necessity, less than half of these children work at a real workplace, and the rest both attend school and work in assisting positions or in the household of their parents or protectors. Of the 250 million children in the age group 5-14 years, 120 million are in full-time jobs. One in every three children work in sub-standard working conditions with risks their health. According to data of the year 2004, around the world, 121 million children are not in primary schools. Of these children nearly 65 million (54%) are girls, and 56 million (46%) boys. Further, many of the children recorded as going to schools do not attend school regularly. The primary reason given as to why these children worked was in order they contribute to the family income. Sixty-one percent of the world's working children are in Asia, 32% in Africa, and 6% in Latin America. However, per head of population, Africa has the highest percentage of working children (Directorate General of Labor, 2002a; Fazlıoğlu and Dersan, 2004; ILO, 2004; UNICEF 2005).

In Turkey, the problem of child labor is one that, as in every country in transition, needs to be addressed. The problem needs to be viewed in terms of demography, educational levels, economics and social development. According to a Child Labor Survey conducted in October 1999, by the State Institute of Statistics with the contribution of ILO, Turkey’s population was estimated at 63,416,000, with 16,088,000 between the ages of 6 and 17 (25.4%). The survey found that 10.2% of this group (1,635,000) was working, while the remaining 78.8% attended schools. Of the children working 61.8% are boys and 38.2% are girls. There are 1,490,000 children at the school age who work. The survey found that the primary reason why these children worked was in order to contribute to the family income (Fazlıoğlu and Dersan, 2004; ILO, 2004). Of those children working 57.6% are employed in the agriculture sector, 21.8% in general industry, 10.2% in trades, and 10.4% in the service sector (Atal, 2004). Child labor remains a significant problem in Turkey despite various efforts to eliminate or reduce it. Some recent studies on child labor in Turkey highlight some of the issues and are discussed next.

**Studies undertaken in Turkey for child labor**

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) are leading organizations addressing child labor. For instance, many countries implement various programs within the framework of the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) initiated by ILO and new countries are welcomed to these programs. Furthermore, the number of countries contributing to the prevention of child labor is increasing (Directorate General of Labor, 2002a). Although various legislative actions have been implemented for the prohibition of the worst forms of child labor in developed countries, the issue needs further solutions and is still on the world agenda (Kuschnereit, 2001). There are
seventeen international conventions and recommendations on child labor, fourteen of which have been ratified by Turkey (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: International Conventions Ratified by Turkey on Child Labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Convention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>European Social Charter, 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Convention Fixing the Minimum Age for the Admission of Young Persons to Employment as Trimmers or Stokers (No: 15), 1921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Employment of Women on Underground Work in Mines of all Kinds (No: 45), 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Convention Fixing the Minimum Age for the Admission of Children to Employment at Sea, (No: 58) 1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Convention Fixing the Minimum Age for Admission of Children to Industrial Employment (No: 59), 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Convention concerning Medical Examination for Fitness for Employment in Industry of Children and Young Persons (No: 77), 1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Protection of Workers against Ionizing Radiations (No: 115), 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Underground in Mines, (No: 123), 1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Maximum Permissible Weight to Be Carried by One Worker, (No: 127), 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, (No: 138), 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (No: 182), and Recommendation (No: 190), 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>ILO Charter, 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Recommendation concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (No: 146), 1973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(cited from the Directorate General of Labor, 2002b).

According to Convention No: 138, the minimum age for admission to employment or work shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years, and the employment persons 13 to 14 years of age on light work is permitted. It is set out in the Convention that the minimum age for admission to any type of employment, which by its nature, or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons, shall not be less than 18 years. Forty-nine countries have signed the Convention. According to Convention No: 182, the term child shall apply to all persons under the age of 18 (Directorate General of Labor, 2002a).

In Turkey, the employment of children below the age of fifteen years is prohibited according to Article 71 of the Labor Law No: 4857. However, the employment, on light work, of persons aged fourteen years who have finished their primary education is permitted as such work is not seen as preventing their physical and mental development, or their education (The Official Gazette, 2003). In line with the Labor Law and the harmonization agreement with the EU, the Ministry of Labor has prepared a directive in which jobs where children cannot be employed are listed. Therefore, a legal basis for Convention No: 138 has been established. Moreover, the introduction of an eight year compulsory primary education has been useful in the prevention of child labor.
In addition to these legal arrangements, a number of organizations have undertaken further initiatives. The International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) provided by the ILO Ankara Branch has implemented a number of initiatives. A Child Labor Department was established in the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. A project was instigated on the impact of chemicals on the working children in Istanbul. A National Household Survey was performed by the State Institute of Statistics in order to collect statistics on child labor and the data on children between 6 and 14 years reviewed. The Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TİSK) has been undertaking various projects on “child labor” since 1993 within the scope of the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) of the ILO.

TİSK’s activities within the IPEC project have had the objective of providing children at the age of compulsory basic education with training, ensuring that those who have to work after compulsory education are employed with legal protection, and that their working conditions are improved. Within this context, TİSK has carried out several projects aimed at enhancing the awareness of employers in a number of industry sectors and to provide children, their families and employers with health, education, training and advisory services (TİSK, 2005).

The Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TİSK) has held seminars in metal industry sites in İstanbul in cooperation with Apprenticeship Training Centers, to enhanced the awareness of owners of small-scale enterprises. TİSK has established a working children bureau at Pendik Industrial Site in Istanbul in order to meet needs of children working at the site and neighboring sites. The Confederation of Turkish Craftsmen and Tradesmen (TESK), the Confederation of Employer Associations, the Foundation of Vocational Training and Small Industries, the Foundation of Human Resources, the Women's Library and Information Center Foundation, the Turkish Research Institute of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and Crafts, the Development Foundation of Turkey, the Fişek Institute - Science and Action Foundation for Child Labor, the General Directorate of Police, Department of Security, Child Police, the Ministry of National Education, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DISK), and the Confederation of Real Trade Unions (HAK-IS), have all held various vocational training courses on child labor. Many have also provided health services and undertaken various activities and projects for their members, local authorities, and for working children. These activities and projects aim at withdrawing all working children from all forms of labor by providing job opportunities for their families. Another project was initiated in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in order to contribute to the elimination of child labor in hazardous industries in Turkey. The project focused on withdrawing child labor under the age of 15 from all forms of labor in selected industrial sectors in Izmir. A workplace monitoring and social support centre was opened in the scope of the project aiming to contribute to the elimination of child labor, in all forms, in the shoes, textile, and auto-repair sectors in Izmir, and to improve working conditions for all children between the age of 15-18 years.

In cooperation with these confederations, further activities providing direct support to children and social support for their families for alternatives of income generation are underway. Moreover, 1710 working street children in 6 provinces were withdrawn from work and registered to regional boarding primary schools within the scope of
“From the Street to Education” Project in cooperation with TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ and DISK. (ILO, 2004).

Furthermore, an agreement was signed between the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality and ILO-IPEC in 1993. Through this agreement, many of the problems of the families of working children have been resolved, the problems of working children at school have been addressed, and the children have been guided towards a more secure future in which negligence and abuse can be prevented. For this purpose, a 1200 m² area in the Ankara Şihhiye Multi-Floor Parking Lot has been allocated since 1 July 1993 to directly serve 200 children. Nutrition, health, sports and animation activities have been undertaken at this location for working street children. Moreover, educational assistance and activities for providing them with healthy-permanent vocations have also been carried out (Fişek, 2005).

Another successful project is the Multi-Purpose Community Centers (Çok Amaçlı Toplum Merkezleri) (ÇATOM) project. Reading, writing, health, computer, mother training, and entrepreneurship training is given to girls over 14 years of age. Moreover, young girls and women have had programs for providing them with the opportunity to gain a job in machine embroidery, precious stone works, silver works, textiles, and hairdressing at ÇATOM’s in the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) region since 1995. Those who produce items and obtain income in return can find jobs in child care, textile, secretary, hairdressing fields, and at Regional Boarding Primary Schools (YİBO). Those young girls and women, with entrepreneurship potential receive loans to establish their own business. One-hundred and ninety young girls and women found jobs at ÇATOMs in 2003, and nine established six workplaces (Fazlıoğlu and Dersan, 2004: 9). In spite of all these developments, child labor is still a significant problem in Turkey as it moves towards EU full membership. The role of apprenticeship training in eliminating child labor is discussed next.

