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Adult Learning Australia

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

The Australian Journal of Adult Learning is an official publication of Adult Learning Australia (ALA). It is concerned with the theory, research and practice of adult and community education, and to promote critical thinking and research in this field. While the prime focus is on Australia, the practice of adult education and learning is an international field and Australia is connected to all parts of the globe, and therefore papers relating to other countries and contexts are welcome. Papers in the refereed section have been blind reviewed by at least two members from a pool of specialist referees from Australia and overseas.

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From the Editor's desk

Tony Brown

One year ago on 4 November NIACE, ALA's sister organisation in England and Wales, voted to change its name to the National Learning and Work Institute (NLWI).

Since then many have suggested that an era of adult education has come to an end. Some have argued that the name change is more than just 'rebranding' and instead represents the end of the most significant national adult education NGO, as the NLWI will become a different type of organisation focused on a narrower view of adult learning. Others contend that the shift to a tighter focus on work related learning reflects the new policy and funding environment and therefore is a necessary step to ensure survival.

NIACE traced its roots back to the grandly titled World Association of Adult Education, which was formed at the end of the 1st World War. In 1949 the British Institute of Adult Education merged with the National Foundation for Adult Education to form NIACE (the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education). It has been, along with the German DVV (Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband, the German Adult Education Association); the most prominent advocate of lifelong learning as it influenced government policy in the UK and through international fora such as UNESCO and its Millennium Goals, and the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) and developed an international publishing arm that supported researchers and educators. It was an extremely influential contributor to Australian adult education, and ALA, through its leadership of international lifelong learning campaigns such as Adult Learners Week, and individually through the work of Alan Tuckett, who was its Director from 1988-2011.

Organised adult education in Australia inherited its early structures and institutions from Britain. The most obvious such as the Mechanics Institutes, Schools of Arts, the WEAs and Evening Colleges can still be found but most have shrunk or ceased to exist. Of course there was already a rich indigenous adult education that existed but went unseen by colonial eyes. Alongside those early implanted British organisations Australia developed its own particular types of adult education delivered by political parties, trade unions, libraries, arts groups, neighbourhood houses and community centres and many more.

Those institutions and arrangements are changing. For many adult educators working in higher education, in vocational education, prisons education and in many community centres, the changes are dramatic and disorienting. The concerted attempts of governments since the early 1990s to create a ‘learning market’ has come at enormous cost, most obviously in the huge losses associated with the VET-HELP scheme, but also the institutional and pedagogical loss involved in undermining TAFEs, and in the withering of many, many community based not-for-profit organisations.

As the demise of NIACE shows the rearranging of adult education across the western world continues. Universities restructure or close faculties and departments that once prepared adult educators and researched

practice; where provincial and national governments restrict or cut off funding of all but narrowly defined vocational adult programs; and where community providers struggle to survive in that policy and funding environment.

However, adults' urge to learn is not dampened and the emergence of different ways of meeting adults' needs reminds us to be alert to examining and understanding changes in the new ways adults seek knowledge, in the delivery sites and practices, as well as the new types of organisations that will emerge.

For well over a century Australia has been establishing links and drawing on experiences and practices from beyond Britain. We are drawn to understand more about how educators work and learn in our region and in other non-English speaking countries. This issue reflects the interconnections with researchers who are examining adult learning across the globe.

In this issue there are papers from Europe, Asia, North America, the Middle East, Africa and Australia. The first three papers are concerned with developing ways of understanding personal learning. From Denmark ***Karsten Mellon*** explores the significant career change that one mature age woman farmer undertook in order to become a social pedagogue. Her return to study involved learning new skills as well as rethinking her personal identity. It is an account of a personal development that includes ambivalence, defensiveness, and various emotional engagements as she re-configures her sense of self. Using a life-history based psycho-societal approach Mellon argues provides a means of capturing the complexity of the changes involved in *becoming* a social pedagogue.

Monika Popow combines two contemporary issues in her research of ten Polish migrant bloggers. The blogs provide a new form of data to explore how adults express their feelings and understandings of their current situation. Migration and immigration have become one of the most significant and intractable issues of the early 21st century, and the individual experience is one shared by many millions of people. In this case a group of migrants unfamiliar with the language of their host country, Poland, recount their experiences and through a critical discourse analysis approach Popow examines the meaning given by the

bloggers to their learning experiences and its impact on their identity creation in a new land.

Making sense of personal experience in a non-formal setting is the subject of ***Sandris Zeivots'*** paper on emotions and experiential learning. The experiences of fifteen Australian adults who embarked on one of three 4-8 day outdoor learning courses form the basis of the research. Zeivots is interested in developing a deeper understanding of how the emotional system in actual learning situations. He used a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to the data and proposes a more sophisticated definition of emotional highs.

The second group of three papers shares an interest in investigating particular facets of learning in higher education. Contemporary constructivist practices in higher education settings are the subject of ***Dorit Alt's*** research among university students in Israel. Her study aimed to assess the relationships between college students' pre-entry factors, their self-efficacy and motivation for learning, and the perceived constructivist learning in traditional lecture-based courses and seminars. 411 undergraduate third-year college students were surveyed along three dimensions of contemporary constructivist practices in learning environments: *constructive activity*, *teacher- student interaction* and *social activity*. Alt concludes that students perceive seminar learning environments as more constructivist when compared with lecture-based course perceptions, and discusses the implications of this for further research.

Jung Yin Kim examines how Korean students participate in group work in an American university and their process of adjustment. Drawing on in-depth interviews and group-work observations, and using a socio-cultural perspective Kim details changes in the students' movement from 'silent participants'. While language proficiency was an underlying factor, Kim concludes that in sociocultural values and educational practices played the most important role in the adjustment process. This raises pedagogical questions for using group work with Asian students in the early stages of university study.

Masilonyana Motseke's focus is to discover the reasons for the slow completion of Masters and Doctoral degrees by adult learners in a South African township. A group of twenty adult learners who had

all completed their schooling and under-graduate study in the same township and were then enrolled in post-graduate degrees at the same township campus of a University were interviewed and surveyed. The lingering effects of apartheid's township education system had left the group under-prepared for higher level study, however Motseke points to a range of other subsequent factors that contribute to slower rates of completion.

In the final refereed paper ***Ya-hui Su*** from Taiwan discusses a more philosophical question of whether society is capable of learning. She notes an emerging orthodoxy among policy-makers that societies are capable of learning and must do so in order to adapt to a changing world. The question she raises is, what is actually meant by a learning society? Drawing on Jurgen Habermas she questions whether a society has agency itself, and poses the possibility that society can learn but only if society is understood as being composed of individuals.

The final paper in this issue is a book review by ***Geraldine Castleton*** of a collection of critical perspectives on adult literacy and numeracy in a globalised world. The book, edited by Keiko Yasukawa and Stephen Black, coincides with the 25th anniversary of *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP), and brings together important contributions that examine literacy and numeracy research in classrooms, workplaces, communities and in policy documents and in so doing question the dominant discourses shaping policy in these fields.

Finally, my thanks go to the authors, reviewers, readers and editorial board members, and to the workers in the ALA office who support me, and the Journal. ALA has itself gone through personnel changes this year and we have welcomed Henrik Steenberg to manage AJAL's layout and publication, along with the ever reliable Catherine Devlin who has been a tower of strength for both AJAL and ALA in 2016. AJAL remains one of the very few refereed print Journals that relies on the efforts of members in the publication process. The Journal is not produced through one of the large academic publishing houses and aims to remain as close as possible to the broad field of practitioners and researchers.

Enjoy the break over Christmas and the New Year and we'll return with Volume 57 in 2017.

Tony Brown

People who have reviewed for AJAL in 2016

Scholarly journals depend on the contributions and support of referees in ensuring their ongoing quality. Without the generosity, wisdom, and rigour of our reviewers, the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* could not exist. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who have given of their time and expertise over the year.

Name	Institution
Arko-Achemfuor, Akwasi	University of South Africa
Brennan, Barrie	University of New England (UNE) (retired)
Breunig, Mary	Brock University, Canada
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Brown, Mike	LaTrobe University
Carter, Rosalind	TAFE NSW Higher Education
Christie, Michael	University of the Sunshine Coast
Collier, Kate	University of Technology Sydney
Davies, Lisa	University of South Australia
Earnest, Jaya	Curtin University
English, Leona	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (Germany)
Field, John	University of Stirling (Scotland)
Hodge, Steven	Griffith University
Kilpatrick, Sue	University of Tasmania
Izadinia, Mahsa	University of Canberra
John, Vaughn	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (South Africa)
Lally, Elaine	University of Technology Sydney
Lawless, Ann	Charles Sturt University
Lee, Moosung	University of Canberra
Li, Linda	University of Canberra
Lisciandro, Joanne	Murdoch University
Maor, Dorit	Murdoch University
McCormack, Silvia	LaTrobe University
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Takeda, Atsushi	Reitaku University (Japan)
te Riele, Kitty	Victoria University
Tett, Lyn	University of Huddersfield (UK)
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Whannell, Robert	University of New England (UNE)
Widin, Jacquie	University of Technology Sydney
Willis, Peter	University of South Australia
Yasukawa, Keiko	University of Technology Sydney

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Australian Journal of Adult Learning

Call for Papers for a Special Issue on: Getting of Wisdom – Learning in Later Life

The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw wrote that “We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.”

We have taken the *Getting of Wisdom* theme (from a 1910 Australian novel by that name by a female author, Ethel Richardson, who wrote as a male, Henry Handel Richardson) for this international exchange of people, researchers, policy makers and practitioners and ideas from opposite sides of the globe. Our aim is to acknowledge, share, listen to and learn from the accumulated wisdom of older people and researchers in the field to help secure and shape our diverse but interconnected futures.

The one week Exchange (12-18 Feb 2017), including three one day Conferences, is a unique collaboration between the Education and Learning by Older Adults (ELOA) Network of ESREA (European Society for Research into the Education of Adults); Adult Learning Australia (ALA), the peak adult and community education body in Australia; Federation University Australia, and ACE Aotearoa, the peak organisation inclusive of New Zealand’s diverse Māori, Pākehā and Pacifika cultures and peoples.

Learning in later life is a relatively new and exciting field of research, and becoming increasingly relevant internationally. The two nations hosting the European exchange (Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa) have only relatively recently begun to acknowledge, celebrate and learn from their rich, diverse and vibrant Indigenous and European ways of being and knowing after centuries of very recent and often painful colonisation.

We have taken four intersecting themes in our attempt to collectively underpin the exchange and better understand the nature and future of learning in later life. These themes have to do with place, equality, empowerment and identity. We have woven these themes into the three conferences to be held in Australia and New Zealand 2017:

- Ballarat (13 Feb) will focus on *Older learning in diverse contexts*;
- Melbourne (14 Feb) on *Learning in later life and social inequalities*, and
- Wellington (New Zealand) (15 Feb) on *Learning, empowerment and identity in later life*.

Further information and registration details for the Exchange, including registering for and submitting papers to any of these Conferences, are available via the ALA and ACE Aotearoa websites.

Conference participants who submit papers by 25 November 2016 have the option of them being peer reviewed and published in the Conference Proceedings. There will also be an opportunity for a selection of these papers (and any later papers submitted to AJAL on related themes by 13 April 2017) to be published in a special, guest-edited November 2017 issue of the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL).

Guest Editors

- Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha (University of Tubingen, Germany);
- Sabina Jelenc Krašovec (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia);
- Brian Findsen (University of Waikato, New Zealand); and
- Barry Golding (Federation University, Australia).

Notes for Prospective Authors

Submissions for inclusion in the AJAL Special Issue should be between 6,000 and 7,000 words and conform to the AJAL Style, details of which can be found via the 'Submissions' tab at www.ajal.net.au

Submissions must be made online at www.ajal.net.au before 13 April 2017 for publication in November 2017.

Further information about the special issue can be obtained by contacting Barry Golding at b.golding@federation.edu.au

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A farmer becomes a social pedagogue: A psycho-societal approach

Karsten Mellon

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In Denmark various non-traditional students are mature-age students who already have some kind of a vocational background. When applying to do a professional degree, most of them fall outside the traditional admission requirements, which is why individual assessment of applicants is necessary for bachelor programmes. This article examines the case of a woman named Amy, a mature, non-traditional university college student who becomes a social pedagogue. Because of severe allergies, Amy had to quit her job as a farmer and began to study to become a social pedagogue. Becoming a social pedagogue is a tremendously complex process that involves taking on a new professional identity and acquiring new skills. In order to ascertain the extent of this complexity, this article uses a psycho-societal approach derived from a Danish/German life history research approach. This article offers a brief presentation of the theoretical and methodological framework applied before analysing the process Amy undergoes to become a social pedagogue. The analysis demonstrates that this type of significant career change is demanding and, for Amy, filled with feelings of ambivalence and defensiveness.

Keywords: *psycho-societal approach, life history, non-traditional, adult learner, social pedagogue, becoming*

Introduction

The question of *becoming* – either *becoming* a human being, *becoming* competent in a certain profession or just trying to *become* a better partner – has for many years intrigued and puzzled scholars, religious groups, artists and many others.

In the Shakespearean drama *Hamlet*, set in Denmark at Elsinore Castle, Prince Hamlet confronts deep existential questions about life and death, his soliloquy pondering existence with the famous words To be or not to be? Hamlet reflects on the possible future consequences of *becoming* or gaining a new identity as the Prince of Denmark. In that process, he is indeed *becoming*, but reflecting on *becoming* makes him crazy, some claim, implying that *becoming* is a treacherous path.

Becoming represents more than just life stages, even though the concept of *becoming* involves a goal or intention. *Becoming* entails ongoing learning and is an identity-building process that takes place in everyday life. A complex matter, *becoming* is also a dynamic and relational aspect of social interaction.

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse how an individual, non-traditional student takes on a new career by acquiring a new professional identity and via the learning process involved in *becoming* a social pedagogue, i.e. how a farmer *becomes* a social pedagogue. This article will also present and apply a psycho-societal approach, which offers, according to Salling Olesen (2012a), a concept of subjectivity and a unique framework for empirical studies of social interaction by combining theoretical and methodological elements.

Learning processes occur whether we intend to learn or not. Educational institutions are one context where new learning processes can take place, for example, when adult students, referred to here as non-traditional students, choose or begin to study a new profession. For non-traditional students a career change is a process of *becoming*

something else that changes their professional identity. Salling Olesen (2007) suggests that professional identity must be seen as a subjective effort at lifelong learning, a process where individuals identify with their profession, enabling them to participate in life more fully. They become able, in the sense that they create their own practice and identity by combining their life history, gendered skills and knowledge with acquiring existing knowledge, thereby *becoming*. From this perspective, professional identity represents the collective effect of multiple learning processes. *Becoming* a social pedagogue or any other profession requires individuals to be active. *Becoming* is not to be regarded as an individual attribute, achievement or property, on the contrary, how subjects become a subject occurs collectively – the subjectivity in social interaction and on an individual level must be considered. The subject must be seen as *becoming* interwoven with the other, or the external sphere, which includes fellow students, the school (system), broader societal structures and a historic perspective.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, the concept of the non-traditional student is described in more detail and the Danish concept of recognition of prior learning (RPL), an essential aspect of non-traditional students gaining access to professional bachelor degree programmes, is introduced. A description of what the profession of social pedagogue specifically comprises in Denmark is also given. Second, the article presents the theoretical and methodological approach applied and outlines key aspects of the analytic approach taken. Third, the analysis of the empirical material is divided into six themes. Finally, the article concludes by describing how the non-traditional student is *becoming*. In addition, the article discusses how the psycho-societal approach can be used in further research on professional identity formation and transformation in adult life to lead to new understandings of non-traditional students.

Non-traditional students, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the social pedagogue profession in Denmark

The phrase "a farmer becomes a social pedagogue" in the title of this article refers to a specific non-traditional student enrolled in a professional bachelor degree program. The term non-traditional student must be used with caution as it is imprecise and, according to Teichler

and Wolter (2004), defining it with precision is not possible since various students are considered traditional by some, but non-traditional by others. The notion of the non-traditional student originates from the Anglo-Saxon term non-traditional adult student (Alheit, 2016) and is currently defined in multiple ways, though there appears to be a general European consensus on a common understanding of the term. Crosling et al.'s (2008) international study *Improving Student Retention in Higher Education* points out five categories used regularly in international access and retention studies to identify non-traditional students: 1) low socioeconomic status, 2) disabilities, 3) first in family to participate in higher education (HE), 4) mature-age and 5) minorities and refugees. The project Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-Traditional Learners in HE, funded by the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme, also employed these criteria (EU, 2011; see endnotes no 1).

For the purposes of this study, the farmer as social pedagogue fits with the definition of the non-traditional student as a mature-age student or adult student pursuing a HE. In the Danish context, these kinds of students most often have a vocational educational background. This is the case because, in recent decades, policymakers in Denmark have put greater focus on informal and non-formal learning, i.e. prior learning, in the effort to provide additional educational opportunities for non-traditional students (Aagaard & Dahler, 2010).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

A wide range of contemporary European, including Danish, policies argues that in a comprehensive educational system individuals should have adequate opportunities to learn throughout life. The key aspects of interest are the learning potential, capacity and adaptability of individuals to become competent while simultaneously increasing their self-awareness and sense of dignity as a responsible citizen (Singh & Duvekot, 2013: 16). RPL in adult education has a strong tradition in Denmark and the other Nordic countries, though approaches vary regarding policy development, systems, solutions and practical implementation. In 2007, a crucial year for the acknowledgment and development of adult education according to the context of lifelong learning, adults in Denmark became entitled to have their prior

learning, i.e. what they know and can do, recognised and validated (Aagaard & Dahler, 2010).

The internationally recognised Danish folk high schools, which offer non-formal adult education, were established in Denmark during the latter half of the nineteenth century based on principles and values expounded by Grundtvig and Kold (Rasmussen, 2013). They represent one of the foundations for the acceptance of adult learning and education and what is now known as RPL. Rasmussen (2013) points out that one of the basic principles of folk high schools was the living word, i.e. prioritisation of oral narration and discussion. Folk high schools do not give exams and students live at the school in order to share not only in learning but also daily life and in practical activities. Over the years the original ideas and values have developed to encompass new, more expansive types of adult education and ways of recognising prior learning to promote access to further education. The philosophy behind the Enlightenment and a belief in universal education supported these efforts. The state and local authorities made practical and financial provisions to allow the establishment of non-obligatory evening classes for young people and adults. At its core, RPL is defined by the Danish Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality (2008) as the knowledge, skills and competencies an individual has regardless of how and where they were obtained. The main policy aim of implementing a new practice and acknowledging people's prior learning was to provide adults with better access to further education and more relevant educational opportunities. With folk high schools laying the groundwork over a century ago, the 2011 Danish Education Act states that when professional bachelor degree applicants do not meet the formal admission requirements, the education institution in question must undertake an individual assessment to determine the applicant's abilities. The assessment involves evaluating the applicant's overall competency, skills and knowledge base in relation what the degree program requires. Formal, informal and non-formal learning, as well as cultural engagement and life experiences in general, are taken in consideration. This expansive approach to RPL means that a broad range of non-traditional students have a greater chance of being admitted, especially in the case of professional bachelor degree programs.

Social pedagogue

The social pedagogue profession is specific to Denmark but analogous to pre-school teachers in a large number of other countries. Comparable positions in out of school care include social workers, educators, play workers and recreation instructors. Danish child care centres, e.g. nurseries, kindergartens, pre-school classes, leisure time facilities, out of school care and youth clubs, are an integral and independent part of the Danish welfare society and should not be confused with the school system and formal teaching (Bubl, 2016). Learning is an important aspect of day care and gaining more attention, but Danish legislation emphasises the importance of play and the child's social and comprehensive development, with a focus on fellowship and inclusion (Skaarup, 2014). As a result, these are essential aspects of a social pedagogue's work.

The pedagogue program provides professional qualifications for people to work with development and care:

- For children and young people (in e.g. day nurseries, day care centres, pre-school classes, recreation centres, school-based leisure time facilities, after-school clubs, 24-hour service institutions)
- In institutions for children, young people and adults with reduced psychological or physical capacities
- For adults with social problems (homelessness, substance abuse, mental disorders)
- In family centres and child and youth psychiatric hospitals (Bubl, 2016)

The theoretical and methodological approach

Across Europe, recent decades have witnessed a considerable expansion of biographical and life history research (Hallqvist, 2013) on non-traditional learners in higher and adult education (EU, 2011). Non-traditional students' stories are seen as a relevant way to gain knowledge regarding the formation and transformation of identity in education (Bron & Thunborg, 2016). The focus on biographical and life history research is part of a more general trend across the social sciences. This flourishing research trend on non-traditional learners is partly fuelled by dissatisfaction with surveys and other traditional research methods,

which tend to marginalise the perspectives and subjective experiences of learners themselves, or reduce them to subjective processes (West et al., 2007; EU, 2011).

In Denmark, especially at Roskilde University, various approaches to life history have been developed inspired by German theory, primarily critical theory originating from the Frankfurt School. Danish researchers were quite ambitious when they began a large-scale, three-year life history project which ended in 2002: “We wanted to develop a methodology for understanding people’s learning motives – and resistances – in the context of their life experiences – past, present and future – in which the totality of their everyday life world and basic societal conditions are condensed” (Salling Olesen, 2016). One of the leading Danish contributions to the field of life history research is the psycho-societal approach, which is a combined theoretical and methodological approach developed by Salling Olesen (2007; 2012a; 2013a) and is applied in this article. Salling Olesen (2016) explains that: “The term ‘approach’ indicates the intrinsic connection between the theory, the empirical research process and the epistemic subject [...] Paradigmatically this is a mediation or synthesis of critical theory of society and the symbol interpretational focus in psychoanalysis”. The psycho-societal approach embraces the life history perspective, where biography is used not to understand the specific individual but to learn about the individual subject and the psychological and societal dimensions by integrating a theory of subjectivity and a hermeneutic interpretative methodology to explore the lived life experiences.

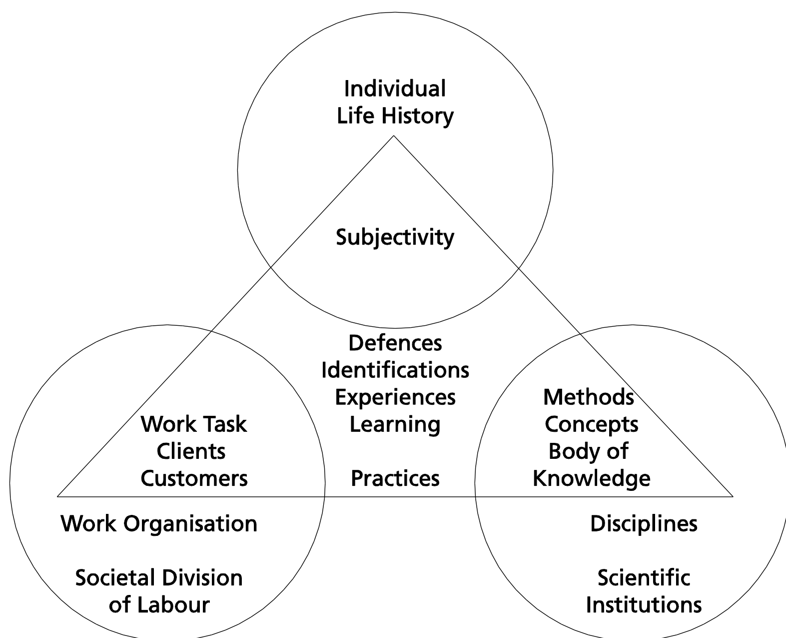
Salling Olesen’s theory of subjective experiences conceptualises individual psychological development as the interactional experience of societal relations. These experiences and encounters with the external sphere produce an inner psychodynamic as a conscious and unconscious individual resource (Ibid.). The individual subject constantly construes his or her subjectivity in the process of *becoming,* which is a result of the dynamic meeting between the individual and the surrounding conditions, which provide various kinds of new influences. This notion of subjectivity is closely related to Weber’s (1994), which points out that people never finish developing their subjectivity and hence simultaneously affect their surroundings as they constantly transform themselves between the subjectivity and the surrounding society. As

a result, *becoming* is an ongoing process where the non-traditional student, as the individual subject in a dialectic process, develops his or her professional identity and competences in interaction with the environment.

Research model

As described earlier, the psycho-societal approach is interdisciplinary, emphasising the dynamic nature between the individual and the surroundings, thus integrating psychological and social dimensions of experience. Figure 1 provides an overview of the three key factors constituting the subject in the research model. This offers a heuristic approach to researching learning processes that is fluid and flexible, though without claiming to be perfectly flawless.

Figure 1: *Heuristic research model used to analyse 'becoming' in professional identity and learning processes (Salling Olesen, 2007)*



The three circles in the model represent relatively independent dynamics but are nevertheless in relational exchange with one another. The triangle illustrates the research areas of relevance for this article. The items listed in the circles but outside the triangle are beyond the scope of this article but will be touched upon briefly as they are pertinent to my research field but can also be understood as widespread structures in society that must therefore be recognised and described on their own terms (Salling Olesen, 2006).

Individual life history, placed in the top circle, represents the individual or non-traditional student's unique life history, which comprises, for instance, childhood memories, school experiences, relationships and work. The life history is not the focus in and of itself, but is used as an aspect of subjectivity to reveal the complexity of subjective processes. As the items in the centre of the triangle illustrate, individual subjectivity is formed by and as the interplay between the individual (and his or her life history) and social and societal (historic) factors in the broadest sense. The circle on the left involves the societal division of labour, which consists of the educational institution, tasks involved in being a student, fellow students and the teachers. The circle on the right represents scientific institutions or the theory base of the research approach, e.g. specific knowledge, the methodological approach and analytic model. This heuristic model shows how the various dimensions dialectically interplay with one another.

Becoming through the consciousness of everyday life

Becoming must be seen as the subject's practices, an amalgamation of her or his defences (mechanisms), identification processes, experiences and learning processes in everyday life, and can be interpreted as a concrete mediation between the three dimensions (circles), especially within the triangle (figure 1). I draw on an important theoretical concept, called consciousness of everyday life, in relation to the individual subjective process of becoming that involves the editing of the complexities of everyday life The consciousness of everyday life relates to the learning, practices and ways, via defences, that subjects handle their lives, including the life of being a student but also of *becoming* a social pedagogue. German Professor Thomas Leithäuser's 1976 book *Formen des Alltagsbewusstsein* introduced a theoretical framework for

understanding the subjective dynamic of the consciousness. Drawing on the work of German psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer and French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre's classical analysis of historical changes of everyday life (Weber, 2003: 108), this framework shows that learning processes can be understood and analysed as something mediated by an individual's life history, culture and history. According to Leithäuser (1976), everyday life situations are flooded with impulses and demands. To prevent the individual from breaking down, individual and collective mechanisms ease various kinds of anxiety, fear and ambivalence by reducing the complexity of reality, which can be called, in other words, the subject's editing of daily life. Therefore, the subject's life must be seen as an array of experiences when adapting due to necessity. In this process of adaptation, suppressing and repressing socially illegitimate sensations and reactions is important but exhausting psychologically in different aspects of daily life (Weber, 2010).

Encountering non-routine phenomena or new contextual factors requires more than just solving cognitive issues as novelties, deviations and new demands involve particularly emotional and social change that may generate anxiety because of the overload of perceptions and information. This input may activate past experiences but also provoke future orientations, such as ideas about seeing oneself in a certain profession one day. The editing of reality may also activate imaginary/imagined meaning, becoming wishful thinking about how life should be (Leithäuser, 2012: 609). Editing the overload of perceptions that impact learning processes, i.e. what is accepted consciously and unconsciously, is essential. The consciousness of everyday life offers an important point, about how people need to edit their perception of life in order to be able to handle it.

Analytical approach

Before embarking on the analysis, I briefly describe the interview approach and the applied interpretation approach, which I call the Dubrovnik method as it involves reflecting with research peers and an ongoing process of developing interpretation methods.

