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Not just petrol heads: Men's learning in the community through participation in motor sports

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Abstract

This paper examines the learning experienced through participation by men in two quite different two motor sports organisations in Western Australia. It relies on interview data from volunteers about what they do and what they learn as a consequence of their participation in staging complex but safe, competitive, public events. The paper provides evidence of a deep well of learning and wide range of skills produced as a consequence of participation. This learning would rarely be recognised as education or training, illustrating the need for caution when concluding that adult education is not taking place and learning outcomes are not being achieved other than through courses where teaching occurs, or in contexts that are regarded as literary. What men skills men learnt, though significant as outcomes, were not the object of the motor sport activity, supporting Biesta's (2006) view that the amassing of knowledge and skills can be achieved in other valuable ways aside from through education.

Keywords: motor sports; men's learning; community; men's sheds

Introduction

This paper identifies adult learning in the community in an unlikely site far from Europe: two community motor sports organisations in regional and remote Western Australia. It identifies and articulates the particular, critical and arguably general importance to men of learning through hands-on practice in voluntary communities of association. The learning is required for and generated through volunteer involvement in motor sports organisations in order for the organisations to safely and equitably participate in motor racing events and to conduct events for the public, in regional and remote locations with very limited adult and community education options. The learning experienced by adult male volunteers in making their sport safe in two illustrative community-based motor sports organisations in shown to be extensive and

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diverse. The findings about learning from research in this most unlikely, grassroots, community sports context highlight the importance of not restricting discourses about adult learning to educational contexts, or to organisational contexts with which researchers are more likely to culturally and socially familiar. Importantly, the opportunities for men to learn elsewhere and develop (or indeed 'interrupt': Wildemeersch & Kurantowitz, 2010, p. 2) their identities through education in these Australian regional and remote settings are extremely limited.

This study, while located in a Western Australian context on the other side of the globe from Europe, presents what Stephens (2009, cover notes) describes as 'a strong case for qualitative research that is grounded in contextual realities'. The study also provides fresh and independent theoretical insights into forms of adult learning less well recognized in the non-metropolitan world, beyond the conventional reach of what Connell (2007, p. 44) characterises as 'Northern theory', with its tendency towards 'the claims of universality; reading from the centre; gestures of exclusion; and grand erasure'. Rather than making of forcing explicit and empirical comparisons, the author anticipates that European and other readers will identify their own connections (or disconnections) with what is presented. There are important epistemological presuppositions here. The first is that the international settings and discourses are sufficiently similar to allow for comparison of education and learning across diverse contexts (Stephens, 2009). Second, that the fundamental principles have been satisfied that underpin comparative research in order to generalise about this macro-social global phenomenon of learning (Schriewer, 1999), education sectors, confederacies and systems aside.

Rationale for researching adults in community settings

Aside from extensive recent studies of learning through work, research into lifelong learning that takes place in less formal education contexts, including in community organisation settings, tends to occur in places and institutions, particularly in Europe and North America, that are more culturally familiar to researchers with extensive and formal learning and education backgrounds. A recent example is the examination by Innocent (2009) of museums, libraries and archives as part of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning in the UK (Schuller & Watson, 2009). In studies of adult learning beyond work, researchers tend to be more familiar with community owned and managed dedicated learning organisations such as U3A (university of the third age) and ACE (adult and community education) where learning, formal literacies, and particularly education, are named as the object of the activity, where many of the participants are already relatively educated and committed lifelong learners, and where 'enrolment' in 'courses' simplifies the research subjects and sampling methods. In such formal and 'tidy' education settings, typically supported by government program funding, there is also more funding for research and evaluation of learning and a tacit expectation that this is where most adult learning occurs.

Schuller and Watson (2009, p. 23) suggest that while lifelong learning beyond formal education is 'inherently untidy', there is evidence that 'getting involved in very informal settings can help people with little record of success'. They conclude that while 'it may seem obvious that learning produces beneficial results' (p. 23), the way it does this is not well understood. UK-based research cited in McGivney's (1999) study of informal learning in the community suggest that around one half of the adult population are involved in local voluntary organisations, and that many adults had left

school early and not subsequently engaged in any form of organized education. Even in Australia, one half of the current Australian workforce has no completed post-school qualification.

