

HOPE

Vocational education is often seen as a place for second-chance learners to develop skills and training, and the future of work will require our learners to be third, fourth or even fifth-chance learners as the changing workforce requires new skills, knowledge and digital/technical efficiencies. Lifelong learning can offer hope for many, especially those from our most disadvantaged communities, but first we need to equip ourselves as teachers to find new pathways to engage and give hope to our students.

Article by Trevor Bayley

I write this article on the eve of the federal election and 'hope' seems an appropriate title and emotion. The last couple of years of pandemic, lockdowns, online teaching and learning have impacted on all in the community and have led me to ask a couple of questions:

- Why is vocational education increasingly important in building hope?
- What does this have to do with vocational teachers/trainers?
- How do we give hope to the students engaging in vocational education and training?

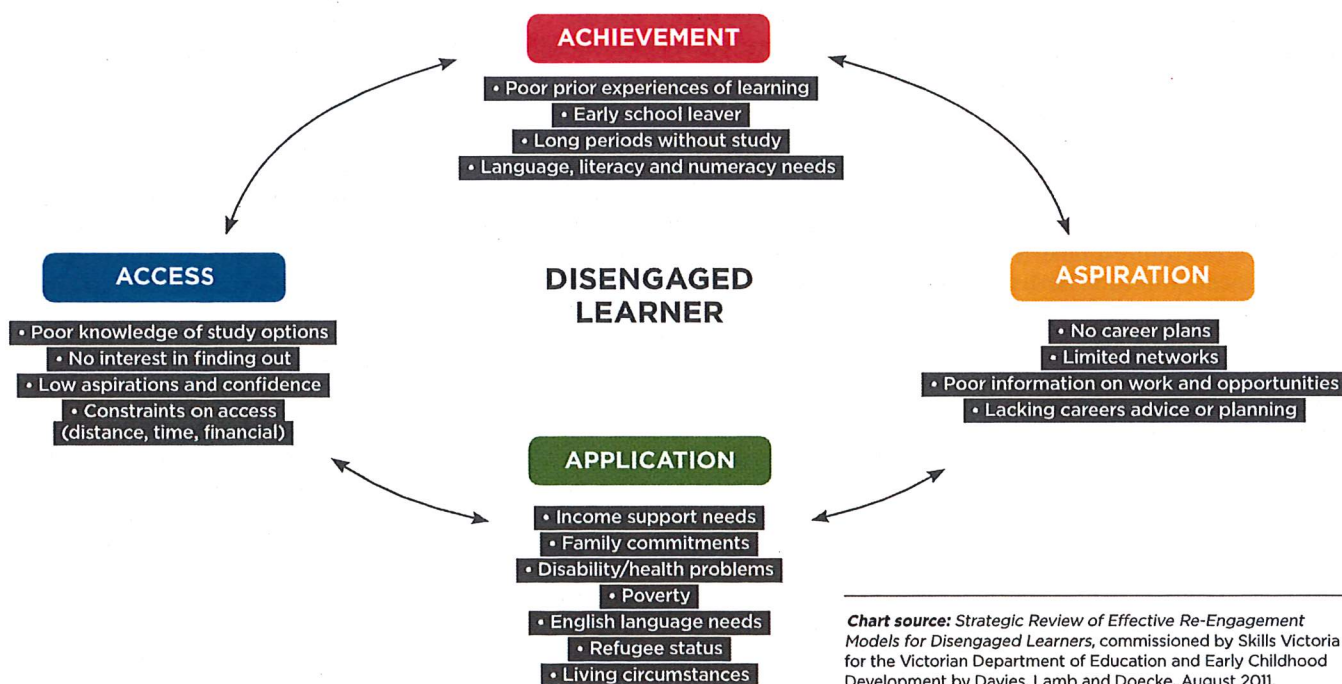
Hope in the context of vocational education, skills shortages, skill gaps and pathways for second-chance learners is crucial to reengaging learners. Merryn Davies, Stephen Lamb and Esther Doecke in their Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement Models for Disengaged Learners report commissioned by Skills Victoria in 2011 identified aspiration, access, application and achievement as key factors leading to disengagement (see chart) and identified four areas for program focus to effectively intervene: outreach, learner wellbeing, pedagogy and pathways. The report says beyond the initial value in second-chance learners reaching qualification, studies have consistently shown that

students who reach qualification are significantly more likely to participate in lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning is connected with confidence and agency, and for economic participation, it will also need to be targeted to the occupations and skills of the future and communities most disadvantaged by access to education – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disabilities, early school leavers, the culturally and linguistically diverse including refugees, low skilled older Australians without any qualifications, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged families.

As teachers, we have the opportunity to make the world better, not just though

Strategic Review of Effective Re-Engagement Models for Disengaged Learners



teaching skills to second-chance learners, but through activism and giving hope. As Jill Scott in *Finding Critical History* (2009) says: *"I learned that teaching was a form of activism: the transmission of knowledge for a purpose beyond itself, a purpose animated by caring relationships and politics, shaping the way people thought about the world in order to make it a better place."*

Prior to the pandemic the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's five-year employment outlook to May 2024 was projected to increase in 16 of the 19 broad industries.

The top four industries projected to grow are:

1 Health Care and Social Assistance (15 per cent)

Health services like hospitals, GPs, dental and ambulance services, as well as services like childcare, disability and aged care.