Working children within the scope of apprenticeship training

In modern economies apprenticeship training plays a significant role in developing the human resource capacity required for continuing economic development. Individuals are employed in a workplace during their training, have an income, and also have the opportunity to develop themselves by performing applicable works in their profession (Obidi, 1995). Apprenticeship training is of significant importance to the economic wellbeing of individuals who do not wish to continue in full-time education. High quality apprenticeship training systems are ones that respond by closely monitoring scientific and technological developments and fast changing process and provide the training sought by both employers and employees (Payne, 2002).

Examples of these can be seen in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Australia, all of whom have implement apprenticeship training by operating a “dual system” that combines school-based education with work-based training. The dual system can be summarized as a system where the training takes place at both a workplace and a vocational school, curricula is developed in co-operation with all the parties involved, and local industry organizations play a significant role in implementing the curricula within a flexible framework.

Shavit and Muller’s thirteen country comparative study reported by Higgins (2003) points out that:
Young people, including those from low income families, were found to be better able to enter skilled careers in those countries with well-developed and vocationally specific pathways than in those without.

Employer-based apprenticeship training (such as that practised in Germany) was found to produce much better outcomes than the school-based vocational approach of the Netherlands.

(Shavit and Muller, reported in Higgins, 2003)

Higgins (2003) further argued that apprenticeship systems appear to have a good track record in keeping youth unemployment at low levels and quickly integrating a high proportion of new school leavers into jobs. There appears to be clear benefits for young people moving between education and employment in the strongly institutionalised apprenticeship “dual system”.

Apprenticeship training in Turkey follows the “dual system” structure. Working children become apprentice, qualified workers and then masters in the apprenticeship system. The roots of this system go back to the Ahilik system in Turkey. The structure was then changed with Lonca, and ended with the foundation of modern Turkish Republic. The apprentice - qualified worker - master structure has been supported for a considerable time (the Debt Law in 1926, Apprentice, Qualified Worker and Master Law No: 2089 in 1977, Apprenticeship and Vocational Training Law No: 3308 in 1986 and Law No: 4702). Each of these laws included regulations on this issue. (Directorate General of Labor, 2002c; The Official Gazette, 1986; The Official Gazette, 2001; Ulusoy, 2005). Some brief comments on the current system follow.

Individuals, who are a least fourteen years of age and who are under of nineteen years, who have graduated from primary school, and whose health is suitable for the conditions of the job in which they are employed, are admitted to apprenticeship training. Those who are aged nineteen years, and who have not received apprenticeship training, can be admitted to apprenticeship training programs established in line with their age and level. Young people working at workplaces established under the Tradesmen and Small Craftsmen Law (No: 507), and those working in provinces at vocations within the apprenticeship training system, are entitled to apprenticeship training.

Individuals, who have graduated from primary schools but who are not yet aged fourteen years, are admitted to apprenticeship training with a “candidate apprentice” status. Training takes place both at their workplace and at vocational training centers. They spend one day in a vocational training center and other days at the workplace. When “candidate apprentices” reach age fourteen years, they then participate in “apprenticeship training” which will last 2 - 4 years with an apprenticeship contract. Their social insurance premiums are paid by the State during this training. Those apprentices who pass an examination at the end of the training receive a qualified worker certificate. If those undertaking master training courses become successful at the final examination, they receive “master certificate” and can establish their own businesses. While this is the general structure of apprenticeship training in Turkey other arrangements have been made for those in work who have not received apprenticeship training at all, and for those who have established their own business, to receive a “master certificate”.
With respect to “child labor”, it should be emphasized that although the Primary Education Law forbids child labor during primary education, a great number of children do work. Moreover, by law, individuals in work after the age of fourteen years ought to have access to apprenticeship training. Since the introduction of eight year compulsory primary education in Turkey, the number of working children under the age of fourteen years has decreased (Atal, 2004). However, due to recent economic problems, some children who used to be apprentices have become street workers. Although there is no sound statistical data for their number, it appears that only one-hundred and twenty-three thousand (123,000) children out of two million four-hundred thousand (2,400,000) children working between the age of 15 and 19 years in Turkey go to vocational training centers (Aktaş, 2005). The exclusion of children from apprenticeship training during the economic downturn can be seen as the exploitation of child labor. These children mostly do not have social insurance, work for low wages, and work in less than ideal or even harsh conditions. A consequence is that they develop bad habits and become unemployed, and do not acquire any qualifications. This is both troubling and will have longer term repercussions. In the final section some recommendations to halt and reverse this current trend are provided.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Child labor is a fact in Turkey. The general level of development of the country, the disparities in the distribution of income, and its education structure all play a significant role in marinating it. The more recent economic crisis has not helped either. Legislative action and ratified conventions have brought about little to change, although the number of working children decreased with the introduction of 8-years of compulsory primary education. Child labor still prevails both before and after the age of fourteen. A heartening fact is that there has been an important fall in the rate of participation in apprenticeship training by children of primary education age. However, there are still large numbers of children working who perhaps ought to still be in the education system. The main reasons of this can be summarized as the lack of control and scope of apprenticeship training programs and the unregulated nature of the economic structure.

Both Government and Industry need to partner activities that ensure that working children of a primary education age have access to education. That is, all public and private organizations, as well as the community at large, need to take full responsibility for developing the nations future – its children. In doing so, the function of adequately resourced vocational training centers can be to organize additional vocational courses for those working children under the age of fourteen years who have not yet been afforded vocational training. While most are employed in light work in accordance with the provisions of the labor laws, these laws do not currently guarantee them any vocational education opportunity.

Labor force training programs for these working children should be organized by vocational training centers within the apprenticeship training system. The programs should provide vocationally specific pathways, and just as importantly, help these working children to adapt to society. In other words, the programs should include
significant social and life skills functions as well. The support should also be extended in terms of nutrition, accommodation, finding jobs or establishing their own businesses. Therefore, the relevant public and private agencies, along with vocational training centers, need to work in coordination. Currently a number of organizations and agencies are undertaking projects to curb child labor. However, these projects and activities lack the coordination needed. These organizations and agencies should be coordinated through a Government supported peak body. Activities such as ÇATOM should be further supported by the addition of vocational training centers in order to expand the scope of their work. To add further support, projects like this should be developed in coordination with local administrations and seek EU funds.

The current status of vocational training is one of the general problems of vocational training in Turkey. After their children complete primary education, families tend to guide their children into general education as an eventual pathway to undertaking a university education. In contrast, children who have been less successful in their primary education tend to end up in vocational training. Improvements to both the employment and the training systems, as outlined above, would assist in improving the status of vocational training in Turkey. This might be further enhanced by providing additional guidance in the final year of the primary education, and first year of secondary education.

General recommendations can be set forth as follows:

1. Social policies should be developed and applied for improving socio-economic conditions of the families of working children.
2. The eight year compulsory primary education policy should be strengthened to ensure that child labor continues to decreased and is eliminated for under 15 year olds.
3. A peak body should be established in order to provide coordination and cooperation for the projects and activities undertaken by various organizations and agencies working to minimize child labor. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security should provide the leadership for this.
4. Information and guidance on the options that children have should be given within their eight years of compulsory primary education.
5. Working conditions for children as deemed as “candidate apprentices” and as “student” in vocational training centers should be improved.
6. Training for new vocational fields should be given in line with the changes in vocational training.
7. Closer control and monitoring of the current legal requirements with respect to child labor needs to be undertaken. Work needs to continue on including working children, who are not currently within the scope in current legislative arrangements, in the legislative arrangements.
8. To support recommendation 7 vocational training curricula need to be developed for these children.
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Learning Ethical Action for Sustainability in a Globalised Economy: An Ecological Perspective

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Background
Calls for sustainability are increasingly evident in literature related to worklife, learning and practices. These calls seem part of the mounting popular concern over threats to health – of human beings, organisations, nature – caused by taken-for-granted patterns. In particular we tend to blame a hyper-acceleration of work activity and hyper-production, created by globalised corporate competition within a capitalist logic of labour exchange and profit motive. For at least half a century, since the environmental social movements became widespread in the 1960s, many initiatives have been launched to promote more sustainable work conditions, worklife and work production practices. These movements have had some impact, certainly improving corporate environmental practices and awareness. But despite the general acceptance of ‘sustainability’ rhetoric, critics note only minimal impact in achieving its overall goals: there is little fundamental change evident in toxic workplace structures and values (Bakan, 2004; Daley & Cobb, 1989; Foley, 1998; Lange, 2001; Willard, 2005). In fact, critique of both opportunism and naïveté suspected in the sustainability movement has generated a fair degree of disillusionment and suspicion of its rhetoric and interests.