This paper seeks to improve the understanding, alluded to by Schuller and Watson (2009), by taking up de Carteret's (2008, p. 504) suggestion that it 'is timely to explore informal learning in community settings other than those understood as having an educational dimension'. It also breaks relatively new ground by focusing on a group that is not often to the subject of separate inquiry in Europe: men, despite recent evidence from a number of nations that men and some boys are less likely to participate in formal learning beyond work (Golding, 2010). The paper investigates what Field (2009) identified, in summarising learning-related research into community men's sheds in Australia (Golding, 2009), as:

> … activities that would not normally be defined as learning, in that they are not part of any formal learning structures, but they provide valued opportunities for the men involved to make transitions from their working lives, and the activities that [engage] them there, to a new range of activities which are in many ways familiar to them, but provide new learning opportunities as well. (Field 2009, p. 226)

In particular, this paper looks at learning by men through two community-based motor sports organisations in the Australian state of Western Australia, in which learning might not otherwise be recognized or researched, let alone be valued as beneficial.

Literature review

Sport is intuitively recognized across many nations as having the capacity to enhance social, cultural, political and economic relations at a number of levels from local to international (Tonts, 2005). Sport and sporting clubs, particularly team sports, have received more academic attention since Putnam's (2000) research, oriented around investigations of social capital, included an exploration of a perceived tendency in the US for less adults to participate in traditional sporting clubs, parallel with the emergence of new sports with high levels of participation and civic engagement.

Sport is recognized as a distinctive feature of the social fabric of many Australian geographical communities (Cashman, 2002), contributing to local identity, sense of community and sense of egalitarianism. Most research into sport elsewhere has focused on questions associated with infrastructure provision, facilities management, physical activity and health promotion (Tonts, 2005). While the role of sport, particularly Australian rules football-based team sports, has recently been examined in Western Australia as a vehicle for the creation and expression of social capital (Tonts, 2005; Atherley, 2006), its role in adult learning, particularly through motor sports, has seldom previously received serious attention. Indeed men who have a passionate and active interest as spectators or participants in sports that involve combinations of wheels, machines and speed, including motor sports, are typically perceived as being relatively poorly educated, and sometimes described derogatorily in Australia as 'hoons' or 'petrol heads': thus the paper title.

An exception to this research lacuna is briefly mentioned in McGivney (2004, p. 110), who suggested that 'the effectiveness of attracting younger men into learning via their main interests such as sports, music and motorised vehicles is well understood'. However none of the seven UK examples used by McGivney to support this contention (pp. 100-112) involved motorized vehicles. A wide range of Australian community-

owned and -managed organisations oriented around motorised machines is widely known to very attractive to, actively participated in and patronised, mainly by men in most towns and cities across Australia. They include organisations specializing in preservation, display, participation or competition involving a wide variety of vehicles. These vehicles can involve racing of off-road cars, trucks or motorbikes, as in the current study, or on-road. Motor sports organisations comprise a subset of other organisations dedicated to restoration, maintenance and operation of stationary engines, agricultural, railway and mining machinery.

Two voluntary community-owned and -managed organisations in the Australian state of Western Australia that organize motor sports events are subject to analysis in this paper. They have been selected to illustrate the learning role that they play within their discrete geographical communities for men who participate, aside from the learning role known to be played by better-known Australian men's team sports, particularly Australian Rules football and rugby. One selected organisation, the *Albany Speedway* conducts regular circuit racing events for a range of modified cars at its open, dirt track and stadium on the outskirts of the city of Albany in the regional southwest of Australia. The other selected organisation is an annual, cross-country race called the *Gascoyne Dash* involving specialized, off-road motorbikes and cars that race through arid and remote country, including the sandy bed of the Gascoyne River in the westernmost region of Australia, near the remote city of Carnarvon.

Method

Interview data from men involved in two motor sports organisations were selected from a wider study of men's learning and wellbeing undertaken in six sites in Western Australia by Golding, Brown, Foley and Harvey (2009). The wider study involved men involved in 38 Western Australian community-based, voluntary organisations in six urban, regional, rural and remote sites, including a total of seven sporting organisations, along with adult and community education, fire and emergency services, religious and Indigenous, age-related and men's special interest organisations. The two selected sporting organisations are the *Albany Speedway* in Albany (ARIA+[1]; population 40,000) and the *Gascoyne Dash* in Carnarvon (ARIA+ 8.10; population 9,000). Both voluntary organisations organize motorized sporting events that like many community sporting organisations across the world, actively involve members and volunteers and put on events that are open to the public as participants, competitors and spectators.