In order to understand the interviewee's experiences and how they are brought to the surface and revitalised through new (mainly study)

experiences, I employed a semi-structured interview approach focusing on narration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 173) inspired by various life history approaches (West et al., 2007; Salling Olesen, 2013a & 2013b) and structured by an infinite number of themes but also left open to allow spontaneity and free association (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007: 36-39). The next section introduces the method of interpretation.

Dubrovnik method

I call the interpretation method used the Dubrovnik method because it was developed at the annual International Research Group for Psycho-Societal Analysis conference held in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Members of the group are researchers from Europe, especially Germany, the UK, Norway and Denmark. The group often analyses transcripts of group or individual research interviews using an approach based on Lorenzer's work, which proposes a tripartite scenic conceptualisation. Sallinge Olesen (2016) explains:

Lorenzer, in brief, draws on the hermeneutic methodology of psychoanalytic understanding, namely 'scenic understanding'. Lorenzer separates the methodological principles of psychoanalysis – simultaneous attention, free association, and the concepts of transfer and counter-transfer – from the clinical context of doctor-patient relationships, and transfers them to social and cultural interpretive practice.

The Dubrovnik method, structured on stages of questions, is an inherently hermeneutic approach. The stages involved in reading a text draw on different dimensions of experience: common sense understanding; immediate bodily reactions of comfort of discomfort; and the sensuous and dramatic patterns of group dynamics. The questions asked of the empirical material in the analysis of Amy, the non-traditional student, are:

1) What is said? What is the text about?
2) How is it said (About what?)?
3) Why is it said in this particular way?

These questions relate to different levels of understanding people's speech and communication. What is said corresponds to the

propositional meaning; how it is said corresponds to the meta-communicative meaning; how it is said about what relates to the pragmatic meaning. Finally, why it is said in a particular way addresses the intentional meaning. Question 3 can also be differentiated into the manifest intentions and the hidden and excluded intentions but also brings in the societal context.

The manifest might be read, but it is possible that the interviewee follows an unconscious strategy that can only be understood when we, as researchers, are aware of our feelings, such as irritation, confusion and shock (see Urwin, 2012), and wishes regarding our own transference and countertransference of reactions (Hollway & Froggett, 2012). The responses of the interviewee and researchers are a mirror of the unconscious scene (Hollway & Volmerg, 2013; Weber, 2001a). As Weber (1995: 132) points out, the researcher subject is not outside the process, on the contrary, the researcher in the process as well, which is why spontaneous provocations should not to be suppressed as an unprofessional disruption but rather seen as a source of critical reflection. Awareness of these aspects in the interpretation process is necessary and acknowledging them is not without challenges.

Analysis of specific non-traditional student

As presented in the introduction, my focus is on how subjects *become*, i.e. on how they take on a new professional identity dialectically formed by the interwoven psycho-societal dimensions. The empirical material comprises an interview with a non-traditional student, referred to as Amy, who was previously a farmer but is now in a social pedagogue degree program. The analysis, supported by excerpts from the interview, focuses on a single case study to illustrate my approach to the field and offers insight into one person's life history.

First, I present a summary of the portraits derived from my content analysis of the interview (narrative segments). This is followed by an analysis and short discussion of Amy's life history and her experiences of being a student, organised in significant themes referring to the past, present and future.

Portrait of Amy

Born in 1980, Amy is 34 years old at the time of the interview and in her fourth semester as a student in a social pedagogue degree program. She has two children. She grew up in mid-Zealand, Denmark and lived with her parents. Her father worked as a contractor, often driving tractors to and from building sites, and her mother worked as a childminder in private day care. Amy's maternal aunt and uncle are social pedagogues. When she was eight, her family moved into a new house and she started in a new school. When she was 12 she participated in school-sponsored internship on a farm. At age 16 she went to a boarding school that specialised in farming alongside traditional school subjects and graduated from here in the tenth grade. She applied many times for a job at the zoo but failed to get it every time.

After boarding school she went to the School of Agriculture in Roskilde, Denmark for three years and eight months. She got her diploma and became a farmer specialising in livestock. She got a job on a farm, where she was responsible for feeding the animals and managing and teaching new staff. While working on the farm, she completed leadership and economic management courses. After six years of employment, she had to quit due to severe acute respiratory problems and nose bleeds caused by an allergy. She did not want to take medicine and was unable to work in the stable for more than a few hours per day. She decided to change her career but had no idea what her new career should be. After participating in a work assessment program run by the local authorities, she quickly applied to a social pedagogue program, went through an individual assessment and was accepted, thus becoming a non-traditional student.

Career choices: Amy's motivation for choosing a social pedagogue program

The subjective motivations for pursuing further education are complex and manifold. In Amy's case, positive trajectories mainly characterise her learning processes during her school life and further education. In the interview, her positive path seems particularly related to her experiences and her ability to focus on any given task, whether for academic or practical reasons. She depicts how she adjusts to the given situation and requirements. There are some breaks in her narrative:

> […] not that it has to be a calling, working as a social pedagogue, I think. It's more… it' of course just paid work, but it's too… that you have the kind of excitement and motivation for it … you see, I … it might be silly, but I'm that kind of a person, as … no matter where I find myself, I adjust.

Even though she describes her choice to study to become a social pedagogue, she does not articulate herself as an agent; the choice appears to have been due to her allergy, i.e. something outside herself. She explains, "The allergy is the reason why I had to change professions, not me". Her narrative about the reason for studying is contradictory. She is split, on the one hand, between herself as a pragmatic agent choosing her own career and, on the other, the allergy, not her, turning away from farming. Reflecting on her present situation, Amy seems to attach importance, and perhaps regret, to her experience of leaving her job as a farmer and being a student, i.e. to *becoming* a social pedagogue.

Acquiring new competences: Pigs or children, same-same?

The analysis of Amy's motivation for studying to become a social pedagogue is ambiguous, as her narrative about working with children illustrates:

> […] I was forced to choose something different. Then, I thought about the little pigs, then the little children … I know, it might sound a bit … but I nevertheless think … well, I had so many things up and running, then I thought that the social pedagogue profession, it's also about love and care […] I don't care whether it is someone with two or four legs because when it comes down to it, it's sort of the same (thing).

Amy draws on her experiences and vocabulary (discourses) related to her former profession as a farmer, using them to describe the situations and problems social pedagogues encounter. She even goes as far as to compare children with pigs because both need someone to care for them. Indeed children and animals both need care, but why is this notion of care essential for Amy to express? *Why is it said in this particular way?* This is a way of dealing with the adaptation of knowledge and skills, from one practice to another, a way of finding a pathway to become competent by applying the well-known language of the profession. At

the same time, this strategy may function to suppress anxiety about feeling incompetent and insecure in an academic profession, as she calls it. Comparing children with animals, however, falls outside the legitimate norms of the pedagogic profession, which she is aware of. Her use of this somewhat unsuitable comparison may therefore indicate feelings of aggression and ambivalence. Amy's insistence corresponds with or symbolically illustrates her ambivalent emotions towards the fact that she had to leave the farming profession and, at present, has to acquire new skills and knowledge about being a social pedagogue, which she nevertheless thinks is interesting and believes holds future opportunities.

As for the notion of *becoming*, i.e. becoming competent, competences in a life historical and psycho-societal perspective must be seen primarily as subjective capabilities developed through life historical experiences, which are a result of societal learning processes. These experiences become individual prerequisites for various kinds of new learning (Salling Olesen, 2013a). In this perspective, Amy's experience with farming (her training) provides her, for example, with perspectives on what it means to be a student and an approach to studying, which in some cases either fits or clashes with the social pedagogue program. This is a complex matter; her professional skills may be viewed not only as an advantage but also as an obstacle by other students perhaps leading to resistance, which might be a learning process but will not always lead to the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills and competences.

Experiences and re-configuration: Amy's life history learning processes and her present situation

Amy recalls or reframes certain situations in her new program by relating them to experiences in her past, her childhood. This approach is an example of *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, and involves re-activating former experiences in a new life situation, evoking new understandings of the past as well as actions in the present (and future). Becker-Schmidt (1982) draws on this term from Freud's description of the Oedipal phase in puberty. Freud sees what occurs as development, while Becker-Schmidt defines it as social learning (Weber, 1995).

Amy's narrative about how she dealt with changing to another school as a child describes how she became quieter, nerdier, playing chess at the library and talking with the librarian. The world of books

became highly important and she interacted less frequently with her classmates socially. The library and talking with the librarian became a safe zone, where her anxiety was suppressed and academic interests simultaneously awakened. The process of being a new student, living in a new house and in a new town – her parents' wish, not hers – led her to the library, which also became a refuge for her when she gave up being a farmer due to allergies to begin studying as social pedagogue. Amy explains:

> […] then there are some breaks. I often go to the library together with somebody. I have a very good relationship with the librarian there and I try to somehow gain knowledge by doing that. Then, back to the classroom, where you have to present something and do a PowerPoint … I really like the times when we have to present our work or have a debate because I think it's very, very important that we don't isolate ourselves.

Her experience in the present recalls former experiences, with certain rituals and similar actions repeated, which provides insight into how Amy experiences studying and dealing with the task of being a student. The library is and has been a pleasant and safe place to go to, but the difference between today and previously is that she wants to interact and discuss with her classmates rather than the librarian. This reflection on the past and the present might reactivate former understandings of her childhood, for example, causing her to realise that perhaps it was not as lonely as she once believed. The above quotation also demonstrates that she has developed new interests by connecting with fellow students in specific work situations. At one point, she also discusses how her work as a farmer changed her behaviour and improved her attitude toward social relations. Amy's narrative demonstrates that subjectivity and capacities developed through the life history of the individual have a significant influence on the conditions for re-configuration of knowledge and skills and for further learning.

Envy and aggression: Critique of salad-days peers

From the viewpoint of being a student in the social pedagogue program, Amy describes her formal peers as being in their salad days, use of this Shakespearean idiomatic expression reflecting her view of them as inexperience and as behaving immaturely. She finds herself in

another position and sees herself as highly competent, possessing a sense of superiority and a degree of omnipotence. The following excerpt illustrates her psychological position of feeling great or unlimited power:

> I was quite amazed at how incredibly young people studying pedagogy are. Well, I might be biased; I just thought they would be a bit older. Well, I thought they might have had some more vocational experience, been out travelling or… […] suddenly I find myself side by side with somebody who just finished their upper secondary education and has never even ever taken care of children or anything. I thought, Oh my God, they're totally in their salad-days […] But I think that some of them are also fairly sharp … who can just do anything.

Due to anxiety and as a defence (mechanism), Amy constructs her peers and younger fellow students from a position of superiority. She sees them not only as less able but as incompetent in terms of taking care of children, which is what the program is about. Her attitude towards them is somewhat aggressive. This portrayal corresponds with the rhetoric and approach familiar to her from the School of Agriculture as well as her farm internship, where 'they certainly are less competent and do not to ask any questions" about ethics and practice. Her discourse not only reduces her fellow social pedagogue students to employees but also reproduces clichés in a tone reminiscent of management talking down to a subordinate. Amy mimics the hierarchy familiar to her from farming. Simplification is a common response when confronted with the complex, multifarious experiences of everyday life, as Leithäuser and Volmerg's (1994) notion of the consciousness of everyday life suggests (Weber, 2010: 11).

In the excerpt above, Amy not only criticises and reacts hostilely towards her peers, but she also praises their knowledge and skills considering they mostly only have an upper secondary education diploma. She recognises that they have something that she does not, which is also evident in other social situations. Her ambivalence towards her peers gives her permission to tell them off or to tell them what to do, but she also needs them as they possess the academic wisdom essential to group work. Ambivalence represents a conflict, and as defined by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Ferenczi, it is not to be understood from the perspective of the classical confrontation between libido and thanatos,

but instead as an inner vacillation deriving from the contradictory qualities of reality (Weber, 2010).

Amy's previously mentioned outburst of aggression (or hostility; see Schorn, 2003) also signifies regression stemming from envy, which is a powerful, even destructive, emotion that arises when people are compared to each other. Unconscious envy is a primitive sensation involving a sense of privation and powerlessness that compels individuals to spoil the success or enjoyment of others (Andersson, 2005: 247). Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's (1984) later writings and theory on envy view its expression as the subject's desire to destroy anything good, beautiful or valuable that is beyond the subject's grasp (Andkjær Olsen, 2002). In this article, the subject's response to unconscious envy is more subtle, working as a psycho-societal process deriving from Amy's feelings of inferiority as a student with the lowest academic skills, activating tension between her and her fellow students, who she calls salad-days peers. This regressive action is fuelled by envy, but is also quite restrained. Feelings of envy are exacerbated by the fact that students compare their work and marks. According to Schorn (2003), identifying envy is difficult because it is often masked.

Relations and domination: The role as the organiser

Amy takes on the role of organiser in group work, giving her the responsibility of making sure that everybody does their agreed tasks and duties and that deadlines are met. When she talks about this role, she refers to her former job as the head of feeding on the farm:

> Because I had to be the leader, you see? I had the responsibility and then I think, nobody helped me or was my safety net, because of that I have expectations toward myself and others, and tell people what I want them to do [...] I expect people to bring their computer every time, and I expect them to have done the reading. People have to actively participate and I also expect them to call and let us know ahead of time if they're sick or send a text or something, and not five minutes after.

On the one hand, her management style compensates for her less developed academic skills and represents a means of being in control. Amy shows her (e.g. academic) vulnerability and lack of experience in

the discipline of academic writing when she states: "[...] The first paper we had to write was three pages or so, and it had to be done like this and like that, I thought, Oh God ... a paper footer, what the heck's that, huh?" On the other hand, she draws on her experiences from feeding the animals on the farm, where being late was not an option, rules and regulations regarding particular farm tasks appropriately and strictly adhered to. In this respect, she reproduces familiar ways of handling a given task in the farming industry, but concentrating on the structure and formal rules may serve as a crutch, possibly obscuring her focus on the substance and content of her study program and interpersonal relationships, which she finds difficult. Amy's relationship to her fellow students is more a matter of work roles as she does not highlight socialising further with her fellow students. Thus Amy's reliance on the rules can be viewed from a dual perspective as either transfer or as a container of anxiety, but perhaps most correctly as a combination of the two.

Imagining the future imaginations: Wishes and expectations about becoming a social pedagogue

Amy's future wishes and expectations are to combine her vocational farmer training with her social pedagogue degree. She sees the latter as a low status profession, commenting: "It's low paid and the present situation is not good at all", but she is nevertheless optimistic about finding a job. Since being a social pedagogue requires a bachelor degree and she has farm training, she can apply for a job at the School of Agriculture as a teacher, which she hopes to do. Amy states:

> But I think if I'm able to combine my social pedagogue degree with my agriculture and farm training, that if it's not possible to find any work at a day care centre, then I could work at a technical school, for example, or at a school of agriculture. Then I could become one of those lively teachers. Well, that's actually an option. I've thought about that a great deal, that could be a ... one ... well, a step stone.

In the process of becoming, Amy reflects on her professional life, stimulating thoughts about possible future paths. She is uncertain that she will be able to get a job, especially if she fails some subjects, or worse, does not get her social pedagogue degree. To diminish the various

feelings of anxiety that the vagueness of her future causes, she simplifies reality. From Leithäuser's (2012) perspective of the consciousness of everyday life, Amy is editing reality to lessen the feelings of doubt, activating an imagined meaning – a dream – of becoming a lively teacher with a synthesised profession. She wants to become as happy and competent as she recalls being as a farmer. The acquisition of a new professional identity simultaneously carries the old identity but in the process of *becoming*, this will change in the coming future.

Conclusion

The qualitative research method employed in this article conceptualises identity change and learning as moments in individual life courses and subjective life experiences. An applied life-history-based psycho-societal approach also formed the foundation for the analysis. This method offered a rich, detailed, more complex and, arguably, more humane view of the human subject, without reducing the subject to merely a social determinant. These results thus reflect the aim that by capturing something of the complexity of our subjects, we offer something true about them (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007:156).

With this aim in mind, the goal of this article was to apply a psycho-societal approach to illustrate how a farmer *becomes* a social pedagogue. Analysing the case of a non-traditional student, Amy, as an individual subject primarily shows that the career change of *becoming* a social pedagogue when already equipped with the professional identity of farmer is challenging, provoking feelings of defensiveness and ambivalence. The outcome of her process uncovered by the analysis is manifold as Amy's life experiences, emotional engagement and interactions play a significant role in *becoming*.

The analysis contains examples of instabilities in the Amy's text that illustrate feelings of ambivalence toward her fellow students. She is dependent on their academic skills, for example, regarding group work and she thinks that some of them are talented but she simultaneously labels them as immature and not suitable as either students or future social pedagogues. The manner in which Amy operates linguistically varies. For example, she employs the discourse she acquired as a farmer as a useful tool to aid in learning the professional skills needed to be a social pedagogue, using language that is familiar to her, i.e. that of a farmer, also has a strong attraction.

Amy's idea of a combined profession or occupation as a teacher at the School of Agriculture is a result of dwelling not only on her former job as a farmer but also the anxiety she projects onto what a positive future might bring. She reacts self-protectively and uses an identity defence. Although the acquisition process is an ambivalent one, where she simultaneously wishes to become a social pedagogue and yet acts against her own best interests by holding onto her farmer identity, she nonetheless demonstrates that she has the ability to combine competences and to re-activate and re-configure knowledge and skills in a new context.

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Endnote

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The Meanings of Learning as Described by Polish Migrant Bloggers

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This paper addresses the meanings given to learning by Polish migrant bloggers. It presents the result of an analysis of ten blogs, written by Poles living abroad. The blogs under analysis were chosen on the basis of random sample. The analysed material was categorised by recurring themes, which included: learning in Poland, language acquisition, formal education, learning about the new culture, discovering the social norms of the host society and seeing immigration as an all-round learning experience. Four types of meanings given by authors were distinguished: migration as learning experience, learning as effort which deserves a reward, learning as a change, and learning as adapting to multiculturalism. The meanings were analysed according to the principles of critical discourse analysis. The paper discusses how the meanings given by authors are linked to a broad socio-cultural context. It analyses also the impact of learning into identity creation processes.

Keywords: *migration, Internet blogs, learning, discourse analysis*

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the meaning of learning for Polish migrant bloggers. The topic of learning among Polish migrants has been the subject of my research since early 2015. As part of this line of enquiry, I have been analysing the process of learning as experienced by various groups of migrants, expats and foreign students living in Poland. In an effort to create a multidimensional image of learning in a transnational environment, I decided to study the process in which Poles living abroad acquire new knowledge.

Even though Poland still lacks a coherent strategy for integrating migrants and the overall social sentiment suggests that Poles are not open to cultural diversity (Leszczyński, 2015), Polish society is increasingly affected by migration. Poland more and more often is becoming a target destination for migrants from all around the world, who often relocate with their families. .

Migration is also an experience shared by Poles. For quite some time now, Poland has seen Polish citizens migrate in search for better jobs. According to the Polish Statistical Office in 2013 almost 2 196 000 Poles were living abroad, mostly in United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland (GUS, 2014, p. 2). Many of them have settled and integrated into local communities. They learn the language of the host country, begin their vocational education and training, or even earn university degrees (Pietrzak, 2015).

The second area important in the context of my study is new media, which have a substantial impact on everyday life of migrants, providing them with means of immediate communication with families at home and a tool for networking and exchanging information. Instant messaging computer programmes and smartphone apps keep migrants constantly in touch with their friends and families in Poland – they can even use the same media or watch the same TV shows. Consequently, the symbolic distance between the country of origin and the host country has become smaller. Media and messaging clients are an important tool for maintaining contact with domestic culture, but can also inhibit integration, as observed by Mikiewicz and Sadownik (2014), who studied Polish migrants in Nottingham. In their research, they described people who spent several hours a day communicating with their friends

in Poland via Skype. While such behaviour reinforces their emotional and intellectual ties to the homeland, it also decreases their ability to integrate and adapt culturally.

Blogs are tools migrants use to communicate with their loved ones at home, but also a way to share their thoughts with a new group of readers. As Chan puts it, the internet helps migrants to cultivate the sense of cultural belonging (Chan, 2005, p. 339). Migrant bloggers mostly document the process of adapting to new circumstances, focusing on daily experiences, local culture and tourism motivated by the willingness to learn more about their new home. Blogging in the native tongue is also a means for maintaining contact with the country of origin, as published texts are addressed mainly to fellow countrymen, with migrant Poles writing mainly to and for other Poles.

Blogs are also an interesting subject of study in terms of adult learning. They have been perceived as, from the one hand, a form of communication and expression, and, from the other, as learning technologies supporting continuing education by adults (Mason, 2006). However blogs, aimed at sharing personal views and gaining feedback from readers, may be also considered as social and community based learning environments, enabling individual as well as collective reflection on life experiences.

Understood in terms of textual record, blogs reflect the mechanism of generating experiences in the context of life long learning. Educational experience is perceived here as cultural and social text (Jurgiel, 2013, p. 17). It's educational dimension is thus not constant, and reveals in particular social practices. As Jurgiel puts it, the acquired experiences become significant when it is given a meaning.. Personal experience, understood as result of interaction with a social world, and as a result of the constructed subjectivity, becomes a cultural and social phenomenon. In this approach an adult is perceived as a learning subject constantly experiencing learning situations, and, simultaneously, a narrator of one's own life, learning and experiencing the world in a particular way (Jurgiel, 2013). Blogs written by adults may be interpreted, then, as narratives, reflecting these processes.

In this article, I examine the meaning that adult Polish migrants assign

to learning. I consider both their past learning experiences from Poland and the learning process occurring in new cultural circumstances

Literature Review

As Benson et al show, migration may be a factor influencing a decision to learn (Benson et al., 2010). The existing research on migration and learning focus either on linguistic perspective (Borland, 1983), or, more commonly, on school or career paths of migrants (Yamauchi, 2004; Furstenau, 2005; Williams & Balaz, 2005; Zieli□ska, 2013), or as a means of identifying transnational migrants (Song, 2010). A growing body of research is devoted to cultural ways of learning (Guttierez & Rogoff, 2003), especially in relation to international students (Spizzica, 1997; Wong, 2004), and second language acquisition (Spolsky, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001; Yılmaz & Schmid, 2015).

Blogs are the subject matter of several studies, first and foremost in the areas of communication studies, sociology, linguistics and health studies. Most frequently, blogs are treated as an element of a dynamic Internet environment (Herring et al., 2004; Trammell et al., 2006) or a communication tool (Ulidis, 2013). Attention is paid to blogging as a domain of public relations professionals (Dearstyne, 2005; Kent 2007). Recent research also focuses on it’s impact on social participation and citizenship (Van De Donk et al., 2004; Burgess et at., 2006; McShane, 2011; Bessant, 2014), educational and pedagogical aspects of social media (Ball & Junemann, 2012), as well as on-line interactions as social practice (Davis, 2007). A study by Chan (2005) was devoted to diasporic discourse of nationalism in on-line forums .

The study of the blogosphere may also focus on reconstructions of identity models expressed through blogs (Liu, 2010; Liu, 2014), as well as on social roles (Morrison, 2010). Another group of researchers focus on health blogs. In this category, blogs of persons with eating disorders have been the subject of especially extensive inquiries (Wronka & Jezierska-Kazberuk, 2011; Tong et al., 2013; Yeshua-Katz & Martins, 2013; Gies & Martino, 2014).

Finally, a large body of literature regarding adult learning as well as educational experiences of adults, should be mentioned in this context. The existing research focus on increasing participation and facilitating

adult learning (Cross, 1981), critical theories of adult learning (Merizow, 1981), and, also, on adult learners' experience in formal education system (Merrill, 1999; Jurgiel, 2013), and the phenomenon of life long learning (Olsen, 2001). Research perceiving adults as agents in the context of one's own learning (Illeris, 2006; Jurgiel, 2013; Popow, 2015) seems of particular importance in the context of my study.

Research methodology

The blogs I analysed focused on describing the author's world and were meant to be read by a broad audience. Aimee Morrison (2010) calls those kind of blogs real-time autobiographies. Such blogs are dominated by spontaneous accounts, which make them a valuable source of immediate insight into the minds and feelings of their authors.

In the case of studies focusing on the immigrants' learning experience, personal blogs document changing contexts, circumstances and motivations, allowing us to observe how the learning experience evolved over time. That is the main difference between them and descriptive blogs, whose authors often rationalise, make generalisations or adopt a viewpoint of an independent observer. Personal blogs are an interesting subject matter precisely because they document the changing approach to everyday experiences.

In my study, having assumed that the blog is a reflection of the individual's image of the world, I based my analysis on the qualitative approach.

First, on the basis of indications of search engines in blogging services, I selected a hundred available blogs, authored by immigrants who left Poland and remained abroad while publishing their contributions, and who planned to stay out of the country for longer periods of time or indefinitely. I assumed that the authors are making a conscious decision to share their content with a varied target audience, which is an approach often used in media analysis, including the study of Internet communications. My research was therefore based solely on public information, and the analysis does not extend to other aspects of life described in the blogs. All of the blogs have been regularly updated and remain active during the writing of this article. I translated all the quoted passages as all the blogs were originally written in Polish,.

Next, on the basis of a random sample, I chose ten blogs. I looked for accounts directly or indirectly linked to learning. I then categorised them by recurring themes, which included: learning in Poland, language acquisition, formal education (schools, universities and internships), learning about the new culture, discovering the social norms of the host society and seeing immigration as an all-round learning experience. This division allowed me to determine the meanings that migrant bloggers assign to learning in a new environment, which were then subjected to a discourse analysis. The analysis was aimed at reconstructing meanings given to learning, as well as analysing it in broad socio-cultural context (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). I am especially guided by previous research on discourse and learning processes (Gee&Green, 1998; Evans, 2001).

I use the term discourse analysis to refer to factors framing the meanings given to learning. Moreover I distinguish the terms 'discourse analysis', which I identify with description, and 'critical discourse analysis', which consists of "description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough, 2001:109). The aim of my paper is to reconstruct and analyse the meanings, however I will not focus on socio-political interpretation of the distinguished discourses as it is done in critical discourse analysis.

Before presenting the results of my analysis, few details about authors of the analysed blogs should be given. They were all young adults, staying abroad from five up to sixteen years. Most of them emigrated to United Kingdom, and Ireland; one person lived in France and one in the United States of America. In Poland they lived in diverse environments, including, both, big cities and villages. They were all well educated; eight persons had obtained a university degree in Poland. Eight out of ten authors were females.

In the next part of this article, I focus on analysing the meanings given to learning.

Results

Emigration as a learning experience

When writing about learning, bloggers devote the most time and attention to the migration in and of itself, calling it a learning experience or even a life-changing event:

> Emigration made me who I am – a young person who knows what she wants from life. It helped me understand what I want and that nothing is impossible. I learnt that there is no such thing as a weird idea for life. Only people are weird – if they are scared.
>
> *sadeemka.blog.pl/78-pamietniki-z-emigracji-ii/*

Similarly it is perceived by a blogger living in France:

> But emigration is a good school of life. And, as every good school, it kicks your ass, but also teaches you humility and optimism
>
> *http://modanabio.com/emigrantow-pisze-bloga/#*

The expression "a school of life" is repeated frequently, indicating that living alone in a new place prepares for adulthood. The authors often indicate that they learnt to see the bright, teaching, side of emigration, which is the biggest advantage of their experience.