Yet popular support for ideals of sustainability in work remains strong, particularly evident in discourses of corporate social responsibility and work-life balance. Perhaps this is like so many human hopes for a better world whose action stops at enunciations of the ideal. But we are educators, and our very practice is dedicated to change. If we believe that there really is reason and hope to persist in bringing about more sustainability, we will find a way to do so through education. But how, when so many educative commitments to sustainability have fallen short? This is the question I address in this paper: How can a genuine project of social responsibility and ecological sustainability in the workplace move forward in a global capitalist economy? I address this from the particular perspective of vocational education, focusing on two related questions: What learning is involved in generating ecological sustainability? How might this learning be fostered, and by whom? The structure of my argument is, following clarification of this vague term ‘sustainability’, to examine what has happened to promote sustainability in worklife and workplace. I argue that a persistent problem in these movements has been a lack of attention to the learning dimension: in particular, a lack of challenge to the cultural and economic knowledge that continue to hold in place consent to work processes that are alienating and destructive; and a lack of systemic support for learning processes that can sustain change for more healthy, life-giving work. Yet there are generative spaces of learning that have influenced notable change. I draw examples from the corporate social responsibility movement to analyse not only why change has often not occurred, but more important, what possibilities are emerging. I read these possibilities against
ecological theories of learning to, finally, suggest a way forward for educators interested in promoting ecological sustainability in work.

**What is ‘ecological sustainability’?**

Sustainability is a term that has come to be applied to ideologically contradictory projects, ranging from notions of economic perpetuation embedded in ‘sustainable development’ to environmental science. In the present argument, my position is separate from both of these concepts. I maintain that ‘ecological sustainability’ involves both social and environmental responsibility, ranging from issues of human rights to viability of local communities and conservation of natural resources. Our actions and wellness are enmeshed in both our natural and cultural environments as part of complex emerging systems. Ecological sustainability is a matter of gender, class and race politics, of social equity and justice, as well as of environmental preservation.

Working from literature of both environmental and human ecology, Lange (2001) has developed ten principles of ecological sustainability which provide useful reminders of the range of interwoven concerns that we might consider to formulate a project of learning sustainability in work. First is **renewable energy**, shifting energy sources from coal, oil and gas to solar power, direct or indirect, water and wind (Suzuki, 1997). Second is **eliminating waste** from production, particularly toxic waste (compounds that won’t break down). Elimination of waste involves taking greater responsibility for the whole life cycle of products created, imitating nature’s cycles (products are not thrown away but are transferred and eventually returned to origin of production). Third is **restoring and conserving biodiversity**, understanding that health of societies and ecosystems rests on rich variation, and minimising use of resources and energy in daily activities (Hawken, 1993). A fourth principle is **biomimicry**, using tools and technology in ways that mimic the flow of natural processes: small scale, integrated in renewable cycles, adaptable to the community level, and serving human needs rather than creating scarcity. This principle embeds a theme implicit in the first two, to do with awareness of the ‘footprint’ (amount of land required to produce the resources and assimilate the waste of a population) or negative impact of one’s individual and collective practices on the interdependent webs of social and biological activity, and deliberately reducing that impact: ‘treading lightly’. Fifth is **universal meaningful work**: ensuring equitable access to work that is ‘life-giving’ and enables all to create and contribute to renewing the whole (Schumacher, 1979). Principle six is what Hawken (1993) calls ‘restorative economy’: building collective self-reliance and integrating commerce and technology into existing biological systems, focusing on the community’s internal resources and bioregion. Principle eight is **holistic urban communities**, which focuses on reducing the ecological footprint of cities by integrating a diversity of activities and amenities in each neighborhood, encouraging zero-emission industry, and renewing neglected and unsafe areas (Jacobs, 2004). Ninth is what many ecological writers talk about in terms of ‘simplicity’ and ‘mindfulness’: incorporating principles of material, social and psychological simplicity, ‘decluttering’ one’s possessions, activities (including work), and habits of mind, slowing down and living with greater focus and balance to renew personal energy (Elgin, 1998). Finally, tenth is a building a **sense of place** in one’s work, integrating connectedness to the natural world with purpose in the social and cultural worlds (Todd & Todd, 1994).
Running throughout these principles are four clear themes. The first is an attitude: a sense of personal ethical responsibility for restoring healthier communities and ecosystems. The others are action: practices of renewal or involving minimal resources and waste in production and life activity; interconnecting or acting with awareness of one’s relatedness to others in local, global and biological webs and the impact of one’s actions on them; and promoting local well-being, as nested within what Bohm (1980) calls the whole, implicate order. These themes embrace and cut across diverse realms and levels. Realms include the social, biological, and cultural realms of human activity, which while distinct, are integrated. Different scalar levels range from micro-interactions in local sites to macro-level structures and the body politic: also distinct, but nested within and impacting one another. We might also map onto this model different spheres of human activity, which again are distinct but overlapped: work, recreation, family, community, and personal life.

The remaining discussion focuses on promoting ecological sustainability in just one site: the work sphere, in the cultural-social realm, at the level of organisations. However, just as it is hard to talk about one’s work without also considering one’s personal aspirations, social relationships, family considerations, identity, physical and emotional wellness, so is this site of focus at the work organisation understood to remain continuously coupled with and mutually influencing activity in all other spheres, realms and levels.

The Workplace – a Site for Learning Ecological Sustainability?
Notions of sustainability, and particularly these four themes of ethical responsibility, renewal, interconnectivity and local well-being have become fashionable in businesses and work organisations. Critics charge that sustainability talk is corporate smoke-and-mirrors, an image-making technology that camouflages entrenched corporate resistance to systemic change for more ecological and ethical workplaces. Bakan (2004) shows that corporations as they currently exist cannot be socially responsible, for the corporation is bound by law to put shareholders’ interests above all others: ‘The law forbids any other motivation for their actions, whether to assist workers, improve the environment, or help consumers save money. . . . Social and environmental goals are and must be strategies to advance the interests of their companies and shareholders; they can never legitimately be pursued as ends in themselves’ (p. 35, 46). Henderson (2002) argues that CSR is nothing more than an ideological movement that intimidates businesses into pseudo-compliance: the lack of clear criteria opens business decision-making to ‘irrationality’ and political lobbying by special interest groups. Analysts of sustainability efforts in corporations and other work organisations insist that the extent of commitment, while affected by regulation and consumer pressure, is primarily an issue of learning (Korten, 1999; Lange, 2002; Nattrass & Altomare, 2002; Willard, 2005). But given the fundamental contradictions, can the workplace become a viable site that learns and promotes learning of ecological sustainability?

One place to look is a movement under which many workplace sustainability efforts organise themselves: ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR). CSR has been defined as ‘treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner’ (Hopkins, 2003, p.1), by recognising a ‘triple bottom line’ of these stakeholders that includes people (employees, customers, competitors, communities -local, national, global), the natural environment, and investors. This is a conservative declaration: others are more
forthright in their commitment to go beyond fair treatment of stakeholders to actively foster ecological sustainability and social development, often working with local government and interest groups including environmental, religious, ethnic, and trade groups (Daly & Cobb, 1989; Hawken, 1993; Korten, 1999). In 1994 in Caux Switzerland, two key ethical principles were adopted to guide corporate sustainability practices internationally, by a group representing over 150 businesses who had begun to gather annually to discuss shared concerns: *kyosei* from the Japanese, meaning to live and work together for the common good, and *human dignity*, referring to the sacredness or value of each person as an end, not simply as a means to fulfill others’ purposes. Common prescriptions for CSR practice can be grouped into seven categories: environmental sustainability (conservation, waste reduction, renewal); local community (towards its sustainability and better quality of life for its citizens); employees’ rights (for equity, fair wage, freedom of speech, decent living conditions, personal fulfillment and development through work); suppliers, competitors, customers’ rights (for honesty, fair dealing, security of property, freedom from coercion); transparent and honest accountability (clear, accurate, transparent, appropriate, timely reporting of products, services, operations); legal and honest operations (regulatory compliance beyond the letter of the law toward a spirit of trust); and global citizenship (to foster sustainable development, justice and peace in foreign countries, respect integrity of local cultures) (Crowther and Raymann-Bacchus, 2004; Hopkins, 2003; King, 2002). Clearly these principles and practices are grounded in the same four themes of ecological sustainability advanced in this argument: ethical responsibility, renewal, interconnectivity and local well-being.

