

‘The way men learn’

Implications for men’s sheds



***What research says about men’s informal learning in
community contexts in Australia***

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Some questions about men's learning

- If older men tend to be missing from formal education, in what ways do men learn, other than formally?
- In particular, how do men learn *through community organisations* as participants & volunteers?
- What factors affect men's *likelihood* of learning?
- What learning contexts and styles *attract and engage* men?



Completed & in-progress research ...

- **Learning through ACE** in 20 small rural towns
Golding & Rogers 2002 for ACFE in Victoria
- **Learning through fire and emergency service organisations** in small & remote towns in Australia
Hayes, Golding & Harvey 2004, for NCVER
- **Men's learning through community-based organisations** (CFA, Senior Cit, Landcare, Football Clubs, ACE; Men's Sheds*) in Victoria
*Golding, Harvey & Echter 2005 for ACFE (*Golding, Brown, Foley & Harvey late 2005)*
- **Encouraging men's Learning ACFE Research Circle,**
Golding & Brown through CEACA 2005
- **Older men's learning spaces & programs in Australia' (including 'Men's sheds')**
Golding, Brown, Gleeson, Harvey for NCVER 2005/6



Some related research by Veronica McGivney NIACE (UK)

- *Informal learning in the community: a trigger for change and development, 1999*
- *Excluded men: men who are missing from education and training, 1999*
- *Men earn, women learn: bridging the gender divide in education and training, 2004.*



Some questions we can answer ...

- What factors *discourage* men from participating as learners?
- Which groups of men are *disadvantaged* in terms of access to learning?
- Is *context* important (where the activity is situated)?
- What learning occurs in 'men's sheds'?

Other important questions posed (but not answered):

- *Are men being excluded (or self-excluding) from formal learning?*
- *Is the problem inter-generational?*



Women continue to experience disadvantage socially & economically

- Women learn in response to a need to flexibly accommodate to changes more so than do men. See McGivney 2004 *Men earn, women learn*, NIACE, UK.
- Women are more likely to experience & travel to un- & poorly paid, casual & part-time work.
- Women are less likely to get access to support for learning 'on the job'.
- Women tend to have more ongoing and conflicting family and work responsibilities.



Women have a ‘learning edge’ in that they typically:

- recognise - earlier than men and boys - the value of learning (and the penalties for not learning)
- assume many of the professional and community learning, networking and leadership roles
- have access to more extensive learning networks by virtue of their multiple roles and responsibilities
- have been quicker to embrace ICT and to relearn
- assume key learning leadership roles in families
- have more positive recollections of learning at school
- have access to a learning organisation that accommodates to their learning needs & preferences.



Why bother about men?

- There are widening disparities in school performance: *fathers & grandfathers are important role models.*
- Learning can change and save men's lives: *current suicide, health and wellbeing indicators.*
- Many men belatedly discover the link between education and work.
- Some men are dis-empowered, disadvantaged and excluded in the new worlds of work and learning.
- In rural towns, men often have no access to a local learning centre that meets their particular and different needs and learning preferences.



Rural men's attitudes to learning

after Golding, Harvey & Echter 2005

- 90% are keen to learn more
- 90% agree that being part of an organisation helps them to learn

- 26% really enjoyed learning at school
- 19% have difficulties with skills that makes it hard for them to learn.



Rural men's learning preferences

- **Agreement:** 95% prefer to learn 'in practical situations'; 94% 'by doing'; 78% 'in outdoor settings'.
- **Disagreement:** 59% prefer not to learn on their own from books or printed material; 58% not 'by computer or the internet' 40% not 'in a classroom'.



Rural men's attitudes to the local adult & community education organisation

- 90% would 'use it if I really needed it'
- 85% agreed 'it is held in high regard in the community'
- 78% agreed it is 'valuable to me as a resource'
- 42% 'don't know enough about it to use it'
- 19% 'don't feel comfortable going there'
- 17% regard it as a 'women's space'.



Within *community organisations*, men agreed they get opportunities to learn:

- in a group (93%)
- hands-on (92%)
- through regular practice (90%)

Does this sound like men's sheds? also,

- by field days or demonstrations (71%)
- by courses that lead to qualifications (69%)
- through the internet (59%).



Important skills for men:

- to stay fit and healthy (93%)
- to deal with OHS (91%)
- to take on responsible positions in community organisations (88%)
- for interpersonal communication (88%)
- for leisure (86%)
- to network in the community (80%) and run meetings (77%)
- to use the internet (73%) and email (67%)
- to deal cross culturally (65%).



In summary, for men...

