

# Chapter 30

## Applied Learning Educators Searching for a Pedagogical Model

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### ABSTRACT

*Australia, like many nations across the globe, has a focus on engaging young people in the post compulsory years of school to ensure their transition into further education, training and /or the workforce. Applied Learning programs which are based on the premise of active, transformative learning from authentic experience have emerged as valuable tools in assisting the transition of young people. Understanding of Applied Learning however, not only varies between nations but also disciplines, context, education settings and curricula. Using a lens of boundary crossing, this chapter draws on research data to provide an account of challenges educators face in an Australian program where there appears little guidance for educators on constructing an Applied Learning pedagogical model for individual practice. From consideration of data and educational theory an Applied Learning pedagogical framework is proposed as a guide for educators in developing Applied Learning programs.*

### INTRODUCTION

This Chapter draws from research on the workplace learning experiences of educators delivering an Applied Learning program in a post compulsory setting. The discussion argues that arming Applied Learning educators with a range of relevant (to the context, cohort and curriculum) pedagogical tools is vital if their use of Applied Learning approaches is to be successful in engaging students in meaningful, authentic learning experiences

and the Applied Learning programs they work in are to flourish. Many Applied Learning programs appear to be based on a premise of active, collaborative learning supported and facilitated by reflecting on authentic experiences. There appears however little guidance for educators on how to construct or interpret a pedagogical model for individual practice. This discussion uses the lens of boundary crossing to provide an account of challenges Applied Learning educators face in an Australian program. To assist teachers who

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9634-1.ch030

move from teaching in one field (or curriculum) to teaching in an Applied Learning program, the discussion concludes by suggesting an Applied Learning pedagogical framework. In doing so the framework incorporates existing teacher tools to construct a boundary object.

Discussion begins by identifying and contextualising the Applied Learning program within senior school pathways and arguing why the learning needs of the educators delivering the program warrant exploration. A brief explanation of the methodology used in the research design follows. Data is then provided as evidence of learning continuities and discontinuities the educators face. This includes their preparedness (or lack of it) to teach the program, differences between this and other programs and educators' desire to better understand the theoretical premises of the program. As a result of considering the implications of the data and drawing on a range of educational theory a pedagogical framework is proposed to guide educators' development of Applied Learning teaching and learning programs. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research approaches.

## **BACKGROUND**

Like many governments across the globe Australia has a focus on engaging young people in the post compulsory years of school to ensure their transition into further education, training and/or the workforce. Applied Learning has emerged as a valuable engagement tool in a range of contexts.

The understanding of Applied Learning varies in and across nations and settings (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, 2011; Harrison, 2006; Shacklock, 2006; Malyn-Smith, 2004). Even within this *Handbook of Applied Learning Theory and Design in Modern Education* there will be contradictions, discontinuities and tension regarding what applied learning is. One reason for this may be because there appears a lack of

literature exploring theoretical underpinnings of Applied Learning. Despite a lack of identifiable literature relating to Applied Learning as theory a summary of a range of contexts where reference is made to *using* Applied Learning follows. Frustratingly most do not necessarily explain how Applied Learning is understood within that context.

The term Applied Learning is frequently used within Higher Education settings in the United States of America, Singapore, Australia and Canada in relation to courses that include workplace learning components which are completed with industry partners or other authentic learning contexts (Philomin 2015, Corpus 2015, The Evening Sun 2015, MWSU 2014). Such opportunities provide learning relevant to the industry (or vocation) students intend to enter. Bryant University in the USA has recently upgraded teaching space to promote collaborative learning (including installation of video conferencing links), rather than traditional lecture approaches. Underpinning these changes is an intention to connect students to companies such as 'Target' to solve real industry problems by applying learning (Daddona 2015). Other Higher Education providers such as the University of North Carolina in the United States of America offer and promote programs which focus on community partnerships and engagement or value service learning associated with workplace experience (Port City Daily 2015, ECU 2012).

Value is also given to the importance of Applied Learning in compulsory schooling years that connects learning in classrooms to real life applications as preparation for industry vocations, particular in relation to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) (Keegan 2015, Ronayne 2015, Zia 2015).

In countries such as New Zealand, Qatar, Hong Kong, Australia, the UK and Canada Applied Learning is seen as means of supporting development of higher order thinking (eg problem solving) in compulsory and post compulsory schooling, vocational training and emergency services training (Chambers 2015, Forward 2014,

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