

The Bush Mechanic as an exemplar Adult Learner:

Introducing the Bush Mechanic/Artificer Learner concept

Bush mechanic (also called Artificer Learner) is someone who may be seen in two senses: **Bush Mechanic in the narrow sense** is *'someone who uses their ingenuity and technical knowledge to improvise unique solutions to field challenges'*.

This narrow sense is where the book starts and then drills down into and across this definition, as was the intent and extent of this book over the 5 years of its compilation. It is possible to see deeper and broader meanings behind the commonly understood characteristics of the bush mechanic, echoes of the past as well as harbingers of a possible future. It has been the intent of this research project as recorded in this book to explicate these broader characteristics while at all times remaining true to the vernacular narrow or street-cred definition.

Bush Mechanic in the broadest sense as used in this book is *'an adult learner who is broadly and deeply technically skilled both in a participative and reflexively orientated manners with normative (ethically) and instrumental (technical-strategic) capabilities who seeks to address key dimensions of the global problematique through prototypes by prioritisation, choice, design and implementation all aimed at acting ahead wisely towards a world transformed'*. Wildman (2005 - several) updated Wildman (2007).

Bush Mechanic as Artificer Learner then is and adult learner setting out to learn from their particular bush mechanic process, he or she may or may not be formally trained however formal learning is not designed to help the bushie who needs vertical skills (idea design implementation) and vertical skills (linking various related expertise areas) e.g. farmer (seed husbandry, tractor maintenance, shed building, farm managing and so forth). The second definition above touches on many of the 'commandments' and key issues in Adult Learning discussed above.

Apprentice, Tradesperson, Artisan, Artificer compared

The Artificer is the step after artisan in vocational education parlance. First one becomes a trades assistant, then apprentice, then Tradesman, (then in Medieval/Renaissance terms a journeyman), then a Master Tradesman (at the presentation of ones 'exemplar project' as 'journeyman's piece - adjudged by a group of one's peers, when one could be admitted to the trade guild), Artisan (expert in a particular skill area e.g. jewellery), and Artificer (1563 - London) where the Artificer is broadly skilled in a related range of skills (horizontal skills) as well as depth skills (design). Today the terms are not interchangeable but do have a certain resonance, particularly in the sense of the building of the cathedrals in Europe during the Renaissance. It is the Artificer (French ~ bricolage) that the Bush Mechanic most closely relates.

Bush Mechanic as a threatened species

Conventional learning is designed to 'teach' one more and more about less and less so to speak and even worse in tertiary situations is generally textually not experientially based. The

bushy then generally develops with broad and deep integrated skill set as the basis of survival and is used on this site as an exemplar of one key method of Adult Learning

These folks are becoming a threatened species and nowadays have to exist largely under the conventional/formal systems radar - simply to survive. They are however around concentrated in Australia in the outer regions e.g. some parts of SA, WA and far north Qld, inc. many indigenous communities. [see web resources in following reference section].

I have always heard of these folk and only recently had the privilege to work alongside one for three years building my own bushy project in the marine arena. They are crucial to our children's economic future and yet are largely unsung heroes. And this needs to be respected as once they are brought into the formal economy the bush simply withers. Innovation and ingenuity and mutual aid simply can't survive at \$100/hr.

During this period of working with the bushy 2001-2006 on my particular marine project I had the privilege of working with several others in various fields on various projects and so on this basis I kept a learning journal in line with that I kept during my Doctoral studies in adult and action learning a decade before. I then used Grounded Theory in order to bring out of the data the key linking themes between the Bushy's I was working with in such diverse fields as philosophy, engineering, disability, art, and theatre. Other crucial bushy arenas are gardening and cooking.

Maybe the bushy will go the way of the dinosaur - maybe not. I believe the jury is still out, however I do strongly believe and have seen firsthand how important the bushy is to innovation both social and physical, economic development based on small scale innovators or tinkerers - in French bricolage - indeed most if not all the folk shown on shows like the inventors are Bushy's in one form or another - small scale innovators working to use their ingenuity usually for general benefit rather than exclusively to make dollars or become rich.

Hopefully you are interested in finding out more about the veritable 'bushy'. If so there is heaps more information available on this website as well as an email support group that would love to hear from you - you can even post your bushy story on our blog.