

Relevance of the Edgeware Model to Indigenous Learning Styles: the Value of Capability-Based Learning in an Indigenous Cultural Context

“In today's complex world, we must educate not merely for competence, but for capability (the ability to adapt to change, generate new knowledge, and continuously improve performance). Capability is enhanced through feedback on performance, the challenge of unfamiliar contexts, and the use of non-linear methods such as story telling and small group, problem based learning. Education for capability must focus on process (supporting learners to construct their own learning goals, receive feedback, reflect, and consolidate) and avoid goals with rigid and prescriptive content”. (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001: p. 799)

The 12-Week Edgeware 'Build Your Business' Program is based on three core elements, which together constitute an capability-based approach to learning. Program participants learn during the actual process of defining and building a viable new business, or a new profit centre for an existing business. The three elements are:

1. *Education* – competence-based learning structured around 5 x accredited VET modules (formal)
2. *Incubation* – networks, business advice, mentoring/coaching (informal)
3. *Interaction* – peer-based action learning, group work, professional relationships, critical friendship (informal)

The Edgeware model provides an action-learning environment focused on highly affective, authentic and tacit knowledge exchange. It is the product of university-based research but is remarkably straightforward and user-friendly in its implementation. It complements the development of business competencies with processes of self development and group work, shaping itself in the process of delivery to the needs, talents and potentials of participants. It is not a lock-step, 'one size fits all' process.

This concept has been proven over three deliveries of the program in Brisbane and one in Noosa, with further deliveries planned in 2007 for Brisbane, Noosa, Bundaberg and Gold Coast.

The developer of the model, Michael Doneman, has a substantial history of working in Indigenous communities, including the development of Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, and most recently with senior women in the Mt Isa region to develop the Arilla Paper Mill. He claims that his experience of interacting with and learning from traditional knowledge was critical in the design of the Edgeware model. As one early Indigenous participant in the Edgeware program commented: 'This is the way we learn things.'

Following is a relation between Fraser & Greenhalgh's formulation of capability-based learning systems to the Edgeware model. In both cases, these ideas complement traditional Indigenous pedagogies, through:

1. The value in Indigenous cultures of relationship and relationality, the traditional connecting of everything in the human domain to everything surrounding it, the traditional importance of family and tribal connectivity to a group, the traditional value of ongoing contact with country and land-based knowledge

2. The value in Indigenous learning of tacit (rather than explicit) knowledge exchange. (For example, one can learn to make a cake by purchasing a recipe and following its instructions without any human contact; alternatively, one can find a good cake-maker and observe her carefully, most likely in her kitchen – as Murriss say, 'keeping your eyes open and your mouth shut'. In the latter (tacit) process, one learns cake-making competencies but this learning is augmented and enriched by one's relationship with the expert, the cake-maker, and skills are contextualized according to the learner's specific needs and perspectives, often through story-telling and other narrative processes.)
3. The Indigenous cultural orientation towards action learning, learning-by-doing, and oral communication. This relates strongly to the Edgeware model, which includes such elements as:
 - Informal and unplanned learning
 - Experiential learning—shadowing, apprenticeship
 - “Networking” and relationship-building opportunities
 - Teachback opportunities—newly skilled workers training others in new techniques and sharing their understanding
 - Feedback—responses that provide the learner with information on the real or projected outcome of their actions
 - Self directed learning
 - Mentoring—named individuals provide support and guidance to self directed learners
 - Peer supported learning groups—the small group process is used for mutual support and problem solving
 - Appraisal—a regular, structured review of past progress and future goals
 - Flexible course planning that explicitly incorporates input from learners at key stages
 - Modular courses with a high degree of variety and choice
 - Non-linear learning
 - Case based discussions
 - Small group, problem based learning
 - Teambuilding exercises—activities focused on the group's emergent performance rather than that of the individual (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001: p. 801-802)