This paper utilizes learning-related narratives from fully transcribed, audio-recorded, small group interviews conducted in these two organisations in 2009 with adult male participants. Some learning-related survey data specific to sporting organisation participants (n=29), drawn from a separate survey to the wider sample of all adult male community organisation participants (n=219), are also briefly considered. Both the survey and interviews focused on men's experiences of learning, particularly on the learning experienced as a consequence of their voluntary participation in the organisations.

The narrative data below have deliberately and unashamedly been presented close to verbatim from participants. The purpose is to separately and accurately communicate the contexts in which the two quite different motor sports events are organised, aside from the important learning that participants report. In a somewhat similar way, Burke and Jackson (2007) explain that they wrote sections of their book on lifelong learning in narrative style to tell the stories of the participants, in order:

> … to challenge the conventions of academic writing and to illustrate the fluidity of the different positionings within lifelong learning and the contested nature of their trajectories and perspectives. (Burke & Jackson, 2007, p. 54)

While I (the researcher/interviewer) played an important part in shaping the interview and the questions, as well as deciding which part of the narrative to include (or omit), I have deliberately tried not to intercede other than where necessary in either extensive narrative. The risk of using narrative in this way is what Reay (1998, p. 15) calls the academy's traditional intolerance 'for lived experiences which it dismisses as anecdotal or stories; it is an affront to scholarly sensibilities'. Most of the researcher narrative, aside from this introductory section, follows separately in the discussion and conclusion.

Results

The Albany speedway

The Weekender in Albany (October 30, 2008, p. 77) reported that 'Albany Speedway season blasts off' with plenty of new cars and faces at its Atwell Park speedway. It has not always been that organized, as a Speedway's Life Member recalled.

> The club was formed back in the late [19]60s by a group of blokes who got together and started racing at an old rubbish dump and then progressed to … the Ocean Beach sand and then they got more organised at the end of 60s and organised the Speedway where it is today. From just a gravel track carved out into the side of the hill it has developed into a first class venue. The track, the pits area, the main clubrooms and canteen are all new facilities. The track has lighting, so we run at night now and that draws more competitors and more spectators. We normally have between ten and twelve meetings a year and between two and three weeks apart. This year we had a National title, [a] modified productions [event], … that's at Easter, and we also run various features during the year … sedans, productions, juniors …

For the uninitiated (as the interviewer/researcher was), there is some necessary but brief technical detail. The modified production cars are:

> … well-modified suspension wise and motor wise. …They are set anti-clockwise so the suspension is set up to go around left corners only … The engine can't be bored or 'stroked': most of the components have had to be of saloon-car type component state of manufacture.

By contrast, stock cars:

> … go both directions and the car has to be very well balanced, so you can't set it for a direction, which makes it a bit more challenging. … As you come onto the track you go left or right, anti clockwise or clockwise. The pits marshal flips a coin as they are ready to leave. They have no idea [which way they will race], until they get out the gate.

Also for the uninitiated, none of this comes cheap to potential competitors. For the cheapest (100cc) division, ' … to get a good condition, basic one you would be looking at about A$5,000. Sprint cars would cost around A$10,000. Super saloon you would be looking around A$100,000.'

In order for a speedway race meeting to be safely started and equitably run, a huge amount of learning has taken place by very skilled and highly responsible volunteers.

Most of it is learned by doing and by progressively taking on and earning responsibility, though some of it is vocational and accredited. On a typical race day, scrutineers go around before every race meeting to check all of the cars are up to formal specifications. The stewards (including a deputy) maintain control of the competitors. In one steward's words, they:

> … keep the blokes in line and help run the meeting. They actually start and stop the race and wave the chequered flag at the end, or - if a car crashes - they control it. … [A Service Club is paid] to do the gate. We have bar personnel who run the bar and people who run the canteen.

All of these bar and canteen staff need to gain nationally accredited safe service of alcohol or food handling certificates. Apart from a timekeeper:

> Upstairs you have got two commentators and scorers and time keepers. … On the infield you have fire crew … [and] St Johns Ambulance. We have a tow truck crew. A 'push ute' or two [for starting open-wheel sprinters]. They all have to be there for it to operate, because if one section fails and it falls over, then the event doesn't happen.

For some drivers, the learning benefits are significant but mostly mechanical, such as learning '…car loads, setting up suspension, … how you get more reliability and more power out of [the cars]'. For some older, experienced drivers such as the following 52 year old, it is about fathers who are mechanics mentoring sons and informally passing on mechanical skills.

