

Lifelong Action Learning for Community Development: Learning and Development for a Better World

By Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Richard Teare

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Book reviewers' comments

'Lifelong Action Learning for Community Development: Learning and Development for a Better World' manages to accomplish an almost impossible goal – to be both deeply inspirational and highly practical all at the same time. The authors make a strong case for the vital importance of lifelong action learning as a strategy for addressing global inequality and for encouraging community development that is respectful of local culture and conditions. This book provides a clear framework to guide this process of individual and community development, along with a wealth of useful methods that can be used to implement the approach, and case studies that illustrate how the basic principles of lifelong action learning can be applied in very different cultural and political contexts. One way of understanding the impact of any strategy for achieving positive change is in terms of what the authors here identify as cascading effects – the extent to which the work inspires others to action. Readers will find here an engaging invitation to become a part of this cascade of projects and partnerships committed to international community development focused on human well-being and positive social change.

Professor Mary Brydon-Miller, PhD, Director, Action Research Centre, and Professor, Educational Studies and Urban Educational Leadership, College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services, University of Cincinnati, USA

I was sold on this book from the foreword – the need to rethink how we think about and 'do' education is emerging as a 'hot topic' among academics. Visionary scholars, such as the authors of this book, accept that our current approach to education is elitist, exclusive and denies the value of locally created knowledge, and by implication, those who created it. The dominant western epistemology continues to dictate ideas of what forms of knowledge are valid, who can create such knowledge and what should be done with it. This book shows how we can begin to challenge this knowledge hegemony by taking the university to the people. Zuber-Skerritt offers a wonderfully clear conceptual framework for lifelong action learning as a methodology to help community members to systematize and professionalize indigenous knowledge through taking action to improve their quality of life. Through convincing case studies Teare shows how this form of knowledge generation engages people in solving the 'wicked' problems of this world through following a systemic and validated process of action learning, guided by the Global University of Lifelong Learning programs. Certainly, this approach yields more positive benefits for community members than formal education that tends to "educate to earn a living" rather than educate for sustainable improvement in quality of life. This book will stimulate the ongoing discussion around community engagement and show that universities can work with communities without losing any of their credibility or power – in fact the opposite is true as this type of work spawns vast amounts of data for research purposes. More importantly, it shows that the academy can partner with communities to increase and enhance the self-respect and dignity of those who have been historically marginalized by the epistemological hegemony of the academy.

Professor Lesley Wood, PhD, Research Professor, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

I have worked as a development consultant in Africa and know first hand the difficulties involved. I therefore warmly recommend this book to all the people involved in community development within developing countries. It provides a conceptual foundation for its approach in 'lifelong action learning for community development', linking established ideas from many sources into a new way of thinking about development. It then provides a step-by-step process for implementing that new way of thinking. I especially like the case studies of how the approach has actually worked to develop successful business in informal economies in several countries. The two authors have an enormous depth of experience in the fields that they are writing about, and that adds to the credibility of what they are describing. All development practitioners and students should study this book carefully, as should aid bureaucrats and aid donors.

Chad Perry, PhD, Emeritus Professor, Graduate School of Management, Southern Cross University, Lismore, and Adjunct Professor, Australian Institute of Business, Adelaide, Australia

In this new book, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Richard Teare present challenging and original models for encouraging community and social development work. Drawing on a Lifelong Action Learning (LAL) approach, they challenge Western-dominated approaches to learning, encouraging the development of local solutions for local needs. The book presents the philosophical underpinning and models of LAL for individual, organization and community development, then a range of case studies demonstrating original work done in a variety of countries (Papua New Guinea, and East African countries). The volunteers who worked in those contexts have been encouraged in their endeavours to provide extensive evidence-based descriptions that meet the assessment criteria for GULL, and have achieved certification at Certificate, Diploma, Masters or Doctoral level through GULL. The book addresses readers in the first person, and besides including URLs to resources and videos of case study participants and their work, contains both transcripts and appendices to support readers who may not have online access, but who want to learn from the examples.

Pip Bruce Ferguson, PhD, Teaching Developer, Teaching Development Unit, University of Waikato, New Zealand

'Lifelong Action Learning (LAL) for Community Development: Learning and Development for a Better World' was a fascinating and thought provoking read of alternative education techniques and community development goals. The authors weave together basic lifelong learning principles, with that of action inquiry and community development projects; reinforcing at every stage the importance of engagement and professional recognition of local volunteers in efforts to improve their personal and community quality of life. This book will be useful to

international community developers, educators and researchers - especially if they are looking for alternative ways of successfully improving living conditions for disadvantaged and subsistence communities. This book will be a necessary read for students in the MA Global Leadership program at Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada.

