Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM APPLIED Definitions of a Community College

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

> at Massey University

Jennifer Mary Taylor

1975

#### ABSTRACT

The value of Continuing Education is increasingly being realised throughout New Zealand. The educational institution termed the Community College is one facility being established in order to further the principles associated with lifelong learning.

This thesis presents an exploratory study related to the first such college built in this country, the Hawke's Bay Community College. The central purpose guiding the study was an attempt to discover how members of the Hawke's Bay region conceive this new institution. Here, what was envisaged as important, was not only the kinds of understandings revealed about the college, but also the attitudes and evaluations expressed by Hawke's Bay citizens regarding it. To this end, the dissertation is divided into a number of parts.

Firstly, there is consideration given to some of the philosophical issues underlying any research process pursued within the social domain. On the basis of this, a theoretically justifiable approach to the problem posed, is elaborated. The theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, and more particularly, the construct of the Definition of the Situation, are discussed.

From such a base, reference is made to the linkages and translation process required when moving from theoretical to methodological issues. Included in this section of the thesis, is a description of the data collection techniques employed for the study.

The results obtained as a consequence of the investigation are then given, along with some discussion relevant to the Community College's operations.

Finally, the thesis presents a series of tentative hypotheses and questions emergent from the research carried out. It concludes with a reconsideration of the exploratory nature of the problem posed, and the theoretical perspective within which it was couched.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the numerous people who have helped me, in one way or another, while writing this thesis. In particular, I am appreciative of the valuable advice and criticism Professor R.S.Adams gave me throughout. My thanks also to the Education Department in Wellington for the financial support they provided for this study.

I am very grateful to those Hawke's Bay residents, willing to take the time to discuss the Hawke's Bay Community College with me, thereby allowing me to carry out this research. My thanks to Evan, Michelle, Rhys and Bryn for making my visits to the Hawke's Bay so enjoyable.

Finally, I am indebted to Colin whose encouragement and patience, as well as hard work, enabled me to complete this thesis.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	
Chapter 1: Philosophical Underpinnings	1
Approaches to the Social Sciences	1
The Notion of 'Social Reality'	2
A Tenable Position	4
Implications	6
Chapter 2: Theoretical Considerations	7
Symbolic Interactionism	7
Human Action and Interaction	7
The Meaning of 'Object'	10
The Definition of the Situation	12
Emergence	13
Relativity	14
The Interpretative Schema	15
Conclusion	17
Chapter 3: From Theory to Method	19
The Pelationship between Theory and Methodolog	y 19
Sensitizing Concepts	20
Exploration	22
Inspection	23
Qualitative/Quantitative Methodology	23
The Research Problem	24
Problem Specification	24
Transition from Theory to the Empirical Case	25
The Interview: An Overview	26
The Interview Design	27
The Interview Group	30
The Interview Guide	32
Interview Guide 1	33
Interview Guide 2	38
Discussion of the Interview Guides	41

	Page
Chapter 4: The Results	43
The Interview Group and the Interview Content	43
A General Description of the Interview Group	43
The Interview Content	44
Definitions of the Community College	45
An Overview	45
The College Defined as a 'Technical Institute'	50
The College Defined as a 'Vocational Training	
Centre'	52
The College Defined as a 'Community College'	54
The College Defined as a 'University'	56
The College Undefined	56
Inter-Relationships	57
The Descriptive Variables	57
The Definitional Components	58
Chapter 5: Discussion	60
General Comments	60
Hypotheses	64
Emergent Ouestions	66
Conclusions	68
Appendix 1	71
Ribliography	70

### INTRODUCTION

If society is to meet the accelerating pace of social and economic change in today's world, Education needs to be viewed as an adjustment process, continuing throughout life, rather than as a preparatory process terminating during or shortly after adolescence. The notion of Continuing Education aspires to such a position.

"The aims of lifelong Education, of which Continuing Education is a part, are to assist all members of the community to adjust to continually changing personal, social and economic circumstances throughout their lives; to control by common decision and action those circumstances which are controllable; and to achieve their maximum personal potential." (New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, 1972, p.102)

Continuing Education is thus not to be seen as a product, a series of packages, or even as a program, but rather, as a process that attempts to involve society at large continuously, in the development of educational goals. It strives to co-ordinate efforts intended to meet the needs and wants of the people, requiring interaction and general involvement by the community as a whole. Central problems inherent in the Continuing Education process then are, to identify accurately what people want, think they want, and actually do need, and then to structure these into a realistic and concerted series of significant educative activities. Communication, particularly between the educator and the community seems to be the key to the resolution of such problems.

It is within this framework that the New Zealand Education
Dep artment has introduced Community Colleges. Such institutions are to
be concerned with: firstly, mobilizing the community's resources
(particularly people, places and equipment), and linking them with the
educational process and existing agencies; secondly, responding to
the educational, welfare, cultural and recreational interests of people
of all ages in their community; and thirdly, providing advice and
guidance to both collectivities and individuals so that their interests,
aspirations and consequent lines of action can be appropriately realized.(cf
Renwick, 1974) In this way the Community College is both a focal
point and a facilitating institution for the already existing learning
networks. At the same time it is to develop new facilities, thereby
leading to the creation of a new learning community, with the
Community College becoming the peoples' college.

The first New Zealand Community College was set up in Hawkes Bay at Otatra, just south of Taradale. The first students were admitted in January, 1975. The college is intended to provide vocationally-criented services and what has been termed 'Community Studies' services, particularly in those areas not catered for by established institutions. Emphasis is to be given to developing facilities designed to serve the expressed needs of the Hawkes Bay region.

In response to an invitation from the New Zealand Education

Department, Massey University agreed to undertake an 'independent' study
of the Hawkes Bay Community College during its early years of development.

The study reported here is one component of the resulting research
project. It is concerned with an exploratory study of what conceptions
of the Community College are held by people in the Mawkes Bay region.

The principal reason for the study was, that as participation in the Community College activities must be largely voluntary, unless members of the community become aware of, and to some extent committed to its philosophy, then the Community College will be less able to realize its objectives. In short, the conception of what the Community College is, requires some control by its propounders. Its philosophy needs to be understood and accepted by the community. But such understanding and acceptance may be difficult to achieve. To a large extent they are dependent on the degree to which members of the community and the Community College come to speak each other's language, comprehend each other's meanings, and see through each other's 'glasses'. However, if incompatabilities are to be overcome, they must first be recognized.

The central purpose guiding this dissertation then, is to attempt to discern the nature of the conceptions held and to surface whatever differences, if any, do exist. To this end, it is aiming to:

- (1) Develop a theoretically justifiable approach to the problem posed.
- (2) Pursue the necessary investigation.
- (3) As a result of the research, provide information which could be beneficial to the Community College's functioning in the future.

With such objectives in mind, the study has been structured in the following way. Chapter 1 is a brief exposition of the philosophical issues which underly the theoretical position taken throughout the study, and which are relevant to a scientific exercise in the social domain. In Chapter 2, consideration is given to the theoretical perspective employed, that of Symbolic Interactionism, and more

particularly, to the theoretical model which guided the investigation undertaken. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the linkages and translation process required when moving from the theoretical to the methodological issues. It also presents a description of the data collection techniques which were used in the investigation. The results of the investigation are given in Chapter 4. The final chapter consists of a discussion of these results, along with a reconsideration of the study as a whole.