Capability-Based Systems	The Edgeware Model	Indigenous Learning Styles
<p><i>Transformational Learning</i></p> <p>In complex adaptive systems the behaviour of the individual agents, and therefore of the system of which they are part, evolves in response to local feedback about the impact of actions. Similarly, the basis of transformational learning is the information that is fed back to learners about the impact of their own actions and those of others. An education process that provides feedback about performance as it takes place will enhance capability. (Fraser & Greenhalgh, 2001: p. 800)</p>	<p>The model focuses on the entrepreneur at the heart of every new business, and his/her personal and social journey as a whole person. The relational aspect of the program ensures ongoing 'critical friendship' and feedback for participants, fitted to their preferred mode of interaction and communication, and directly relevant to their learning goals.</p>	<p>Learning is a socialized and socializing process, rooted in knowledge systems which provide ongoing feedback and reinforcement of the place of the individual among the group, and in relation to country. Traditional cultures are evolved for hunting and gathering, and are very practically oriented.</p>
<p><i>Relational Learning</i></p> <p>Learning how things are interconnected is often more useful than learning about the pieces. Traditional (European) curriculums, based on a discrete and simplistic taxonomy of disciplines that focus on the acquisition of facts, usually highlight content without helping learners understand the interrelationships of the parts. (Op. cit.: p. 800)</p>	<p>Edgeware stresses the complete individual, for whom business building is one facet of a whole. Customer feedback strongly reinforces the value of relationships in the group and the qualities of networking, reciprocity and dialogue.</p>	<p>In traditional cultures, the 'self' is defined and realized through its relationships with others, with the natural environment and the spiritual world.</p>
<p><i>Non-Linear Learning</i></p> <p>The complex real world is made up of messy, fuzzy, unique, and context embedded problems. Context and social interaction are critical components of adult learning. Adults need to know why they need to learn something and they learn best when the topic is of immediate value and relevance. (Op. cit.: p. 800)</p>	<p>The Edgeware model provides for 6 formal seminars, interspersed with informal whole-group meetings ('Inspiration Salons'), small-group meetings and one-on-one mentoring, coaching or 'critical friendship' sessions. The latter are usually organised by participants themselves, with Edgeware providing resources and other support as needed.</p>	<p>Traditional pedagogy is directly linked to the needs of the individual and the group, and responsibility to country and Law. Elders – uncles and aunts and other mentors – are highly respected as the vectors of knowledge exchange. Learning must be directly relevant to these imperatives.</p>

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<p><i>Process Learning</i></p> <p>A small group can be a powerful educational structure for solving complex problems and promoting capability. In a small group the combination of individuals can achieve more than the sum of the parts (non-linear effects in a complex system), as social interaction between members stimulates learning, raises individuals' confidence, and increases motivation.</p> <p>Attention to process is the distinguishing characteristic of productive, non-linear learning. Future educational efforts ... almost certainly need fewer content experts and more tutors, mentors, and facilitators. (Op. cit.: p.801)</p>	<p>The Edgeware model stresses 'incubation' and 'interaction', both of which value a group dynamic and the relationship between participants and presenters, and among participants themselves. Its action orientation, including elements listed above, such as "course planning that explicitly incorporates input from learners", encourages and rewards a self-starter mentality where the learner becomes responsible for his/her learning, but is also compelled through a principal of reciprocity to feel responsibility for the welfare and advancement of the group.</p>	<p>Traditional cultures are evolved to an optimum travelling group of around 20 individuals, which come together periodically (e.g. at the Bunya Festival in SE Qld) for larger gatherings. Belonging to a small group imparts a sense of belonging and responsibility.</p> <p>Learning is task- and process-oriented to <i>action</i>, where 'theory' serves 'practice', not the other way around.</p>

Reference:

Fraser, Sarah W. and Greenhalgh, Trisha (2001), *Coping with complexity: education for capability*. British Medical Journal, Vol. 323, 6 October 2001, pps 799 - 803