For about 15 years now and accelerating since the 1994 international recognition of the CAUX principles in 1994, the promotion of sustainability has influenced significant learning and change in organisational policies and practices, claims Hopkins (2003). At least three international CSR conferences are held annually, and several organisations such as Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (www.cbsr.bc.ca) and Business Alliance for Living Local Economies (www.livingeconomies.org) in Canada, and the Australian Centre of Corporate Social Responsibility (www.accsr.com.au) in Australia, are devoted to educating managers, entrepreneurs, small businesses and large corporations about sustainability practices and why they should be adopted. The movement works largely through informal networks and alliances among large and small business, community groups, trade unions, and environmental activists. It has produced international measures of corporate ethical practices, dialogues about regulatory enforcement and incentives, and accounting protocols for social responsibility practices. The International Labour Organisation has been involved in activities such as facilitating tripartite discussions (labor, management, policy actors) to foster sustainability and ‘fair globalisation’, assessing off-shore suppliers’ compliance with CSR practices, and helping to shape, implement and monitor codes of conduct. Federal government rhetoric and some resources actively promote sustainability/CSR in work organisations in both North America and Australia. Willard (2005) argues that even though executives continue to respond first to ‘shareholder’ demands, that since the mid-1990s they are responding to powerful and urgent demands emerging from a convergence of green consumers, activist shareholders, nongovernmental organisations and governments.

For adult educators interested in sustainability, work and the workplace do appear to signal a viable site for learning ecological sustainability, about what it means to be a
global and local citizen. Potentially this learning could extend throughout a workplace, engaging managers and supervisors at different levels, educators and human resource developers, professional/technical staff and front line workers in envisioning and implementing socially responsible work practices. But what really happens in practice, in organisations that try achieving learning sustainability practices?

**Challenges of Learning Ecological Sustainability in Organisations**

Studies of implementing sustainability in work organisations are not particularly promising. Three main problems appear frequently: (1) sustainability principles and rationale are little understood or appreciated below senior management levels; (2) the ideals often do not become translated into everyday practices, through lack of: genuine support from senior management, infrastructure, strategies, or consistency with core operational practices and reward systems; or (3) the practices are perceived too costly, difficult, time-consuming, or removed from core business goals to be worthwhile (Nattrass & Altomare, 2002; Willard, 2005). Levels of genuine commitment and understanding to the ideals range widely across and within companies, as does internal resistance. In Canada, (CBSR, 2001, 2002) surveys of businesses found that educating employees, customers, and other stakeholders to understand and support social responsibility principles was a key challenge that often went unrecognised.

As a result, CSR policies adopted by some businesses are often far more comprehensive on paper than they are in actual implementation. Organisations didn’t always spend time deciding a focus and choosing priorities, which could then be mapped against the actual practices to determine areas for change. Even when there were value priorities, these didn’t necessarily align with the kinds of indicators that were most easily measured (such as community investments) or made most sense to stakeholders. So while corporate annual reports might publish successful limited initiatives in reducing energy or waste, Dobbin (1998) argues that the values of ecological sustainability rarely seem to penetrate practices that promote work intensification, accelerated productivity, or offshore outsourcing.

The business gains such as enhanced reputation and improved relations with community groups (e.g. an oil refinery actively building relations with local Aboriginal bands to ameliorate potential protests over plant expansion) were not always seen to justify the high costs of sustainability. Elevated expenditures might include ‘green’ products and practices, community donations and services, employee development and employee earnings allotted to allow their involvement in community connection activities, and possibly higher costs of local products and services). These costs are tough for some businesses, particularly small and medium businesses struggling against low price points set by retail giant competitors, and rural or remote-area firms who may lack access to information, supporters and environmentally-friendly suppliers and products. In fact, existing models of workplace sustainability tend to target large organisations’ interests and resources. Few practices feasible for small to medium enterprises have been explored. The sense of sustainability being more costly in practice than it is worth is exacerbated by lack of government regulation, formal recognition, or financial support of sustainability practices in terms of tax incentives or subsidies for buying responsible products/services. Bakan (2004) shows that shareholders and even the public are not always on board. The latter still
seek lowest costs, and the former still seek greatest profits. Leaders committed to sustainability, such as Anita Roddick of The Body Shop, are often forced to compromise their own principles by these pressures.

And what about the educative aspect? To what extent is learning deliberately addressed in these initiatives to increase ecological sustainability? Evidence logically would appear in the human resource development unit, where responsibility usually resides for individual and organisational learning. With this reasoning, we conducted a study (Fenwick & Bierema, 2005) in which we set out to interview senior human resource directors in 10 large corporations formally recognised for their CSR leadership – five in Canada, five in the US – about their actual implementation of CSR. We were astonished to find that some actively resisted speaking to us, demonstrating suspicion of our motives and confusion about why they would be expected to speak about CSR. In four cases we were directed to the public relations/customer service units of the corporation. In the two cases where HR came closest to aligning its learning initiatives with CSR, one director noted ruefully that only two questions in the lengthy CSR company internal audit had anything to do with learning and training, and the other director focused on safety training as promoting employee respect for one another and for company property.

**Hopeful Examples: Promotion of Ecological Sustainability in Organisations**

Evidently the possibility for learning ecological sustainability in work organisations is ambivalent. Why is this, and what can be learned from this movement for more successful efforts to foster sustainability? The reasons for the challenges are complex, as the previous section indicates. At their root are issues that organisational change literature describes as commonplace: top-down implementation rather than building decentralised commitment, often via prescription rather than learning processes, often by the converted without addressing others’ perceptions and positionality, focusing on altruistic ideals rather than everyday practices and meaning-making, failing to appreciate the patterns and politics embedded in the entire organisational system and reinforced in its everyday performances of culture, and neglecting to understand and promote the actual dynamics of ethical action. These issues suggest three lessons for more effective promotion of ecological sustainability. First, that emphasis should be more on learning, with attention to contemporary models of learning in workplace communities and processes through which knowledge is reproduced and rewarded. Second, that sustainability needs to be understood and fostered holistically, in multiple work levels simultaneously: at micro-levels including people’s meanings of and strategies of participation in everyday practices, and at macro-levels accounting for the entire system and its relation to other systems. Third, that ethical action needs to be understood and promoted as part of everyday coping – decision-making, interactions, and production activity.

And in fact, CSR research has revealed some firms that actively and genuinely appear to enact ecological sustainability. Certain organisations have infused these principles of ethical responsibility, renewal, interconnectivity and concern for the local not just into their espoused missions and company values, but also into their work structures, their employee relations practices, and their interface with their suppliers and communities. In these cases, learning receives prominent attention, sustainability appears to be integrated as much as possible in everyday practices at different levels, and ethical action appears to be central.
One outstanding case: Mountain Equipment Co-Op (MEC)

MEC is a Canadian outfitter selling gear for wilderness sports ranging from hiking/camping to kayaking. Born in 1971 from a philosophy of cooperative principles and connection to the environment by three university students, the firm has grown to 10 stores nation-wide, all cooperatively owned and managed. Staff tend to be attracted from its enthusiastic customers. Its core business is explicitly stated to be promoting wilderness conservation, adventure and responsible use of the outdoors through quality products, which became extended in its business mission to ‘improve the social and environmental impacts of our products, services and operations’ and ‘empowering our members to be active participants in our co-op endeavors’ (www.mec.ca). ‘Ethical decision-making’, a core process in MEC’s vision of ‘leadership in a just world’, involves all staff in choices from paper purchase to store design for sustainability. One manager emphasised recruitment: ‘We’re looking for people that are passionate about the outdoors and passionate about the environment and I think when you hire with those traits, they’re usually pretty self motivated to come in and learn all they can about it’ (Fenwick & Bierema, 2005). Diverse staff expertise in outdoor pursuits (kayaking, mountain climbing, etc) is sought informally without a centralised hierarchy of classified jobs. Even retail floor staff reflect diverse backgrounds: some we interviewed were professionally trained but preferred to work for an organisation for whose mission they felt personal connection and identification. CSR appeared to evolve naturally from this combination, supported with company funds. CSR practices ranged from a ‘green building programme’ and analyzing waste/garbage audits to enforcing a vendor and supplier code of conduct. Local MEC stores develop their own initiatives to promote local development and partnerships with community organisations.