Another female migrant, currently living in France, reflects upon the assertion, that some people view emigration as a defeat. She argues that, quite the contrary, it is the migrants who should be seen as successful:

> Are those who left losers? Of course not. They are very successful – they've already achieved success – they left. There, behind the new frontiers, I see real opportunities (...). How is it possible that a warehouse worker can be a teacher in another country? Realistically speaking, that happens when the state doesn't discriminate against you, and Poles love discriminating more than anyone.
>
> *mustasza.blog.pl/2014/12/03/jestes-emigrantem-jestes-nieudacznikiem/*

In the quoted passage, the author protests against a stereotype of an migrant who fled Poland because they could not succeed in Poland. Loaded with emotions, the ironic image of Poland as a land of opportunity should be read as a vocal rejection of stereotypes. According to the author, Poland is a country where failure is caused by discrimination. It is difficult to determine what she means exactly by discrimination, but the use of this term is not crucial to the text. What is important, however, is her image of Poland – a country where migrants could not succeed. This opinion is one of many such voices, claiming that in Poland honest work goes unrewarded.

Also learning is conceptualised as effort that should be rewarded. The section below will focus on reconstructing this concept.

Learning as effort which deserves a reward

All bloggers whose texts I analysed obtained education in Poland, sometimes even at tertiary level. In fact, eight out of ten authors were university graduates.

The issue of studying, especially in tertiary institutions, is most often explored by authors who emigrated for economic reasons. The accounts of bloggers who chose other European Union member countries, in particular the United Kingdom and Ireland, are particularly distinctive. Members of this group were motivated by the belief that they would not be able to find well paid, satisfactory employment in Poland. This phenomenon is best illustrated the blog of a young doctor who left in search of better employment opportunities and professional advancement. Having failed to secure a specialist residency spot, this blogger decided to emigrate as he felt that Poland denied him access to personal growth. In his opinion, the state – not the individual – is to blame:

> Poland denied me the right to study to become a professional or to continue my university education.
>
> *lekarz-emigrant.blogspot.com/2013_12_01_archive*

The passage above is an example of a trope found relatively frequently in the analysed material – that of the author feeling rejected by Poland. Poland is often conceptualised as a person who left the blogger with

no choice – they simply had to leave their homes to find suitable employment. Consequently, Poland is seen as wasteful, mismanaging the funds and efforts that go into education:

> Why is it that first they put taxpayer's money into free education during a six year university tour, and then suddenly all you are good for is the dole.
>
> *lekarz-emigrant.blogspot.com/2013_12_01_archive*

A female blogger living in France shares this view:

> Universities, institutes of technology, tertiary schools – so much to choose from, all fine words. Until you graduate, become unemployed and find yourself manning the supermarket cash register.
>
> *mustasza.blog.pl/page/10*

The resentment about the domestic situation, where work is hard to come by and the effort put into education is not rewarded, causes the author to have an extremely negative image of education in Poland. In strong words, she criticises the Polish system of education, suggesting that both the teachers and the students are idiots, and accusing the higher education system of not taking people seriously.

Polish wastefulness is often contrasted with the entrepreneurial spirit of the host country. Migrant bloggers admire good organisational cultures of their new homes and stress the fact that learning is an activity that wins recognition. Furthermore, education and social utility may also be an obligation, which is seen as big victory for the system:

> The government apparently thinks that they would rather help you get an education than see you spend your life on the dole because you didn't get any (...). They're basically saying – go get a trade, and everyone will be better off!
>
> *sadeemka.blog.pl/34-edukacja-dla-doroslych-w-uk/*

In the excerpt, the different work and study model is portrayed as belonging to a separate culture. According to the author, the British organisational culture

is more advanced than the Polish, which translates into the host country's higher economic standing. At the same time, this model solves the problem of unemployment, which was one of the main reasons many economic migrants left Poland.

In the host country, migrant bloggers are not above doing jobs below their qualifications, even though they have put substantial effort into getting an education. This behaviour is justified by the remuneration they receive for working menial jobs, which, contrary to the Polish experience, may be also seen as an opportunity to learn:

> My first job in the UK? Cleaning toilets at a train station... I'm not complaining, because it taught me an important lesson. It shaped me – now I can appreciate what I have. It showed me that sooner or later hard work pays. All you need to do is be patient.
>
> *a-na-obczyznie.blog.onet.pl/nienarzekam-staram-sie/*

The author describes her unglamorous job as a formative experience, and therefore a learning opportunity. Working below qualifications for fair wages may also be construed as an appropriate occupation for someone with a university degree:

> Hard work, like any other. Nothing a graduate can't handle. Especially a starving one. You can eat at the restaurant. You can pay the rent, and save some money for training, or buy a book.
>
> *szeptywmetrze.blogspot.com/2013/05/emigranckie-salto-morale.html*

Other people's refusal to acknowledge the effort that goes into menial jobs is seen as jealousy or envy, leading to a sense of lowered self-esteem. Another passage, this time from the blog emigracyjny.wordpress.com, explores the issue of brain drain caused by economic migration:

> Polish migration is not a problem because several million people fled the country. It is a problem because those people were the elite, and now they've found peace in working below their qualifications. They put their dreams aside and have every intention to live and die anywhere but in Poland. And they are not

> going back. Not even joking about going back. ....
>
> *emigracyjny.wordpress.com/2014/03/17/listy-z-emigracji*

High qualifications earned by the migrant elite thanks to education are portrayed as something that has to be left behind, 'put aside', as the author put it. The hard work put into learning in Poland is rewarded with an unattractive job. Even the cost of 'putting dreams aside' proves to be relatively low.

Learning may also help migrants improve their standing in the host country. Some bloggers stress that taking advantage of the available educational opportunities is worth their while. Even when involving some sort of risk, for instance taking out a student loan, learning is seen as an chance to improve qualifications and gain access to better employment opportunities in the future. Contrary to the Polish education system, learning in the host country is considered worth the effort:

> I think getting involved and trying this thing out would be worth my while, especially since it can be done either free of charge or for peanuts. Either way, I think it's worth a try.
>
> *sadeemka.blog.pl/34-edukacja-dla-doroslych-w-uk/*

Working hard to just earn a living in the host country, immigrants see free training as an opportunity, which – with all its advantages and disadvantages – is more than worth the risk.

Learning as a change

The authors of the analysed blogs write extensively about familiarising themselves with the new culture. Most of them started their blogs early in the migration process, reporting their impressions as they happened or reconstructing events and experiences that were fairly recent. They describe first meetings with co-workers, as well as with people met on the street. First comments are devoted into cultural differences in everyday life. In either case, migrants learn about the new culture and the world around them on a daily basis.

Having to adapt to a new reality, migrants see how the culture of their daily lives changes, changing them in the process. One female blogger living in the United Kingdom reconstructs the process, depicting the way in which migrant behaviour evolves in time. At first, the process is quite gradual:

> The language changes even faster. After a year or so abroad you'll start to incorporate new foreign words into conversations with fellow countrymen.
>
> *a-na-obczyznie.blog.onet.pl/ponglish-czyli-wspolczesne-neologizmy-emigranta/*

The author tackles the issue of language which often is perceived as the key requirement of adapting to the new culture (Berry, 1997). In the analysed text, the language is an indicator that the immigrant is becoming a citizen of the host country, and no longer identifies as someone from Poland:

> In time, you will start using more and more loanwords. Soon you'll need a moment to explain something to your family in Poland. The day when you start translating from English into Polish instead of using Polish automatically will be the day you've seen it all.
>
> *a-na-obczyznie.blog.onet.pl/ponglish-czyli-wspolczesne-neologizmy-emigranta/*

According to some authors, becoming proficient in language and culture of the host country is a guarantee of a good life. At the same time, those skills can have a broader meaning and be connected to a change of identity. This gives rise to a new state of being, an identity that is 'in between', typical of people involved in global mobility events (Mamzer, 2003).

At the same time, the authors have a strong sense of Polish national identity. This is true especially for bloggers writing from the United Kingdom or Ireland, the two countries where Polish migrants represent a large, visible group. Consequently, such authors often invoke the idea of a national bond, frequently using the collective form "we, the Polish people".

Interestingly, their opinion about their compatriots is not always positive, with the behaviour of other Polish migrants attracting considerable criticism. Some authors harbour grudges against Poles who are not familiar with the host country's culture, for instance writing about people who spend years abroad without making the effort to learn the language of their new home. Others feel burdened by negative stereotypes about Poles, but feel some of them are justified. They feel ashamed of Poles who are incapable of changing bad habits (such as drunkenness) or unwilling to modify their behaviour to better fit the new living environment. They see it as a personal failure to adapt, unsuccessful education or aversion to learning.

Learning – understood as a change – is at the centre of the next category I intend to discuss, especially since tackling multiculturalism is a crucial part of adapting oneself to living in countries more ethnically diverse than Poland.

Learning as adapting to multiculturalism

Polish migrant bloggers often write about living in a multicultural society. Having left the country, some of them find themselves facing cultural and ethnic diversity for the first time in their lives. As Poland is still relatively ethnically homogeneous, some of the authors whose writing I analysed had to learn to live in a diverse society. The bloggers stress that immigration has taught them tolerance for ethnic and national diversity and different behaviours. This can be illustrated by the excerpt below, in which one author explains what emigration gave her:

> I won't turn my back on people just because they look one way or another or dress funny, as that might cost me good friends, even though couple of years ago I would probably ignore them based on their looks alone.
>
> *a-na-obczyznie.blog.onet.pl/szkola-zwana-emigracja/*

The author writes about how her behaviour changed in response to the migration experience. Because she became more open towards persons different than herself, she sees this newly acquired quality as a skill learnt while living in a new country. The authors often explore this issue in contrast to the concept of 'Polish mentality', which in their opinion is

synonymous with low tolerance, bigotry or stereotypical thinking.

Limitations

It is important to remember that blog analysis has its limits, attributable chiefly to the fact that the Internet is a space for both expression and creation. This makes blogs different from traditional memoirs. As a researcher I had no means of meeting the authors in the real world. Consequently in my analysis, I sought to reconstruct solely the meanings bloggers attach to learning, that were expressed in the blogs.

As far as methodology is concerned, I recognise limitations of discourse analysis, related primarily to possibilities of various interpretation of the given data. However, the qualitative approach, implemented in my study, percieves subjectivity as an integral part of the research process.

It should be also stressed that the authors of the blogs I studied live and learn in different areas and cultural contexts, which may affect their understanding of the learning process. However, in this article I assume that they all originate from the same cultural circle, and therefore underwent similar socialisation and enculturation. All analysed authors were born and raised in Poland, with Polish being their native tongue.

Moreover it should be mentioned that authors are homogeneous group. Most of them were in similar age, between 25 and 40 years old, using similar learning strategies. It should be also stated that, due to relatively high ITC competencies (Tondeur et al. 2010), young educated adults are more likely to use the Internet as a mean of self-expression than older generations of adults. For that reason the biggest limitation of the presented study is that it does not cover learning experiences of older adults.

Discussion

It seems that learning, one of the most common topics of pedagogical analysis, may be of key importance to the study of adult migration. Faced with a new reality, adult migrants have to acquire a number of new skills to find their place and survive in the host country. Paul Scheffer remarks that “the price of staying is that you take the trouble to learn. Learning and spurning are two quite different things” (Scheffer 2010, 15). Consequently, the migrant’s decision to start the learning

process is always a conscious one – one that relates to the choice to stay abroad. In other words, the migrant's dilemma is whether to make the effort and adapt to the changed environment or not. The analysed material reveals, that the authors want to learn, what may be related to their high cultural capital. Learning helps them also to built social capital in the host countries (Townsend, 2008).

As evidenced by this short analysis of blogs written by migrants, Poles abroad attach a wide variety of meanings to learning. The concepts reconstructed in this paper reveal a wide spectrum of attitudes to learning, which go from financially- to culturally-motivated. Moreover it seems that Poland is still the main reference point for how authors perceive learning.

The meanings given to learning, distinguished in my analysis, may be identified as biographical learning, understood as the "transformation of experience, knowledge and actions in the context of human life" (Alheit 2011, p. 7). First and foremost, the authors of analysed blogs see migration as a learning opportunity, which provides them with new skills and experience, but also helps them embrace new cultures, behaviours or diverse lifestyles. The bloggers represent migration as a school of life, a formative experience or even a rite of passage for marking the transition into a member of a multicultural, or even global, society. My analysis confirms that migration may be a factor, which enhances self-reflection (Nowicka, 2015).

Seeing how most bloggers emigrated chiefly due to economic reasons, it is no surprise that they often conceptualise learning as something that should be rewarded, with that notion especially popular among migrants with university degrees. However, what is important is that this reward does not have to be related to high status or prestige. The bloggers indicate primary the advantages of living in diverse multicultural environment.

For the analysed bloggers, learning in a new country is also a cultural experience. This should not come as a surprise, as migration, even within a single continent, may require lengthy acculturation, or even lead to culture shock. Furthermore, cultural diversity may be as much of a learning factor as new behaviours and the culture itself. This may be related to the idea of 'intercultural learning' (Thomas, 1993). In

this case, the purpose of learning consists in acquiring competences required to function in different cultures, as well as developing cultural awareness, including the knowledge of own culture (Thomas, 1993). It may be also interpreted as part of identity formation processes in a globalised world, in particular in relation to the active search for the Self and exploration of individual identity through contact with the Other (Cybal-Michalska 2006, p. 32). However, it is doubtful that the process of learning reconstructed in my analysis, may be assigned to what Rizvi (2009) describes as cosmopolitan learning, and which involves formation of critical consciousness. Although the authors reflect on their learning processes as well as their present situation as migrants, their critical reflection is limited to fragments of reality, and does not include intersectional perspective regrading their origin, gender, ethnicity, social position or other premises. In few cases the authors idealise receiving countries, looking critically exclusively on their past in Poland.

While some bloggers reflect on how little they understood of cultural diversity early in their stay, others simply reveal their initial lack of understanding by providing an ongoing account of their struggle to adapt. The fact that many of them go through this process may have something to do with how little exposure they had to cultural diversity before leaving Poland. The culture shocWk may also stem from a relatively homogeneous public discourse in Poland. Discourse analyses focusing on education and media in Poland reveal that migrant issues are sometimes marginalised or even pathologised (Zamojska, 2013).

It seems therefore that ‘learning as adapting to multiculturalism’ and ‘learning as a change’ are equally important in the context of identity processes. The analysis of available research on identity models articulated in the public and educational discourse in Poland suggests that normative models in terms of gender, social class, physical ability or national and ethnic roots as well as other premises, are strongly endorsed (Zamojska, 2013; Popow, 2015) In this context, discourse analysis allows to reconstruct the process of identity formation at the moment of transition within a more diverse societies. Moreover, through analysis of how learning is conceptualised, one could reconstruct an open catalogue of identities that became available to the individual thanks to the process of migration.

The emotional load, varying from resentment, feelings of abandonment, as well as anger at other Poles, indicates negative strategies in representing homeland. It may be assumed that Poland and Poles become the Other to Polish migrants. This may be interpreted as ambivalence, which is considered as central for migration experience (Naficy, 1993; Kivisto & Vecchia-Mikkola, 2013), resulting from negotiation of self-identification, which is a mechanism typical for transnational migrants (Golob, 2009). Learning may be though interpreted as gaining of new identity, but also as escape from the previously known models.

Conclusion

The reconstructed relation between conceptualizations of learning and identity formation processes, pose questions for more complex as well as critical analysis, especially in the context of inclusion and exclusion of particular identities. What identities become available for migrating Poles? And, simultaneously, what kind of identities appear due to arrival to Poland of migrants from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds? The questions seem to be fundamental for the further analysis of contemporary migration processes in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Emotional highs in adult experiential learning

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Despite knowing that positive emotional experiences tend to be beneficial for adult learning, our incomplete understanding of the emotional system rarely allows us to incorporate emotion adequately in real learning situations. The experience of emotional highs, as observed in adult experiential learning courses, has been selected as the phenomenon of the study. This paper is concerned with developing a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon by studying the lived experience of emotional highs. Hermeneutic phenomenology has been selected as a suitable approach. This approach examines the lived state of emotional highs as well as recognises how adult learners make sense of these experiences. The lived experiences of 15 Australian adult learners were examined. Learners participated in one of three 4–8 day adult experiential learning courses, including two Outward Bound courses. The courses were held half indoors and half outdoors. Learners reflected and made sense of their lived experience through surveys and semi-structured interviews. As a result, a sophisticated definition of emotional highs is proposed.

Keywords: *Experiential learning, adults, emotional highs, positive emotions, hermeneutic phenomenology*

Introduction

In early childhood, many perceive learning with great joy and excitement. Encountering their first learning experiences, children passionately talk about what they learned, demonstrating an intrinsic satisfaction to find things out. Becoming older however, many adults gradually seem to lose their sense of intrinsic excitement to engage with learning (Willis, 2007). Some explain this phenomenon in relation to the increasing responsibilities of becoming an adult; like work, family and social roles, and as a result, not having enough time and energy to pursue 'learning' (Lieb & Goodlad, 2005). Others claim it to be due to limited language, literacy or numeracy skills (Dymock, 2007).

In the literature, formal learning is commonly considered to be among the pivotal factors that assist in 'deforming' the understanding of what 'learning' is. An increasing number of scholars (e.g. Olson, 2009) argue that the contemporary notion of learning has become painfully disconnected from learners themselves. Learning has become something we must do. In the middle of the 20th century Einstein stated that "it is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry" (1949:17). Sadly, learners still face similar challenges and approach learning as something one must do. In an environment where learners are supposed to accurately demonstrate what they have learned through a single test or where there is little room to guide what is important to learn, it is rather challenging to engage someone with learning (Wolter-Gustavson, 2004). Olson (2009) warns that by continuing on this course, learning environments might soon reach the level where learners do things *only* for external reasons, numbing their internal curiosities and motivations. This study joins this discussion and considers approaches that attempt to shift from 'doing learning' to 'engaging with learning'.

Background

Learning from experience occurs in all human settings, from schools to workplaces, from research laboratories to the aisles of the local supermarket. It encompasses all life stages, from childhood and adolescence to middle and old age (Kolb, 1984). Beard & Wilson (2013) point out the ubiquitous availability of learning from experience. It is among the most fundamental means of learning available to everyone.

Experiential learning is understood differently by different people. Among the most common concepts are adventure learning, professional development training, corporate experiential learning, personal development, experience-based training and development, outdoors education or outdoor management development (Hayllar, 2000).

Engagement with experience, for instance, is regarded as crucial in experiential learning. According to Beard & Wilson, so-called experiential learning is “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (2013:26). The importance of engagement also comes across in other studies, ‘Learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level’ (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993:8).

In this study ‘experiential learning’ is understood as an individual and interpersonal experiencing process that deals with personal growth, development and self-actualisation issues. This understanding is similar to that described by an experiential learning group in a study by Weil & McGill (1989). According to the group, experiential learning focuses on change, particularly in terms of personal autonomy, self-fulfilment and interpersonal effectiveness.

According to Dewey (1938/1975), learning often is seen in association with an overwhelming focus on the cognitive side of learning and this has quite profoundly alienated learners from their affective selves. For some time emotions have been viewed as ‘non-intellectual’ feelings that are out of human control and may be detrimental to learning. Although this paradigm may still be present in some cases, the discourse on emotions in learning has gradually progressed and changed (e.g. Headrick, Renshaw, Davids, Pinder & Araújo, 2015).

Some studies (e.g. Artino, 2012; Kim & Pekrun, 2014) indicate that emotional dimensions have an important role to play in learning. They are considered among the pivotal themes in such learning theories as experiential learning (Jordi, 2011) or transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009). In fact, emotions are not only considered to have a significant effect on learning (Jarvis, 2006), but learning is not likely to happen in the absence of emotions (Damasio, 2000; Meyer & Turner, 2002).

Emotional dimensions support the foundation on which practical and conceptual modes of learning are based (Dirkx, 2001). According to Damasio (1994), pure thought untainted by emotion is less useful than commonly supposed. Cognitive actions, including reflection, should not be perceived solely as a feature of mind. Mind is deeply affected by emotions and, in fact, rational decisions are likely to be based on emotions. In other words, alienating emotions from cognitive aspects is, strictly speaking, impossible, as emotions are an integral part of thinking rationally.

Recognition and involvement of emotional experiences are commonly used to engage learners in adult experiential learning. These experiences are not only considered as crucial for the learning process, but emotions always refer to the self being in the world, providing a means for developing self-knowledge. Emotions are an integral part of how we interpret and make sense of the events in our lives (Dirkx, 2001).

Whilst the scholarly literature frequently attempts to discriminate between 'emotions', 'feelings', 'moods', 'sensations' and 'affect' in well-defined ways (e.g. Scherer, 2005), this process often involves a degree of rough reductionism that comes at the expense of the grey areas between these categories (Griffiths, 1995). These attempts fail to acknowledge that what we call 'emotions' and how we experience them, gain their meaning as part of a wider sociocultural frame. The mutability and intangible nature of 'the emotions', as well as their emergence from constantly changing social, cultural and historical contexts, implies that they are unlikely to be amenable to specific categorization (Lupton, 1998).

Emotions in this paper are understood in a simple way: as human experiences. Based on the work of Hochschild (2003/1983), emotions are approached as means that assist in understanding one's relationship-to-the-world. In this way rather than approaching emotions as a pre-existent response syndrome, they are seen as something that is unique to each individual. In this way the experience of emotion depends on how it is experienced and interpreted by the learner.

An increasing amount of studies dealing with emotional experiences are concerned with those moments that are perceived as positive. Disregarded for a long time, positive emotions have been researched as

being related to several benefits in learning; particularly in the last two decades. Among some of the benefits are engagement (Rowe, Fitness & Wood, 2015), safety (Cohen, 2006), being creative, pushing limits (Fredrickson, 2004), building social skills (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006) and interpersonal satisfaction (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013).

The variety of benefits positive emotions can bring to the learning environment and the limited amount of literature studying this area, indicate the necessity for further research and underpin the foundation of this study. Scholars in the area (e.g. Fredrickson, 1998; Kohn, 2004) assert that more studies on positive emotions are needed. This is not simply to even up the balance of knowledge between negative and positive emotions, but more critically, to guide application and interventions to improve learners' well-being and efficiency.

Research problems

The literature draws attention to some of the problems in the area of experiential learning. One of the major problems is related to the need to recognise the complexity of studying positive emotions in learning. Positive emotions appear to be far more complex phenomena than commonly assumed. Emerging literature, for instance, shows that positive emotions tend to be beneficial for the learning environment (e.g. Beard & Wilson, 2013; Fredrickson, 2013). Nevertheless, understanding of how these processes take place is limited and weakly explored. This is particularly important as learning environments, like experiential learning courses, can be vulnerable and emotional experiences are commonly used as triggers for reflection. Incomplete understanding of emotional experiences prevents us from integrating and dealing with positive emotions in learning settings.

More divergent research on positive emotions in learning is needed. Specifically, studies, that acknowledge not only uncertainty in the domain of positive emotions, but also illustrate more sophisticated and innovative methodological solutions on how to approach emotions, should be undertaken.

The phenomenon of the study

To demonstrate the phenomenon of this study, different scholars use

different terms and metaphors to describe a seemingly particular state of being that learners commonly experience during or after experiential learning activities. To describe this experience, Schoel, Prouty & Radcliffe (1988), for instance, label it as ‘peak experience’. Hebb (1955) refers to similar experiences as an ‘optimal arousal’, Heron (1996) - ‘imaginal awakening’, whereas Harris (1996) simply calls it ‘energy’. Likewise, Hayllar (2000) uses a chain of words to describe experiences of being ‘excited’, ‘valued’, ‘fantastic’, ‘worthwhile’ and ‘reinvented’.

Although these scholars use different wording, they seem to relate to similar experiences observed in, but not limited to, experiential learning settings. Something happens in experiential learning courses that learners find meaningful and valuable at some point in time. For an unspecified period, they feel positively changed: excited, worthwhile and reinvented. These moments are not only highly regarded by learners but also come across as uniquely beneficial. Instead of using a chain of words, this paper proposes referring to these experiences as ‘emotional highs’. The focus of the paper is to pin down the phenomenon of emotional highs and clarify the ambiguity of its lived experience.

The notion of ‘emotional high’ is suggested as the phenomenon and point of interest for the study. An emotional high, as inspired by Briscoe’s paper on inherent joy in learning, is seen as “inner deep satisfaction a person feels when they have learned something that they wished to learn” (2012:78). The notion of emotional high is used to describe an optimal experience in learning settings and, initially, is proposed as a proxy with a possibility for further changes. To study the phenomenon, a deliberate decision was made to approach emotional high as an experience. In this way it allows illumination of features and particularities of emotional highs.

This leads to the main question of the paper: what is the ‘lived experience’ of emotional highs in learning? The decision to return to the fundamental basis and focus on learners’ experiences is taken to avoid adapting accounts and models that may be inadequate to study positive emotional experiences. Studying learners’ ‘lived experience’ can showcase more grounded understanding of the phenomenon and advance methodology on studying emotional experiences.

Notably, this paper does not aim to encourage high levels of positive emotions in most learning situations; nor does it extol positive emotions

as being the single answer to the challenges in experiential learning. Rather, this research attempts to provide a more sophisticated take on the phenomenon, demonstrate more grounded methodology to study emotional experiences and assist in better understanding how to deal with positive emotional experiences in the learning environment.

Conduct of the study

Hermeneutic phenomenology is selected as a suitable approach as it focuses on the lived experience of learners and, furthermore, returns to the basics of positive emotions and assists in understanding what it *is*. Hermeneutic phenomenology is seen as a "philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person – world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known" (Wertz, 2005:175). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology enables the research to capture the human experience to provide a better understanding of learners' individual accounts with clarity and meaning.

This study requires the selection of learning events that allow the phenomenon to emerge and be accessible. Experiential learning courses are well-known for dealing with emotional highs and lows (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000) and, thus, are to be selected. Preferably, courses where the phenomenon typically emerges multiple times and in multiple ways are to be considered to provide more experiences for the learners to reflect upon. Furthermore, to address the research question particular learners need to be selected. They should have participated in an experiential learning course and experienced the phenomenon of emotional highs.

This study focused on lived experiences of adult learners who participated in three adult experiential learning courses in Australia. There were two different Outward Bound (OB) courses and one conducted by Collective Possibilities (CP). All courses were leadership-themed, involved experiential learning activities and aimed to foster personal growth, development, self-actualisation and included social aspects. The courses were residential (OB1 – 8 days, OB2 – 7 days, CP – 4 days) and took place with an equal number of days indoors and outdoors.

A typical sample size for a phenomenological study is up to ten people

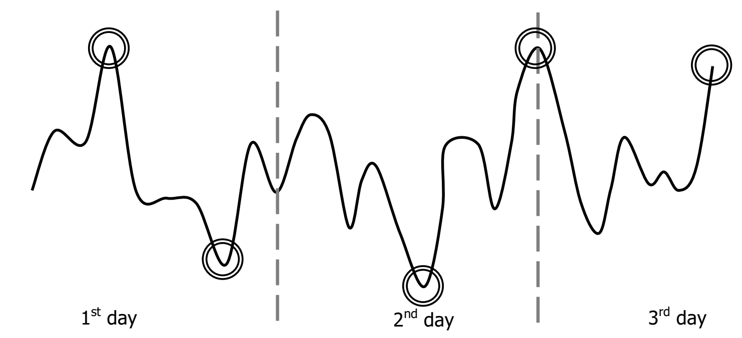
(Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Nevertheless a number of other scholars (e.g. Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) claim that the number of participants can vary depending on the nature of the study and the data collected. This paper is a part of a larger study where another research question was included and, therefore, involves slightly more than ten participants.

This study focused on the experiences of fifteen selected participants from the three courses; on average five participants per course. The number of adult learners in most courses was comparatively low: OB1 – 12; OB2 – 8 and CP – 18. The selected sample was diverse in age, gender and location: ages ranged from mid-twenties to early seventies and involved a similar number of men and women representing different states of Australia.

This study followed a two stage research design. The first stage of the research involved a short questionnaire, which participants received at the end of the course. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify and select participants with relevant experiences, not to use them as data. The second and most important stage involved in-depth interviews with participants who had agreed to engage further with the study.

