


New findings about older men's learning & wellbeing from men's sheds

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Outline

- RAVE research interest and concern
- Why is it important to consider & include older men?
- When might single sex provision be appropriate?
- Background to our research in Australia: learning in in small and remote towns (ACE, football clubs, land care, senior citizens, volunteer fire brigades); community based men's sheds.
- Data on preferred pedagogies for older men.
- Our international men's learning & wellbeing project.
- Questions & discussion



Our concern is for *some* men

but maybe these principles apply to *some* women?

- The most productive way to reengage people in learning is to look closely and critically at where they are already learning informally.
- Our particular interest is about the potential for learning to enhance wellbeing, and vice versa.
- Older people whose 'third places' are missing or have diminished (home, work, community) are most in need of connection through informally learning together.

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My interest in men In Australia

- Men comprise 50 per cent of the population.
- Men's and women's work are highly segmented by gender.
- Men tend to earn, women tend to learn. *McGivney, UK*
- Men tend to be missing or self-exclude from adult education provision & be missing from research by default.
- Some groups of men are disadvantaged and have difficult lives.
- There are alternative, preferred learning contexts and pedagogies attractive to and inclusive of otherwise excluded older men.

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Why the interest now? In Australia

- There is insufficient account of men's needs, identities & prior experiences in existing service providers (health, welfare, education, aged care).
- It has become more acceptable for men to argue for and create places, spaces and pedagogies that meet their different needs.
- Health and wellbeing data show problems with men's ageing, health, happiness & wellbeing.
- Men are spending longer in retirement or out of work and with no 'third place'.
- Boys become men; some become fathers & grandfathers.


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Why bother about older men?

- Men are people: making up a relatively small proportion of older formal & adult education learners.
- Men not in the workforce comprise a large & growing proportion of men. (Lattimore 2007: 30%: incl 4% unemployed)
- Men's withdrawal from the labour force below retirement age imposes adverse economic & social impacts on men & families and governments.
- Single men without community connections and who did not enjoy or benefit from school are most vulnerable, benefit least from formal training but most from informal community involvement with other men.

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Rationale for creating some men-only spaces and programs

- Adult education, health services & aged care tend to be underpinned by feminist pedagogies & practices that may not encourage some working men & their learning pedagogies.
- Men have a right and responsibility for their own and family wellbeing to create informal learning spaces that address and deliver their particular and different needs as older men.

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Why get 'blokes' involved?

Ideas from a Western Australian ACE forum, 2008

- Pass skills on and share experiences
- Create positive role models
- Redress gender imbalance & advance equity
- Make men part of the solution, not the problem
- Strengthen family values
- Assist in the ageing process
- Reflect men's make up in the community
- Increase parenting consistency

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Preferred informal pedagogies

From our research into men involved in Australian community-based organisations

- Hands on and practical
- Doing real tasks of real & transferable benefit
- Outside wherever possible
- Involving informal mentoring in groups
- In places where men already feel at home, sometimes but not always with other men.


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When might single sex provision or facilitation of learning be appropriate?

- In situations where people are most damaged (by work, life, health, change, aging, community exclusion), they tend to benefit most.
- Where people can model positive and non-hegemonic, gendered identities.
- Where learning occurs beneficially and informally within an already gendered community of practice.
- Where older men re-create some (but not all) aspects of gendered, work-type places and spaces for social and community purposes.


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There is a growing realization of:

- the value of bringing people together in a way that is socially inclusive and not threatening, including through adult and community education
- significant economic & social capital benefits of lifelong learning
- positive relationship between learning, wellbeing, equity & social inclusion.


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As part of an international men's learning project, we are interested in researching:

- the learning situation for older men: what is known about their preferred pedagogies?
- what men of working age do who are excluded or withdrawn from paid work?
- where older, retired men are concentrated, and what learning they seek or experience during unemployment or in retirement?
- where men already go to connect to the community (what are their 'third places')?
- what learning governments provide or encourage for men generally, and for older men and men not in paid work in particular?