Clearly its central business structures appear to be significant in enabling the co-operative’s CSR success. First is its diversity and decentralisation - co-op organisational principles unconstrained by shareholder-profit motives. Diverse participants interacted in daily decision-making: member customers, staff from different professional spheres and different background experiences of the outdoors, and diverse local stores who arrive at company decisions cooperatively. Diverse partnerships were cultivated with local groups to undertake community development projects and with agencies such as the Canadian Cooperative Association and Outdoor Conservation Association to exchange information and identity problems. Second is a central, shared focus – in this case, a shared value for nature. A focus ensures a sufficient degree of overlap among the participant diversity, and enables diverse, decentralised activity and ideas to emerge while avoiding decentralized scattering. In the case of MEC, it seemed significant that the central operational value and mission explicitly focused on ethical responsibility through action – much different than a mission to become the number one outfitter in Canada. Three further elements appeared to contribute to the firm’s success in consistently enacting ecological sustainability while remaining viable. Learning is valued and actively promoted – not as training in some pre-determined knowledge, but as opportunities to share and improvise. Beyond initial mandatory training, optional staff development was plentiful, including outdoor treks to ‘play with’ and test products, workshops held for one another in wilderness expertise, and staff focus groups to assess new suppliers (who must meet CSR standards) and determine new store directions. ‘Paid project days’ were available to all staff, for involvement in community outreach projects of
their choice. Connectivity and is fostered not only in terms of connecting humans to nature, but also as frequent, multi-point communications and feedback among the many stakeholders of the co-op, internally and externally. On-site ‘SR Coordinators’ worked with staff to develop SR initiatives for the store’s own communities, which were electronically ‘tracked’ and shared across stores. In these continuous interactions, new problems were identified, new ideas for SR were born, and micro-dilemmas were worked through.

Finally, the organisation’s ideals of ecological sustainability appeared to permeate every layer. When we asked to speak to the HR director, we were directed at first to floor staff, who without warning of our coming were able to explain the firm’s mission, how its products and their own activity contributed to this, and the latest SR initiatives in their own community. When we asked for a spokesperson to represent the company we were directed to a knowledgeable junior supervisor who had worked at MEC for less than two years. A senior manager later attributed MEC’s CSR success to the staff, who are ‘stoked’ on this organisation: ‘Ninety percent of the people that are there are interested, they’re focused, they’re asking good questions, giving great feedback and they’re using the stuff, and this is what they’re doing in their lives every day … they’re getting out and they’re actually … living the lifestyle that they’re learning about.’ This characteristic of the system’s whole being reflected in the smallest part is what complexity theorists call self-similarity.

Small businesses and corporate social responsibility

After completing our study of the Mountain Equipment Co-Op, my colleagues and I began two studies of small businesses trying to incorporate ecological sustainability practices. During these studies we began to see similar characteristics among these organisations. These elements were highlighted in the preceding section: diversity, decentralisation, a shared (ethical) focus, learning as improvisation, connectivity (as continual interaction, as different scalar levels nested and communicating, and as purposeful feedback), and self-similarity.

For example ‘Eclipse Awards International’, a Vancouver, Canada business that manufactures trophies, uses primarily recycled materials such as glass for all of its products. The owner is now investigating further energy reduction through a firing plant that captures and reuses all heat energy. Because the business is located in a low-income neighborhood reputed for multiple problems (high levels of unemployment, homelessness, drug abuse and violence), the business has committed to hiring and training local residents as 10% of employees. Staff are active on boards of local neighborhood associations establishing safe houses, shelters, needle exchanges and community revitalisation, often in mentoring roles to help build and fund-raise. Ideas for these directions of involvement emerged through interaction within the community, and increased as the diverse neighborhood residents mingled with established staff within the company. The diverse connections of the business – business networks as well as community groups, social responsibility and environmental associations – ensure a flow of information and perspectives that prompts new learning and experimentation. But the whole is held together by strong shared commitment to ethical responsibility: for renewal, interconnectivity and concern for well-being in the local community. The owner manager explained, ‘Businesses can’t be profit-oriented anymore. It doesn’t work out. There has to be a social aspect to businesses. That will become the new standard. People are aware
enough of their environment, and want a different way of doing things. . . . As a responsible person it’s up to you to change your behavior’ (group interview, March 2005).

Another example is ‘Organic Roots’ restaurant and catering in Edmonton, Canada, owned and managed by a young Lebanese family. Like Eclipse Awards, their motives for core commitment to ecological sustainability are integrated with their reason for starting the business: to promote healthy bodies and healthy environments. Strategies for waste/garbage audit, composting, and education programmes for the public emerge through the business’s diverse networks and its emphasis on improvisational learning. Customers, say the owners, as well as staff are an important source of learning: they question suppliers, recipe contents, and suggest employee involvement programmes. Challenges are no less than what other small businesses experience, described earlier: high costs, lack of government support or recognition, balancing reasonable sustainability with viable business practices – while meeting expectations of environmentally-aware customers and demands of local community groups. Similar to Eclipse Awards and MEC, Organic Roots’ success in working through these challenges appears to be influenced by, besides diversity, decentralised decision-making, connectivity and learning emphasis, a central focus on ethical, socially responsible action.

Ethical Action, Ecology and Learning
What is ethical action, and how does it develop? Ethical being, writes Zygmunt Bauman (1993), embraces uncertainty, engages micro-interactions, and lets go of rational intention: reason deprives the self ‘of what makes the self moral . . . That non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may’ (p.247). This attunement to ethical interconnection, to the relations among things and one’s changing location and responsibility in these relations, is an energising force in ecology. In ecological education (Sumara, Davis & Laidlaw, 2001), a thing cannot be considered without also considering how that thing influences and is influenced by other things. The ecological writer Francisco Varela (1999) who has influenced educational theorists Brent Davis (2003), Dennis Sumara (2001) and Hesoon Bai (2004) among others, explains that ‘cognition consists not of representations but of embodied action’ (p.17): ‘in a nutshell . . . two interrelated points: (1) that perception consists of perceptually guided action, and (2) that [higher] cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided.’ (p. 12)

