
Interviewing Peter McIlveen¹

1. As Director of the Australian Collaboratory for Career, Employability, and Learning for Living (ACCELL), after about one years and half from your previous interview for «Counseling. Italian Journal of Research and Intervention», could you please describe the contributions of this important and innovative center in the international scenario during the current pandemic period?

Australia, like many other countries, has endured the pandemic's destructive effects on macro- and micro-economic conditions. Australia's Covid-19 mortality and morbidity rates are relatively lower compared to other nations, its vaccination rates are approaching levels necessary for herd immunity, and its economy is recovering well, but there are crucial aspects of ordinary life which are more complicated in their return to «normality». I shall mention just one aspects of life that is fundamental to career development and brutally disrupted by the pandemic: Education. Restrictions on students' attendance at schools, colleges, and universities disrupted the normal developmental stages through which students move from early childhood to adulthood.

Online classes were rapidly adopted by Australian schools to ensure students were continuing their education in some form. The immediate and short-term effects of not attending classes are obvious. Going from daily attendance in classes, socializing with friends, playing, and enjoying sport, to home-schooling would be disruptive on any young child and their family who had to give up work, or work at home, in order to supervise their children's online schooling. The long-term pernicious effects are unknown at this stage; however, there is reason to suspect children's academic and social development will be tainted. Research will no doubt reveal the effects in years to come. For example, Australia's

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longitudinal National Assessment Program--Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) may show changes in the trajectory of students' achievement. Only time will tell.

We should not forget that teachers were significantly affected by restrictions and lockdowns, not only in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. Our research demonstrates that primary (elementary) teachers, in particular, experienced significant impact on their mental health as a result of the transition to online teaching. For some primary school teachers, the effects were evident in their K-10 scores for depression and anxiety being at clinical levels. The long-term effects on teachers' careers are crucially important to investigate. Teachers are essential to society.

Australian universities are familiar with online learning platforms, with some traditional institutions using online as supplement to on-campus teaching and learning, and with others reliant on online teaching due to their institutional specialization in distance education for decades. Whilst the transition to online was challenging for some university staff accustomed to traditional on-campus teaching, our research suggests that their mental health was not as negatively affected as primary school teachers. Our research continued its focus on the psychological factors that contribute to graduates' employability. Those factors seem even more important than ever. The effects of online learning on graduates' employability, particularly those who study at an on-campus university, are yet to be discerned as those graduates' transition into the workforce.

2. What are the current projects of the center you consider relevant in relation to sustainability, sustainable development goals and the new research area of the Psychology of Sustainability and Sustainable Development?

The health, wellbeing, and work of people who live and work in rural and regional communities continues to be a focus of our research and development. For example, our research into decent work and careers in agriculture demonstrates that this psychologically and physically demanding work requires psychological qualities of employability as

much as a professional job in an air-conditioned office. The availability of a sustained labour force for agriculture prior to the pandemic was challenging. The pandemic worsened the problem. International supply chains continue to experience difficulties in sourcing, transporting, stocking products across multiple industry sectors. Workers were stood down, retrenched, or worked at home, if at all practical to do so, but much of the work of agriculture is not performed at a desk. A lack of workers is at the core of the international supply chain problem. Lockdowns, domestic travel restrictions, and restrictions on international workers stripped valuable workers from agriculture. Sadly, there were media reports of Australian farms leaving crops to rot on the vines because there were insufficient workers to pick and pack these vital goods.

Last year, we expanded our research program to include a focus on wellbeing and employability in rural and regional communities which are prone to the effects of drought. Communities of whose residents' lives and livelihoods are dependent on industries that are susceptible to the economic challenges of fluctuating water supply are at risk of mental health issues because of the uncertainty of their work and income. Comprehending the psychological torments of climate and drought may be difficult for people who live in other countries in which water supplies are plentiful. Our research program about wellbeing and employability is a thread of the Future Drought Fund supported by the Australian Government. Our research will improve how Australian can prepare and respond to the constant cycles of drought (and flood), which is intrinsic in Australia's climate and rural communities. The lessons we learn may have benefits for wellbeing, mental health, and employability of other rural societies.

3. For the originality of the research issues of your center and for the relevant international scientific fellows included, what are the best promising lines for research and future projects you consider important to underline in the current scenario?

The nexus of quality work and wellbeing, and, conversely, poor quality work and diminished wellbeing will be increas-

ingly important topics of research. Clinical psychology, vocational psychology, and organizational psychology have much to offer one another as scientific and professional fields. But current dialogue among these specialist disciplines does not reflect their amazing potential to combine for the betterment of individuals, communities, and workplaces. Imagine cognitive behaviour therapy that is informed by the scientific and professional expertise of vocational psychology/career development which specializes in students' and workers' decisions, motivations, and happiness in their work and careers. Vice versa, imagine career counselling that is informed by the scientific evidence of clinical psychology's treatments for workers' maladaptive schema and behaviours which damage their work lives and long-term careers. It is time for strong convergence of our respective disciplines' scientific and professional expertise.