2 Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (15.1 per cent)

University qualified/higher skilled roles such as scientists, accountants, advertising and marketing specialists, lawyers, management and other consultants.

3 Education and Training (12.2 per cent)

Teachers, instructors and support staff – who, along with many others, had to learn new skills, tools of engagement and digital literacy as we transitioned online.

4 Construction (9.7 per cent)

Still growing above average for all industries but at lower rate than 2014-2019.

Context of COVID

In terms of employment the top four current and future industries of employment continued to both work and grow during the pandemic and as we emerge those top four industries are in greater demand and the future of employment in these skills/qualification-based industries is "hope filled". The demand for workers in skill-shortage areas has increased with educators, industry and governments all recognising the need to "build a bridge" over the gaps between the skills required in the increasingly qualified and skills-based employment market and the existing skills of the

traditional second-chance learner engaging with vocational education.

Lessons from the field

A couple of years back I attended a professional development workshop delivered by Gray Poehnell, a visiting Canadian careers expert who was talking about his framework outlined in his book *Hope-Filled Engagement: New possibilities in life/career counselling*. The framework identified through conversation and storytelling:

- Knowledge, resources, skills, tools and hope
- That uses everyday language
- Engages in exploration and discovery
- That encourages hope

This framework has been useful in my teaching and professional development. Reflective practice supported by professional development that explores and finds solutions to what are the knowledge, resources, skills, tools that I need to be the effective, engaging teacher – a teacher that, as Scott says, is also built on caring relationships with the aim of making the world a better place.

Following is an example of an informal discussion that engages the learner in the exploration of their existing knowledge, resources, skills and tools using a strengths-based storytelling approach that rewires a new narrative:

Teacher: So, tell me, you are on parole currently for stealing cars, is that right?

Student: Yes, mainly Holden Commodores, 'cause there is lot of 'em and they are easy to break into

Teacher: Right, so you have got some research skills. What else do you do in this activity?

Student: Go with my mates, look out for cops, yell out if anyone is coming, take some meat in case there is a dog to distract them, hot wire the car

Teacher: You have been explaining communication, teamwork, problem solving and technology skills. What a great base to start from.

Reframing and strength-based practice has been utilised in social sciences for a while but is increasingly a skill set required in education settings. It takes imagination and practice and contributes to the process of neurological change (rewiring of the brain with a new narrative) and helps learners to firstly understand the

strengths and skills that they already have and explores the application of these skills to a different objective – completing a vocational course.

Vocational education promotes the development of knowledge, skills, tools and resources within the curriculum, helping to bridge the gaps in all these facets as we progress students towards competency and engagement is the key. Traditionally, engagement is looked at through the lens of those with the power – that the students are disengaged. Gray encourages looking at engagement through a power lens and asking yourself, as the educator, 'what am I doing to engage my students on a pathway to future learning, engagement with career planning, and future employment based on a new narrative of hope?'

Flipping the framework and applying the knowledge, skills, resources and tools questions to my teaching led me to ask myself, 'what do I need to know? What skills do I need to develop? And what tools and resources do I need?'

Knowledge

Frameworks that underpin the teacher-student relationship and promote engagement: knowing about my learners and their journey, understanding the labour market and workforce future. As well as knowledge of social capital approaches to transitions that highlight the importance of the bonding-bridging-linking continuum and the application of a cognitive apprenticeship framework.

- Coaching: assisting in the development of new skills
- Modelling: professionalism, employability related attributes
- Mentoring: guide on the side
- Scaffolding: building the supports around the student that promote success.

Resources

All of the above. The need to continue to build my resource portfolio that enables me to teach and engage across multiple platforms. Networks/communities of practice are a key resource that both trainers and learners need to expand to increase agency, currency and opportunity. Our learners need additional resources focused on social capital, expansion of networks linked to

opportunities to apply new skills learnt, build confidence and, importantly, expand employment networks.

Increasingly it is hard to get independent, free career advice in the community and vocational education students need to be provided the skills, tools and resources to align their future, aspirational hope-filled thinking with employment futures and skills required in the changing world of work.

Skills

Engagement skills built around theoretical and practical approaches like strength-based reframing. Understanding brain-compatible approaches to learning and advances in neural science and its implications in the teaching and learning space, neuroplasticity and bonding-bridging and linking, building relationships with our learners and then walking over the bridge together to link up with new networks and opportunities.

Research from the Foundation of Young Australians (FYA) identified the top in-demand skills from employers across the country and these include

digital literacy and presentation skills. Skills that are central to the learner and teacher experience. Further enterprise skills including confidence and agency, enthusiasm for learning and creativity and critical information analysis skills. Skills that our learners need to develop in vocational education.

FYA identified the importance of career management skills in the future workforce journey. These include self-awareness and decision-making skills to build a career, ability to use career services and information along with job seeking, and capacity to embrace ongoing learning.

Tools

Digital literacy and the swift transition to online during the pandemic resulted in a steep learning curve. There is so much professional development that I could do in this area that would both help my teaching practice and keep me current in a digital literate world – and access to tools that allow us to teach effectively is essential.

As teachers, we take on a huge job, but with support and resources I have

hope we can deliver meaningful change and hope for our students' futures. ●

As a leader in the development of the vocational education and training sector, the VET Development Centre prides itself on delivering quality, professional and relevant programs for the vocational education workforce.

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