In this enacted notion of knowledge emerging ‘through our history of structural coupling’ as well as ‘the alternative microworlds that are activated in every situation’ (p. 17), Varela shifts the focus of ethical action from rational intention to ‘the daily enactments that comprise our traces within the world’. Ethical know-how, writes Varela, is a mode of ongoing coping, a mode of appropriate responsiveness in the immediate – to the natural and biological as well as the social. Ecology looks beyond human interaction, beyond an anthropocentric world to examine the press of the biological and natural in the social world, expanding notions of intersubjectivity to appreciate interobjectivity – ‘the mutually affective relations among phenomena and knowledge of phenomena’ (Davis, 2003). In ecological education, caring is expanded to flows among and within humans that mix the biological and social and cultural and technological.
A burning question in examining people’s ethical learning – in this case, learning responsibility for ethical action promoting ecological sustainability – is: what actually prompts individuals or groups to take up a particular cause of ethical action? Then, what sustains them to follow it through, and to what extent? Why do some stop when personal or business survival are threatened, where others follow ecological principles even when personal security is threatened? Without straying too far from the central discussion, it is worth noting that ecological writers grappling with this question have pointed to insights from transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990). In particular, Mezirow’s claim that a ‘disorienting dilemma’ felt personally and deeply, and prompting critical reflection on one’s life processes, has been verified in scores of empirical studies. Lange (2001) for example, in studying people who had decided to take up principles of ecological sustainability in their lives and work, reports that all experienced a personal work-related crisis in stress, illness, or feeling a loss of work meaning or integrity. Lisa Princic, a director with Canadian Business for Social Responsibility who has spent 11 years teaching sustainability to companies, claims that the starting point tends to be ‘an epiphany’, often experienced by senior managers. It might be caused by personal/family crisis, sudden awareness of the destruction they perpetuate, or realisation that they can make a difference (personal communication, May 4, 2005). Studies of social movements that examine emergence of commitment to an altruistic cause in individuals and groups show various influencing factors: (1) feeling personally affected by a problem or condition in ways that threaten valued things; (2) perceiving a feasible action for that problem; (3) feeling personally called to that action; (3) experiencing support for and success in that action; (4) perceiving a general social tide of change that appears inevitable; or (5) identifying with a social group that has taken up a cause or action (Chovanec, 2004; Davidson and Hatt, 2005; Foley, 1999; Goodwin et al., 2001). A complex mix of these and other factors might initiate involvement in ecological action, after which learning unfolds through deepening awareness of the problem’s significance and breadth, deepening involvement in developing practical strategies, and deepening social ties and commitments to others in the group. Griff Foley (1999) shows that this learning is embedded in the action itself. As people enact solidarity, strategising and learning together about unjust or unsustainable social arrangements in a choreography of action, they recognise new problems and possibilities for action. Each action opens alternate micro-worlds, while expanding people’s confidence and recognition of the group’s capacity to influence other systems.

Ecological Learning – A Model

So to return to our central question, How can a genuine project of social responsibility and ecological sustainability in the workplace move forward, given the contradictions and practical limitations imposed in a global capitalist economy? I have argued that those organisations who are successful in navigating these contradictions appear to meld two characteristics: a systemic structure of emergence (diversity, decentralisation, connectivity, etc) and a central focus, deeply rooted, on ethical action. To address my second question, I have also shown that learning is involved in at least three main levels: a ‘conversion’ that leads to this ethical commitment; continuous adaptation and improvisation as organisational members interact in everyday activity to instigate ecological practices; and flow of new ideas and perspectives, generated through diverse networks, to spark strategies. But perhaps the
most relevant for us as vocational educators is my third question: How might this learning be fostered, and by whom?

To answer this I offer an ecological model of learning and pedagogy that parallels the organisational processes producing ecological sustainability. I suggest that educators in any work-learning-related context – whether instructing in a TAFE classroom, training at the job-site, or designing conditions to foster workplace learning communities – can promote learning of ecological sustainability through ecological approaches to pedagogy itself. Writers on ecological adult education are generally agreed on two principles: that people have innate ecological knowledges that can and must be used as the foundation of learning for change, and that ecological learning does not happen spontaneously: education is critical to facilitate this change (Clover, Follen and Hall, 2000; Tan, 2004).

From ecological and complexity theory orientations, an important task for education is to *enable emergence*: opening intentional spaces that enable unintended possibilities. We know, from complexity science, that emergence requires certain conditions: diversity, redundancy (enough overlap to ensure interaction), interaction, decentralised organisation, enabling constraints, and feedback (Davis and Sumara, 2005). Davis (2003) and others have been applying these conditions to teaching and learning. What they found is these conditions do not necessarily occur spontaneously. Difference is a given, but may be ignored or avoided. Different individuals may lack desire or ability to confront and understand one another. Educators can foreground difference and its difficulties: they can even introduce difference, to disturb and unsettle what is taken-for-inevitable. And educators can prompt enough commonality - shared language and experience - for different individuals to interact. Educators can also stir up occasions that encourage participation, where an ‘occasion’ is a falling together of things in surprising ways. These intentional spaces need what Davis calls ‘enabling constraints’, some focus, simple guiding rules and boundaries that prevent scattering and enable improvisational learning. Educators can promote decentralised organisation: different nodes of control that communicate and cooperate. Educators also promote feedback within a system, feedback that attends a group to healthy directions and to negative loops that threaten to kill a system. In this sense, pedagogy entails open-ended design but not control: amplifying difference, opening spaces for connectivity, attuning participants.

What is immediately of interest to this discussion is the consonance between these conditions for emergence – diversity, redundancy, interaction, decentralised organisation, enabling constraints, and feedback – and the characteristics noted earlier in organisations that had successfully integrated principles of sustainability: diversity, interconnectivity (interaction, communication), decentralisation, improvisational learning, and feedback. But emergence is only one part of ecological sustainability, as we saw in organisational examples. A central and shared sense of responsibility for ethical action is the second part. As lessons from social movements and transformative learning suggest, education alone will not cause attitude transformation to an ecological sensibility – though ecological education can help influence people to care about their conditions and the effects of their immediate actions. Ultimately what matters is how we reach out to participate, and engage others in active participation, in this moment with the situations and resources in front of our noses (Davidson and Hatt, 2005).
Youth are increasingly visible in global activist movements challenging unregulated corporate rule and promoting more ecological, sustainable, just practices for business and industry (Barlow and Clarke, 2002). Vocational educators can appeal to these ethical commitments, going beyond a narrow focus on vocational skills to get students thinking about their life trajectories, their work purposes, their impact on others, and the impact of economic systems on their lives. The first step is to treat students as knowers rather than doers, as capable of understanding and assuming personal responsibility to affect systems. The second is to promote students’ ethical action through critical ecological education about work environments and structures, their enmeshment in these, and their potential to make a difference. Instead of a skill orientation, which trains people to fit what exists, vocational education can adopt an ecological orientation that engages people directly to envision and participate in action for more sustainable work environments.

Practical examples showing what educators can actually do abound in literature about ecological education and corporate social responsibility (Clover, 2003; Nash, 2001; Nattrass & Altomare, 2002). Educators teach by taking people into the community and into nature to map patterns of consumption, waste, and effects. They arrange single-issue dialogues between community and labour groups, and businesses. They help build alliances or foster networks among small and large work organisations for dialogue and strategy-development. They help individuals develop personal awareness of their work’s consequences on their emotional and physical health, their families, their immediate natural environments and their communities. Then they help groups of individuals see links among these patterns, and track the links to systemic and historic patterns of unsustainability. Vocational educators may be uniquely positioned to make alliances to link students with work sites interested in promoting sustainability and finding strategies, environmental adjustments and job designs to achieve this. Vocational educators can offer knowledge about learning processes as well as the dimensions of emergence characterising an ecological sustainable system. And vocational educators can teach new generations by immersing them in ethical action in emergent systems: of diversity, interaction and connectivity, decentralisation, enabling constraints, improvisation and feedback. As Clover explains, the aim is to acknowledge, respect and tap into existing ecological knowledges while at the same time challenging assumptions and providing opportunity for critical reflection.

I began by arguing that sustainability, as explained in both ecological literature and corporate social responsibility (Clover, 2003; Nash, 2001; Nattrass & Altomare, 2002). Educators teach by taking people into the community and into nature to map patterns of consumption, waste, and effects. They arrange single-issue dialogues between community and labour groups, and businesses. They help build alliances or foster networks among small and large work organisations for dialogue and strategy-development. They help individuals develop personal awareness of their work’s consequences on their emotional and physical health, their families, their immediate natural environments and their communities. Then they help groups of individuals see links among these patterns, and track the links to systemic and historic patterns of unsustainability. Vocational educators may be uniquely positioned to make alliances to link students with work sites interested in promoting sustainability and finding strategies, environmental adjustments and job designs to achieve this. Vocational educators can offer knowledge about learning processes as well as the dimensions of emergence characterising an ecological sustainable system. And vocational educators can teach new generations by immersing them in ethical action in emergent systems: of diversity, interaction and connectivity, decentralisation, enabling constraints, improvisation and feedback. As Clover explains, the aim is to acknowledge, respect and tap into existing ecological knowledges while at the same time challenging assumptions and providing opportunity for critical reflection.