The interview consisted of two interwoven parts: an emotional graph and reflection. First of all, the participants were to construct an emotional graph (see Figure 1) which focused on their emotional experiences throughout the course. When finished, most graphs resembled a heart rate diagram with several peaks and lows. Learners were invited to speak about their highs and lows.

Figure 1. *Example of emotional graph*



Data analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used for analysis in this hermeneutic phenomenological study. IPA is a qualitative research approach that has significant roots in phenomenology, symbolic interactionism and discourse analysis. Overall, the approach explores how people make sense of their experiences (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009) and is a particularly useful methodology for examining topics which are ambiguous, complex and emotionally laden (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA, similarly to hermeneutic phenomenology, 'gives a voice' to the participants and highlights the value of their narratives.

A 6-step approach, proposed by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009), was used to analyse data in the study. The first step is reading and re-reading, which involves engaging with the original data. The second step includes initial noting, which is the most detailed part. Developing emergent themes is the third step, which is followed by step four: to map connections and patterns between the notes. Finally, the last two steps involve moving to the next case and repeating these steps and, eventually, illuminating patterns across cases.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study are largely related to the use of the phenomenological process. The nature of this process is to delve into the accounts of the chosen sample who have experienced similar phenomena, which eventually assists with illumination of the essential particularities of an experience.

The small sample size limited this study. By typically involving a small sample size, phenomenological studies are not generalisable to the larger population. Nevertheless, the accounts gathered were lived experiences that were true for this group of people. Similarly, learning contexts were limited. The selected courses involved relatively similar methodology, philosophy, facilitation and expected outcomes. More diverse courses could have showcased more divergent outcomes.

Results

Overall, the lived experience of emotional highs differed widely in

length, strength and complexity. For some, the high experience was related with experiencing certain emotions, like “really content feeling” (Diane CP), “inherently happy” (Susan OB2), for others - overcoming a challenge. Leanne (CP), for instance, shared her emotional high that is related to other people. It was when participants were divided into personality – head, heart and gut – groups based on a test they did as a part of the course.

> I was in a heart group with other heart people. It made a lot of sense to me being with those people in my team. I found my other people! It was sort of connecting and getting along with those people (Leanne CP).

On the other hand, the highest moment for Robert (OB1) was being at the top of the mountain. Being on top of, and in relation with, the mountain appeared in a number of places during his narrative.

> We were outside at the top of the mountain. I was at the peak and I was looking around the tips and mountain ranges. Whichever way I looked, I was on top of the mountain. I knew I didn’t have to carry that backpack and climb the hill anymore (Robert OB1).

Despite the fact the emotional highs were unique for each individual, a closer examination of the occasions participants reported reveals that there were two: abseiling and Value path, that were referred to as emotional high moments in most narratives. These occasions were a part of the two OB courses and participants referred to them not only as emotional highs, but also regarded them as ‘meaning-full’ and ‘life-changing’ experiences.

The first activity, abseiling was a part of a leadership activity. The task was given late in the night and it required preparation from scratch for the abseiling and zip line activities within the next twenty-four hours. Several participants of a group were selected to lead this activity from scratch.

Abseiling was a 25 metre drop which started on the top of a mountain. A few people were scared. Selected participant-leaders talked to these people, assuring them all was well. They tried to make them feel comfortable and encouraged them. These leaders stressed that it was

important to relate to other group members that they had met only a few days before.

Among the participant–leaders for the abseiling activity was Caitlin. Being a typically quiet person, Caitlin did not hide her astonishment about acting as a different leader, not as she was used to. As she narrated the abseiling experience, it appeared as if physically she was not the person leading and supporting the team. It seemed that she was in another person's shoes. "I have never really stepped up... I normally lead in a different, a very quiet way." Asked to justify this difference, she contended: "I had a responsibility. I had a role then".

Similarly, abseiling was amongst the emotional highs for Susan (OB2). She revealed that at her age of 50+, she never thought she could enjoy abseiling. "I abseiled for the first time in my life and it was just awesome. I had the best experience". It was positive as well as surprising experience for Susan.

Another popular occasion for emotional highs was a Value path that for many was a personal break-through point. Value path was an activity where participants spent around two hours walking through the field alone and reflecting on, and connecting with, their values. Participants were set off in the field around fifteen minutes apart from each other and were not allowed to talk or walk along with others. The Value path involved minimal guidance, providing a few triggering questions or activities to reflect upon. Participants had a large space and time in which to wander around and engage with themselves. The Value path was followed by reflection among the group members.

Many referred to the Value path as their emotional peak experience. Being on the Value path was "a reflection of you as a person. This is a ve-ry, ve-ry personal journey. For two and half hours you are not talking to anybody" Kirra (OB1). Likewise, Thomas (OB1) contended that the Value path was powerful and came at the right time in his life. He is a busy businessmen and emphasised that a lack of time is often the reason for not having similar experiences in everyday life.

That was pretty special for me. Because I do work in an incredibly fast paced environment. I don't have time to think about myself and what I've done, what I've been able to achieve and where I want to go next (Thomas OB1).

Findings

According to the analysed data, six themes emerged to showcase the particularities of the lived experience of emotional highs in adult experiential learning:

- *Facing the unknown*. There is a type of genuine excitement about interacting with the unknown. Some people refer to these experiences as uncomfortable, while others emphasise the abundance of adrenaline and joy while interacting with the unknown. The unknown appears through interactions with the world as well as experiences within; often both together. Nature in particular comes across as a rich provider of unknown experiences. Building a bridge between the unknown and known can contribute significantly to emotional highs.

- *First-time experience*. Many emotional highs take place during or after doing something meaningful for the first time. This includes experiences like abseiling or reflecting on your values with strangers. These moments can occur through a wide spectrum of chaotic, nonlinear, but ultimately, meaningful learning experiences. First-time experiences can be filled not only with something new, but also unusual, surprising and stimulating. At times they are seen as sacred and irreplicable.

- *Unexpected discovery*. Many emotional highs are based on discoveries. A discovery here can be seen as a cognitive A-ha moment or a change of old ways of knowing, similar to what Mezirow calls ‘disorienting dilemma’ (Mezirow, 1990). Emotional high experiences however seem to go beyond cognitive awareness; it is rather an embodied experience. Unexpected discoveries frequently take place when a learner notices the grey areas between ‘what I think’ and ‘what I do’. They can take place through a collation of different emotions and, notably, contribute to an emotional high.

- *Being on a journey*. Emotional highs are associated with temporarily leaving one’s everyday life. A sense of being on a journey, path, road or travel is present. Quite often participants refer to it as a learning journey, personal development and

progressing. The importance of sharing the journey has been highlighted as a significant part of experiencing emotional highs.

- *Sense of change*. This typically involves newness or difference in the way a learner is bodily aware of themselves. This is perceived not solely as a change from state A to state B; it rather comes across as a fluid experience of progress, moving on. The change can be associated with different dimensions of the learner, including the emotional, bodily and spiritual, and can affect one's actions, thinking and values. The learner quite often is aware of this change, and yet, this awareness appears to go beyond pure cognition. At times it cannot be grasped in the form of words, implying it is an embodied phenomenon.
- *Meaningful learning*. Learning here appears to go beyond the learning environment and is applicable to a real life context. That makes learning personalised, worthwhile and, more importantly, meaningful. Quite often learners claim to be energised and awakened during these learning experiences. By the same token, at times learners perceive it as 'not real learning', as it involves features typically not associated with conventional learning.

Contribution to knowledge

An important intention of this work was to understand how these findings contribute to the areas of experiential learning and positive emotional experiences. Based on the observations from these themes, the following two contributions to knowledge are to be considered. The first contribution involves implications for studying positive emotional experiences. The second and, the most important, contribution is the development of a sophisticated understanding of emotional high experiences.

Implications for studying positive emotional experiences

This paper states that it is problematic to apply conventional models of emotions to study positive emotional experiences. This can be challenging due to limited understanding of the emotional system. Some of the emotional models include certain assumptions that inhibit the area of enquiry. To prevent conceptual misunderstandings, this paper

proposes studying emotions, including emotional highs, as experiences. Studying positive emotions as experiences can allow noticing and understanding the particularities of the phenomenon rather than approaching emotions as pre-existent models. Taking this approach, two aspects were observed.

Emotional highs are a more complex phenomenon than literature suggests. This study observes that emotional highs go beyond being just a synonym for positive emotions or a group of extreme positive emotions. The highs can embrace a wide spectrum of emotions and experiences; many of them happening simultaneously. Several cases also illustrate the presence of emotional low experiences. In fact, this study observes that very low emotions can be pivotal for the emergence of emotional highs. This contributes to a discourse that positive emotional experiences can no longer be seen as something that is exclusively positive. Instead, this study suggests that there is a wide range of emotions that constantly interact, all contributing to the development of an experience.

This study also observes that emotional highs no longer can be seen as extreme emotions. It is true that learners referred to emotional highs as the highest peak experiences on the Emotional graph. Quite frequently these experiences were seen as strong and powerful, at times even reaching moments of imaginal awakening or euphoria.

Whilst an emotional high can be perceived as a state of extreme high, after having a closer look at the experience, it appears as anything but extreme. Quite often the phenomenon comes across as rather mellow and soothing. For instance, the Value path activity involved medium intensity experiences, some of which were mild and meditative. This implies that an emotional high cannot be seen as a specific type of emotion experienced in the same way by everyone. In terms of learning, it is useful to see the phenomenon as an experience of different intensities.

Re-considering emotional highs

The most important contribution of the study is the development of a sophisticated understanding of emotional high experiences. A number of salient particularities and features of the phenomenon have been observed. Emotional highs appear as relatively rare, unique learning-

related moments that are unlikely to happen in everyday life. The high is typically experienced as a simple, uncomplicated moment that in one or another way makes sense of something meaningful to the learner. Often there is a certain clarity about something that matters, that does not necessarily emerge through cognitive dimensions. This clarity frequently comes across as embodied experience; something that is *bodily known*.

A crucial part of emotional high experiences is a sense of enrichment, expansion and development. At times it is a sense of being more of a person than one thought they could be. These moments are often associated with higher order clarities, like values, attitudes and beliefs. Whilst emotional highs can appear as an experience that focuses exclusively on individual dimensions, they are individual as much as social phenomena. In fact, social context is an integral part of these experiences.

In short, emotional highs are seen as important learning experiences. They are experienced as moments where many things come together and more broadly can be perceived as 'settledness', being at home in one's life.

Based on these particularities that illuminate the experience of emotional highs, this research reframes the notion of emotional highs. A proxy, inspired by Briscoe (2012), was used to enter the field of enquiry to contribute to a discourse on positive emotional experiences. Tentatively, Briscoe pointed out the need to initiate a discussion on understanding positive emotional experiences specifically in the context of learning. By doing that, one would attempt to learn how to engage with learning, actualise learners' potential and abilities, celebrating the right of each individual to exercise their creative individuality. To contribute to this debate, Briscoe proposed a phenomenon described as "inner deep satisfaction a person feels when they have learned something that they wished to learn" (2012:78).

Briscoe's definition is certainly an important starting point in the discourse of positive emotional experiences. She advocates focussing on emotions as context situated phenomena; in her case focus on positive emotions in the learning environment is useful. Individual and social dimensions of the phenomenon are also pointed out.

Based on research data, this study proposes several modifications to Briscoe's definition that will elaborate the further development of the phenomenon. Firstly, this research suggests studying emotional highs as experiences. That enhances freedom in understanding what the phenomenon is, rather than making assumptions that can be misleading and irrelevant for particular settings. In terms of learning, approaching emotion as an experience can open new avenues. These include perceiving an emotional high not solely as a rootless phenomenon, but also recognising triggers as a part of the experience. Furthermore, studying emotion as an experience can assist in embracing different dimensions of phenomena, including emotional as well as bodily, cognitive and spiritual.

Secondly, Briscoe observes that the phenomenon occurs when one learns something they 'wished to learn'. This is an important note, particularly when contemplating authenticity and motivation of the learner. Yet this study observes that experience frequently presents itself without being *wished* to happen and that *unwished* experience can still lead to emotional highs and meaningful learning. In other words, emotional experience here is seen as something that emerges in relationship with the world and that may or may not include experiences that we necessarily aim for.

Finally, the third proposed modification is to situate the phenomenon in an organised learning context. This does not mean that the experience cannot emerge outside organised learning settings. In fact, although some learners claimed that emotional highs are unique experiences that are difficult to replicate outside the courses, others confirmed imagining such a possibility. The main argument here is that placing the phenomenon into a context may assist illuminating particular features of emotional experiences.

Based on these three modifications, this study defines an emotional high as *inner deep satisfaction a learner experiences when they have absorbed something meaningful*. This definition could be a valuable starting point for practitioners and scholars working on future research in this area.

Conclusions

Something happens in experiential learning that some learners find meaningful and valuable. At some point in time and for an unspecified period, some learners feel positively changed: reinvented and worthwhile. These moments are not only highly regarded by learners but also come across as uniquely beneficial for those involved in teaching and learning. Instead of using a chain of words by several scholars, this paper proposes referring to these experiences as 'emotional highs'.

Based on Briscoe's (2012) understanding, emotional high has been proposed as the phenomenon of this study. According to the lived experiences of learners, six themes emerged to feature particularities of emotional highs. Combining the findings of the study and literature, the notion of emotional highs was refined and defined as "inner deep satisfaction a learner experiences when they have absorbed something meaningful".

This is a starting point for continuing discourse on specific positive emotional experiences in learning settings. Concepts, notions and findings of this study, especially the notion of emotional highs, are open to further refinement. Future studies can apply the current understanding of the phenomenon in different learning contexts and other fields.

Further research is needed on emotional highs as a social phenomenon. Some studies (e.g. Rantala & Määttä, 2012) suggest that positive emotions in social situations can be contagious. Similarly, this study observed cases where emotional highs appeared as experiences shared by several participants. This is an invitation to consider studying emotional highs not only as emotional experiences owned by a single learner, but as a shared phenomenon. To study this, more innovative and social methods and approaches would be required.

Practitioners should be aware of the lived experiences, their sensitivities and triggers of emotional highs when designing courses. Attempting to understand and to find triggers of emotional highs may be useful and beneficial for practitioners who seek to recognise and find ways to deal with positive emotional experiences in the learning environment. In particular, more understanding is needed on how these triggers

interact. Rather than approaching triggers as individual elements that act independently, a robust understanding of the relationships they form would be useful.

This paper started with an observation that learning has become painfully disconnected from learners themselves. If current trends continue, learning settings may soon reach the level where learners do things only for external reasons, numbing their internal motivations and emotions. This study attempted to advance understanding of how to engage with learning and demonstrate that the presence of emotional high experiences can assist in making learning meaningful and worthwhile. There is still a way to go in terms of understanding positive emotions. However, what we can do now is to think about learning spaces as places where emotional highs are the norm rather than rare experiences found in exclusive learning settings.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on a larger research project that focuses on lived experience of emotional highs in experiential learning settings (Zeivots, 2015).

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Contemporary constructivist practices in higher education settings and academic motivational factors

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This study was aimed at assessing the relationships between college students' pre-entry factors, self-efficacy and motivation for learning, and the perceived constructivist learning in traditional lecture-based courses and seminars (SM). The study included 411 undergraduate third-year college students. Several scales were administered to the participants: The Constructivist Learning in Higher Education Settings scale (CLHES) aimed at measuring students' perceptions of occurrences of contemporary constructivist practices in learning environments, along three dimensions: constructive activity, teacher-student interaction and social activity; the Academic Motivation Scale - College (CEGEP); and the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). Regression analysis main results showed that the constructive activity and teacher- student interaction factors were positively correlated. The teacher- student interaction variable was highly effective in enhancing intrinsic motivation for learning which in turn, contributed primarily to academic self-efficacy. The motivational factors were not solely affected by the learning environment perception but were also informed, to some extent, by several pre-entry factors.

Multivariate analysis of covariance results have corroborated the research hypothesis, indicating that students perceive seminar learning environments as more constructivist when compared with lecture-based course perceptions. Implications of these findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *constructivist learning; academic self-efficacy; academic motivation*

Introduction

In the face of the growing Internet–based information, the fast development of technologies, social changes, globalization of education, and the pursuit of quality, it has become clear that students as adult learners must develop the ability to become lifelong learners by learning new skills and creating knowledge throughout their careers. Lifelong learning is defined as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective" (EU, 2001: 9).

Being a lifelong learner involves not simply knowing existing practices, but also having the skills and will to search for new knowledge when needed, to move beyond existing routines, rethink key ideas, practices, and even values in order to change and adapt to changing circumstances. These types of renewal needs require developing updated instructional practices that could integrate knowledge with the personal transferable skills (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). In the field of higher education, the creation of learning environments based on the constructivist pedagogy is suggested to engage learners in knowledge construction learning, carried out by cooperative learning processes in real-world contexts (Schwarz & de Groot, 2011) while enhancing students' ability to regulate their learning (de Kock et al., 2004). The constructivist learning is often described as 'a holistic approach' (McGrath, 2007), aimed at educating for sustainable development, that is, offering learning experiences that are integrated into day-to-day personal and professional life. Compared to traditional instruction methods, in this authentic approach, educational efforts are purposely tailored to the goals and needs of the learner.

Despite the many theoretical appeals of comparing between these contradictory views of the learning environment, few are the empirically based discussions that focus on affective (rather than cognitive) variables connected to the constructivist learning process such as academic self-efficacy (Alt, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Milner, Templin, & Czerniak, 2011; Tenenbaum, Naidu, Jegede, & Austin, 2001; Tynjala, 1998). Such efforts could demonstrate the wide range of positive effects attributed to constructivist environments.

This study represents an effort to elucidate current constructivist learning factors (Alt, 2014) and to examine the impact of these constructs on several motivational factors in two higher education settings - a traditional conventional lecture and a research-based seminar. This research design could challenge the relative contribution to learning outcomes attributed to the constructivist environment by comparing it with traditional environments' outcomes, thus, might strengthen the empirical evidence supporting the constructivist learning effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Contemporary Social-Constructivist Practices

Both cognitive constructivism and social constructivism perceive learning as an active process, where knowledge is constructed, not acquired. Yet, while cognitive constructivism is concerned with the individual's construction of knowledge, social constructivism stresses the collaborative processes in knowledge construction, thus, links social component to cognitive component of knowledge building (Windschitl, 2002). The ability to communicate, interact with others, listen to new ideas, express yours, synthesize, and develop new collective ideas is interwoven in the educational process of lifelong learning (EU, 2012). Current studies' classifications suggest three key tenets of the social-constructivist learning environment (Alt, 2014): *constructive activity, teacher-student interaction,* and *social activity*.

The first tenet (*constructive activity*) pertains to the process of 'learning to learn'. This principle is based on several educational dimensions. First is the idea that learning occurs during sustainable participation in inquiry practices focused on the advancement of knowledge. In these

learning processes learners are required to actively make meaning from information. Thus, learning is something students do rather than something that is transmitted to them (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, & Norman, 2010).

Authenticity is another dimension of the *constructive activity* tenet. Situating learning in a real world task ensures that learning is personally interesting (Erstad, 2011). McDougall (2015) maintains that this kind of learning is more meaningful and incisive, and produces high levels of engagement and positive learning outcomes compared with the traditional forms of content-based instruction. It equips students with skills needed for their future and encourages proactive learning experiences. Such learning experiences have relevance to real-world situations, not just the context of a formal education, and thus have direct relevance to the needs of adult learners (Lahn, 2011).

An additional dimension of the constructive activity tenet is providing multiple perspectives and representations of content. In the constructivist learning environment the student is encouraged to examine a phenomenon from several points of view (perspectives). When students are able to examine an experience from multiple perspectives their understanding and adaptability are increased (Lund & Hauge, 2011).

Another dimension of the first tenet is *in-depth learning*, characterized as allowing participants to focus on in-depth content knowledge (Evans, 2014). Through this constructive activity, learners could use their experience and knowledge to seek a clearer understanding of the learning materials, in contrast to surface learning which is confined to rote learning and memorising facts (Price, 2014).

In line with the final dimension of the *constructive activity* first tenet, content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge. Students' prior knowledge can help or hinder learning, therefore, teachers should leverage accurate knowledge in order to identify learning gaps and insufficiencies in students' prior knowledge that may not adequately support new knowledge. Furthermore, when prior knowledge is applied in the wrong context it may lead to students making faulty assumptions (Ambrose et al., 2010). Teachers should also create environments for teaching and

learning that are decompartmentalised, by integrating individual, social and institutional processes (Alt, 2014). According to this new interdisciplinary approach, learning is understood as the result of a mix between, meaning, experience retrieved from the past offering mediations to decipher present experience, and lessons learned from present inquiry turned towards a creative future (Perret-Clermont & Perret, 2011).

The second tenet (*teacher-student interaction*) is one of the main conceptual pillars of the constructivist pedagogy. The teacher is no longer perceived as the sole authority but as the facilitator of learning, guiding and supporting learners in the process of constructing knowledge. In these processes, students are given opportunities to actively engage in self- regulated learning (Järvelä, Hurme, & Järvenoja, 2011). Smith (2005) suggests that self- regulated skills are also essential for new employees who are better able to take charge of the conduct and accomplishments of their actions at work, that is, their ability to undertake the personal management of their actions and interactions that comprise their individual construction of knowledge for and through work.

Based on the final tenet (*social activity*), learning is a social activity in which individual learning processes are affected by personal characteristics as well as by external social factors, and meaning is constructed from the interaction between existing knowledge and social situations (Vygotsky, 1978). This process includes the promotion of communities of inquiry and dialogue skills through the use of forums of alternative voices and the induction of students into real dialogues across cultural differences (Vella, 2008). Cooperative learning is also supported by cognitive elaboration theories. Discussion of the subject matter during the process of peer work helps students verbalize and elaborate their initial, immature thoughts. In this process of elaboration, a student has an opportunity to develop ideas from vague to concrete and from preliminary to sophisticated. Discussions could lead to active processing of information and reprocessing of ideas, consequently, can help students learn better, retain information longer than working alone, and enhance their achievements (Snowman & Biehler, 2006).

Higher Education Course Types

Pedagogical design is the implementation of an underlying pedagogical approach and is manifested in course types that are used to achieve educational goals within a study track. As in other Western universities (Kiraly, 2014), in Israeli university Social Sciences programs two basic course types are traditionally used. First is the lecture type, designed to expedite the transmission of knowledge to large numbers of students. The teacher speaks to the students most of the time during a 90-minute lesson per week. This type of learning environment is associated with traditional instruction, or back-to-basics, which means following traditional teacher-centred methods used to be found in schools that society has traditionally deemed appropriate. This traditional 'banking' view of one-way traffic instruction is based on objectivist philosophical assumptions and encourages rote memorization (Beck, 2009). Licklider (2009) argues that despite decades of research about learning uncovering the limited effectiveness of this traditional teaching pattern, most educators focus on this teaching, which typically means conveying information.

Although the conventional lecture type has been consistently associated with the traditional one-way traffic instruction, Alt (2014) argues that several constructivist activities could be implemented in university lecture-based settings. For example, authentic real life examples can be integrated into a lecture-based course. Such implementations necessitate qualified teachers who have the special skills required for this instructional design.

The second course type is the Seminar. Seminars include intense study relating to the academic discipline to which an undergraduate student formally commits, and typically have significantly fewer students per professor than normal courses. The seminar involves independent research work, carried out by individual students and presented orally in the classroom. The final work is submitted to the teacher in a written form. Kiraly (2014) argues that, to some extent, seminars tend to parallel the lecture type of course regarding the type of interaction encouraged. Several introductory lectures on given topics are usually followed by students' presentations who read off their own lectures to the other classmates. The teacher is always present,

navigating the lessons, filling in knowledge uncovered by the presenters, and answering questions.

Despite the increased writing on learning environments, the potential differences between various forms of contemporary learning settings and the assessment of the use of constructivist activities in these settings are insufficiently explored (Tenenbaum et al., 2001).

Academic Self-Efficacy

Prior work has accumulated consistent empirical evidence supporting the view that self-regulation is a crucial predictor of academic achievement (Alt, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). Self-efficacy competence has been repeatedly linked to the psychosocial learning environment that students experience in their classrooms (Loyens, Rikers, & Schmidt, 2008). For example, a recent study (Donche, Coertjens, Van Daal, De Maeyer, & Van Petegem, 2014) showed how academic self-efficacy has a positive direct effect on first-year university students' deep learning engagement. Students' self-efficacy is considered a valuable explanatory factor in explaining differences in academic motivation and achievement. Carroll et al.'s (2009) study supports this premise. In their study, the relations between self-efficacy and academic achievement of 935 students aged 11-18 years from ten schools in two Australian cities were investigated. Results showed that academic and self-regulatory efficacy had a direct positive effect on academic achievement.

Academic self-efficacy is grounded in the broader psychological construct of the self-regulation theory, having evolved out of Bandura's (1986, 1977) social cognitive model of behaviour. This concept refers to personal judgements of one's ability to succeed at an academic task on a designated level or to attain a specific academic goal (Bandura, 1997). Accordingly, self-efficacy competence includes behavioural actions as well as the cognitive skills necessary for performance in a specific domain, and has been defined as "an individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task" (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002: 110).

Academic Motivation and the Constructivist Learning Environment

The self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008) defines the motivation behind the choices that people make and focuses on how social factors affect people's sense of volition and initiative, as well as their well-being and the quality of their performance. The SDT defines intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation, arranged on an internal-external continuum. Intrinsic motivation refers to internal factors, such as enthusiasm and pleasure experienced while engaging in a task. In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to external factors, such as obtaining good grades or passing exams. It has been recognised that students rarely select one form of motivation during learning processes, but rather a combination of both orientations Thus, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations do not exist on a single continuum, but rather on two separate ones, and students may often have a variety of motivations for learning. Therefore, having a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could help shape a highly productive student (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Studies on the effects of those motivations on learning strategies and achievements have associated controlled (extrinsic) motivation with surface processing and weak coping strategies in the case of failing (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Autonomous (intrinsic) motivation has been found directly and positively connected to a deep approach to learning, that is the use of more information processing, high concentration while studying and better time management, and indirectly to higher academic achievement (Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005).

Nijhuis, Segers and Gijselaers (2005) maintain that learning approaches are not considered to be stable psychological traits, and are not independent of the characteristics of the learning environment. Learning approaches can be modified by the teaching context or learning environment. For example, constructivist learning environments have been associated with deep approaches to learning (Rikers, Van Gog, & Paas, 2008). Therefore, this study explores the connections between the learning context and the learners' personal characteristics of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that may impact the students' learning outcomes.

The Present Study

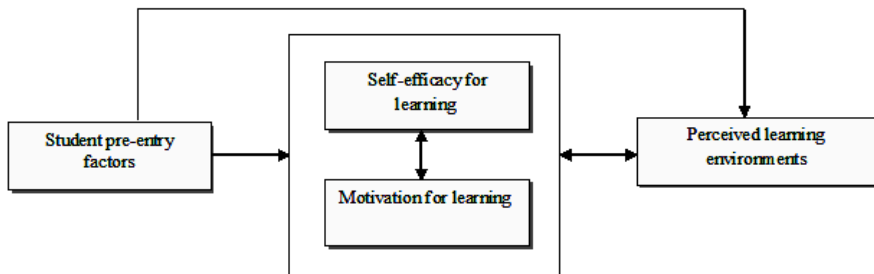
This study assesses the relationships between college students' self-efficacy and motivation for learning, and perceived constructivist learning in traditional- and constructivist- based environments. The research presented in this article focuses on the following research aims and questions:

a. The first aim is to measure the set of connections between students' perceptions of their learning environment, their motivation, and perceived self-efficacy for learning and their pre-entry factors. Fig. 1 demonstrates the structure of the proposed theoretical model.

b. The second aim is to assess more specifically which of the perceived learning environment, motivation, and self-efficacy for learning factors, differentiate regarding the course setting (lecture-based environment [LBE], seminar [SM]). Because SM settings are conceived as excellent ways by which constructivist activities could be fostered (Alt, 2014), it is hypothesized (*H1*) that these environments will be highly connected to students' constructivist learning perceptions, motivation, and self-efficacy for learning factors, compared with LBE.