> I have been a mechanic for 35 years. Since becoming involved in the Speedway and through the cars I have learnt a lot about suspensions, how they handle, what happens when you get a job, being a scrutineer and some of the things people do to cheat, which is not one of the good parts. By participating in the club I am supporting my [nineteen year old] son for racing. That's why I am involved in the club, so it's supporting him … I have a lot of other friends there too. … I have got [an automotive] workshop and [my son's] also doing an apprenticeship so there is a relationship that way. It certainly makes it easier to race and … we can do all the repairs on the mechanical side.

His son confirmed that 'I get a bonus with a race and I enjoy working on cars. I am an apprentice mechanic and the Speedway has helped me into that area.'

A volunteer who helped out in the bar explained what he had learned other than through the job itself.

> I have done a bar manager's course … and that's something that I would never have done if I hadn't been involved in the Speedway. Just in helping out you learn what different people are like, how to handle some people and that's quite entertaining sometimes, how to get involved in groups.

A driver and helper explained that he had learned to mix more widely, socially and through work, as well as to tolerate a wider range of people.

> You tolerate all natures of people who come together for the one sport. You learn to work with people of all different natures of work and attitudes of all sorts, and that helps you because you are mixing … You don't always get a chance to meet with that many different people in one location … I find that is good, the social part of it, just to learn to work with other people … and to get jobs done … and all the different ways you can go about it, all the different angles with the people you have to work with. That's a big thing, it's quite good, because working for myself you are stuck with your customers that you are working with all the time.

A speedway steward without the money required to race explained the multiple wellbeing benefits and enjoyment of being in a responsible position trackside, with cars racing 'straight underneath' him. He also explained clearly how he was motivated and learned to be a volunteer trackside steward.

> I have always enjoyed car racing probably more so than football …You get interested with the cars, you look at cars racing, you see what is happening, you understand what happens to the car when they are doing different things … I have never been able to afford to race so I have never had that opportunity … so you go there and you watch. I have been coming to the Albany Speedway [for eleven years]. I used to park my chair up in front of the canteen there and I sat down and watched. And you have these people in the tower there at the start line and they were doing their job - and after a while you start learning things and you're seeing things. And there were things that weren't quite right … decisions weren't getting made properly.… In the end there was one bloke standing in the tower by himself. Now if anyone can see that it *really* needs two people to do that job and they only had one person - so silly me put my hand up … So now I have been placed on the edge of the track.

Quizzed further about how he learned to make the quick and responsible judgements, the steward elaborated.

> You have to anticipate … I thought I used to be pretty good at that when I was in trackside. You could anticipate when accidents were going to happen, you can see it happening … When you become a steward then all of a sudden you have to look at *everything* and you have to know everything straight away - which puts a lot of pressure on you. When you have to make a decision and a judgement on something that happens in a split second and you have to come up with that information. … You have to learn what is your job and you have to be on the ball 100 per cent of the time … Sitting there as a spectator is easy. People make mistakes and you wonder why do they make [them], but [when] you are actually responsible, that's it! … Once the responsibility goes on your shoulders, it's a different kettle of fish.

A Speedway Club Life member recollected on what he had learned.

> [I've] learned not to be upset by what people say or by people's criticism. … You learn the technical side of things and the unpredictability of the sport … People say its boring and it goes around in a loop and that's all they do. But every time, just about every race, the track is different.

For the Albany public, the benefits are about evening entertainment for all ages, including some accidents, described colloquially in Australia as 'prangs'.

> … [I]t's the only night-time motor sport in Albany and it's beneficial and it gives [people] somewhere to go, a social outing. We could get 600 to 800 people [on a quiet night] and up to 3,000 to 4,000 people [on other nights], depending [on] what's on. If it includes the sprint cars, we have had 4,500 people. … It ranges from young kids up to granddads.

The Gascoyne Dash

The *Gascoyne Dash* is an annual, off-road race over a weekend through a remote area east of Carnarvon in Western Australia, over one thousand kilometres north of Albany. In 2009 it involved 25 off-road car drivers and 128 off-road motorbike riders from across Western Australia and interstate. The annual event takes a significant amount of complex management and coordination over the previous twelve months by a volunteer

committee and event manager. The event has its own highly professional website that in 2009 experienced 60,000 hits in the six months leading up to the event. 'The Dash' as some participants call it, requires significant input in terms of time and expertise from a large number of local volunteers, businesses and other voluntary community organisations.

