

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

## **A Book Review**

**By Ron Passfield, PhD**

This book is co-authored by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt and Richard Teare who have both spent more than 25 years dedicated to creating a better world through action learning.

Both are highly credentialed in the traditional academic world – Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt with her 2 PhD's and a D. Litt. and author/co-author of 35 books; Richard Teare with his professorships in four UK universities, his international reputation in hospitality and marketing, experience as Global Dean of the IMCA and co-author/co-editor of 21 books.

Yet, what they are offering in this book is an alternative to formal, accredited learning.

In *Lifelong Action Learning*, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt once again displays her inimitable ability to integrate concepts and ideas and to bring together the concepts of action learning and lifelong learning. I think the book is worth its price just for the review of lifelong learning literature incorporated in it.

While lifelong action learning provides the framework for the book, the centrepiece is Richard's work through the [Global University for Lifelong Learning \(GULL\)](#). Through GULL, Richard and others are bringing education to the majority of the world who have no means to access formal education.

In this book, Richard discusses his work in Jamaica, South Sudan, PNG, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Uganda, Tanzania, East Timor, Cambodia and Logan. What he has done through GULL is provide a means for anyone without funds or qualifications to access an inclusive, practical, professional and credible alternative to accredited learning.

GULL has moved away from accreditation to the concept of recognition and endorsements. Richard, himself, has first-hand experience of the very real barriers to organisations seeking to gain accreditation to offer formal qualifications.

Thomas Kuhn in his work on paradigms suggests that new paradigms emerge when existing paradigms fail to meet the prevailing problems of a particular time. He also suggests that to gain legitimacy, the new paradigm needs to redefine some key concepts. I'm reminded of our early challenges to redefine "validity" for the purposes of action research.

To secure credibility, the founders of GULL knew that they would need to work beyond the established frameworks for accreditation or validation and to move to a system that was at once trackable and credible.

GULL's solution was to seek and secure global Government recognition for their awards, with multiple endorsements by Governments. Thanks to the leadership of Sir Paulias Matane (Director General of PNG), Sir Michael Somare (Prime Minister of PNG), GULL has its global recognition and the process of gathering multiple endorsements from Governments, Leaders (e.g. Heads of State) and Institutions (like the World Bank) is on-going.

Richard demonstrates in the book his work in villagers in remote parts of PNG, Kenya and Sri Lanka. In this respect, he reminds me very much of Orlando Fals Borda and his work in Colombia.

You will not hear Richard talking about his own exploits in the global world of hospitality where he worked with some of the largest organisations in the hotel and tourism industry – but rather his passionate vision to bring education to the under-privileged of this world, the majority of the world's population.

The book, *Lifelong Action Learning*, explains how GULL's approach to education is open to anyone who has a willingness to embark on a personal development journey and to generate practical outcomes and applications.

The book discusses a central platform of GULL's operations in PNG, the concept of "personal viability" (PV) – where Richard has integrated the GULL qualification structure (Certificate to Doctoral) into the steps to attain personal viability developed by Samuel Tan. The focus is on developing character and competence in the context of actual business – character in terms of discipline, healthy self-esteem, integrity and competence in terms of understanding the laws of nature of the market.

Richard explains how people progress through levels of personal viability – developing their own budget and micro-enterprise, engaging their family in a business and moving beyond that to employing other people.

Families are involved and the process is cascaded to communities. Richard explains in the book how this holistic development draws on the real meaning of education which derives from the Latin word, *educo* – to develop from within, to educe, to draw out and grow through use. There is a PV coach to aid the process of personal development and financial independence.

Richard states in the book that Personal Viability focuses on development of the mind (mindset) - participants are able to discover what they need to learn to fully utilize innate knowledge and resources and to draw from other sources as they need.

As Richard illustrates, the outcome is "viable" people who know how to acquire and make intelligent use of all resources, both tangible and intangible, to satisfy needs and to become self-reliant and financially independent. A

viable person also knows how to establish and run a business, add value, and prepare and organize generally.

In the book, Richard explains how GULL has joined forces with the Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP) in Africa (e.g. Nigeria, South Sudan and Kenya). GULL has enabled CCMP facilitators to gain professional qualifications and achieve recognition. CCMP, through GULL, now has a process for outcome tracking at the community and individual level which has helped the movement provide evidence of ROI on received funds.

In his chapters within the book, Richard discusses the key characteristics of the GULL approach:

- Holistic – development of the whole person including physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual
- Personal viability – integrates the work of Samuel Tan in PNG (self-esteem, home budget, micro-enterprise) – challenging self-imposed boundaries.
- Evidenced based – verification – trackable and credible
- Outcomes focus – personal learning and organisational/community outcomes
- Cascading – working from one level to engage the next e.g. in Haiti
- Mobilization of Church and Community Organisations – e.g World Vision, Tearfund
- Contextual – embedded in local customs and environment
- Reflective – builds true reflective practitioners through journaling which in turn builds evidence of outcomes
- Cross-funded – fee-paying professional services offered to organisations to help sustain GULL’s global efforts on behalf of the underprivileged
- Recognition – Certificate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels.
- Capacity building (e.g. community workers for World Vision) - through recognition, skill development and a chance to make a sustainable, trackable difference.

Seth Godin, multiple New York Bestseller, wrote a book called, *Tribes*, subtitled, “We need you to lead us... to make a difference in the world”. Richard demonstrates in *Lifelong Action Learning* that he is a leader of a tribe

– a community of people who are connected and inspired by a vision to make a real difference in the world.

In reading the book by Ortrun and Richard, you need to put on new paradigm glasses to appreciate its outstanding contribution to global education. You need to move beyond accredited learning, inaccessible to the bulk of the world's population and increasingly legislated and standardised, to a paradigm that looks at learning as a life-time pursuit of life skills and personal viability grounded in everyday reality and local customs.

As Ortrun and Richard explain in their book, Lifelong Action Learning in a community setting focuses on outcomes not inputs and community contribution not individual status. It is flexible not constrained, multidimensional not disciplinary and permeable not impenetrable.

As the authors state, GULL enables people to have a better understanding of who they are and what they are capable of – together with the tools & support necessary to achieve personal viability.

If you are looking for a book that is at once inspiring and practical, visionary and grounded, conceptual and instructional, you have come to the right place.

The book, **Lifelong Action learning for Community Development**, can be purchased through the following outlets:

- [Sense Publications](#)
- [Amazon](#).
- [Book Depository](#)