The influence of variables such as gender, age, and SES on the above perceptions will be also addressed.

Figure 1. *Model 1. The theoretical structure of the proposed framework*



Method

Participants

The questionnaires were submitted to 411 undergraduate third-year students (12.4% males and 87.6% females) from one major college in the Northern Galilee, of whom 40.8% were Jewish students and 59.2% Muslim students, with a mean age of 24.5 (SD=4.4) years. The distribution of the participants with respect to the course settings (Course groups) was as follows: 42% LBE students (enrolled in three randomly selected courses), and 58% seminar course students (SM) (enrolled in eight randomly selected courses). The sample reflected the faculty enrolment breakdown of the campus, composed as follows: Education – 59%, Criminology – 15.2%, Sociology – 7.3%, Management - 9.3%, Economics – 5.3%, Behavioural Sciences – 1.4%, Political Sciences1.4 - %, and Communication – 1.1%.

Instrumentation

Pre-entry characteristics.

Data were gathered using a questionnaire aimed at measuring the student's cultural group, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and prior education achievements. Students' socioeconomic status (SES) was assessed by the father's educational attainment (FEA) and the mother's educational attainment (MEA), both defined on a six-level scale: 0 = *lack of education* to, 1 = *elementary school*, 2 = *high school*, 3 = *BA degree*, 4 = *MA degree*, 5 = *doctoral degree*. Another SES factor was the participants' report on their family current economic condition (EC), defined on a six-level scale: 1 = *extremely difficult* to 6 = *comfortable, no financial worries*. Finally, students' prior education achievements were measured by their self-reported average score of the matriculation exams (MAT).

Academic motivation.

Academic motivation was measured by two constructs from the Academic Motivation Scale - College (CEGEP) version (Vallerand, Blais, Brière, & Pelletier, 1989): Intrinsic motivation (four items), for example: 'I go to college because I experience pleasure and satisfaction

while learning new things' (Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.79); and extrinsic motivation (four items), for instance: 'I go to college because with only a high-school degree I would not find a high-paying job later on' (Cronbach's alpha equals to 0.70). The overall scale included eight items scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Academic self-efficacy.

An eight-item scale using items derived from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & Mckeachie, 1993) was used to assess perceived academic competence in the students' learning environments. The MSLQ was originally designed to measure college undergraduates' motivation, self-regulated learning perception and learning strategies. The MSLQ is modular, thus allows using the subscales separately, as has been the case in the present study, which used only the academic self-efficacy subscale. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. For example, 'I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in this course.' (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92).

The Constructivist Learning in Higher Education Settings [CLHES] Questionnaire.

This new 36-item scale was designed by (Alt, 2014) to obtain measures of students' perceptions of the occurrence of constructivist practices in higher education learning environments. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *completely true*. Table 1 indicates the CLHES factors, sub-factors, item descriptions and internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha). Each of the eight resulting factors showed a very high internal consistency. Convergent validity has been shown by statistically significant and positive bivariate correlations between all factor pairings ($.157 < r < .616$; $001 < p < .05$).

Table 1. *The CLHES questionnaire: factors, sub-factors, item descriptions and internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha)*

Factors and sub-factors	**Item**	**Cronbach's alpha**
Constructive activity (F1) Knowledge construction (A1)	c3. During this course, I was given opportunities to search for possible explanations for real problems	(five items) .85
Constructive activity (F1) In-depth learning (A2)	c6. In this course, I have learned skills with which I can deeply explore a subject of interest to me	(four items, item c10 was omitted due to a low loading result) .81
Constructive activity (F1) Authenticity (A3)	c18. The course addressed real life and interesting events	(five items) .83
Constructive activity (F1) Multiple perspectives (A4)	c21. In this course, ideas were presented from several points of view	(four items, item c25 was omitted due to a low loading result) .77
Constructive activity (F1) Prior knowledge (A5)	c27. The subjects learned in this course were related to prior knowledge I have gained	(four items, item c30 was omitted due to a low loading result) .82
Teacher- student interaction (F2)	c15. In this course, the teacher made me think about the advantages and disadvantages of my learning	(five items) .89
Social activity (F3) Social interaction (H1)	c31. This course included a variety of learning activities with other students	(three items) .90
Social activity (F3) Cooperative dialogue (H2)	c36. In this course, I could express my opinion, even when it was different from other students	(three items) .84

Structural equation modelling (SEM) (Bentler, 2006) was employed to further assess the construct validity of the CLHES, using a confirmatory factor analysis. Data used for the SEM were analysed by the maximum likelihood method. Three fit indices were computed in order to evaluate the model fit: $\chi 2(df)$, ($p > .05$), CFI (> 0.9), and RMSEA (< 0.08).

The measurement model which is included in the structural model (Figure 2) contains the following factors: First, the *constructive activity* (F1) latent variable accompanied by five latent variables: *knowledge construction* (A1) with five observed items, is described as multiple opportunities given to students to investigate real problems, raise questions and search for possible explanations while using various methodological approaches; *in-depth learning* (A2) with four observed items, pertains to the extent to which students are given opportunities to deeply explore a certain subject matter, rather than engaging them in a surface learning; *authenticity* (A3) with five observed items, deals with giving relevant meaning to the learned concepts and addressing real life and interesting events which are related to the studied topic; *multiple perspectives* (A4) with four observed items, refers to presenting complex ideas from several points of view; and *prior knowledge* (A5) with four observed items, deals with connecting the subject materials to other courses' topics. The second factor is the *teacher- student interaction* (F2) latent variable accompanied by five observed variables, refers to the teacher's role which includes guidance towards reflection on learning processes. Third factor is the *social activity* (F3) latent variable accompanied by two latent variables: *social interaction* (H1) with three observed items, which includes a variety of learning activities with other students, such as learning with other students, not necessarily during a lesson; and *cooperative dialogue* (H2) with three observed items, which refers to dialogical activities during the lesson in which students can express opinions and original ideas. items: c10, c25, and c30 were omitted due to low loading results (< .30) The goodness of fit of the data to the model is shown in the *finding* section.

Procedure

The scales were administered to the participants near the end of their courses - at the second semester of the third year of studies. The students were told that the purpose of the study was to examine their

perceptions of the course. Prior to obtaining participants' consent, it was specified that the questionnaires were anonymous and that no pressure would be applied should they choose to return the questionnaire unfilled or incomplete. Finally, participants were assured that no specific identifying information about the courses would be processed.

Findings

First Research Aim

In order to assess the first research aim, several stepwise regression analyses were employed; their results are presented in Table 2. In Model 1 (Table 2), the dependent variable of self-efficacy for learning (SE) was regressed on all the pre-entry variables: Cultural group (CG - Jewish = 1 Muslim = 2), age, gender, mother's (MEA) and father's (FEA) educational attainment, economic condition (EC), and the average score of the matriculation exams (MAT); the three CLHES factors: *constructive activity* (F1), *teacher- student interaction* (F2) and *social activity* (F3); and the motivational factors: extrinsic (EXT) and intrinsic (INT). As shown in Table 2, six factors have positively affected the academic self-efficacy variable (SE), with a relatively higher result indicated for the intrinsic motivation variable ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), which explained 18% of the variance. In Model 2, intrinsic motivation was entered as a dependent variable and was regressed on all the pre-entry variables, extrinsic motivation, academic self-efficacy, and the three CLHES factors. The *teacher- student interaction* factor (F2) accounted for 30% of the variance, with the highest positive connection coefficient result. In Model 3 (Table 2), extrinsic motivation was regressed on the same variables as in Model 2, with an additional factor of intrinsic motivation, which accounted for only 8% of the variance, with a positive low connection result. Model 4 included the *constructive activity* factor (F1) as a dependent variable which was regressed on the pre-entry variables, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, academic self-efficacy, *teacher - student interaction* (F2) and *social activity* (F3). As shown in Table 2, *teacher- student interaction* (F2) accounted for 56% of this model variance, with a positive moderate connection result. Similarly, in models 5 and 6 *teacher- student interaction* (F2) and *social activity* (F3) were entered as dependent variables, respectively. In both models, *constructive activity* factor (F1) was found to be the most effective variable with the highest positive connection coefficient results.

Table 2. *Summary of stepwise regression analyses*

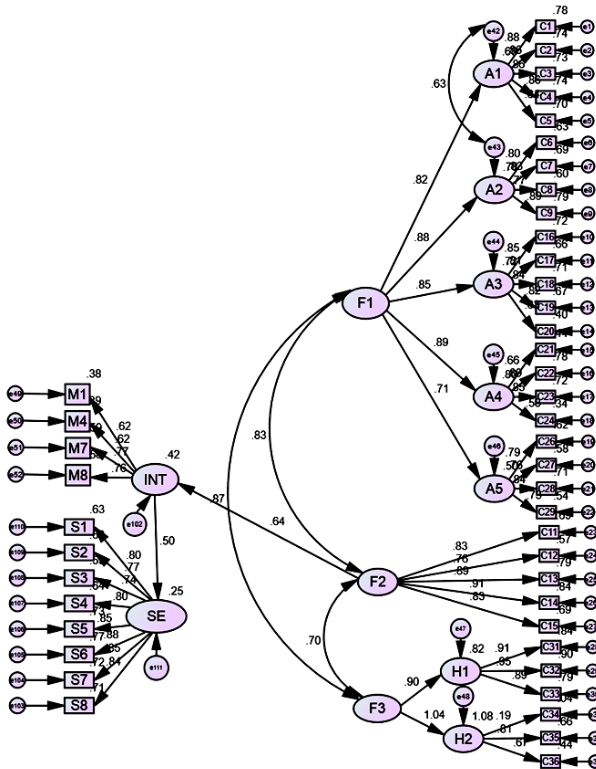
Model	Independent variables	B	SE. B	β	ΔR^2	F	R^2	Dependent variables
1	INT	.36	.04	.42***	.18	83.17***	.29	SE
	F1	.21	.05	.24***	.04	54.39***		
	EC	.10	.03	.16***	.03	41.81***		
	Age	.03	.01	.15***	.02	35.15***		
	EXT	.12	.04	.13**	.01	30.18***		
	F2	.10	.05	.15*	.01	26.22***		
2	F2	.43	.03	.54***	.30	167.25***	.43	INT
	CG (Muslim)	.38	.07	.24***	.05	106.10***		
	SE	.25	.05	.22***	.04	83.43***		
	F1	.23	.06	.23***	.02	68.74***		
	MAT	.07	.02	.11**	.01	57.68***		
	EXT	.11	.04	.10*	.01	49.69***		
3	INT	.27	.05	.29***	.08	35.64***	.15	EXT
	Age	-.03	.01	-.17***	.03	25.10***		
	SE	.16	.06	.15**	.02	19.85***		
	CG (Muslim)	.20	.08	.13*	.02	16.77***		
4	F2	.40	.03	.50***	.56	503.75***	.68	F1
	F3	.31	.03	.37***	.11	403.76***		
	INT	.12	.04	.12**	.01	280.50***		
	F1	.79	.05	.64***	.56	503.75***	.59	F2
5	INT	.25	.05	.20***	.03	282.37***		
6	F1	.77	.04	.66***	.43	303.77***	.43	F3

*Note: p < .05 * p < .01** p < .001****

It can be learned from these analyses that the *teacher- student interaction* (F2) variable was highly effective in enhancing intrinsic motivation, which in turn contributed primarily to academic self-efficacy. The *teacher- student interaction* (F2) and *constructive activity* (F1) factors were highly correlated. The *social activity* (F3) factor was merely connected to the *constructive activity* (F1) factor. Some pre-entry variables (EC, MAT, CG, and Age) have slightly explained the motivational factors, however, were insignificantly connected to the perception of the learning environment factors. Based on these analyses,

Model 2 (Figure 2) was constructed. The model included the CLHES latent factors and observed items, as described above. In addition, the self-efficacy (SE) and intrinsic motivation (INT) factors were also entered into the model ($\chi2$ = 2167.655, *df* = 932, *p* = .000; *CFI* = .916; *RMSEA* = .057). It can be learned from Figure 2 that the *teacher-student interaction* (F2) and intrinsic motivation factors are highly connected (β = .64, $p < .001$); the latter and academic self-efficacy are moderately related (β = .50, $p < .001$). The *teacher- student interaction* factor explained 42% of the intrinsic motivation factor variance, which in turn explained 25% of the academic self-efficacy variance.

Figure 2. Model 2 with standardised parameter estimates



Second Research Aim

In order to assess the second research aim and *H1*, multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) with Wilks' Lambda criterion were

applied to allow the characterization of differences between the Course groups (LBE and SM) in regard to: (1) a linear combination of the multiple eight dependent factors of the CLHES scale; and (2) a linear combination of the motivational and self-efficacy for learning factors.

The following factors were entered as covariates in order to assess how these variables intersect and may contribute to the dependent variables: Cultural group (CG: *Jewish = 1 Muslim = 2*, age, gender (*Males = 1 females = 2*), mother's (MEA), father's (FEA) educational attainment, EC and the average score of the matriculation exams (MAT).

Table 3. *Mean scores, SD, F values, Wilks' Lambda and partial Eta-squared statistics (ηp2) of the two Course groups (LBE and SM) on the eight CLHES scale factors and academic self-efficacy and motivational variables.*

	Factors		LBE		SM			
			M	SD	M	SD	F	η_p^2
MANCOVA Wilks' Lambda statistic (Main effect)		Course					53.21***	.524
Wilks' Lambda statistic (Covariate)		CG (Muslim)					3.57**	.069
ANOVA	1	A1	2.16	0.89	3.87	0.70	390.22***	.498
	2	A2	2.65	0.96	3.97	0.66	226.89***	.366
	3	A3	3.25	1.00	3.95	0.67	53.98***	.121
	4	A4	3.04	0.86	3.70	0.67	57.10***	.127
	5	A5	3.03	0.94	3.67	0.73	45.05***	.103
	6	F2	2.81	1.00	3.70	0.80	77.11***	.164
	7	H1	2.46	1.03	3.36	1.04	58.59***	.130
	8	H2	3.15	1.08	3.81	0.81	40.73***	.094
MANCOVA								
Wilks' Lambda statistic (Main effect)		Course					7.12***	.052
Wilks' Lambda statistic (Covariate)		CG (Muslim)					20.87***	.138
		Age					8.38***	.060
ANOVA		SE	3.73	0.79	4.06	0.56	11.68**	.029
		INT	3.24	0.80	3.67	0.72	16.54***	.040
		EXT	3.73	0.72	3.84	0.75	.913	.002

*Note: p < .05 * p < .01** p < .001****

Knowledge construction (A1); *In-depth learning* (A2); *Authenticity* (A3); *Multiple perspectives* (A4); *Prior knowledge* (A5); *Teacher-student interaction* (F2); *Social interaction* (H1); *Cooperative dialogue* (H2)

Table 3 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, *F* values, Wilks' Lambda and partial Eta-squared statistics of the analyses. Results indicated significant differences between the Course groups regarding the combination of the multiple CLHES factors and separately on each of them. All the between- group differences were accompanied by moderate to large effect sizes when small, moderate, and large effects are reflected in values of ηp2 equal to .0099, .0588, and .1379, respectively (Richardson, 2011: 142).

As presented in Table 3, salient between- group differences were indicated for the factors: *Knowledge construction* (A1) (ηp2 = .498) and *in-depth learning* (A2) (ηp2 = .366). Somewhat lower effect sizes were found for the *teacher- student interaction* factor (F2) (ηp2 = .164), s*ocial interaction* (H1) (ηp2 = .130)*, multiple perspectives* (A4) (ηp2 = .127), *authenticity* (A3) (ηp2 = .121), and *prior knowledge* (A5) (ηp2 = .103). The relatively lowest effect size was found for the *cooperative dialogue* (H2) (ηp2 = .094) factor. On each factor, the lowest mean result was indicated for the LBE group and the highest for the SM group. Regarding the motivational and academic self-efficacy factors, differences were found between the Course groups on the intrinsic motivation (ηp2 = .040) and self-efficacy (ηp2 = .029) variables, both accompanied by low effect sizes. Insignificant Course group differences were indicated for the extrinsic motivation variable. Lastly, the covariate of CG (Muslim) was positively connected to the perception of the learning environment (ηp2 = .069), and to the motivational factors (ηp2 = .138). The age covariate was found to be related to the motivational factors (ηp2 = .060).

Discussion and Implications

The overarching goal of this study was to measure the set of connections between students' perceptions of their learning environment, their personal characteristics of motivation and perceived self-efficacy for learning, and several pre-entry factors. The second goal was to assess the effect of two learning environments: lecture-based and seminars on the above perceptions.

First Research Aim

Regression analysis main results showed that the *constructive activity and teacher- student interaction* factors were positively correlated. The *teacher- student interaction* variable was found highly effective in explaining intrinsic motivation for learning which in turn, contributed primarily to academic self-efficacy.

These findings indicate that stimulating meta-cognitive and reflective aspects of learning could bolster the students' confidence in their ability to accomplish an inquiry-based task which requires higher order thinking skills. Constructivist environments provide skills for abstract thinking and reflective multi-perspective examination of an issue, which allow the students to construct essential information for themselves rather than being provided with information that fully explains the concepts and procedures that they are required to learn (Alt, 2014). In addition to information construction, such skills, as indicated by the present study's results, could develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, and encourage students to reflect on and interpret their learning capabilities, as suggested by the first and dominant source of self-efficacy enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Studies indicate that students who develop strong academic self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to successfully complete their education and be better equipped for a variety of occupational options in today's competitive society (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Carroll et al., 2009; Donche et al., 2014; Loyens et al., 2008).

Second Research Aim

Multivariate analysis of covariance results have corroborated the research hypothesis (*H1*), indicating that students perceive SM learning environments as more constructivist when compared with lecture-based course perceptions. However, the findings also showed that the *social activity* sub-factor of *cooperative dialogue* was accompanied by a relatively low effect size. This finding could suggest that SM settings are less consistent with this key feature of the constructivist pedagogy. Kiraly (2014) maintains that in practice, seminars and lectures tend to share certain objectivist characteristics: the teacher acts as a knowledge conduit regardless of the class type and most of the practice work is done by students alone rather than in groups. Communication

among the students themselves is usually considered unnecessary or undesirable.

Another plausible explanation for the above finding could be that social activities, such as dialogues, are also applied, to some extent, in lecture-based environments, in accordance with previous findings (Alt, 2014), there are teachers who encourage students participation in the classroom. These teachers intuitively recognize that education is a constructive acculturation process rather than a process of reflecting reality (Kiraly, 2014).

Regarding the motivational and academic self-efficacy factors, the multivariate analysis result showed a low positive impact of the SM course on the intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy variables. It could be inferred that the different activities and instructional methods taking place in the classroom, compared to the lecture-based course, highly impact the students' perception of what is happening during the lessons, in terms of perceptions of constructive activities. However, in conjunction with the regression analysis results, the motivational factors were not solely affected by the learning environment. These factors were also connected to some pre-entry factors, such as the cultural group, age, and economic condition.

It can be concluded that students' perceptions of the learning activities in their classrooms could be related to their enrolment in different learning settings (SM or LBE). These perceptions might have an impact on students' motivational factors - which are also partially connected to some pre-entry factors. In accordance with previous research (Nijhuis et al., 2005; Rikers et al., 2008), this study mainly shows that the student's psychological traits are not independent of the characteristics of the learning environment, and are partially connected to the learning setting context.

Conclusions and Limitations

This study underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships to students' psychological outcomes, specifically, the significant role of *teacher-student* relationships in enhancing intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy for learning is recognized in this study. Yet, some limitations of the present investigation and directions for future research must be

noted. First, future research should consider expanding the model tested here with additional variables that could be related to learning activities such as, students' approaches to studying and learning (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001). These variables could be related to learning setting perceptions and academic motivation psychological variables, therefore assessing them in conjunction with the present study examined constructs could allow measuring additional constructivist environment effects on a wider range of psychological constructs.

Second, some studies point to several factors that limit the effectiveness of constructivist learning settings (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven, & Dochy, 2010; Gijbels, Segers, & Struyf, 2008; Kyndt, Dochy, & Cascallar, 2014). For example, Kyndt et al.'s (2014) main premise is that these learning environments demand too much from the students in terms of workload and task complexity, in these cases inducing an effective learning could be difficult. Thus, it seems important to detect possible relations between the learners and their social learning environment that could encourage them to become self-regulatory and support their confidence and ability to excel in *complex tasks* required for constructivist learning.

Third, this study was conducted in a single country, meaning that the results cannot necessarily be generalized. Therefore, larger population studies are needed to validate these findings, and more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the associations between the perceived learning environment and psychological factors are more clearly understood.

Research Implications

These research findings indicate that stimulating meta-cognitive and reflective aspects of learning could strengthen students' confidence in their ability to excel in inquiry-based task. Accordingly, this study suggests that constructivist educators should be aware of the importance of pursuing this outcome by motivating students to think reflectively. Through this process of evaluating their own performance as learners, students could become, as suggested by this study, more confident in their ability to execute assignments.

In accordance with the constructivist theory, interaction is perceived to be one of the most important components of the learning experience, in

which students are given sufficient opportunities to express themselves and to share their own experiences with others (Järvelä et al., 2011). This process may promote dialogue skills through the use of forums of alternative voices, which allows the learners to reflect on their own work and to make independent use of their results thus being able to perform more effectively. Yet, based on this study results, *cooperative dialogue* activities were inadequately practiced in seminars. This course type is conceived as an excellent way by which a community of learners could be built, interdisciplinary research-based settings could be promoted, and student-centred activities, where students themselves could take a key role in creating the research/learning link, could be fostered (Alt, 2014). Therefore, this study suggests that educators should be aware of the importance of facilitating cooperative tutorial study groups in order to create a well-functioning environment and meaningful knowledge construction, as well as to nurture self-efficacious learners in higher education studies. This conclusion is also corroborated by this research empirical model in which the *social activity* factor was positively related to the *constructive activity* factor.

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Group work oral participation:

Examining Korean students' adjustment process in a US university

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This study examines, from a sociocultural perspective, the factors that explain why a group of seven Korean students attending an undergraduate business program in a US university are initially labelled as silent participants when first engaging in group work, and how these factors impacted the students' overall adjustment process. Data came from in-depth interviews and group work observations. 'Discourse system' is used to categorise how they adapt over the course of a semester, with changes in expressing ideas, holding ground, and self-autonomy. The study showed that while various factors, including the students' English language proficiency, differences in sociocultural values and educational practices, and group work environment were intertwined and informed their group work adjustment process, differences in sociocultural values and educational practices played the most important role in their adjustment process. Regardless of their length of stay in the US, gender, and individual differences, all of the students felt challenged in the initial stages of participation in group

work. The findings suggest pedagogical implications for promoting oral participation of Asian international students, especially Korean students, when they first commence in group work.

Keywords: *sociocultural features, group work, cultural interaction, Korean students*

Introduction

The issue of cultural adaptation of adult South Korean (henceforth, Korean) students in overseas academic communities has been addressed by many researchers (e.g. Coward, 2002; Chen, 2003). Cross-cultural experience deepens the students' own awareness of the need to make changes to their study habits (McClure, 2007). Students select appropriate learning strategies based on their contextual needs which are influenced by learning discourses, peers, teachers, and institutional practices (Morita, 2004). Despite various intercultural challenges, which are often overwhelming in the beginning stage of studying in a new learning environment and culture, many students show determination to learn and are eager to adjust and develop. Not only do these students successfully survive the demands of studying in a new environment, but they also find a sense of fulfilment in such changes (Furnham, 2004).

This study examines a group of seven Korean undergraduate students, who transferred from a university in Korea to a US university in their second year to gain a business degree. In particular, the study explores the cultural background that these students were brought up in, and how this affects them when initially working with others; and examines how oral participation in group work enriches their learning strategies and leads to changes in their intercultural communication approach. Students in this study shared similar cultural and educational backgrounds. Born and raised in Korea, they were born post-1990, a cultural period in Korea when many Korean families, if they can afford to, have been jumping on the study-abroad bandwagon by sending their young children to English-speaking countries (Shim & Park, 2008; Kang & Abelmann, 2011). Though it is widely understood that culture, especially amongst young students, is constantly in a state of change, their parents, who uphold a traditional Korean Confucian culture,

continue to influence the students' outlook formation (Lee, 2008). Two research questions guided this research:

(1) Does Korean culture influence students' initial group work participation, and if so, in what ways?

(2) In what ways does group work in a US business school effect students' adjustment process?

Literature review

Literature on Asian students' tutorial discussions in higher education often describes them as quiet, passive and compliant (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), who do not always welcome student-centred learning and feel comfortable with participatory activities, especially in the multicultural classroom (Lee, 2005). One notable feature of Asian students studying in western institutions of higher learning is their negative response to, and low level of oral participation in, group work due to their lack of language proficiency as well as cultural differences (Littlewood, 2000; Duff, 2002). Research shows that students' silent participation may be due to their cultural and social inheritance. Due to cultural, contextual and personal constraints, namely learning preferences, language, motivation, and group dynamics, students choose verbal silence in group learning settings (Kang, 2005; Cao & Phillips, 2006). However, one cannot claim that this is an exclusive behaviour of such students, and it is an unwarranted claim to regard verbal expression as the only means reflecting active participation in learning (Nonnecke & Preece, 2003). The essence of learning in a collaborative manner, such as shared leadership and one-on-one interaction, may collide with some values that Asian students are brought up with (Phuong-Mai et al., 2009, 858). The silence may also be a risk-avoidance strategy (Kim, 2008). Nevertheless, Korean students manage to adjust their home-country's style of learning and communication, and such adjustment, plus the value of Confucianism that places focus on hard work and discipline, help students live up to their parents' expectations (Holmes, 2004). While they are still accustomed to a teacher-centred learning environment, the students slowly adapt to an approach that is more student-centred with many of the participants claiming that learning becomes easier when learning by themselves. Rather than being culturally based, such approaches tend to be more contextual (Morita,

2004). The learning approaches of Confucian heritage students can change over time. With time, students appropriate a more pro-active approach to learning similar to that of their western peers (Grey, 2002). The students' positive attitudes about their host society and their ability to take control of their own adaptation process indicate that intercultural adjustment is a complex set of shifting interactions between social interaction, language learning, academic success, and personal growth. Nonetheless, the nature of successful socialization is restricted by the kinds of contact within the environment which they are engaged in (Furnham, 2004).

Group work in higher education

Group work serves as the Korean participants' main contact with students of other nations, primarily a mix of Asian and other western students. Research shows that the importance of learning through group work, particularly in a multicultural setting, has increased significantly in higher education in the past three decades (e.g. Collier, 1980). However, incorporating group work, particularly in multicultural settings, in higher education creates both challenges (e.g. different communication skills) and potential benefits (e.g. sharing knowledge).

Based on the literature on group work in higher education, research studies addressing challenges faced particularly in multicultural groups have focused mostly on: (1) how group members' cultural differences affect group work performance (e.g., Behfar *et al.*, 2006; Halverson & Tirmizi, 2008), and (2) how group members' cultural dimensions of behaviour affect their understanding of and behaviour in a collaborative situation (e.g., Behfar *et al.*, 2006; Halverson & Tirmizi, 2008). For example, people from collectivistic and high-context cultures prefer indirect communication, while representatives of individualistic and low-context cultures prefer direct modes of communication (Hall, 1990). Another issue researchers have often addressed is how limited comprehension between group members may be due to different English proficiencies and great variation in accents (e.g., Davison &Ward, 1999). The current study attempts to address the aforementioned challenges in terms of the relationship between them and a group of Korean international students' cultural and educational background.