The learning involved is significant for the organisation of the Gascoyne Dash's volunteer core group, comprising four to five men, a committee of ten and approximately 150 other men and women directly involved. It involves liaison with competitors, landholders and sponsors as well as what the event manager called:

> ... all the crap that you do post an event. It has developed into a twelve months a year job. … I suspect it's something different. It's not like being involved with the end of town soccer. You're getting a view of a country and a group of people both involved in the event and parts of the event … the land holders, sponsors, businesses involved, there's an excellent cross-section.

The event's impressive web site (Gascoyne Dash, 2010) that now includes a facility for competitors to enter on-line, is increasingly important to the event's success. However the event typically takes a lot of learning, work, proficiencies, training and assessment 'behind the scenes'.

> One of the huge things in terms of people is physically managing all the data that is provided by the competitors. … You want to have all the particulars …and that typically all comes on the forms with the data entry. … This year we have moved to a fully on-line process which is virtually a back room where they load up the details. … It is significant for the club's ability to have a more efficient website and that will be one of those proficiencies. It will reduce the load on volunteers too, because there is an enormous amount of data entry and paperwork leading up to the event that there is always a problem. … This year (2009) we were completely overloaded [and] we ran short of volunteers. The website will be absolutely imperative in the long term to get that up and running for events like this.

The key organizers, when asked about what they learn, initially and playfully acknowledged that: 'It's bloody hot in that river bed!' The Committee Chair more seriously proceeded to explain how much learning was involved by the diverse range and number of volunteers, some of which involved risk management training issues for and with volunteers.

> On the organising side of things, with your own committee, you have to work with them. … You have people coming from different backgrounds, so in a short period of time you have to work them out. … I used to do it in footy in the old days. You can't treat one player like you treat another player, so you have to be reactive in a way…. You have to try and evaluate … on the run what's going on and make decisions. Everyone is a volunteer, so it's quite difficult to apply real business principles. … We have some outcomes which are not negotiable, there's certain safety aspects. [Sometimes we] sit down and performance manage a person who has done a less than satisfactory job.

The event's race director concluded.

> I guess we have learnt to get better at organising [volunteers] and to provide more infrastructure for them in order to get the job done. And we have identified that we need more volunteers to get the job done. … Probably the biggest problem is trying to drag those extra volunteers in.

The risk management strategy is very specific, elaborate and involves much formal learning, recording of competencies and testing as well as a check of competencies in a 'mock run'. The race director stressed that:

> There is that specific training [for volunteers] and they have to go through an accreditation process and a test. … They physically go out on the spot and they have got all the gear there and there is a 25 question test in terms of safety expectations. … They are signed off on and the information is retained for insurance purposes, so that if they had an accident and had been told that they weren't allowed to wear thongs [for example], … that is all in the documentation. Above that, you have got different levels of officials. We operate under the auspices of Motor Cycling Australia, and they have their accreditation instruction for their officials. … [Several of the organisers] have done the hands-on modules. … [O]utside of going to a State or National event, we are probably as high up the accreditation tree … as possible. … Similarly, most of their modules and training is on line so you can go in and get all the relevant material and answer the questions and you're done. You have a logbook so they keep track of what you have done so that [training] experiences are recorded.

The post-event evaluation process is similarly rigorous and actively involves volunteers.

> When the event is finished in terms of improvement we get feedback in a number of areas … from our people through a debrief. … Like everything, everybody and his dog want to give their two bob's [=coin's] worth. We have a series of debriefs to find out from the people on the ground, the coalface. …. I guess that is part of the volunteer process that is pretty important, to get that feedback. No matter how well it works, it is obviously important for them to attend meetings and stand up and contribute.

The main organising committee have strong links through their diverse professions to the local business community and most of them got involved initially as event participants. However their reasons for giving much of their time and effort to this major community event are partly out of a sense of community obligation and part about making the most out of the social adversity in this remote location. As the club chairman said, 'Given the town is a little bit remote, I think you have to get involved in the community activities, otherwise you go stir crazy.'

The event and organisation started organically as a one-off fundraiser, for both fun and purpose, as the race director explained.

> In 1995 we had a major flood here and there was a lot of … property damage. … Plantations [along the usually dry Gascoyne river] were washed out and there were all sorts of disaster about the place. … [So we] organised a 'wet run' down-river and we raised money for flood relief. … But then the [Gascoyne] river didn't run for about five years and by then we were getting a bit frustrated. Then in 2000 we had a major flood … so we got another group together and did a major powerboat run from Gascoyne Junction to [Carnarvon] … another fundraiser. That time we actually donated to the hospital here which bought an emergency trailer for them. We wanted to do something and have some fun but also have some purpose in it.