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Recent research that has shaped our thinking about men

- *Men's sheds in Australia: learning through community contexts.* (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson, 2007, NCVER) www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1780.html
- 'Encouraging men's learning' Research Circle 1 (2005/6) & 2 (2006) Golding, Foley & Brown with Naufal, Victoria, Australia for ACFE.
- *Best practice in men's sheds in Victoria* (Hayes & Williamson, 2007), La Trobe University.
- 'Bringing in the blokes: A guide to attracting and involving men in community neighbourhood and learning centres', 2nd Edition 2004, Learning Centre Link, Perth, Western Australia.
- Veronica McGivney's research for NIACE in the UK (*Informal learning in the community*, 1999) and men's learning (*Excluded men: men who are missing from education and training*, 1999, and *Men earn, women learn*, 2004).


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What are men's sheds in community contexts? Australian Sheds Show

- A new, diverse, loosely coupled set of shed based community organisations for men, found mainly in southern Australia, providing a social context for informal, workshop-based activity and programs.
- Unlike personal, 'backyard' sheds, they are available to groups of men, organised by and auspiced through existing community organisations.
- Usually provide a group workshop space, tools and equipment and adjacent social area in a public, shed-type setting, sometimes with an adjacent garden.

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Men's Sheds - in community contexts in Australia

- Have proliferated and diversified in community contexts in southern Australia, most since 2000.
- Grassroots organisations auspice them through a wide variety of organisation types, many reaching and targeting older and isolated men.
- Community spread has been assisted by popular texts and research in aged care settings.
- 230 men's shed programs are open or soon to open in Australia in 2008.
- Mainly found in locations where the proportion of men not in work and/or socially disadvantaged is highest.
- There are significant opportunities for education, health & aged care organisations to embrace, collaborate & learn from men's shed practice.

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Where are community-based men's sheds in Australia?

Community-based men's sheds in Australia to 2006 from Golding, Brown, Foley et al (2007)

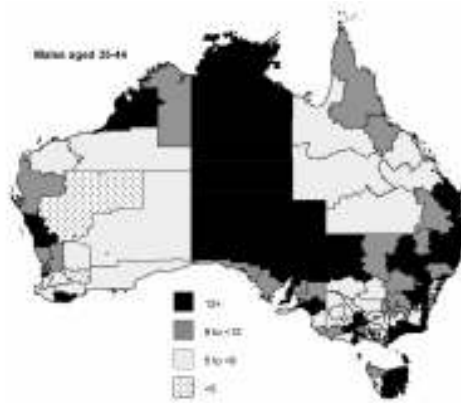
QuickTime™ and a TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.

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Sheds are most common where men are more likely to be not in paid work ...

- The distribution of men aged 35-44 in Australia not in paid work.

From *Men not at work*, Lattimore, 2007, p.71

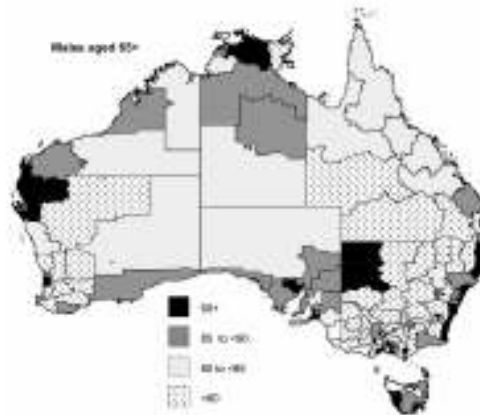


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... particularly older men

- The distribution of men aged 65+ in Australia not in paid work
- From *Men not a work*, Lattimore, 2007, p.72



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Who uses men's sheds, and why?

- Median age 65.
- Most men with limited formal education.
- Perceived need for friendship in a place that affirms positive aspects of masculinity.
- Men enjoy the lack of compulsion, opportunities for hands-on, productive activity, mentoring, socialising and belonging.
- Men enjoy 'getting out of the house' (empty or shared with a partner).


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What do men learn in sheds?

- Non-vocational & informal learning of hands-on skills through practical, productive activity.
- The positive value of leisure activity and friendships with other men.
- Health, fitness, relationships, identities as men and emotional well being.
- Coping with changes associated with unemployment, separation, ageing, disability & retirement.


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Why do sheds work? #1

- They positively accommodate men with an aversion to formal education.
- They encourage mentoring and sharing of leisure, trade, technical, craft, health and safety skills.
- They match the specific learning needs of the men that use them and make men 'feel at home' and valuable.
- The focus is on the needs of men as joint participants in the activity.