Korean students and group work

Indeed, there are many challenges Asian international students confront in their initial oral participation in group work. For example, Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, and Pilot (2006) argue that many Asian international students may not feel comfortable receiving feedback from their peers during group discussion; rather the students believe that paying attention to the teacher's lecture is a more efficient way of acquiring knowledge and skills. However, this study is not intended to claim that Korean students in this study are utterly unaccustomed to team or collaborative learning; they too appreciate team work and academic discussions (Li & Campbell, 2008). However, they prefer collaborative learning in a more informal environment outside the classroom, and they seem to feel uneased in formal classroom settings among teachers and peers (Tiong & Yong, 2004). For the Korean students in this study classroom formality, showing respect for authority, saving face and group harmony present a challenge when confronted with a constructivist approach of learning that is self-regulatory in nature, and when active interactions and debate with group members are at times required (Cronin, 1995). To maintain interpersonal relations, goodwill and harmonious relations are important for these students (Williamson, 2002); thus, Korean students in this study use strategies to avoid direct confrontation, such as politeness, and face-saving strategies, which are centred on listening and implicitness (Murphy-LeJeune, 2003).

In societies and cultures where cooperation, harmony, and image are highly valued, the importance of reasoned judgment and thinking, and face-to-face confrontation may be considered as less valued tools for learning (Morita, 2004). Earlier research focusing on Korean university students indicates that they prefer assessments on individual work, since such evaluation are believed to reflect an individual's strengths, efforts and one's competitive standing amongst other students (e.g. Cronin, 1995; Kim & Margolis, 2000). According to Phuong-Mai, Terlouw and Pilot (2006), the individualistic and competitive spirit hinders cooperative learning for Korean youths, which may also be related to Korean universities' overreliance on traditional forms of instruction and examination (Lee, 2005).

Research methods

In order to deepen our understanding of how a group of Korean students came to participate in group work in a US undergraduate business program, I adopted a qualitative research approach through in-depth interviews and group observations (Patton, 1985).

Setting

This study is part of a larger research. The original research was an 11 month long case study conducted in both the US and Korea. The original research included two groups of young Korean students; namely, the US group and the Korea group, with seven students, respectively. This study focuses only on the US group and reports on their cultural adjustment via one semester group work in their second year in an undergraduate business program at a mid-west US public university where international undergraduate students make up 22 % of the total population with over 10% of the international students coming from Korea. The business course observed was Marketing Management II, which was a required course for all second year students. A total of 48 students were in the class. Almost half of the students in the class were international students from various countries, including Brazil, China, Taiwan, Korea and Mexico. Nine students, seven male and two females, in the course came from Korea.

As typically required in the business courses, the coursework in the class included readings on theory, discussion of readings, seminars, and group projects. Group projects took up a large proportion of the final grade in the course; therefore, students often spent several hours each week meeting with group members to complete group projects.

In the business course, the students had various opportunities of joining American and other international students during both informal learning groups and more formal groups in their courses. The formal group meetings tended to last several weeks in which students worked together on specific group projects until the submission deadline. The informal group meetings were provisional and often met off campus for group discussions when their schedule permitted (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). In addition to the course work, students listened to lectures, which were followed by seminars where students participated

in group discussions. They also assessed one another on team work in the course, which is a common approach associated with autonomous, cooperative and interdependent learning.

Participants

Potential students interested in this study were approached individually. I informed them of the project's nature and objective, and they were screened in advance based on learning approaches, specifically "surface" and "deep" strategic learning, by applying Biggs'(1987) study process questionnaire (see Appendix A). Seven participants, who stated their interest in this project, were chosen. In this study, there was a relative good mixture of gender (four females and three males) and learning approaches. Pseudonyms are used to ensure the participants' privacy. Their biographical information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: *Participant profiles*

Name	Age	Gender	Major (in Korea)	Study in the US	Learning approach
Jenna	20	F	Business Administration	6 months	Surface
Sooah	21	F	Business Administration	N/A	Surface
Mina	19	F	Finance	N/A	Deep
Younghee	23	F	Business Administration	8 months	Deep
Minsu	22	M	Economics	4 months	Deep
Joonhan	25	M	Finance	1 year	Surface
Changsoo	23	M	Business Administration	1 year	Deep

Data collection

The primary data for this study consisted of the transcripts of in-depth interviews (78 in total). Secondary data were observational notes of small group discussions in both the formal and informal groups. Each interview lasted between an hour to an hour and forty minutes. All interviews were conducted in Korean and translated into English. While certain variations in coping strategies and general evaluation of the group work were found between participants with differing learning approaches in the research, it will not be the focus of this specific study.

At the beginning of the semester, a semi-structured background

interview was conducted and audio-recorded individually with each student for approximately one hour (see Appendix B). During the interview, I began to ask the students to talk about their experiences in learning English in Korea, learning styles, their current situation, and their future plans. Then, I asked them more specific questions related to my research inquiry, including how they felt about participation in group discussions and what they considered important factors influencing oral participation in group work. The background interviews were conducted in Korean, audio-taped, and immediately transcribed verbatim.

To further support the interview data, I observed both the formal and informal group gatherings in and outside the classroom environment. During the group gatherings, sitting with other students in the circle, I took observational notes on the interactional patterns of each participant.

Data analysis

As is typical in a qualitative study, data collection and analysis did not always occur in a consecutive manner. While interviewing the participants, I also continued to observe group discussions, have informal conversations with the participants, and analyse the interview and observational data. Thus, data collection and data analysis reciprocally influenced each other.

After the first background interview, I transcribed the recordings, and read the transcripts. NVivo-7 was used to facilitate in coding and analysis of the data. Analysis began with line-by-line coding, generating free nodes. Then I grouped the free nodes of similar features into tree nodes. This process helped summarize the data and present the key points of the interviewees' responses. Thereafter, I attempted to create categories that described the connection between tree nodes in a meaningful way to explain my research questions. In this process, some of the categories were redefined and revised. For example, as I began to organize the categories, I first included English language ability as a separate theme that emerged between the categories. However, recursively analysing all the data, I found that all students repeatedly cited cultural factors as having a more significant influence in their group work participation. Therefore, while students' English language

ability is noted by the students as a factor influencing their group participation, it was not grouped as a separate theme but included as a subtheme. As I continued to go through both the integration and the refinement of the categories, themes that crystallised the relationships between the categories' were developed. A theme chart was built to illustrate the emerging essence. They are categorized under 'discourse system,' which is defined as a system of communication with a language shared by a particular social group (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). In this study, discourse system is made up of three points in cross-cultural communications, namely kinds of discourse (language and personal welfare), socialization (formal education and informal learning processes) and face systems (relationships among members and meaning of self).

Findings

Influence of cultural factors in initial participation

Earlier literature of how cultural inheritance impacts students' participation points out that lacking confidence, poor language skills, different communication style, and lacking socialization with students from other cultures within and outside the class all leads to students' passiveness (e.g. Behfar *et al*., 2006; Halverson & Tirmizi, 2008). In Confucian culture, directly stating one's opinion, being explicit about problems or situations that occur, speaking in a loud voice and asking questions not related to the issue at hand are deemed as bad manners (Cheng, 2000), which contributed to the Korean participants' silent participation when they first commence group work. This study suggests that several educational, cultural, and ideological factors hinder the Korean participants to actively participate when initially participating in group work that is conducted in English with group members of widely varying degrees of English language proficiency. The following excerpts quoted in the findings of this study are typical of the interviewees' views.

Forms of discourse

The participants reported that they lacked self-confidence when participating in a new learning environment. The lack of self-confidence contributed to the participants' silent participation in the early stages of their group work adjustment process. As commonly noted by all the

Korean students, one reason for this lack of confidence was attributed to their limited spoken English language skills. However, a more interesting finding was that the problem of second language use was not only limiting the students' ability to convey their thoughts but also impeding their communication style.

Regarding communication style, the participants reported that they often had to think twice before acting and tended to use indirect communication style. This was heightened by the students' anxiety on what to say and how to say it; concerns about having to reiterate complicated ideas in front of their peers in a second language, particularly when their ideas appeared wrong or valueless; and fear of wasting other students' time due to their limited linguistic ability.

> *I guess the greatest worry would be my inability to speak fluently in English. Since I am not a native speaker, it takes a lot of effort to clearly express my thoughts. I also get so nervous, and falter in my speech . . . Sometimes, I ask myself if my comments make sense; it's all very complicated . . . Usually, I end up speaking only half of my ideas in very short sentences so that everyone can understand what I am saying. (Minsu)*

Joonhan shared a similar experience. He reported that he often could not understand his team member's questions, which obstructed his ability to think. His description of his feelings during such moments shows how such situations cause him to panic as an English as a Second Language (ESL) speaker. He said, '*In my head, I had a lot of ideas, but when my peers asked about them I was not sure how to express them; rather than having to face the difficulty of explaining all my ideas, I tell myself to make any quick comment; explain one or two key ideas and move on to another topic.*'

Face system

Regarding the preferred or assumed relationships within the group, the Korean participants reported that they were self-conscious about losing face if their ideas were questioned. This self-consciousness is in keeping with the relationship between communication and culture, as communication practices are greatly influenced by culture (Hall, 1990). Communication style for many Koreans emphasizes indirectness,

formalism, and *Chaemyon* (Lee, 2005). That is, if one is said to maintain *Chaemyon*, one does not reveal everything, but attempts to maintain harmony and politeness with respect to one's status in the group (Kang, 2005). Thus, the Korean communication process generally reflects the concepts of 'amssi' (insinuation) and 'seoyeol'(hierarchy and role relationship). For example, when a group member challenged their reasoning, many of the Korean participants took it in as a personal attack. Moreover, the participants tended not to question or challenge others' ideas for fear of not wanting to appear aggressive and damage any good relationships. Another challenge they faced was the inability to notice non-linguistic cues and pauses in conversations; thus, they were not sure when it was appropriate to speak.

> *I try not to stand out by saying something wrong without enough evidence. If I feel that I made a comment that is out of context, I look at the facial expression of my peers . . . When no one responds to my comment, I get a little embarrassed; I feel I could even lose face, and be perceived as an outsider*. (Joonhan)

Although a universal phenomenon and aligned with the ideology of *Chaemyon*, saving face is particularly salient in the Korean social psychology and culture. Saving face is not only a person's private affair, but also concerns the person's whole family, social networks and community at large (Cronin, 1995). Widely practiced in everyday life in Korea, saving face regulates human relationships and social communications (Cronin, 1995). It also influences communication approaches to avoid conflict situations (Furnham, 2004).

Socialization

When discussing identity during their learning process, the Korean participants viewed other group members (e.g. both national and international students) as superior in terms of English language proficiency and knowledge; therefore, the participants tended to respect and follow authority when they perceived themselves to be in a weak power situation. For example, when they did not believe they stood in equal footing with other students, the participants noted that they did not feel at ease expressing their opinions. My observations of the group dynamic showed that the Korean participants' sense of equality in expressing one's opinion was not strong, and they often preferred to get

inspiration from other group members' opinions and ideas:

> *There's a difference in the culture and educational background where we come from. Here [in the US] asking lots of questions is a natural part of learning; it's different. We're used to being quiet, and listening to the teacher's comments. . . [In Korea] If you must speak out you should always raise your hand, because other students will listen and judge your comments. So, usually we would think that if you are speaking out it means you must have a really important comment to make.* (Jenna)

In Korean culture not everyone is entitled to speak, a spoken 'voice' is equated with authority, experience, knowledge and expertise (Coward, 2002). Free-flowing exchange of ideas and questioning of knowledge and authority are not commonly seen in the Korean educational system (Cheng, 2000).

Group work promotes adaptation

An illustration of the Korean participants' adaptation is seen from comparing their initial silent participation and later-stage adjustments. The participants appeared to see the value of pro-active participation, just as other western students. They emulated how other students participated in group work, and adapted to the new group setting over the course of the semester: they learned to express their opinions, hold ground in group conversations, and build self-autonomy and responsibility. With being exposed to different cultures during group work, the participants learned to be more sensitive to differences between cultures and various outlooks, and fit in with their new learning context.

Forms of discourse: actively voicing ideas

One of the noticeable changes that occurred after doing group assignments via group work was that cognitively they viewed group discussions as an important part of learning. Emotionally, they became more comfortable and willing to give their input on different ideas. While many of the students were still conscious of other peer members' evaluation of their performance, behaviourally many of the students noted that they became less self-conscious of how other group

members might judge their ideas. Their determination and courage to openly discuss with and contribute to the group was promoted when group members listened to each other, and considered one another's viewpoints. Group members' encouraging behaviour helped some of the Korean participants to build more self-confidence in putting forward their views. Non-defensiveness and open-mindedness aid in motivating learners to participate in the co-construction of knowledge (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

> *At first I felt shy because I worried about making mistakes and tainting the image of my fellow Korean colleagues. With effort, I came to believe it is okay to make mistakes. Maybe it is just me, but I kind of noticed that other students don't think too deeply about what I did wrong. So, it makes it easier to say what I think. (Changsoo)*

> *If my group members are patient and not judging me, it feels easier to express my ideas. With peers who are stubborn and defensive, I rarely say anything because I don't want to bring negativity to the group. Still, it takes time to adjust, but here it is actually less stressful to just share my ideas than in Korea because there is less judgment. (Joonhan)*

For Korean students, group work offers them the opportunity to learn from peer members. For example, the students learn independent thinking and direct and explicit ways of expressing opinions. Moreover, in the final two months of the semester many of the Korean students realize that their ideas are equally valuable as those of other group members. In the early stages of group work, the participants easily lost self-confidence and withdrew from group participation before even attempting to convince others to accept their ideas. It appears that support and encouragement from members, particularly in group work, is proven to be quite helpful to the students. As Li and Campbell (2008) have noted, group support and communication have a strong impact on students' participation, and students view group work in a positive manner in which they are able to interact and make friends with other students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and build interpersonal communication skills.

Face system: attempt to hold ground

The participants found that some of the local American students in their group did well in persuasive talk. These students gave the impression that they were well-versed in defending their ideas and opinions. On the other hand, the Korean participants had the tendency to give up their ground quickly when faced with disagreements. Moreover, according to the participants, they acquiesced to the fact that other members in their group did not accept their work and ignored them. This outcome may be due to the idea that Korean students are not accustomed to interrupting, commenting, and providing critique or proposing answers (Holmes, 2004). The participants revealed their reasons for not holding ground and how they have changed:

> *At first, I did not make any comments when my opinions differed from that of others. Maybe it was because my English wasn't good enough. Sometimes, some of the members did not listen to my comment because they didn't understand me. It was now or never; if I continue to stay quiet it would get harder for me to speak up. (Changsoo)*

> *I was uncomfortable arguing against others' ideas, because I didn't want to appear crude.. . . Sometimes I had a hard time finding the right timing, so I just listened. As a result, members thought that I didn't make enough contributions. . . as I got used to the group, I began to understand that sharing and challenging different ideas forces me to think outside the box. . . When I had some relevant points, I began to speak up more. Of course, I was still careful not to disclose too much irrelevant ideas because I was still being evaluated by my peers for group contribution. (Younghee)*

These representative excerpts illustrate that the focal Korean students' views of disagreeing with others' ideas, and putting forward their arguments during group discussions can change. The participants interpret the notion of confrontation in a distinct way: expressing differing ideas or disagreeing with others' arguments does not necessarily mean being rude. The participants slowly began to accept others' ideas to be valuable for teamwork rather than confrontational and personal. They also interpret the notion of confrontation at a deeper

level in the sense that in different cultures it has different implications. That is, while in one specific culture, openly expressing various opinions may be perceived as the outcome of critical reasoning and part of the practice of discussion, in another culture, it may be seen as rude or being unsociable.

Socialization: learning self-autonomy

The Korean participants' outlook towards independent learning slowly changed. They felt empowered in regards to how tasks were allocated, organizing meetings and administrative skills during collaborative group work. However, at the same time they found themselves continuously facing more challenging responsibilities in order to successfully complete team projects. For example, the Korean participants believed that instructors were potential evaluators of their knowledge rather than co-contributors in their learning process. They were taught to believe that the most crucial factor in academic success and successful learning were contingent on the instructor's guidance and input. This belief was challenged by the pedagogical approaches in the US whereby students were required to read and research independently with appropriate referencing of reading materials. Cutting and pasting information from texts without appropriate citation was regarded as plagiarism in which students learned about in the US.

Through group work, there was a shared changed view among the participants: they learned to be in more control of their studies and became more self-autonomous. This was also accompanied by their ability to take control of one's own learning, namely, they sought guidance from their instructors as well as from peer group members. The Korean students in this study believed it was important for them to build individual abilities to actively collaborate with other peer members, to respond to problems and conflicts autonomously and to contribute to group work as a responsible member. A number of the participants in their interview noted that while working in a group with a diverse group of students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they felt a sense of responsibility to act as model Korean students so that other members did not look down upon Korean students.

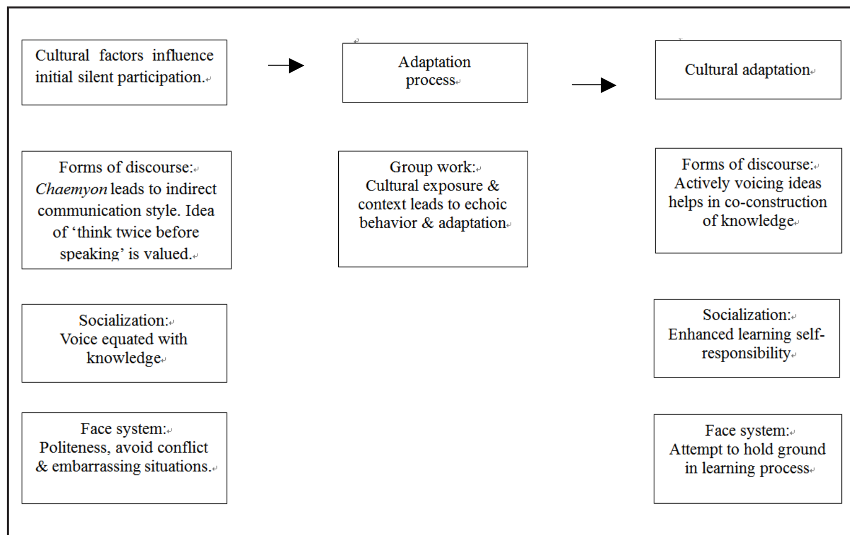
> *I am still adjusting, but I feel I have become more responsible with my studies, because I am forced to do more reading and research alone. . . . With my assignments, I still try to receive the instructor's feedback; so when I share my work with others, I have the right answers. . . .I remind myself that for every assignment I have to do my best for myself and as a senior for the Korean juniors. (Joonhan)*

> *During class discussions, I have to respond to various questions. With assignment grades, there is a rubric to follow, so the grading is stricter than in Korea, so to do well I have to manage my time and request assistance from instructors. In this sense, I can say I've made a little progress working independently. (Sooah)*

The findings illustrate that the Korean participants' outlook on their learning process gradually changes and their communication skills improve as they meet a wide cross-section of people. The changes were most notable in the final two months of the academic semester. In examining the participants' adjustment process, data showed that they have grasped the value of autonomous learning, taking responsibility for self-motivation, and acknowledging opinions of their peers (Aronson & Osherow, 1980). Cultural diversity, plus negative stereotyping, may make team experience quite complicated, yet can be valuable (Ford & Chan, 2003).

As already discussed in the findings, three aspects of intercultural communication (forms of discourse, socialization, face systems) explain the silent participation behaviour of the Korean participants in their initial group work participation (Figure 1). The figure illustrates the three developmental stages in their adjustment process via group work. In the first and second stage, as students are exposed to a new learning context and culture (via group work), they emulate and echo the learning patterns of their peers. In doing so, in the final stage of their adjustment process (final two months of the academic semester) the students show noticeable response patterns, such as being more proactive in voicing ideas, learning self-responsibility, and holding one's ground.

Figure 1: *Group work adjustment process*



Discussion

The recursive analysis of the data led me to conclude that the student's perceptions of their language level, and differences in sociocultural values and educational practices were intertwined and strongly influenced the participants' group participation and overall socialization process.

Two notable factors are commonly used to explain Asian international students' reticence in group work participation: lack of adequate language proficiency (Ferris, 1998) and differing sociocultural norms and values (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995). Indeed all seven Korean students in this study identified both factors as influencing their group participation. They perceived their language skills as inadequate for effective participation in group discussions. As previous studies on Asian students in US higher education (Liu & Littlewood, 1997) have indicated, this perception appeared to lead them to feel uncomfortable talking among their peers and to be greatly concerned about how their instructors and classmates might evaluate them as competent students. However, in this study it was particularly interesting that the Korean

students' evaluation of their own language proficiency was generally lower than I would have ascribed, based on their presentation skills, and participation in the small group discussions. While it would be erroneous to minimize the role of language proficiency, it does seem important to distinguish between actual language proficiency and self-perception of language proficiency, with both playing important roles in their group work adaptation process.

It is also important to note that, as Vygotsky (1978) has emphasized, language is learned and used within a particularly sociocultural framework. Thus, addressing the first research question, all of the participants identified sociocultural differences as playing the most important role in their lack of group participation. Broad sociocultural differences between Korean and US culture regarding the value of speaking out and role expectations between the two cultures were evident in the patterns of group work participation. In particular, although the participants had studied in academic fields closely associated to the field of business in Korea, the students seemed to be influenced by the Korean social conduct, *Chaemyon*. Their effort to meet Korean social expectations seemed to keep them from actively participating in group discussions.

The second research question addressed ways group work effects the participants' socialization process in a US business program. Findings from my data analysis showed that factors related to specific differences in their current peer group practices also impacted their socialization process. For example, the participants worried about peer assessments due to their limited language proficiency and sociocultural and educational differences in group work participation. Moreover, for international students to participate in group dynamics in the particular context of a US educational institution, they need not only proficient language abilities but also knowledge of and experience with the discourse norms (e.g. peer members as active co-contributors of meaning) in peer group practices. As the Korean students negotiated between their prior sociocultural and educational practices (e.g. saving face system and silent participation) and current discourse norms of peer group dynamics (e.g. peer members as active co-contributors of meaning) by which they had to operate, they had to rethink their conceptions of the roles of instructors, peer group members, language,

and their own participation. They also had to learn how to navigate turn-taking signals occurring quickly among peers during group discussions. I found that the students blended expectations from the two distinct discourse practices and often switched between viewing group work as heuristic tools and an evaluative process. On the one hand, they believed that group work offered them a valuable means of learning. Yet they also seemed to retain some of their cultural habits of the Korean educational and sociocultural practices, as evident in their valuing the instructor's response and knowledge over those of other students and in the belief that the instructor and peer group members were not always responding as co-contributors of meaning but as evaluators of their knowledge and ability.

Conclusion and Limitations

The Korean participants' responses in their interviews may not represent that of all Korean international students in the US. Factors, such as individual skills, gender, personality, motivation, and prior experience residing in the US, may influence the students' cultural interactions with other international and local native English speaker students, who may also show cultural and learning variations. Moreover, the participants' experience interacting with group members, time spent during group work, participants' interaction with students' of different nationalities will influence their overall experience, and thus, their socialization process in a US educational setting. Also, it is worth noting that culture is not bipolarized: culture is complex, rich, dynamic and diverse. As De Vita (2000) has noted, "Subcultures and regional cultures within and across a national culture can differ diametrically and from the national culture" (De Vita, 2000, p. 172). Nonetheless, by understanding the cultural context of a group of Korean students in this study, my intention is to help educators avoid a few common stereotypes of Korean students as rote and passive learners, and why they are regarded as silent participants.

The study suggests that instructors can do much to help Asian international students orally participate in group work more actively. To better equip students in this learning process, instructors should not completely exclude the importance of instructor intervention, particularly in specific stages of building team work. For instance, in

the initial stages of team building, many of the participants reported the need for the instructor to intervene in allocating groups. The participants believed that a few native English speakers were reluctant to be in the same group with international students because native speakers feared that international students' limited English proficiency would negatively impact group communication and final grades. Moreover, unguided multicultural groups may not always provide much learning potential and may even raise anxiety among students. Such groups might also create a sense of uneasiness in the group dynamic, less commitment, and even negative stereotyping among students (Ledwith, Manfredi, & Wildish, 1997).

To address such issues that may arise in team building, pedagogic scholars in adult education (e.g. Allen & Higgins, 1994; Collier, 1980) argue that cooperative learning skills need to be taught the same way as academic skills. Particularly in multicultural settings where intercultural challenges exist, students need explicit on-going training in skills that facilitate teamwork among students from different cultures. For example, the participants in this study would benefit with additional training on group learning, such as how to set goals, share roles, and adopt strategies for conflict resolutions, and communicate face-to-face (Collier, 1980).

In this study, Korean students' adjustment in this new cultural and educational setting show that 'culture of learning' (Murphy-LeJeune, 2003) is not fixed, but is dynamic and changing under various contextual influences. The significance for the students is that they move from mono-culture to multi-culture; and from single experience to diverse experiences, which is a process of enriching their learning experience.

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Appendix A

The Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, 1987) is a 42-item questionnaire used to measure students' approaches to learning. Based on the results of the questionnaire, the process of students' learning is categorized as either 'surface', 'deep', or 'achieving.'

Table A-1: *Difference in motivation and study process of surface, deep, and achieving approaches to study*

Approach	Motivation	Process (strategy)
Surface	Fear of failure	Rote learning of facts and ideas
	Desire to complete course of study	Focus on task in isolation
Deep	Interest in the subject	Relate ideas to evidence
	Vocational relevance	Integration of materials across courses
	Personal understanding	Identifying general principles
Achieving	Achieving high grades	Use techniques that achieve highest grade
	Competing with others to be successful	Level of understanding patchy and variable

Appendix B

1. Where did you learn English?
2. How do you evaluate your English ability?
3. Describe the most/ the least successful participation in a group environment.
4. How do you prepare to participate in group discussions?
5. How do you feel when you talk in a group environment?
6. What factors do you think are important to participate in group discussions?
7. What suggestions would you give someone who may be struggling to adjust in group learning?

About the Author

Jung Yin Kim currently works as a visiting professor at University of Seoul, South Korea. Her current research interest lies in examining the interrelationship between student discourse and learning using theoretical frameworks from sociolinguistics and second language education.

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Reasons for the slow completion of Masters and Doctoral degrees by adult learners in a South African township.

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The aim of the study was to investigate the reasons why adult learners took longer than required to complete their Master's and Doctoral degrees. A questionnaire and focus group interviews were used to collect data. Twenty adult learners who registered for the Master's and Doctoral degrees at one township campus of a university were targeted, and 16 responded. All 16 participants lived in the townships, and obtained their primary, secondary and tertiary education from the township schools. It was found that the lack of computer skills, poor research skills, inadequate access to the internet, stress, supervision problems, as well as employer's workload contributed enormously to the adult learners' inability to complete their studies within the prescribed period. The study also highlighted the impact of apartheid education on adult learners at postgraduate level. The apartheid education system, which was characterised by poor education provision, played a major role in the slow completion of Masters and Doctoral degrees by the African adult learners. It is recommended that African adult learners who enroll for Masters or Doctoral

degrees should do training in research approaches, computer skills, information search and stress management prior to their study. The study duration for both the Masters and Doctoral degrees also need to be reviewed, especially for adult learners or students who obtained their education from the township schools.

Keywords: *Slow completion, African adult learners, Master's and Doctoral degrees.*

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate reasons why the adult learners took longer than required to complete their Master's and Doctoral degrees at a township campus of a university in South Africa. The specific research question which this study intended to answer was: "Why African adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds took longer than required to complete their Master's and Doctoral degrees?"

At the particular university, and at most universities in South Africa, the minimum duration for the Master's degree is one year full-time and two years continuous part-time; and no candidate should register for the Master's degree for a period longer than four years – except with the special permission of the Senate. For the Doctoral degree the minimum duration is two years full-time and three years continuous part-time; and no candidate should register for the Doctoral degree for a period longer than five years – except with the special permission of the Senate. However, the adult learners who participated in this study did not adhere to the stipulated durations, since most of them were registered for the Master's and Doctoral degrees for between five and seven years without completing these degrees.