As it transformed from a one-off, grassroots fun event to a semi-regular public event and fundraiser, it required new skills and lateral thinking, as the race director detailed.

> One of the problems with events like this is that you need insurance. The first [event] we [conducted] under the service clubs under their insurance. We … all knew each other and were able to pull the strings to do it. The second one we did under the auspices of the Variety Club so we used their insurance and pulled the second one off. Of course you have got major issues, insurance and litigation these days. … As it's grown it has

> snowballed and dragged in more people and everybody who has come along has wanted to become involved in it.

The wellbeing outcomes, apart from the unique motor sports 'buzz', and the money raised, now extends to a wide range of Carnarvon community organisations and their members involved as volunteers and participants. The race director explained that the volunteers …

> … get a big buzz out of being involved in something, particularly the ones around the event time … My old man [=father] for instance went out and laid the stop/go sign on a desolate little road track in the middle of nowhere. He got out there with my cousin and they just stayed there for five or six hours and he was stoked [=very satisfied]. He had great fun. … There are several other pensioners who have nothing to do with the event all year who have gone and got accreditation as road crossing attendants. … It gives them a feeling of worth and purpose and they feel important. … It gives them something to aim for and strive for and they're proud of it.

While the Gascoyne Dash committee and all but a handful of the 150 competitors were men, the committee acknowledged that a number of female partners, 'particularly those with time on their hands', are 'maybe begrudgingly' interested. Effectively, women played a key role in the event but it is not 'always roses' domestically about the extent of the commitment required for men involved and the impact on their partners or children. As one man said:

> It puts a lot of pressure on family relations, probably because we over commit. We decide that The Dash needs to happen, and regardless of whatever else is going on around, it is going to happen – and we get on with the job, unfortunately as blokes do, that does become a pain in the arse in relationships and wives and everything else and they do get cranky with it. We have had to 'pull out of the red' a few times.

One of the organizers noted that these sorts of events…

> …seem to be men dominated, and particularly in the sports sector. The culture is that women are quite happy to take a backward role. There are dozens of women behind it. …They are obviously cooler under pressure than males tend to be … They probably understand the social run of events and the men want to know the trucks [=machines].

Discussion

The remote town of Carnarvon and the regional city of Albany have no venue and very few programs inclusive of learning by men other than those that are formal and vocational. While TAFE [Technical and Further Education] campuses are found in both sites and in most rural cities and a small number of towns across Australia, these vocationally-oriented facilities have been deliberately drained of any critical, political or intellectual tradition that they had when their antecedent organisations began as community-based, grassroots, worker education organisations over a century ago. In Australia, as in Europe, there has been a tendency for the national and most state governments to only fund education for adults which is vocational, as part of a wider, neo-liberal skills agenda and move toward the market of user pays, aside from that which is seen to be 'pre-vocational'. University education is not accessible in Carnarvon other than in via distance mode, and is restricted to a small number of university

extension programs and services in Albany. It one defines adult education as that which is formal, professional or semi-professional, men are effectively missing from education and training beyond work in Australia, particularly beyond the major cities.

The current study has identified deep pools of learning in an unlikely and rarely examined community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), motor sports, in both localities. Conventional academic definitions of education would classify almost all adult men in Carnarvon and Albany as non-participants in education. Data from men involved in these two sporting organisations, along with the data from men involved in the 36 other community-based organisations in four other sites in the Western Australian research (Golding et al., 2009), confirm similarly deep and wide pools of lifelong learning, adult education aside, much of which, for older men (Golding et al., 2009), is post-vocational. Separate research has identified similarly rich learning contexts for men through their active, hands on participation in fire and emergency services organisations (Hayes, Golding & Harvey, 2004) and in community-based men's sheds (Golding et al., 2007).

The survey data collected from men involved in the seven sporting organisations in the wider, Western Australian study (n=29) that included the two motor sports organisation participants, highlighted how different attitudes towards learning were for sporting organisation participants compared to the broader population of men involved as participants in community organisations. The group of men participating in sporting organisations were significantly more likely ($p<0.05$) than men in other community organisation types to be former tradesmen (seven out of ten were) and a high proportion (around one half) had completed trade apprenticeships. Men who participated in sporting organisations participated more frequently than men in other community groups (54% participated several times a week) and their association was typically over extended periods. More than half had been involved in the same Western Australian sporting organisation for between five and nineteen years. Along with fire and emergency service volunteers, men involved in sport were least likely of all men in community groups to agree that they knew 'enough about the local adult education organisation to use it'. Consistent with this finding, research by Learning Centre Link (LCL, 2004) in Western Australia found that adult learning centres had primarily been developed as a response to women's needs and were widely perceived as 'a women's thing' (p. 8).