I began by arguing that sustainability, as explained in both ecological literature and corporate social responsibility, can be represented by the four themes of ethical responsibility, renewal, interconnectivity and local well-being. While many challenges compromise efforts to incorporate these in today’s businesses rationalising themselves to compete in global markets, sufficient examples exist to inspire vocational educators to continue pressing for change. In work organisations enacting these four themes of sustainability, activities echo what complexity science shows to be the conditions for emergence in complex adaptive systems: promoting diversity, decentralised decision-making, connectivity, feedback and learning. But beyond these conditions, a key factor is a central commitment: a shared responsibility for ethical action. Educators alone won’t convert attitudes to this commitment, but education is critical to fostering understanding and active participation in sustainable practices within and among work organisations. One way forward is through an ecological pedagogy that enables emergence and prompts ethical action. The drivers of change,
the resources, the strategies and the partners anxious to work with us are waiting. The beginning point is with ourselves, expanding our own visions of what is possible and creating the connections needed to achieve it.

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Talking-Up Vocational Education and Training for Indigenous Peoples in Australia

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Abstract
Vocational education and training provides a constructive and meaningful role in promoting education, training and employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples in Australia. First, the paper overviews Australia’s national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for vocational education and training, Partners in a Learning Culture. This paper explores some of the issues emerging from a focus group discussion by key, mid to senior level Indigenous stakeholders on the strategy’s potential for promoting Indigenous vocational education and training. A range of critical issues were identified that call for a ‘talking-up’ of vocational education and training for Indigenous peoples. The findings of this paper are of significance to researchers, educators, policy-makers and other stakeholders with an interest in advancing equity and best practice in vocational education and training for Indigenous Australians.

Introduction
The authors’ interest in vocational education and training comes out of their ongoing commitment to equity and best practice in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The authors understand that the low levels of unemployment of Indigenous peoples that have formed the basis of numerous strategies and reports by successive governments over the past three decades, mirror the poor rates of Indigenous peoples in education over that same period (ABS, 2003; ABC 2005). While the efforts and good-will of governments to work with Indigenous communities and the education sector have seen some gains made, there remains a considerable way to go to achieve equity across all sectors of education, including the vocational education and training sector (VET).

Australia’s VET sector supports the delivery of training through a variety of institutions and enterprises including TAFE (technical and further education), universities, secondary schools, industry organisations, Adult Migrant Education Scheme providers, private enterprises, agricultural colleges, community education facilitators and other government providers. In 2004, state, territory and federal governments contributed a combined $3.92 billion to the sector to undertake and support the delivery of training to an estimated 1.6 million Australians of which

1 The authors use the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to, both, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise the linguistic, cultural and spiritual diversity among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and apologise for any diminishment of that diversity in our usage in this paper.

2 For an understanding of Indigenous higher education, refer to our recent research, Anning, B., Robertson, B., Thomas, R. & Demosthenous, C.M. (2005). ‘A national review of the roles, responsibilities and services provided by Indigenous higher education support centres’, (in press). Contact the authors for information on accessing copies.
58,000 were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. In 2005, there is a reinvigorated debate on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander national strategy on VET. This work-in-progress explores some of that debate.

The paper begins by providing an overview of Australia’s national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for VET, *Partners in a Learning Culture*. Following on from that, the paper moves to explore some of the issues that were raised by key, mid to senior level Indigenous stakeholders, who participated in a focus group discussion on education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although this work-in-progress does not deal with the entirety of the discussion, these early findings contribute to the ‘talking-up’ of Indigenous VET.

**Method for proceeding**

Initially, the researchers met with key traditional Elders[^3] to ask for their support for conducting a focus group discussion on issues impacting Indigenous peoples in VET. Those participating included key Indigenous stakeholders, who had, or were, employed in the VET sector, and had worked at a mid to senior level at some stage during their period of employment. In (re)presenting excerpts of that discussion, the researchers have respectfully worked to ensure the accurate reporting of participants’ comments.

Further, the researchers returned to discuss the findings with participants, prior to making recommendations and submitting the paper for public review. The researchers have complied with protocols for culturally sensitive and respectful dealings with Indigenous peoples, as set down by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2000, the National Health and Medical Research Council’s 2003 Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research and Griffith University’s Research Ethics Committee.

**Partners in a learning culture: Australia’s national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy for vocational education and training 2000-2005**

Over the past three decades, state, territory and federal governments have continued to express commitment to a practical reconciliation that overcomes barriers to full Indigenous participation in Australian society. Successive governments have implemented a number of strategies to raise the quality of life for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and have identified education and employment as crucial in this process. Specific attention has been given to encouraging a greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in VET, with the late 1990s seeing the development of a national strategy on VET for Indigenous Australians.[^4]

According to the Australian National Training Authority:

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[^3]: The term ‘Elders’ is used to refer to senior Aboriginal peoples, who are held in held in esteem for their vision, wisdom and guidance on matters relating to their community or clan. Elders act on behalf, and in the best interests, of Aboriginal peoples, providing understanding and advice on issues to the general community, industry and government. We understand that, in more recent times, the term ‘Elder’ has also been applied to Torres Strait Islander peoples.

[^4]: The authors use the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to, both, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise the linguistic, cultural and spiritual diversity among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and apologise for any diminishment of that diversity.
Vocational education and training will help increase employment and business developments opportunities for Indigenous people and communities, providing a foundation for greater economic independence. Vocational education and training will be enriched through an exchange of a learning culture, Indigenous people will be enabled to create and adapt vocational education training products and services in order to exercise their rights to positive learning environments for their communities.

(ANTA 2003).

In 1998, ANTA worked in collaboration with its Indigenous advisory body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC). This collaboration resulted in the development of a strategy for increasing opportunities for Indigenous peoples in VET. This was in line with ANTA’s vision. Australia’s National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2000-2005, Partners in a Learning Culture (NCVER & ANTA 2004), is a five year strategy with an accompanying Blueprint plan for its effective implementation. With the support of the NCVER and representatives from a range of relevant and interested stakeholder bodies, the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC) oversaw the implementation of Partners’ Blueprint. The Blueprint had as its stated vision:

A vocational education and training (VET) system which renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice and community economic development and sustainability.

Four key objectives were developed to support Partners achieve its vision:
1. Increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning, resources and delivery;
2. Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community
3. Achieving increased, culturally appropriate and flexible delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people; and
4. Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry, and employment.

In 2003, a mid-term review of Partners was conducted to identify progress made under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander national policy on VET. The review raised a number of questions that asked interested stakeholders to consider whether Partners needed reform to improve its current implementation. Further, the review raised questions as to whether it should continue beyond 2005 as a separate strategy or whether its key elements should be rolled into the new national strategy, Shaping our Future, Australia’s National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010. Objective 4 of that national strategy explicitly refers to Indigenous Australians (Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared) (ANTA 2003). In terms of the progress made in developing and implementing the Partners’ strategy, the mid-term review found that, ‘Partners needs renewed emphasis and attention in many parts of the VET system’ (Blueprint Document, p.1).
Some Critical Findings

The following section presents some of the comments shared at a focus group discussion that was conducted in Brisbane, Australia in September of 2005. A total of 13 (thirteen) Indigenous stakeholders, who had, or were, employed in the VET sector in mid to senior level positions participated in the discussion.

Generally speaking, the purpose of the focus group discussion was to contribute qualitative data from mid to senior level Indigenous stakeholders to achieving renewed emphasis and attention to *Partners* in many parts of the VET system. The following makes no claim to present the data in its entirety. Rather, the paper draws the reader’s attention to some of the issues that participants identified as essential to the successful longevity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and practice in VET, and its positive contribution to the lives of Indigenous peoples. The issues are contained under the four headings, which articulate the objectives of the *Partners’* strategy.

**Objective 1: Increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making about policy, planning, resources and delivery**

You need to make sure workplaces and learning environments are culturally receptive to Indigenous people. In some of the places I’ve been in, you see really racist attitudes. How do you get our people involved, you don’t unless you change the attitudes of the people in the system (former advisory council representative, public education sector).

Indigenous people in management have a manager above them, who is, usually, non-Indigenous. The non-Indigenous often manager does not recognise the skills of the Indigenous manager as a manager in his or her own right. The decisions go nowhere because there is no respect for us, and our abilities and our ways. We are treated as though we are illiterate regardless of the positions that we are appointed to (former trainer, government/industry sector).

Increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making requires cultural acknowledgement and recognition of individual competencies. That’s what we don’t have in VET. The Indigenous manager makes decisions and is seen by non-Indigenous as biased when he/she makes a decision, because the non-Indigenous manager has a particular understanding that does not fit with the Indigenous manager’s decision. Recommendations end up nowhere (former manager, government department).