Literature study

The research into Master's and Doctoral studies has demonstrated an array of potential impediments to candidate progress, with the possibilities of either delayed completion or attrition. Attrition differs from country to country, with some countries reporting up to 85%, while in some countries more than a third of all students of Master's

and Doctoral programmes drop out within the first year (Cantwell, Scevak, Bourke, Holbrook, 2012; Essa, 2011). The situation may be more intricate for adult learners, due to the complex nature of their circumstances. Richardson (2013) states that adult learners require much higher levels of motivation in order to start and complete a learning programme, as compared to younger students. Many adult learners view the research process in the Master's and Doctoral programmes as characterised by anxiety, uncertainty and 'stuckness' (Batchelor & Di Napoli, 2006; Evans and Stevenson, 2010). The Master's and Doctoral programmes are generally rigorous, and may require that the adult learners are highly motivated in order to successfully pursue them.

The adult learners are faced with a number of challenges and commitments which compete for their attention. The main responsibilities of most adult learners are work and family. Morris (2013) states that there already exists tension between work and family, and that this tension could be worse if the person is studying. The main sources of tension could be time available, family and social interactions, personal priorities and financial constraints (Morris, 2013; Duke & Hinzen, 2014). The time constraints imply that work, family and studying responsibilities share the limited time that the adult learners have at their disposal – leading to the neglect, postponing and mishandling of some of their responsibilities. Researchers in various parts of the globe have found that adult learners enrol in order to improve their status, productivity and income (Morris, 2013; Spaull, 2013; Rothes, Lemos & Gonçalves, 2013). This is more applicable in South Africa where the *apartheid* government deliberately denied many Africans an opportunity of acquiring qualifications and good education. Access to higher education for African children was also very difficult (Letseka & Maile, 2008; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). The efforts by the South African government and local universities to address injustices of the *apartheid* government have led to an increase in the numbers of African students studying at universities, including the numbers of adult learners and women. However, increased numbers of African students at universities was not accompanied by a support system that takes into consideration the deficiencies of the apartheid education and township schooling system from which they come. Hence in their manner of writing the African students reveal these deficiencies – as confirmed by

Thesen and Cooper (2014) who believe that an individual's writing is never neutral, but it is always influenced by factors such as background, culture, exposure and experiences – all which may be contradictory to scientific writing. African students need clear guidance in this regard, without which the contradictions they experience in their writing may lead to the risk of failure.

The literature study indicates that there are various reasons for the delayed completion or non-completion of the Master's and Doctoral degrees. The first reason could be the adult learners' readiness to do research. Evans and Stevenson (2010) believe that the adult learners' readiness to engage in research may have a great effect on the time of completion and the quality of the research. Meerah (2010) found that many adult learners doing research generally felt that they have yet to acquire skills in seeking information for their research, and are also deficient in analytical skills.

The second reason could be the supervisor. The nature, style and norms of interaction within the supervision relationship play an important role at the Master's and Doctoral levels of research. Many studies identified that some adult learners initially experience confusion, anxiety and alienation due to a lack of clarity regarding the norms and expectations of the supervision relationship (Essa, 2011; Evans & Stevenson, 2010). Ismail, Majid and Ismail (2013) found that supervision is sometimes characterised by a lack of positive communication, a lack of the necessary expertise to give support, and power conflicts in a case where there are supervisors and co-supervisors. Many research students seem to expect a close relationship in which supervisors display a strong personal interest in the student (Abdulla & Evans, 2011; Sidhu, Kaur, Fook & Yunus, 2013). However, the serious shortage of senior lecturers qualifying to supervise Master's and Doctoral students at many national and international universities make close relationships between supervisors and students very difficult – since supervisors may have a high number of students to supervise (Abdulla & Evans, 2011; Muhar, Visser & van Breda, 2013). The resultant supervision overload may lead to neglect of weaker students, and this may greatly disadvantage adult learners who may need special attention.

The third reason could be what is referred to as problematic candidature (Cantwell et al. 2012). Problematic candidature refers to

shortcomings or weaknesses that are within the student, and which may impede progress, and diminish the quality of the final product (Cantwell et al., 2012). Such candidates may lack the ability to engage with the complexities of Master's and Doctoral studies. The issue of problematic candidature may be common among African adult learners in South Africa, since most of them attended township schools during the *apartheid* era. The *apartheid* education grossly neglected their development in numeracy, literacy and information technology (Blignaut & Els, 2010; Spaull, 2013). Such students struggle to meet the high demands of university education, especially at Master's and Doctoral levels. Essa (2011) found that many adult learners in South Africa quit their postgraduate studies due to 'their inability to cope with the demands of the academic rigour'. The universities in South Africa are also under pressure to produce many Master's and Doctoral candidates, since the funding of universities by government is in such a way that the successful completion of Master's and Doctoral degrees fetch much more subsidies than the successful completion of lower degrees (Govender, 2011). Therefore, in order to claim the higher subsidies, universities may admit many students into the Master's and Doctoral programmes – without properly screening them to determine readiness for studying at such high levels. In some instances, the selection processes may be deliberately skewed to favour weaker or marginalised students. Espenshade and Chung (2005) found that many elite universities apply certain selection qualities, which they call affirmative action, in order to increase the admission of certain type of students. In South Africa, the National Plan for Higher Education suggested that participation rates at universities could be augmented by recruiting increasing numbers of 'non-traditional' students—including mature adults, women, workers and disabled people (Castle, Munro & Osman, 2006). The social benefits for such affirmative action are enormous. Long (2007) found that affirmative action policies such as class-based affirmative action, and targeted recruiting among minority or marginalised groups have had a positive effect on education levels of these groups. Although universities are commended for recruiting among minority or marginalised groups, such students may be high risk cases, with greater chances of taking longer than required to complete the study programme or quitting it. Therefore, support systems are to be in place to ensure that such students successfully complete the study programmes for which they enrolled. Essa (2011) found that

the majority of adult learners who quit their postgraduate studies complained about a lack of institutional and social support. A good institutional support may ameliorate the effects of an ineffective social support and help adult learners to successfully pursue postgraduate studies.

Research approach

The research design comprised a multiple-method process of data collection, where a questionnaire and focus group interviews were used to gather data. The literature on adult education, township education, access to higher education by Africans as well as completion and attrition rates played a major role in the development of items for the questionnaire and for the interview guide (as advised by, for instance, Billett, Henderson, Choy, Dymock, Kelly, Smith, James, Beven & Lewis, 2012; Essa, 2011; Govender, 2011; Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015). The questionnaire had tick boxes for aspects such as biographical information, type of school attended, access to resources, the research environment and the work situation. The questionnaires were delivered to individual candidates, and were collected after one week.

Two focus groups were formed, one for the Master's adult learners and another for the Doctoral adult learners. The purpose of separating the Master's and Doctoral adult learners was to avoid a situation where the Master's adult learners may feel dominated or intimidated by the Doctoral adult learners. Also, the experiences and knowledge of the two groups may not be the same, and this may negatively affect the principle of homogeneity which is emphasised by various authors writing about focus group interviews (Carey, 2015; Yager, Diedrichs, & Drummond, 2013). The Doctoral group was composed of six adult learners, while the Master's group had ten adult learners. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to elaborate upon and help to interpret the findings of the questionnaire. Therefore, the results of the questionnaires were made available to each member of the group, and they had to agree on issues which had to be discussed. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and that they should be free to express their opinions. The focus group interviews allowed further probing for purposes of clarity regarding reasons and circumstances which made it difficult for the adult learners to complete their studies within the stipulated

time. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) believe that probing enables the researcher to explore the participants' subjective realities, feelings, reasoning and belief systems.

This is an interpretive study which explores the experiences of studying at postgraduate level by a selection of African adult learners. Studies around African adult learners at tertiary institutions in South Africa, especially at postgraduate level, have not yet been earnestly pursued. This study aims to influence planning and support for adult learners at tertiary institutions, specifically at Master's and Doctoral levels. The study relies on self-reporting and expression of opinion by the African adult learners. Since there were only 16 participants, the findings of this study may not be applicable to other institutions in South Africa. Nonetheless, they still can be regarded as casting some light on the issues as experienced by these participants and as offering some insight into what is needed in the institution. Furthermore, other researchers can continue to explore the extent to which similar conditions and experiences apply in other South African tertiary institutions.

Participants

The population comprised of all adult learners who registered for Master's and Doctoral degrees in the Faculty of Humanities at one campus of the university. While the main campus of the university is situated in another city, the campus in this study is situated in the township. Twenty adult learners were targeted, but 16 (80%) responded. All the participants were African. Of the 16 adult learners who responded twelve (75%) were male. The Master's programme had ten participants, of which seven were male. The Doctoral programme had six participants, of which five were male. The ages of the participants ranged between 37 and 61. All the participants were involved with the township schools, either as teachers or principals (school-based) or education administrators (office-based). The majority of the participants held positions of authority, such as school principal, subject adviser, school inspector and director in education; only two of the 16 participants were ordinary post level one teachers. Most of the participants were registered for between five and seven years for the Master's and Doctoral degrees, and had not yet completed these degrees. All the participants met the minimum requirements to be

in the Master's and Doctoral programmes. All the participants did their previous qualifications on a part-time basis or through distance learning. All participants acquired their primary education, secondary education and teacher training qualifications in the township schools during the *apartheid* era.

Results of the questionnaire

Table 1: *Access to resources*

No.	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1	I have access to a librarian for information search	15	94	1	6
2	I am able to visit the library, at least, twice a week	9	56	7	44
3	I have a computer of my own	13	81	3	19
4	I am able to write reports using a computer	15	94	1	6
5	I always find the library internet services available	9	56	7	44
6	I have my own private internet access	8	50	8	50
7	I am able to search for articles on the internet, on my own	11	69	5	31
8	It is possible to complete my studies within the normal duration	13	81	3	19
9	I have access to a computer at my workplace	12	75	4	25
10	I only have access to the internet when I am at the campus	6	38	10	62
11	I have completed a report or dissertation before this study	9	56	7	44
12	The library has enough books for my field of study	3	19	13	81

The results indicate that the lack of relevant books in the university's library and the students' inability to access internet were the major problems experienced by the participants. About 13 of the participants complained that the library did not have enough books relevant to their fields of study. Although 13 of the participants had computers of their own, ten could not access internet on campus, and eight had no internet access of their own. There were also seven adult learners who were unable to visit the campus regularly. Nevertheless, 15 of the participants were able to write reports using the computer, 11 could search for articles on the internet and 15 had access to a librarian for subject search.

***Table 2:** Research issues*

No	Item	To a great extent	%	Somewhat	%	Very little	%	Not at all	%
1	I struggled with my research proposal	1	6	6	38	9	56	0	0
2	I need training in the basics of research	4	25	7	44	2	12	3	19
3	My family accepts that I am studying	13	81	2	13	0	0	1	6
4	I experience stress due to the difficulty of my studies	4	25	7	44	4	25	1	6
5	The attitude of the supervisor is encouraging	13	81	2	13	0	0	1	6
6	My work environment contributes positively to my studies	11	69	1	6	2	12	2	13
7	The township environment contributes negatively to my studies	4	25	3	19	3	19	6	37
8	My employer's workload allows me to do my studies	2	13	5	31	0	0	9	56
9	My employment is relevant to my field of study	13	81	3	19	0	0	0	0
10	The problem I am researching is based on my work environment/ situation	12	75	4	25	0	0	0	0
11	The use of English is a problem for me	0	0	2	13	3	19	11	68
12	My previous degree adequately prepared me for this research	8	50	7	44	1	6	0	0
13	I can handle the pressures of work, family and studies	4	25	12	75	0	0	0	0
14	I need this qualification for promotion or improved status	6	37	2	13	2	13	6	37

The results indicate that the work situation, lack of research skills and stress negatively affected the participants' studies. Fourteen of the 16 participants reported that their employers' workload did not allow them to do their studies, and 13 of the 16 participants reported that they needed training in basic research skills; while 15 of the 16 participants experienced stress due to the difficulty of their studies. Ten of the participants needed the qualification to improve their status or chances of promotion. Nevertheless, 13 of the participants were comfortable with their studies since their studies were in their area of employment.

Results of the focus group interviews

The group members had used the tables above to prioritise and agree on issues they wanted to discuss. Most of the participants showed interest in discussing issues around the library, research, work, stress, the supervisor, computer skills and internet access. The results of each of the items mentioned above will be briefly discussed.

Library

The complaint by both groups was that very few relevant books were available in the library, while those books which were available had fewer copies – with the result that adult learners waited for too long before they could obtain a copy of the book. Other problems related to the library included noise by undergraduate students, shortage of computers in the library and limited internet access. One adult learner remarked as follows: 'I think the campus library was not meant for post-graduate degrees because for us there is just not enough resources in place'. The inability to visit the library regularly was also a common concern for both groups, with work and family commitments cited as the most common reasons for failure to go to the library regularly. One member said: 'We are really busy, and always away from home for up to a week'. The lack of internet access and the shortage of relevant books in the library were summed up as follows by one participant: 'If you make efforts to go to the library, you may go home empty-handed, with no books and no information'.

Computers and the internet

Although both groups felt that their poor mastery of computers was

a serious problem for their studies, the Doctoral group felt that there were basic computer operations they could manage, but these were inadequate since their Doctoral studies required much more advanced skills than the basic skills they possessed. Common words used included: 'I can use a computer, but for my simple everyday needs'; 'The tables which I have in my studies I cannot do'. When it came to internet access, both groups felt that the university's inability to provide them with internet access on campus was disadvantaging their studies. However, the majority of the Doctoral adult learners seemed to have made personal efforts to access internet through their 3Gs (private internet access) and using their cell phones as modems. The problem the Doctoral adult learners had was that some of the articles and material they needed to access were not available via 3Gs and private modems, but only accessible through the university internet since the university paid subscription fees to some of these publishing companies. The students used words such as: '3Gs don't help'; 'Whether you have internet of your own or not, it's [lack of access] the same'.

Research

Both the Masters and Doctoral adult learners complained a lot about their poor research skills. Although the Doctoral adult learners showed a much better effort and knowledge as compared to the Master's participants, they still felt that their knowledge fell short of the demands made by their doctoral studies. 'I can't help myself with what I know, I need guidance', and 'The many research concepts and approaches confuse me' were some of the comments made by the Doctoral adult learners. The Master's adult learners' comments were: 'I really struggle with research', and 'I don't know it [research]'.

The participants also mentioned that supervisors expected them to know more about research; and the supervisors, therefore, did not explain much in their feedback to these adult learners. The Master's participants were particularly concerned about the lack of detail and the use of complex research concepts during the feedback discussions with their supervisors.

Work

When it came to the impact of the employer's work on their studies,

both groups felt that their workloads were too heavy, and thus made it difficult for them to complete their studies in time. The Doctoral participants complained about being away from home a lot (due to work) as a reason for their inability to visit the campus library regularly. The Doctoral participants held higher positions in Education administration, and were thus travelling a lot and spending a number of days away from home and from the campus. The comments from the Doctoral adult learners were along the lines: 'Work demands keep me out of town most of the time', and 'I am always away from home'.

The Master's adult learners also complained about school teaching and administration work. Their comments included: 'Preparing and marking learners' work take time', and 'I always do administration work which I cannot do when I am in office'.

Stress

Both groups were clear on the impact of stress on their studies. They mentioned that the family and work pressures were taking a toll on their health, with experiences of headaches, stomach aches and stiff muscles becoming common or regular. 'This work will kill me' or 'These studies will kill me' were common statements among the adult learners.

Discussion

The study sought to investigate reasons why adult learners in the Master's and doctoral programmes took longer to complete their studies. The factors which were reported by the adult learners as problematic in their studies were the following: a lack of research skills, inadequate computer skills; a lack of sources in the library, stress and work pressure. The biographical information revealed that all the participants lived in the townships and obtained their primary and secondary school education, as well as their teacher training qualifications from institutions situated in the townships; while their tertiary education was also pursued through university campuses situated in the townships, or through part-time or distance learning. The townships were residential areas established for occupation by Africans only, in line with the apartheid policy. These townships were characterised by inadequate infrastructure, shortage of education institutions, inferior education and high rates of crime, unrests and unemployment.

The results revealed that most of the participants did not have the basic research skills required for their level of study prior to embarking on the Master's and Doctoral studies. The research skills are promoted by projects, group discussions and analysing available data. However, the teaching content in the township schools was too basic, and memorisation of facts was encouraged. Therefore, there was no need to find additional information. Hence the adult learners' basic research skills could not be developed from an early stage. The focus group interviews confirmed that the participants experienced problems with research skills, with Master's adult learners experiencing more research related problems than the Doctoral participants.

The participants' poor knowledge of research created communication problems between them and their supervisors. The participants reported that their supervisors assumed that they were conversant with basic research, and thus in their feedback and discussions, the supervisors simply used research concepts which participants did not understand. In many instances the supervisors were white males, who have never attended or worked at township schools, but have been exposed to a different and better system of education as compared to that of the participants. Therefore, the supervisors did not understand the research deficiencies of students from township institutions. The shortage of suitably qualified lecturers at many universities means that supervisors are overloaded with too many students to supervise (as emphasized by, for instance, Mouton and Boshoff (2015). Although the participants felt that their supervisors displayed professionalism and a caring attitude, the supervisors' work overload and their lack of knowledge about township schooling negatively affected their ability to adequately guide students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The inability to effectively use computers and access the internet also posed a serious problem for the participants. The participants attended township schools where they never had access to computers and internet connectivity. Hence the application of complex functions of the computer may be a problem for the participants. Although the majority of participants reported that they could write reports using a computer, the focus group interviews revealed that they could only write short reports needed for their work situation, but could not handle tables, graphs and complicated computer operations needed for their post-graduate studies.

Some of the participants had access to the internet only when they were on campus, with others unable to do so even on campus. However, many participants were unable to visit the campus library regularly – in order to use the internet facilities available on campus. In many instances, the scholarly research sites are not freely available to private internet users, since universities pay subscription fees to these sites in order for students to freely access such sites. Therefore, students who have private internet may not be able to access these sites without paying – which most students are not willing or able to do. Access to the internet is crucial for studies at Master's and Doctoral levels. In the case where the library did not have adequate books, as reported by the majority of the participants, access to the internet would even be more important since most of the sources the participants needed for their studies would be available on the internet. Meerah (2010) recommends that Master's and Doctoral candidates, prior to embarking on their studies, need to equip themselves with higher order information-seeking skills such as the ability to access, select, interpret and critically evaluate the related information in a timely and efficient manner. Therefore, the lack of internet access, coupled with poor computer skills for some of the participants, may make studying at Master's and Doctoral levels very difficult.

The work and family pressure also contributed negatively to the completion rates of the adult learners who participated in this study. The ages of the participants ranged between 37 and 61. They all had families and stable jobs, and most of them held key positions at their work places. Since the responsibilities of work and family were already demanding, the Master's and Doctoral studies may have been an additional burden to the adult learners. Hence an overwhelming majority of the participants reported that the employers' workload did not allow them to adequately focus on their Master's and Doctoral studies. In South African, the pressure to produce good results in Grade 12, to improve school administration and to adjust to the ever changing assessment systems in schools is unbearable for the majority of teachers and education administrators (John, 2015). The high numbers of resignations by teachers in South Africa is attributed to the pressure teachers are continuously exposed to (Nkosi, 2015). The work situation for teachers and education administrators is generally stressful, and the Master's and Doctoral studies may worsen the stress situation of the

adult learners who are also involved with schools in the townships.

The few female learners who participated in the focus group interviews seemed withdrawn, or participated less in discussions as compared to their male counterparts. However, they did mention that they were faced with a lot of responsibilities around the home – which male learners never complained about. The reason could be that in the African culture women, including professional or working women, are often expected to take care of their husbands, children and all household chores – with little or no help from their husbands. Therefore, the female adult learners may have experienced much more pressure than their male counterparts. The situation may make it very difficult for African professional women to focus on their studies and professions. Hence there were fewer women students at post-graduate level at the institution.

The majority of the participants reported that they enjoyed their Master's and Doctoral studies. This is in line with the view that adult learners who are working become more comfortable with their studies if such studies are relevant to their work situation (Essa, 2011; Morris, 2013). Choy, Billet and Kelly (2013) maintain that working adult learners prefer to engage in studies or training which could help them to become more productive, and also to improve their employment opportunities. Since the participants were in education, studying in education may have helped them to improve their performance or to manage situations more efficiently. The relevance of their studies to their work could also be the motivation which kept them in the Master's and Doctoral programmes for that long.

The minimum duration for both the Master's and Doctoral degrees may also be too short. The above discussion indicates that education provision for the African learners had been characterised by deficient content, inadequate facilities and poor administration. Therefore, recipients of such education would need longer time in order to cope with the demands of tertiary education. The fact that all the participants had not completed their studies after five to seven years of study could be indicative of their unpreparedness for the rigorous tertiary education programmes such as the Master's and Doctoral programmes. It could be that universities need the subsidies paid by government after successful

completion of these degrees, hence they could not make longer durations.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study focussed on the adult learners' slow completion of Master's and Doctoral degrees. While the number of participants in this study is small, the results are very clear: the adult learners took longer to complete their Master's and Doctoral degrees maily due to their heavy workloads, inadequate knowledge of research and a lack of technological skills. The delayed completion of the Master's and Doctoral studies by the adult learners may be costly for the university since government subsidies are delayed or even forfeited in the case of attrition. There is a need to address the slow completion rates of the adult learners, especially in the fast-changing world, which is characterised by technology, longer life-spans and a need for life-long learning. The introduction of a training programme for the adult learners who enrol for the Master's and Doctoral programmes could help to improve completion rates in these programmes. The training programme could include research approaches, computer skills, information search and stress management. The extension of study durations could also reduce the pressure (to complete) on adult learners, and thus enable them to have time for family and work – without feeling guilty.

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Is society capable of learning? Beyond a metaphysical foundation

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There is an assumption that any contemporary society should become a learning society to maintain stability in the face of change. Although proponents and policymakers take for granted that a society has the ability to learn, can this idea be defended? There is a problem in determining exactly what is meant by a learning society that learns. One response concerning whether a society has the ability to learn is negative, arguing that society lacks agency. In this article, I argue that society has the ability to learn by demonstrating how the negative position is untenable; I also show how the positive position is possible when the idea that a society has the ability to learn assumes a new meaning based on the view that a society is composed of individuals. I present Habermas' view that society can be a learning mechanism on its own, yet I argue that social agency has a distinctive character on its own but not a distinctive character on its own behalf. We need not build a metaphysical foundation, which claims that society can be a learning mechanism on its own in a way that extends beyond the efforts of individuals to construct a self-image.

Keywords: *individuals, society, intersubjectivity; learning; learning society*

Introduction

Does society have the ability to learn? It would be peculiar to give a negative answer. If a society manages to survive throughout the ages, then its very survival shows that it not only adapts but also successfully learns to sustain itself and thrive. Thus, the mere existence of society proves its ability to learn and change.

The idea of a society that is able to learn is often taken for granted in related policies and literature and is even perceived as more than a narrative, steering policy towards showing preference for the development of 'the learning society'—a society that consciously aims to learn (e.g., Jarvis 2007; Ragatt, Edwards, & Small 1996; Ranson 1994; Stiglitz & Greenwald 2014). After all, learning suggests a direction of betterment. The development of an educated society becomes valuable, and there appears to be a tendency to assert that any contemporary society confronting change should become an educated society as an important but not exclusive aim (Faure et al. 1972; Husén 1986; European Commission 1996; Kuhn 2007; NCIHE 1997). However, although proponents and policymakers offer their own accounts of educated society and take for granted the idea that a society can learn while proceeding directly to the practical agenda, a learning society is preoccupied with the pursuit of efficiency and quality driven by, in most contemporary cases, economic achievement or civic demand (e.g., Benn 2000; Biesta 2011; Greenwald & Stiglitz 2014; Welton, 2005). Therefore, at the level of implementation, policy and institutional efforts focus on setting supra-individual goals for individuals to meet pre-set, grand directives. Such a top-down vision of a learning society (Su 2007), which operates via systemic planning and regulation, emphasises the primacy of the rhetorical specifications of what must be learned as prescriptive guidelines for individual action rather than developing an awareness of how individuals, as concrete beings, actually act and learn. While relevant policies or institutions try to determine what should be learned, the direction of learning and therefore of action that individuals value is, paradoxically not something entirely decided and directed by policy or institutional demands. Scrutiny of the everyday lifeworld suggests that individuals may follow system-led requirements or guidelines but may also accommodate them, negotiate them, or choose to resist them to create a place for themselves. The power of individuals' agentic

subjectivities to assert their own perspectives, results in the mobilisation of learning in various and different dimensions instead. Before a commitment to the development of educated society is made, we must determine exactly what is *meant* by a learning society that can learn. The exploration of this idea is important because, as described above, neglecting to explore what this idea actually means could lead even proponents of the idea of a learning society to misinterpret the manner in which the idea is developed.

In the first part of this article, I provide the negative position that society lacks agency and thus cannot learn. Subsequently, I demonstrate how the negative position is untenable. I then present Habermas' view that society can be a learning mechanism on its own, yet in response to Habermas, I argue that we need not build a metaphysical,*'zoomed-out'* foundation that extends beyond the efforts of individuals to construct a self-image. I draw upon Habermas's (1987a) concepts of system and lifeworld and the colonisation that may occur during individuals' learning processes and interactions to show how difficult it can be for individuals in society to engage their whole person in learning. I also aim to show the importance of viewing individuals as *subjects* in the sense that they learn in a spirit of genuineness rather than as *objects* who learn to fulfil imperatives and therefore to experience reification. Indeed, the idea that a society has the ability to learn assumes a new meaning based on the view that a society is composed of *conscientious* individuals from which a learning society is not reduced to a summation of learning individuals but rather is constituted by individuals' interactive and authentic processes and learning efforts that could not possibly be produced by any single individual. This composition determines the meaning of a society that can learn.

The negative position

One answer that has emerged to answer the question of whether this idea can be defended is a negative answer. This argument lies in society's lack of agency. Learning is a process or activity that necessitates and presupposes agency, given that only agents can learn. To show and confirm whether a society can learn could involve viewing society as an agent. Giddens rejects the view that there is such a construct as social agency. He states that 'only individuals, beings which have a corporeal

existence, are agents' (1984, 220). To state that a society can learn is to perceive society as if it were an agent itself and a distinctive individual entity. Society, according to Giddens, lacks a singular corporeal existence that could exert its agency.

Wall (2000) also objects to the existence of social agency, which he alternatively calls 'group agency', by proposing that society itself has 'internal decision structures' that play a role in making a collective decision that could not be made by any single individual. Wall further argues that 'we should distinguish *having* a decision-making procedure from *making* a decision' (italics in original; 2000, 189). According to Wall, what is produced from the internal decision structures is actually reduced to the decision of the sum of individuals. Society only possesses the decision-making structures; it is the individuals who make decisions. Wall states that 'agents do more than simply behave in a way that can be justified by reference to some rule or policy. They are also *motivated* to act in one way or the other' (italics in original; 2000, 189). Wall contends that how a society acts is not the same as how an individual acts. The latter has thoughts, beliefs, desires, and reasons and can therefore act *for* something, whereas the former lacks cognitive ability and hence cannot produce thoughts, beliefs, or reasons. The aspect of structure is attributed to society, while the aspect of acts, which are motivated by thoughts, beliefs, reasons, and desires, is attributed to individuals. Society appears to act and have motives to act, but for Wall, it is actually individuals who act and have such motives.