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Shed-type settings work #2 because they provide opportunities for:

- active participation and situated informal learning in communities of (men's) practice
- safe, positive, therapeutic and male-positive contexts where men feel 'at home'
- a voluntary social and community outlet for older working class men
- opportunities for sharing and mentoring
- new types of collaboration.


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Shed-type settings provide:

- a positive circuit breaker from both social isolation and 'underfoot syndrome'
- opportunities for regularly sharing existing workshop-based, hands-on, trade skills with other men and sometimes young people
- an opportunity for giving back to communities
- opportunities for modelling positive and non-hegemonic masculinities
- regular participation & socialisation in community settings with other men
- situated learning in communities of practice.

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Research into shed-based practice by older men has sharpened our understandings of:

- the role of agency
- long term, debilitating impacts of negative experiences of formal schooling
- effects of an aversion to formal learning
- limited access to services that match older men's preferred pedagogies
- limited access to ICT
- age discrimination in employment & training
- impact of underfoot syndrome
- sickness, disability, caring and family roles.


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We contend from our research that ...

- many men benefit significantly from informal learning
- formal education providers can collaborate to enhance that learning.
- some community-based organisations (eg sports clubs & volunteer fire brigades) are more effective learning sites than for men than ACE for men involved in them.
- Older men's learning pedagogies need to account for the quality of the engagement, including opportunities for men to have friends & ment
- isolated men over 45 are unlikely to engage in new, formal or vocational learning beyond work without creatively renewing their community engagement.
- men's sheds in community contexts provide some new ideas & opportunities for learning and wellbeing.


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Men with negative prior learning experiences:

- have significantly different and more difficult lives
- are much less likely to be engaged in community organisations or hold positions of responsibility
- are much less likely to be have happy or satisfying relationships at home, socially, at work or in the community
- experience significant problems with change as they age, including with relationships, technology, work, re-creation, health & retirement
- have more difficulty in engaging in or benefiting from most forms of new or essential learning.

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What can service providers learn from Australian shed-based practice?

- 'devise programs to make sheds more socially inclusive and productive learning centres'. (Earle, Earle & Von Mering 1999)
- Sheds are 'an important place or space for gathering men (a utility function) and for men to gather together (serving a social function).' (Hayes and Williamson 2005, 'best-practice guidelines').
- It is important for men to have a 'third place' other than work or home (Oldenberg 2001).
- 'Shedlessness' in retirement is an issue in aged care settings, particularly for older men, including those with dementia (Bettany 2005).
- Recognize 'underfoot syndrome' and loneliness amongst men.

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Important new findings about women & sheds

- Shed organisations and participants vary greatly in their attitude to the involvement of women.
- Most sheds have been established with women's active & direct involvement, particularly with the procurement of funding.
- There is consensus that sheds better fulfil their objectives if they are mainly for men and if the shed supervisor is a tradesman.
- Female partners of men who participate typically and strongly support the benefits to participants.
- Male participants with the most difficult social circumstances and health problems tend to prefer the company of other men.
- Men's sheds auspiced through Adult Education providers have worked very effectively. Some actively include women.


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Our international '*Men's informal learning & wellbeing*' research

- What shapes attitudes towards learning for men beyond the workplace?
- How are these attitudes affected by location, class, culture & men's different masculinities?
- Which contexts engage men not in work?
- What is the relation between men's learning & wellbeing?
- What learning roles do community organisations play for men & what pedagogies are preferred?
- What can be done to positively re-engage other men in learning through community engagement?

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Organisations for intensive study

- Adult & community education
- Sport
- Religious, cultural or Indigenous
- Voluntary fire or emergency services
- Disability, age-related and institutional
- Men's social & special interest


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Nations (Phase 1) & partners

- Australia (U of Ballarat)
- New Zealand (U of Canterbury & U Waikato)
- Scotland (U of Glasgow)
- England/Wales (NIACE, Leicester & Cardiff)
- Northern Ireland (Queens U, Belfast)
- Republic of Ireland (NALA & National U of Ireland, Dublin)

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Research principles & methods

- Male-positive, inclusive & gender just.
- Critical, positive, solution oriented & accessible.
- Mixed method (quantitative & qualitative)
- Enough common method to allow international comparisons.

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Questions

Discussion