There seems to be a lack of respect for our culture. You try over and over to effect change and nothing happens, you remember your place. You stop banging your head against the brick wall and take a back seat (current trainer, industry).

There needs to be more Aboriginal and Islanders throughout the sector. It’s lonely when you’re the only black face. There’s too much racism and ignorance from migloo [white] staff (current manager, government department).

We’re yarning [talking] about the same things we were years ago. We’re saying the same things now as we did back then (Aboriginal Elder).
Objective 2: Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community

In my experience, the biggest problem in VET for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is a lack of basic literacy and numeracy, especially in rural and remote communities. In the remote communities where English is a second or third language, there is no access to participate (former manager, VET).

One of the main reasons for the relatively limited participation and success rates of people in education, including VET, is that decisions continue to be made by non-Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people (current manager, VET).

Even when there are policies in place that speak of the participation of our people in making decisions, those decisions have to correlate with what the non-Indigenous educator, the researcher or the curriculum development writer thinks is best. When they think of a way that allows both their thoughts and ours to have equal spacing, then we may very well get somewhere (tertiary lecturer).

Transition, participation, partnership and sustainability of Aboriginal people in the field of VET are dependent upon an understanding of past issues and a commitment by VET administrators to adopt a new way of dealing with Indigenous people. Only then will equitable access, participation and retention become a reality and only then will the commitment to partnerships and sustained outcomes have practical application as opposed to being yet another philosophical statement that has no real meaning (current manager, VET).

Objective 3: Achieving increased, culturally appropriate and flexible delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people

They should be redeveloping the curriculum and make sure it suits Indigenous people. If Aboriginal people don’t see anything in the training that is about them, they are going to move on [withdraw from their course] (former manager, government department).

We are always struggling to get through an education and training system that criteria and assessments that many of our people can’t meet and that does not meet the needs of our people (former manager, VET).

They talk about our people enrolling in courses and only doing a few months and coming out with increased confidence. But how long does the confidence last for? Is it sustainable and is it equal to the skills and knowledges they should have achieved? (current manager, VET).

Objective 4: Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry, and employment

We need more jobs on communities. We should be saying ‘what do communities need in terms of trades to develop a sustainable economy base for the community’. The courses then need to be developed about that (Aboriginal Elder).

Industry is an influential factor in the allocation of government expenditure in education and a primary source in the development of curricula and programs in VET. The need for education administrators to find a balance in terms of community
responsiveness is crucial. The need to access programs and courses that equip Aboriginal people with the skills and knowledge to help address the current economic crises in Aboriginal communities is of paramount importance to developing closer links (lecturer, tertiary education).

The development of a best practice, strategic, mutually beneficial partnership between Aboriginal people and educational administrators and a process that guarantees quality assurance in the development of policies, programs and curricula for and about Indigenous Australians, continues to be as elusive to Aboriginal people as the search for the holy grail (current manager, VET).

‘Talking-up’ Vocational Education and Training for Indigenous Peoples

Comments made by key Indigenous stakeholders participating in the focus group reveal a number of challenges presented in increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making, achieving participation and culturally appropriate and flexible delivery, and developing closer links across all stakeholders in the sector.

It was clear that while Indigenous peoples hold decision-making positions in the VET sector, they have little involvement to decide, and even less power to promote or veto decisions that are not culturally appropriate, credible or responsive to Indigenous peoples’ needs. As a former manager in a government department commented, ‘The Indigenous manager makes decisions and is seen by non-Indigenous as biased when he/she makes a decision, because the non-Indigenous manager has a particular understanding that does not fit with the Indigenous manager’s decision’.

While Hughes’ (1988, p.5) point that ‘[t]he legacy of the colonial attitude that regarded our people as sub-normal exists today in many racist attitudes’, Indigenous people appear to be forever struggling against the imposition of particular ways of seeing and understanding Indigenous ways, mores and culture that are premised on the world-view and values of non-Indigenous persons. Increasing the involvement of Indigenous peoples in decision-making practices, calls for the development of organisational cultures that are receptive, responsive and respectful of Indigenous peoples, in their own right. In other words, increasing involvement is about the establishment and maintenance of an educational culture that embraces the Indigenous decision-maker in a respectful and appropriate way, as opposed to gesture that is merely symbolic.

Education for Aboriginal people is full of challenges etched in the principles of cultural accreditation and articulation and the true principles of partnership and sustainability being appreciated and aptly applied. If a considerable rise in the level of successful participation of Aboriginal people in VET is being sought, it is imperative that a concerted effort be waged to equate this to more than one of mere access. It is about the development of pedagogies and epistemologies that are culturally responsive and acknowledge the significance of ‘the social and cultural contribution to our thinking and acting and sourcing of knowledge’ (Billett, 2002, p.19).

Given that culture dictates what we have to learn, and the types of skills and knowledges we need to develop for particular communities of practice, we must remember that ‘action is mediated and cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out’ (Wertsch, 1991). In other words, we need to identify and respond to the
literacy, numeracy and skill needs of Indigenous students and their communities, if we are to increase their effective participation in the system, which supports the research findings of Spiers’ (2005). We must be mindful of Kemmis’ (1998, p.2) statement,

‘[t]o the extent that systems and institutions focus on the ‘mainstream’, they may continue to set up categories which exclude, rather than include, Aboriginal communities and culture, and give rise to the suspicion that the day-to-day treatment they receive from education systems and institutions is inequitable, not just different.

Accelerating Indigenous educational outcomes for Aboriginal people has been a well documented and recorded goal of successive governments as a means of closing the social and economic differences they experience. Improving these goals is dependent upon the readiness of those concerned to acknowledge the anomalies that continue to exist. While such anomalies continue to be present in the application of policies, the acquisition of much needed skills, knowledge and competencies will continue to be in deficit.

Urgently required is the development of a true partnership and equal collaboration of VET stakeholders in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice and community economic development and sustainability. For effective partnerships, a shift in the way policies, programs and curriculum are developed and implemented is an urgent requirement for the sector to redress. On a policy and practical level, true partnership is needed to allow for the appropriate and equal representation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests to develop and implement policies and practices that articulate and reflect that partnering.

**Conclusion**

If we are to secure a VET system that ‘renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians in a spirit of reconciliation, equity, justice and community economic development and sustainability’ (ANTA, 2003), then we need to engage in a ‘talking-up’ of Indigenous people in VET. The need to improve the partnering capacities of existing policy and practice is crucial to the success of Partners’ Blueprint strategy and the ongoing longevity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the VET sector. We invite you to participate in this ‘talking-up’.

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## Appendix 1: Glossary

**Communities**
Groups of Indigenous peoples bound culturally, spiritually and, sometimes, linguistically to specific regions and one another through historical and biological kinship, and embodying a store of regionally specific knowledge and common practices.

**Cultural Protocols**
Indigenous codes of behaviour and sets of rules for appropriate, ethical practices and procedures.

**Elders**
Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples held in esteem for their vision, wisdom and guidance on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Elders act on behalf, and in the best interests, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; providing understanding and advice on issues to the general community, industry and government.

**Indigenous**
The term refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising the linguistic, cultural and spiritual diversity among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and apologise for any diminishment of that diversity in our usage in this paper.

**Migloo**
The term refers to a non-Indigenous person.

**Talking-up**
Opening up for discussion issues of critical importance.
NOTES TO INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

The *Australian Vocational Educational Review* publishes analytical commentary on contemporary developments and issues in vocational education in Australia, and where relevant to Australia, developments and issues in vocational education in other countries. Articles in the Review should be aimed at a broad audience of policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and students within vocational education. The papers within the review are intended to be short, succinct and accessible to its audience. The review is published twice yearly and is the principal journal of the Centre for Learning and Work Research.

Contributions must be original and not previously submitted elsewhere for publication.

Please include on a separate sheet the author(s) name, affiliation, phone, fax number and email address where available.

Three copies of manuscripts should be submitted. They should be typed, double-spaced on A4 paper with 1 inch margins, and submitted in both paper and electronic forms. The preferred word-processing format is Microsoft Word. Total length should not exceed 5000 words.

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References should be formatted as per examples:


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