Accordingly, the statement that a society can learn is considered meaningful merely in the metaphorical sense. What occurs in reality, according to this perspective, is that society changes but does not learn. As Jarvis (2001, 78-79) explains,

societies and organizations might change but they do not learn. … It is individuals who learn, but they are social beings. When people learn they sometimes subsequently change their behaviour and/or the procedures of the organization in which they function. This can generate change and the changes introduced into the system might cause other members of the society to learn and change their behaviour or, alternatively, to change their behaviour and learn. But it is the people who learn. The 'learning' might describe a type of society or organization

whose structures are designed to cause or encourage people to learn, and it is only in this sense that we can understand the term ‘learning society’.

This view again claims that only individuals can learn, whereas society can change but cannot learn. The difference between ‘learn’ and ‘change’ is that the former presupposes agency, whereas the latter does not. It makes sense to say that ‘Peter is learning’, which is caused by agency. We do not state that the picture is learning but rather that ‘the picture drawn by Peter is changing’. Peter has agency, whereas the picture that Peter is drawing does not. Likewise, society changes because individuals can learn. This argument can be traced to Giddens (1984, 220), who stated, ‘[a]ction descriptions ... should not be confused with the designation of agency as such’. To claim that a society learns is merely providing a shorthand description of individuals’ learning.

The untenable dichotomy

I argue that the negative position held by Giddens, Wall, and Jarvis regarding society with respect to agency is adopted by reference to the untenable dichotomy between the individual and society. For them, the individual and society appear to be opposing entities, with one being positive and the other viewed as negative. By holding the individual and society in tension based on the dichotomy, ‘[a]ll of these understandings are rooted in a more or less atomistic notion of the individual in which society is simply the sum of such individuals, negotiating with others to secure mutual accommodation of individual preferences’ (Jonathan 1997, 111). Such an atomistic notion of the individual is inadequately premised because what substantiates the existence of the individual is not taken into account. The perception of the individual and society as two separate entities is illusory once the focus is shifted to the *development* of them. The development of the learning individual is ‘penetrated, infected, characterised by the existence of others’ (Bradley 1927, 172). Even self-directed learning does not occur as a psychological and personal activity of cognition but is constructed socially and contextually. In Newman’s words, ‘If I blocked out the world, I necessarily blocked out the self as well’, (2008, 289).

As Urry claims in introducing Latour’s thoughts, ‘[s]ociety on its own does not hold us together, but it is what is held together’ (Urry

2000, 201). Instead of either 'society against individuals' or 'society and individuals', as if society were an entity of its own and there were two different entities juxtaposed, there exists 'a society *of* individuals' (Elias 1991). The 'of' here is meant in the constitutive sense, seeing the development of the individual and society as two manifestations of the one activity. The individual and society are not excluded or opposed to each other but rather are the *sine qua non* condition of each other (Bauman 2000, 40). The mutually constitutive position shifts the way learning is conceptualised from a psychologistic focus to one that is socially contextual and relational. It is the micro-processes and relationships of individuals, who themselves are socially and mutually bound, that constitute and constantly produce learning effects that no single learning individual could produce. A learning society, based on the sense of 'a society *of* individuals', when focusing on its qualitative, holistic sense of development, requires being understood in relational rather than entity-oriented terms (Cooper 2005).

Habermas' view

Jürgen Habermas, the social theorist who most consciously sees society through a learning lens, places 'individual and social learning processes at the core of his massive project' (Welton 1995, 136). In Habermas' (1987a) paired concepts of 'system' and 'lifeworld', the operation of system, based on a functionalist rationality, 'integrates diverse activities in accordance with the adaptive goals of economic and political survival' (Ingram 1987, 115); it progresses towards securing the system's own continuous operation and functioning. The lifeworld 'contributes to the maintenance of individual and social identity by organizing action around shared values' (Ingram 1987, 115). The lifeworld is fulfilled through intersubjective interactions in which individuals learn, communicate, and move based on meaning and value that they achieve and share together.

Habermas' view, although also characterised by the language of dichotomy, does not describe society as an image with an abstract structure or system, whereas individuals are in the life-world. Habermas rejects the reduction of social agency to the acts of individuals. The distinction Habermas makes between the system and the lifeworld should be borne in mind as 'theoretical entities describing various levels

of modern society' (Bohman 1989, 392); they are distinct for the sake of analysis but 'actually cut across, and refer to, one another' (Cook 2005, 57). Systems are not simply given; rather, they 'need to be anchored in the lifeworld: they have to be institutionalized' (Habermas 1987a, 154). Likewise, if the development and growth of the lifeworld are to be made possible, systems are required and inherently bound to the lifeworld. 'We all have to live in some kind of system with implicit tensions in its relationship to our individual and collective lives' (Mezirow 1995, 61). The system and the lifeworld are interdependent and intersect in all individuals' life situations and settings.

Habermas does not deny that societal learning is in fact attributed to individuals as social subjects who learn. Society, drawing on the learning capacities of individuals, learns in the derivative form of intersubjective agency. For Habermas, it is 'in a derivative sense that societies "learn"' (1979, 121).

...in a certain way, only social subjects can learn. But social systems, by drawing on the learning capacities of social subjects, can form new structures in order to solve steering problems that threaten their continued existence. To this extent the evolutionary learning process of societies is dependent on the competences of the individuals that belong to them (Habermas 1979, 154).

Such a derivative relationship between individuals and society does not lead Habermas to further conclude that society as a 'learning mechanism' (Habermas 1976, 1979) is reduced to individuals' learning. Rather, society itself gains its own strength, in terms of its own capacity for self-direction, to succeed in 'adaptation and goal-attainment' (Habermas 1976, 5). Some societal aspects, such as norms, systems, structures, or institutions, are self-steering, self-reflective, and self-regulated in ways that are not adequately explained simply in terms of individual agency. For Habermas, there is 'system integration', in the sense that a society as a system has a self-steering mechanism for self-regulation that is distinct from what he calls 'social integration', which is spoken of in relation to life-worlds in which individuals as subjects are socially related. Social integration and system integration are related in the sense that 'the former attaches to action orientations, while the latter reaches right through them' (Habermas 1987a, 150). In

less differentiated societies, according to Habermas, the integration of society is a process whose dynamics are determined by the constituent social members rather than conducted through them to achieve some supra-individual, pre-determined purpose. In such societies, system integration, dependent on learning individuals' efforts and competences and steered via economic and power dynamics, forms systemic societal mechanisms to sustain the material substratum of the lifeworld and make possible and maintain the lifeworld's continued existence. Habermas considers less differentiated societies first as lifeworlds and then as self-maintaining systems to show that social integration and system integration are actually interwoven (Habermas 1987a, 155). Through social integration, society is construed 'from the internal perspective of members of social groups' (Habermas 1987a, 150) as a lifeworld in which individuals learn and interpret their contexts and relate to others on an intersubjective basis. Through communicative action, they intersubjectively engage in constructing meanings and values and achieving mutual understanding. Concurrently, through system integration, society is necessarily conceived of as a self-maintaining system. From 'the external perspective of an observer' (Habermas 1987a, 150), this system is guided via power and exchanges that objectivate and enable the lifeworld to function and move.

However, with the increasing complexity of modern, capitalist societies, political and economic systems are differentiated and discrepant from the lifeworld, which is the result of 'an uncoupling of system integration from social integration' (Habermas 1987a: 180). Problems arise when the role of systemic mechanisms do not merely supplement the social integration of the lifeworld but intervene in the internal logic of the lifeworld, in which the direction of learning is related to individuals' self-determination about the life they desire to lead. Individuals learn by considering their lives and acknowledging their finitude. Embedding individuals in learning endows them with the opportunity to develop their potential, which fosters human growth. Learning, therefore, is not merely an intellectual activity; it is also an existential activity. However, if society is kept at a distance, as if one were viewing it from a 'zoomed-out', panoramic position and thus adopting 'the external perspective of an observer', it begins to be perceived as a whole via system integration and is assigned biological characteristics, such as the ability to self-regulate and to be recursive. In such a perspective, learning individuals,

as concrete beings coming to terms with and engaging in everyday lifeworlds, become hidden and invisible (Kemmis 1998, 279). As a result of zooming out, the sense of wholeness is realized, and concern shifts to how the whole system can be sustained, making 'function' the primary focus. When wholeness is the prevalent perception of society, individual members are considered to be parts of it, instrumental units that make possible and ensure the operation of the whole societal system. In this way, society as a system tends to be perceived as gaining its own strength, although in a derivative sense, holding individuals together and subordinating individuals to it.

Habermas notes that, as system differentiation in modern societies increases, system forces based on instrumental reason can invade the lifeworld. The system forces override the lifeworld, shifting the action logic of the lifeworld from communicative action to purposive action. Money and power, as the driving forces of the systems that regulate exchange and system interconnections, become central to individuals' motives, causing them to act according to the logic of purposive rationality. In response, individuals in the lifeworld may adopt strategic learning and responses for adaptation and survival; they approach learning not with an attitude oriented to understanding but 'oriented to success' (Habermas 1984, 332). Accordingly, 'the functionally rational subsystems combine the results of these strategic and instrumental actions in such a way that they further the ends of the subsystems themselves rather than the aims consciously sought by their agents' (Cook 2005, 58). Exchanges of money and power in the pursuit of societal efficiency and performance begin to operate 'on their own terms' (Kemmis 1998, 279; Fleming 2002: 4), while the pursuit of mutual understanding and identity formation in the lifeworld 'are made peripheral instead' (Habermas 1987a, 154). Under the domination of system integration and its purposive-rational logic, the vision of a learning society as a self-run mechanism and a macro-system is privileged. The perception of the *necessity* of the maintenance of the macro-system, in dealing with complexity and for survival, could easily be elided into the *priority* of the macro whole that narrows learning individuals' actions and objectifies individuals' learning to meet the society's and systems' ends. The system begins to 'colonise' the lifeworld, in which individuals' learning and life cease 'to be a *subject* rich in experience' (Purcell 2006, 208) and are identified in system terms,

becoming reified as an *object* for system maintenance and recursion. Individuals are reduced to 'the roles of consumer and client' (Habermas 1987a, 351), subjecting themselves to economic or specific bureaucratic forces and functions.

Society as a society of individuals who can learn

To de-colonise lifeworld learning requires the dismissal of society as a macro-entity or a 'social totality' (Habermas 1987b, 357) and a return to understanding society as intersubjective relationships and actions deriving from individuals as authentic learners. Although system integration is necessary to maintain society as a whole, the system and its integrated dynamics should not be ends in and of themselves. Rather, they should be the conditions that allow the learning individuals in the lifeworld to be sustained. This perspective represents a shift in emphasis away from the premise of society as an independent structure or 'self-run automaton' (Bohman 1989), which seeks explanations for a transcending society purely as a distinctive organism with biological characteristics, to a sphere of intersubjectivity that acknowledges the interactions and relationships of authentic learners that form and define what a learning society is. The learning individuals, not the system per se, become the primary consideration in the development of a learning society. Emphasis is given to the internal perspective of the lifeworld, which has 'to be gotten at by a hermeneutic approach that picks up on members' pretheoretical knowledge' (Habermas 1987a, 153). Individuals, from this perspective, would be viewed as subjects with intentions to achieve mutual understanding within their lifeworlds. Individuals, as subjects, learn in a self-directed and interpretive manner; they learn from their specific contexts and lifeworlds and take them into account, rather than being restricted by grand, self-regulated system forces based on instrumental reason. In this way, learning is motivated by individuals' desire to value themselves as ends rather than as exchangeable commodities. The intersubjectivity of learning individuals is brought to the core of understanding the constitution and development of a society such that society is no longer a higher-level self-run and self-regulated unity, nor is it reduced to any aggregative sum of individuals as parts. Instead society is conceived as a practice that must be anchored in the relationships and actions of authentic learners who create intentional and unintentional learning results that

no single individual learner can produce; it is these agentic and bottom-up intersubjective actions that fundamentally constitute the society's base.

To be authentic learners, individuals are required to acknowledge their status as subjects by developing 'critical consciousness' (Freire 1972) and being sensitive to their learning contexts and their capabilities of transformation. Learning is not a value-free activity. It is when learning individuals realise how the system based on money and power is structured and how it functions that they understand and question the domination of the system's logic and begin to learn in more self-reflective ways. Recognising that this reified learning arises from the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system is the first requirement for undermining the primacy of the purposive-rational learning actions that encroach upon the lifeworld. Critical consciousness or reflection is the key to placing lifeworld learning back in the hands of its individual members for their own ends. Foley (1999, 12) proposes the significance of individuals' learning to recognise the systems and structures of oppression, 'to make sense of what is happening' at the individual and societal levels and to challenge and 'work out ways of doing something about it'. This involves resisting money and bureaucratic power based on instrumental reason and reflecting on the purpose and nature of individuals' learning in the lifeworld through dialogue and discussion. Learning of this kind is bound up in individuals' civic, intersubjective actions. Women's liberation, the adult workers' movement, and environmental protection campaigns are examples of societies becoming learning societies, and learning in such situations 'is tacit, embedded in action and is often not recognised as learning' (Foley 1999, 3). Such learning processes involve Mezirow's (1990) critical reflection that 'triggers transformative learning', and they are in line with Freire's (1972) 'conscientization' that grants learners the capacity to become the subjects that develop knowledge and actions that are significant to themselves. A return to individuals' conscientious reflection matters because it allows the exercise, at least to some extent, of self-assessment, through which learners determine whether their lives are truly their own. This self-evaluation may prompt individuals to learn and broaden the potential of their lives and situations. Individuals 'come to understand themselves as knowledge-creating, acting beings' (Foley 1999, 64) and learn based on what Habermas calls emancipatory

interests. Learning is then not simply a cognitive process but is practiced as a praxis in which learning *is* action, a 'cognitive praxis' (Eyerman & Jamison 1991) that counts as social movement learning that deepens and ultimately shapes knowledge that is localised with a 'grassroots' character. Knowledge, accordingly, is not predetermined but rather derives from learners' awareness of, and actions in response to, unreasonable and unjust situations and norms.

Accordingly, a society that can learn, beyond a top-down epistemology of learning development, is grounded in the agency and efforts of learners who, being authentic, must be empowered as 'subjects in their own right' (Purcell 2006, 209), using their capabilities of critical consciousness and action for justice. Through standing back and considering their alternatives, learners value having choices and enabling change by transcending their limitations to transform the interactions and relationships of learning individuals that constitute and shape a learning society. In this learner-based, lifeworld-centred approach, authentic learning, occurring through individuals' reflections and intentional actions, is assisted and made possible by the system rather than being colonised by the system. Instead of being the primary force directing learning as a strategic endeavour and expecting individuals to be aligned with its purposive aims, the system plays a derivative and supporting role in regulating infrastructure establishment to create favourable conditions for the flourishing of lifeworld learning, in which individuals' intersubjective learning is central and their conscientious actions towards ensuring lifeworld quality are emphasised. This requires the system to be devoted to fostering internal lifeworld learning and reflection so that a learning society becomes a more reflective and conscientious practice directed by individuals—a society *of* intersubjective individuals who can learn.

Conclusion

In this article, the idea that a society can learn assumes a new meaning when based on the view that a society is a society of individuals. The dichotomy between society and individual is helpful for the sake of analysis, but it does not reflect the process of micro-lifeworld learning. The separate, atomistic notions of society and individual are abstract and empty because they take little account of how the individual and

society are developed. The development of society depends upon the agency of individuals and is also permeated and characterised by their existence. Either of their developments must result from the exercise of the other.

According to Habermas, while a society dynamic that is understood as a process of system integration explains how society is adapted and maintained, this external systems-focused perspective alone does not account for the complexities of the lifeworld. It does not address how learning is oriented towards learners' particular circumstances. The system-focused perspective is characterised not by the concrete and intersubjective relationships of individuals but by de-contextualised relationships such as impersonality, efficiency and bureaucratic power. The development of a learning society as a system only is incomplete until such development is placed back into the context of the lifeworld to integrate what learning individuals experience. A society that is capable of learning, from the internal perspective of the lifeworld, should be a person-centred practice, not a function-centred practice. This learner-based, lifeworld-centred approach goes beyond system-based epistemology and towards learning for meaningful development in which individuals in the lifeworld, as active and participatory subjects, are placed at centre stage. The learning individuals' critical consciousness and the conscientious actions taken to de-colonise the lifeworld challenge the maintenance of instrumentalised forms of system control. The learner-based, lifeworld-centred approach to understanding a learning society must be considered because it helps us see the development of human learning in a spirit of genuineness and more closely reflects what individuals experience and learn when they treat themselves as ends.

The idea that a society is capable of learning, accordingly, draws on individuals as social subjects who learn. This idea does not mean the reduction of the idea of a society that learns to the sum of individuals who learn. What social agency produces cannot be explained by claiming that what is produced is the addition of any single individual's agency one after another to eventually equal the sum of the individuals. Societal learning, by drawing on learning individuals, does gain its own strength. The existence of social norms, structures, systems, or institutions where societal learning is regulated is not denied. Nor is it denied that

individuals create these collective realities and are also embedded in and influenced by them. What is denied is the attempt to consider beyond the ties of social agency with individuals and to construct a self-image that claims that society, or these collective realities, have some form of agency of their own that may extend or differ from the agency of individuals in certain ways. The strength of societal learning produced is not gained on its own behalf; its *actual* occurrence and development are on behalf of the collective efforts produced by individuals' interactions and engagement. It is the manner in which individuals learn, struggle, and move towards conscientious actions that form a learning society as such. Society is defined less as a wholly stable entity beyond individuals than as a mobile entity composed *of* interactivity and intersubjectivity between individuals. We do not need to build a metaphysical foundation by looking beyond individuals' efforts to construct a self-image.

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Book Review

Beyond Economic Interests: Critical Perspectives on Adult Literacy and Numeracy in a Globalised World

Keiko Yasukawa and Stephen Black (eds.)
Sense Publishers, The Netherlands, 2016, 237 pages

Reviewed by
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It may be no coincidence that this book has been released in what is the 25th anniversary of *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP)* (1991). This policy document followed on from Australia's involvement in International Literacy Year (1990), a series of reviews and extensive consultation. The policy introduced funding for adult literacy, starting with $18.2 million in 1990/91 and rising to $52.63 in 1993/94, with funds going to provision within a range of contexts provided by cross-sector providers, curriculum development and tutors' professional development. The policy put Australia in the vanguard internationally of adult literacy policy, coming eight years ahead of Skills for Life (England, 1999), and ten years ahead of the Adult Literacy Strategy (2001) in New Zealand, for example.

The book, in part at least, can be read as a report card on the health

of adult literacy and numeracy policy and provision in Australia and New Zealand. The editors are well known and highly respected within the Australian and international adult literacy and numeracy community. The book is designed to give voice primarily to adult literacy and numeracy researchers in Australia and New Zealand, whom the authors argue have not had the air (print) space typically accorded to their counterparts in the United Kingdom and the United States in particular. The contributing authors bring critical perspectives on adult literacy and numeracy drawn from a range of research contexts including classrooms, workplaces, institutions, communities and policy documents themselves to critique what the editors have named as 'the one-dimensional discourse of literacy and numeracy as human capital' (p.x), arguing that this has become the dominant discourse across OECD countries which privileges the economic interest of industry and nations at the expense of individuals and groups within the contexts named above.

Interestingly, though the *ALLP* (1991) did include the importance of raising the literacy and numeracy skills of workers in Australian workplaces, it also acknowledged literacy as social practice, context dependent and context shaping. How the policy has delivered on this inclusion has become a matter of history.

The editors' Introduction successfully sets the scene for what is to come, providing an introduction to the three distinct parts of the book, outlining the key tenets to be presented in the chapters to follow before finishing with a challenge to their readers to seek out alternative futures for both practitioners and their students.

Mary Hamilton's chapter introduces **Part 1: Globalisation, the OECD and the Role of Powerful International Surveys**, by giving the reader a brief though rich history journey covering how contemporary discourses of literacy as situated social practice that challenge the dominant, reductionist discourse, have emerged. In providing this history, drawing as it does on contributions from anthropology (Street, Heath), linguistics (Gee, Fairclough), sociology (Smith), social history (Graff) and philosophy (Freire, McLaren and Lankshear), Hamilton moves on to discuss the more recent contribution of a sociomaterial approach to literacy and how it assists in our

understanding of how a 'range of globalising mechanisms [are] at work in the adult literacy context' (p.9).

Yasakawa and Black continue the theme of this section by skilfully critiquing Australia's National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults, identifying how it fails to deliver on the initial optimism that existed among practitioners, researchers, policy makers and representatives from industry, with no space given to the different social worlds beyond that of industry, within which we all engage in a diverse range of literacy and numeracy practices. The authors argue, that even though practitioners, their students and researchers are largely powerless to change this agenda, it is important to understand the roots of the Strategy and what it is meant to achieve.

The next chapter by Evans moves to the international context with some wise advice on how to interpret international surveys such as PIACC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), an example of the "powerful knowledges" or discourses referred to by the editors in their Introduction, that shape our lives. Evans ends on an optimistic note, however, putting out a challenge for practitioners and researchers to focus on alternative, richer knowledges that situate literacy and numeracy in people's everyday lived experiences.

In **Part 2: Resistance and Agency in Local Literacies and Numeracies**, Inge Kral's chapter brings us back to the local through compelling case studies of two Indigenous communities situated in the remote Central and Western Desert of Australia. Kral expertly portrays how changing language socialisation processes are played out in these communities, bringing together a complexity of traditional modes of linguistic and semiotic systems with digital multimodality and connectivity and the new social practices, in largely non-formal settings, that surround these modes (e.g. Facebook) and again challenge the appropriateness of a dominant reductionist discourse of literacy and numeracy in these kinds of contexts.

The next chapter by Ollerhead shifts the focus to a different adult literacy and numeracy program context through which new arrivals, many of whom have restricted literacy in a first language, seek support in learning the language and language practices of a new country. Through the stories of four refugees Ollerhead's account

effectively demonstrates how, what she terms 'the economically driven demands' (p.92) of their literacy programs position these learners in an inequitable power relationship which has consequences in their daily lives and on their capacity to benefit from the material and social resources that flow from employment.

Holland's contribution from New Zealand moves to a vocational environment to report on the significance of building trust through mentoring relationships in learning that assist young apprentices to fulfil their goals. Strauss, also from New Zealand, then discusses students of foundation studies in polytechnics, and the difficulties they often face in being recognised as serious tertiary students within their own institutions, arguing for due recognition to be given to the fact that their needs extend beyond what a program can provide to tangible appreciation of who they are and what they bring to their studies and their institutions. Coben and McCartney's work is also located in New Zealand and in the tertiary sector, in this instance foundation level adult literacy and numeracy courses, to discuss the capacity for a national framework (National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy for Adults) to inform practice that moves beyond compliance to meaningful, deep professional engagement and responsibility that leads to enhanced student learning outcomes.

Museums become the context in the next chapter by Yasukawa and Widin, a surprisingly rich and varied source of literacy and numeracy practices and opportunities that have the potential to contribute to individual and social wellbeing. This requires museum management and staff to take up and build on concepts of change and diversity and of a two-way relationship between museums and the current and potential visitors to understand how museums 'read' their visitors, and how they, in turn, are 'read' by their visitors.

The final chapter in this part of the book comes from Boughton who makes an important contribution through offering a critique of new literacy studies in terms of its inability to adequately accommodate the important contributions of 'large-scale state- and social movement-led adult literacy campaigns' (p.149). Bringing together a collection such as this one is always a challenging exercise, but including Boughton's contribution adds to the integrity of the volume and to the work it can

achieve in the field and beyond.

The first chapter in **Part 3: Contesting Dominant Discourses** returns to the UK with Duckworth, a practitioner and Hamilton a researcher, combining to document and reflect on efforts in that country to link research and practice in adult literacy, particularly through the growing significance of practitioner research (PR) as a mechanism to achieve that goal. This position is not presented uncritically as the solution to all ills, with the writers readily acknowledging detractors of this form of inquiry, but the authors argue for the potential of PR based on informed professional judgements to equip practitioners with the capabilities to more effectively connect with research and thereby equip them to engage with, and in educational policy agendas.

McCormack's chapter takes us back to the past to remind readers that the need for practitioners, researchers and others to be vigilant in their resistance to dominant discourses is not new. Her chapter provides an account of a time (1980s in Victoria, Australia) when adult literacy and basic education practitioners took the initiative to work together to formalise their student-centred work through what became known as "Four Literacies", which defined '*domains of meaning and activity*' (p.199). Operating within this framework, that represented a more expansive range of skills and capacities to be nurtured in their students, enabled practitioners to work (in their classrooms at least) against strong government pressure to reduce adult literacy provision to functionality in workplaces.

Evans and Simpson from the UK next introduce the reader to the Radical Statistics Group and discuss how a group such as this, comprised as it is of statisticians, research workers and interested citizens, can support organisations, professional associations, community groups and others in putting forward alternative views to predominant reductionist discourses on adult literacy and numeracy into the public arena enabling alternative voices to be heard in public policy debates.

The final word, in the form of the last chapter, is given to Hunter from New Zealand who focuses on the potential for adult literacy and numeracy tertiary programs for practitioners to circumvent practitioners being reduced to technicians in the implementation of

national assessment policy and procedures. Arguing for the legitimacy of the new literacy studies and social practice that emphasise meaning making of literacy and numeracy in use as place-based, Hunter laments the absence of social practice approaches in policy, but also in teaching and learning. It is this situation, she contends, that has enabled practitioners to be constructed as technicians. Hunter draws on the work of Giroux (2012) to call on practitioners to give greater voice to their students and to redefine the ways they enable their students to engage with, and in, their worlds.

In conclusion, this book makes an important and timely entrance into its field, helping to rectify the imbalance the authors note about the underrepresentation of published research from Australia and New Zealand. It will become an invaluable resource for practitioners, researchers, tertiary students in this field, and, hopefully, also policy makers.

To return to the analogy of a report card, what might it say about the health of adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia and New Zealand? Readers of this book will answer this question in their own way based on their own knowledge of, and experience in, this field. For this reader, while I continue to remain disappointed that government policies have taken us down the path they have, I continue to hold the highest respect for those active in the adult literacy and numeracy field and strongly believe that they are more than up to the challenge set by the editors in their Introduction.

About the Reviewer

Geraldine Castleton is currently Deputy Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts at Australian Catholic University. She has an extensive research track record in adult literacy, was consulted in the development of *Skills for Life* (UK) and been engaged as a consultant by the National Adult Literacy Agency (Ireland). Geraldine is a past president of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and a past president and life member of the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy. She was a member of the National Advisory Panel English/Literacy National Curriculum (ACARA) and is currently a member of the expert literacy group, LANTITE (ACER).

NOTES FOR INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

1. AJAL publishes papers in two main sections – blind peer-reviewed articles that draw on research, historical examination and/or theoretical insights and contributions; and a non-refereed section which aims to help practitioners reflect on their fields of practice, policy, improve teaching and learning and so on. These articles tend to be shorter and developmental. Articles that are more appropriate for the refereed section will not be considered for the non-refereed section. Authors should indicate in which section they want their paper to appear. In addition the Journal publishes book reviews, and from time to time special sections devoted to a theme or historical event.
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   d. In text references
   e. References
4. Papers are submitted online via the AJAL submission area on the AJAL website www.ajal.net.au. Submission requires completion of an online form, and separate attachment of the paper.
5. The online submission form requires the following information:
   a. Article title, author(s) name(s) and author institutional affiliation(s);
   b. Up to 6 Keywords
   c. An abstract of between 150-200 words;
   d. A five-line biographical note
   e. Complete contact details, including postal and email addresses, and telephone numbers
   f. Indication of whether you want your paper to be refereed (that is, blind peer reviewed by at least two specialist reviewers from Australia and/or overseas)
6. Papers are accepted on the understanding that they are not being considered for publication elsewhere.
7. Brief research reports and book reviews (of approximately 800 words) relating to adult and community education are welcomed.
8. Some issues of the Journal are thematic. While papers published in a particular issue are not restricted to the theme, intending contributors are encouraged to submit papers on themes announced from time to time.

Further information about possible articles can be addressed to the Editor,

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