Wendy Rowe, PhD, Associate Professor and Program Head, School of Leadership, Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada

In this book Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Richard Teare invite us to re-think, re-evaluate and re-create our views of learning. They introduce Lifelong Action Learning (LAL) as an effective approach to sustainable community development so that by working collaboratively and mindfully we can transcend current educational paradigms to help improve human life, especially among those in greatest need. They describe, explain and illustrate how LAL values, such as authentic solidarity, respect, self-respect, and appreciation of the richness of diverse ways of thinking and doing, can be put into action within communities to help unlock and empower human potential. The authors' insights lead us to also re-think the constraints of dominant economic assistance models aimed at promoting the empowerment of poor and disadvantaged communities both in developed and not so developed societies. For the English-speaking world here is an inspiring book whose principles of action and learning coincide broadly with Latin American ways of approaching community empowerment, inspired by Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda.

Doris Santos, PhD, Associate Professor, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota DC, Colombia

The authors, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Richard Teare, are highly credentialed in the formal academic world by virtue of their qualifications and experience. They use their resultant profound knowledge to reconceptualize accredited learning as lifelong action learning within the context of communities within developing countries. As with any new paradigm, their writing and work on the ground reinvigorates the established concept of accredited learning and extends its meaning to incorporate learning within organizations and community that achieves verifiable personal and organizational/community outcomes. In this way, they are able to give access to accredited learning to the great majority of people who are unable to access the formal education system. By bringing education to the people, rather than people to education, they create the possibility for real personal, organizational and community learning on-the-ground in developing countries. At the same time, they challenge each of us to embrace the new paradigm of lifelong action learning within our own context and to support their efforts to bring education to the many millions of people in developing countries.

Ron Passfield, PhD, Organizational Consultant and Freelance Social Media Manager, Merit Solutions Pty Ltd

As a development practitioner, I have found myself in the middle of training courses thinking 'I understand what I'm being taught - but I have no idea how I'll be able to apply it back in the office - or out in the field'. I have observed this situation continually in the cross-cultural training context. I have struggled to work out where to start to implement training courses in many complex development situations. When working in a community that is at war with itself - where does one begin? Now I have an answer. The genius of this book is its simplicity. It provides a sound approach to addressing the holes in our mainstream approaches to education, training, development and in living together in communities, through providing a new understanding of 'lifelong action learning' and how to achieve it through proactively cultivating and passing on local knowledge. By effectively bringing together proven methodologies/approaches - action learning and action research, community development, cross-cultural theories and lifelong learning - this work provides a clear way forward for development that has two distinctive strengths. It is self sustaining - enabling real progress that will not fall over once interventions stop - and it is self developing - unlocking human potential to deal with the complex and turbulent C21.

Frank Thompson, PhD has worked in development for more than 15 years in government, NGOs and as a consultant. He currently delivers programs in Africa

This book presents an enlightening account of the use of action learning in developing countries. It is characterized by the integration of concepts, theory, practice and detailed easy-to-use processes, all in the service of empowerment for the often disadvantaged and neglected in the third world.

Bob Dick, DLitt, Adjunct Professor, Southern Cross University, Australia

As a critical reader and having responded to the content in each of these chapters, I believe this book has the potential to transform the century old teaching and learning paradigm that is failing many countries to one that is futures oriented and transformational in nature. The coming together of organizations and communities described here demonstrates how people power is enabled through a paradigm shift that centres the learner and community in a process-oriented approach to managing change. The partnerships that create these learning opportunities recognize the inherent value of self-directed, facilitated learning. The challenge now is for the entrenched education paradigm to recognize these partnerships as alternative and valid education providers. This is a book that all educators need to read and to consider within their own learning context.

Margaret Fletcher, PhD, Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Griffith University, Australia

I read this book without prior knowledge of the subject matter. Despite this, I found the book engaging and easy to read and understand. I particularly appreciated the inclusion of diagrams and flow charts, which helped elucidate the concepts in a simple visual way. The concepts and their realization as described in the book present a very persuasive argument for their implementation and utilization. The multiple aims of personal growth and community enhancement are admirable and the book demonstrates the benefits and advantages that adoption of these systems can provide. The reflections of the participants make clear the very positive effects of Lifelong Action Learning. One commented that 'when I studied and graduated, I thought that learning was just in the four corners of the room, but through this process, I really come to know - learning is everywhere'. Dr Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Dr Richard Teare and their colleagues in GULL are doing commendable work, not only through providing people with the means for improving their subsistence, but by giving them ways to enrich their life experience through these lifelong learning methods which in turn enables them to pass their knowledge on to others. As Dr Zuber-Skerritt states the book is future-oriented and I hope it can go on to help many more people.

Jo Anne Pomfrett, BA(Hons), GradDip Museum Studies, Consultant Museum Curator, Writer and Researcher, Queensland, Australia