The extensive narratives from both motor sports organisations above illustrate the difficulties of making judgements about learning by men who are superficially 'missing' from adult education and training 'courses' as they are conventionally defined. These men are not necessarily missing from learning. While the narratives from both the motor sport organisations provide evidence of a rich tapestry of learning through motor sports organisations for volunteers and participants, they are unable to throw light on the learning experienced by the women involved or by the spectators. Nevertheless they richly illustrate the ways in which both community motor sports organisations have the capacity to involve and include men with high levels of engagement over many years. Most of this learning is either necessary for participation or achieved as a consequence of learning through participation. All of the learning is directly or indirectly associated with the process of ensuring that public motor sports events organised for and by volunteers are safe for spectators and participants. The most effective learning for motor sports organisation participants is associated with community contexts which provide opportunities for men to become volunteers and co-participants in hands on, shared group activities and events. Both motor sports organizations depend highly on social capital (trust, reciprocity, shared norms,

networks: Putnam, 2000). While both organisations provide a wide range of opportunities, albeit in different combinations and with differing emphases, for men to learn, develop and practice a wide range of valuable communication skills and practical skills, it is important to stress that learning is an outcome rather than the object of the activity. In this sense this paper is supportive of Biesta's (2006) view that the amassing of knowledge and skills is not the prime aim of education. Biesta also holds that while certain skills and relevant knowledge are important, what matters more in the case of these and other community organisations is the opportunity created for interaction between different members of the community.

In order to systematically analyse the nature and extent of the skills created through this community interaction, the narrative data in the paragraphs above are filtered through the six, inter-related aspects of communication contained within the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF, 2008, summarised in Table 1, and *italicised* in the paragraphs below the table). The ACSF is perceived as a valuable as a tool of analysis in this instance, since it anticipates that 'not all adult learners are familiar with the instruction or socio-cultural context of texts and tasks. Some may have little experience of learning' (ACSF, 2008, p. 7). This skills framework also anticipates, as do these narratives, that adult learners 'can derive valuable contextual support for core skills development from their immediate learning, working and social environment' (p. 7).

Table 1. Aspects of communication in the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

ACSF Aspects of Communication	**For …**	**Related to …**
Personal	expressing identity	personal identity or goals
Cooperative	interacting in groups	functioning of groups
Procedural	performing tasks	carrying out tasks
Technical	using tools & machinery	tools, machines, technology
Systems	interacting in organisations	interaction in organisations
Public	interacting with community	social & community context

Source: Adapted from ACSF, (2008), p. 9

In the case of *personal communication* (expressing identity), there is evidence of significant opportunities for men in these motor sports organisation to develop, express, model and share positive and responsible identities as men. Importantly, this is achieved without naming or foregrounding the personal learning or its benefits. The learning is most effective for the men involved in both organisations if they are able to participate as equal, co-participants in a group activity rather than, in institutional learning environments, as students, customers or clients. Both motor sports organizations also provided opportunities for men to engage in *cooperative communication* (interacting in groups). These opportunities were found from the wider Western Australian research (Golding et al., 2009) to be richest in relatively small community organizations where a high proportion of volunteers worked in teams or groups and had opportunities to engage in and take on increasingly responsible roles within the organisations. Ironically, these opportunities were more likely to be missing in more highly professionalised and formal adult and community organisations.

Both motor sports organizations also provided opportunities for learning and practising *procedural communication* (performing tasks) and *technical communication* (using tools and technologies). Both these aspects of communication presuppose a

practical context in which the tasks are undertaken. These opportunities are available in these motor sports settings, by virtue of the fact that men are able to work productively for the common and community good in groups. Opportunities are also available in both community organisations for men of all ages to maintain and take on ongoing, responsible roles within the organizations. There are therefore ample opportunities for men to practice *systems communication* (interacting within organizations) with increasingly higher levels of responsibility.