- Taking an active part in community organisations plays a key role men's learning
- Most men have a desire to learn but have negative recollections of formal and school education.
- Some are hindered by limited literacies including ICT.
- Most men want learning in less formal, practical group settings, locally and on-site through their own organizations.
- **Most men want to learn *through* being involved in an activity in real and familiar situations rather than by abstracted learning 'about' something in classrooms. (consistent with '*situated learning*' theories).**



Findings from other research about barriers to men's learning? McGivney 2004 in the UK

- Lasting impact of school experiences on men
- 'Laddish' behaviour (*'being blokes'* in Australia)
- Fear of failure
- Negative attitudes to post-school education
- The importance of work
- Resistance to change
- Lack of trust & networks ('social capital')
- Scepticism about the benefits of learning.



Practical and structural obstacles for men

after McGivney 2004, again in the UK

- Employment pressures
- Inadequate work-based learning opportunities
- Lack of awareness of options beyond the workplace
- Lack of suitable programs
- Inadequacies in VET provision
- Unsuitable learning locations.



Research into older rural men in Australia shows Foskey & Avery 2003

- Links between occupation, identity and place values in rural men's occupations.
- Strong values of 'doing it on your own' and 'just getting it done' in rural occupations.
- Narrow image of 'being a man' (masculinity) based around rugged individualism.
- Reluctance to regard social and emotional connectedness as being men's business.



Men's sheds

- Very recent, grass roots initiatives for men
- No obvious overseas parallels
- A wide variety of forms & organisations for a diverse range of men (including youth, women)
- **Southern Australia** 48 Vic, 40 SA; 24 NSW, 9 Tas, 7 WA, 1 Qld, 1 ACT (130 total – approx 100 active and open)
- **Men targeted include:** Vietnam Vets; 45+, Frail aged; Special needs; Isolated, Aged care; 'tinkerers'; corrections, Socialisation, Commercial, Indigenous, boys, VCAL.
- **Based out of** Wide variety of existing & purpose-built 'sheds' based around wood or metal, sometimes craft. Some mobile. Some out of ACE, health services, day care, local govt.



Sheds function as a base for

- men's socialisation and services
- maintenance of community infrastructure
- men's health & well being programs
- addressing men & family relationship issues
- Programs Work for the Dole, HACCC, Corrections, D&A
- Meeting the needs of particular groups of men: eg older, isolated, carers, Alzheimers, day care.



The current Victorian survey

- Posted out last week, 10 per shed to participants due Nov, results Dec 2005
- Please fill them in & encourage others!
- Part A shed-specific: Part B allows unique comparisons with other men using identical items CFA, Senior Cits, Footy Clubs, Landcare, ACE
- Supported by Adult Community & Further Education Board
- Complements Ric Hayes research from provider perspective
- Helps inform method for national Men's sheds research for NCVER, due for completion mid 2006.



What do we already know about men's sheds?

- Work best if properly targeted to men's local and specific needs (another reason for the survey)
- It is possible, desirable & equitable to target, reach and engage a wide variety of men.
- Sheds appeal to men: have origins & strength in informality & grass-roots community action.
- Derive from holistic health, welfare and community services concerns rather than concerns about skills or competency-based or deficit models of training.
- May be masculinist and pro-feminist.



We know that older men ...

- are typically only marginally attached as learners in formal settings
- with the most limited formal learning experiences (and the most need to keep learning) have the most negative views of formal learning
- with the most limited computer & web skills have very limited opportunities to learn these skills.



Some good, unanswered questions

- What is it about ‘men’ and ‘sheds’?
- Where do women fit into all this (or not)?
- Is it about the men’s space (or is it the space itself)?
- How transferable is this to other men’s (and boys) spaces and programs?
- What are the wider parallels (if any)?
- What are the benefits, costs and outcomes?



Finding a place for men elsewhere

- Men's sheds are only one answer in some places.
- We need to ensure learning organisations are inclusive of men and their learning preferences.
- Education & training providers (including ACE as well as aged care need to accommodate for men (places programs, staff, management, committee, timing, locations).
- Creating & valuing men's learning spaces; 'men's sheds'; men's programs; male ways of learning.
- Breaking an inter-generational cycle: by male role modelling, teaching, parenting & addressing boys education in schools.
- Other approaches?



Some broader observations

- Active & regular involvement in community-based organisations plays a critical role in men's learning.
- Older men tend not to have access to ICT skills.
- There is a clear link between men's positive views about learning and active community involvement.
- Negative experiences at school have ongoing and debilitating lifelong consequences for men's learning and community involvement.
- Men's learning spaces & programs, including men;s sheds, are useful for some men.



For all adults, learning *through* active & practical community involvement

- is effective and important, particularly for people (including men) damaged by previous negative experiences of formal learning
- can be enhanced by strategic inclusion of access to ICT for everyday community purposes
- transfers positively to family, work & enterprises
- is sometimes more effective than formal learning if it accommodates gendered learning styles, preferences & pedagogies.
- has positive outcomes for health & well being.

Questions?



Comments?