Finally but importantly, both motor sports organizations actively interface with the wider community within and beyond these discrete regional and remote geographical communities, providing rich and diverse opportunities for men to practice *public communication* (interacting with the wider community). It is important to note in passing that some men who do not use the internet or other contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones were found in the Golding et al. (2009) research to be 'passed over' when the responsible organisational roles associated with both systems communication and public communication were allocated in community organisations. This was because of their perceived inability to rapidly share information now routinely distributed in most (but not all) community organisations via email, internet and mobile phone. The Gascoyne Dash is of particular interest here by virtue of its use and increasing dependence of modern management and business techniques and its dependence on the internet to engage and involve much of the remote Carnarvon community. As one of the organizers claimed:

> The Gascoyne Dash [has] the largest portion per population of volunteers involved in any one event anywhere in the country. … I don't think I have seen as much support from any other community for an event – it's brilliant.

'The Dash' and its organisation is reflective of a trend, observed by the author in other community organisations in Australia, including the recreational mountain biking community where mainly younger people are involved, to eschew traditional, face to face and formal methods of meeting and running events which include formal meeting procedures and minute taking. The trend, as in the organisation of the Gascoyne Dash, is toward a small core of very active, professional people using new information and communication devices, to keep a larger body of less connected supporters 'in the loop' through text, blogs, internet and mobile phones.

It is important to observe that the Gascoyne Dash event has, in some senses, by organising itself in this new way, inadvertently overstretched itself. The core committee realised in 2009 that the event was now too successful for the size of the committee organising it and for the pool of committed volunteers available. The organizers acknowledged …

> … the enormous amount of work that a small community has pulled off to have what we have now – from what we started with, to the huge amount of infrastructure and assets that we now have. The idea was to build the event to a self-sustainable point. … Unfortunately the event is building quicker than what we can build to save itself. … These kind of things tend to have a win and then all the volunteers fall off and the event falls over. We didn't want that to happen and we think it is a lot bigger and better than that, so we drove it to sustainability. … Unfortunately, I think it has actually caught up with us and actually over-burst: its popularity has actually overtaken our ability to keep up. You get trapped. We need more people. We are locked in because we have committed ourselves to it and we have got people falling off the side. It does make it difficult with something like this and I don't know what the answer is.

Conclusion

There is copious qualitative evidence from the narratives collected from volunteer participants within these two motor sports organisations that extensive and rich learning was taking place for community organisation members and participants. This learning was taking place as a consequence of voluntary participation or as a condition of participation. Importantly, in both sites learning through adult and community education was either unavailable, inaccessible to or inappropriate for men. In order to regularly, safely and equitably conduct sporting events for the benefit of participants and spectators, much of the learning required was technical, formal and accredited. While in some cases this learning enhanced some men's paid work roles, it was not otherwise vocational or work-related. In effect, men involved in these motor sports had to learn in order to safely participate and contribute to a safe public event. Much of that learning was through participating and doing. The narratives from both organisations illustrate the way that adult roles and identities as learners in these organisations, while diverse and different, tend to be tightly associated with their personal experiences and social and community relations within the organisations. In broader terms, participation in these motor sports organisations enabled men from diverse backgrounds, who shared a similar social and cultural interest in machines to exercise agency and become active producers of that culture rather than rather than passive consumers' (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006, p. 98). As in Light's (2006) study of situated learning in Australian surf clubs, membership of these motor sports clubs:

> … involves highly significant and meaningful learning and identity formation, where learning is co-constructed with other members as a process of negotiating meaning and knowledge. (Light, 2006, p. 155)

As de Carteret (2008, p. 515) put it in her analysis of learning in Australia through dances and markets, much of the learning through these and other sporting organisations also '… happens either incidentally or specifically as a result of involvement in activities'. This learning is situated and mediated in particular sites where 'learners are involved in "communities of practice" that embody a set of values, behaviour and skills to be acquired by members' (Schugurensky, 2006, p. 168). Far from being written off derogatorily as 'petrol heads', there is strong evidence here in Australia of a solid commitment through motor sports, and by extrapolation through many other community owned and managed voluntary organisations, to their place and organisation communities in general, and to learning in particular. Just as 'difference and plurality is the basis of our present day society and the backbone of democracy' (Wildemeersch & Kurantowitz, p. 2), so too is plurality and difference in what constitutes learning for adults in diverse contexts within and beyond Europe.

Note

[1] ARIA+ is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia. Higher values are indicative of increasing remoteness, ranging between very accessible (ARIA+ = 0.00) in most Australian capital cities, to most remote (ARIA+ approaching 16).

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