Volume 59, Number 1, April 2019

3 From the Editor's desk

REFEREED ARTICLES

7 Are we all on course? A curriculum mapping comparison of three Australian university open-access enabling programs
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Sharon Zivkovic

76 Learning to deal with freedom and restraints: Elderly women's experiences of their husbands visiting a Men's Shed
Joel Hedegaard & Helene Ahl

94 Generativity and life satisfaction of active older people: Advances in educational perspective
Jose-Manuel Muñoz-Rodríguez, Sara Serrate-González & Ana-Belén Navarro

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Chunlin Yao

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Reviewed by Juliet Austin

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APRIL 2019

59

59

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The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL) has been published on behalf of Adult Learning Australia for over 59 years, and is now recognised as the leading journal in Australia on adult education. The Journal is widely regarded internationally in the discipline of adult education.

AJAL is concerned with the theory, research and practice of adult learning and adult community education. Its purpose is to promote critical thinking, research and practice 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

Dr Trace Ollis

The April edition of the Journal finds Australia in the middle of a national election. There are many issues regarding education that are important to the readership of AJAL. In particular, at a federal level the appropriate funding and recognition of the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector is high on the agenda. The community-based education sector is incredibly diverse and comprises adult education institutes, neighbourhood houses, community centres and community colleges. There are also other organisations that are recognised more broadly as delivering ACE programs, including Universities of the Third Age, public libraries, Men's Sheds, even workplaces running professional learning programs.

ACE organisations provide personal interest, pre-accredited and formal and informal learning experiences for a broad range of learners in local communities. ACE takes a place-based approach providing educative experiences for young people, second chance learners, older learners, migrants and refugees, etc. ACE organisations are frequently under-recognised for the work that they do in providing inclusive education for learners who have frequently been alienated from the neo-liberal system of education that assesses, ranks and categorises learners according to their abilities. Many of the learners in ACE have had negative experiences of the formal education system, and need to rebuild their self-perception and understanding of themselves as successful learners.

Relationships that are built between the learners and teachers and learners and coordinators are central to this process of reconnecting and developing trust in education and learning again.

In this election, Adult Learning Australia is calling for a greater focus on the funding and recognition of ACE. They claim we need public policy that enshrines ACE as a part of the Australian education system and recognises its role and contribution to the socio-economic future and civic engagement of this nation. ALA argues adult and community education has been on the margins of debates about post-secondary education in Australia – currently dominated by discussions about the future of TAFE, private VET and Universities (Macaffer, 2019). There has not been a ministerial statement on adult learning in Australia since 2008. Furthermore, in Australia adult education has largely operated without the benefit of legislation or policy enshrining its purposes (Tennant & Morris, 2008). Australia still does not have a lifelong learning policy and calls for a new ministerial statement on ACE have been largely unheeded, reaffirming the claim made some time ago from Tennant and Morris (2008) that Australian governments like the idea of adult learning so long as the demand on public funds are small.

In this edition of the Journal the first three papers focus on adult learning in various sites of education in Australia: higher education, social movement learning in an environmental campaign and an active citizenship education program in South Australia. The remaining papers have an international focus on older adult learning at a university in Spain, women's experiences of their husband's engagement in Men's Sheds and finally English language learning by adults in China. This edition uncovers the broad range of sites and spaces of adult learning in Australia and internationally, and the complex practices of adult learning that occur across these spaces.

The first paper in this edition of AJAL by ***John Andrew O'Rourke, Bronwyn Relf, Nicole Crawford*** and ***Sue Sharp*** is titled 'Are we all on course? A curriculum mapping comparison of three Australian university open-access enabling programs'. The paper analyses three university enabling programs against the back drop of the massification of higher education in Australia, with a focus on retaining access and equity students. University enabling programs address the widening participation agenda of second chance learners in the Bradley review into higher education. This paper uses a mapping exercise to examine the design and curriculum principles of university enabling program. The findings of this study emphasise the importance of clarity between the enacted and intended curriculum.

Our next paper explores adult learning in a social movement of older women, campaigning against coal seam gas exploration in Australia. Here ***Larraine Larri*** and ***Hilary Whitehouse*** reveal the critical pedagogy of the Knitting Nannas using the term ‘Nannagogy’ to define the radical methodology and pedagogy enacted by the women in their campaign for environmental justice. In their paper ‘Nannagogy: Social movement learning for older women’s activism in the gas fields of Australia’, they outline the importance of adult learning and social movements on one of the most important social issue of our time. They frame the practice of the activists in lifelong learning theory and social movement learning drawing on Freire’s theory of conscientisation and claim: ‘Framing activist adult learning as social movement learning locates environmental and climate justice struggles within lifelong learning practices and enables researchers to better understand the complex processes of informal, situated and often spontaneous adult learning for creating and sustaining movements for social, environmental and political change’.

Keeping with the theme of social justice and education ***Sharon Zivkovic*** in her paper, ‘The need for a complexity informed active citizenship education program’ defines the active citizenship programs as a ,‘wicked problem’. In the paper, Zivkovic outlines research that seeks to determine the impact of an active citizenship education program covering education for sustainability. In unpacks the problems and impediments that constrained the program. The paper makes recommendations and suggests changes for a new program supporting participants to pass on their knowledge and skills to other participants.

‘Learning to deal with freedom and restraints: Elderly women’s experiences of their husbands visiting a men’s shed’ by ***Joel Hedegaard*** and ***Helene Ahl***, is a comparative analysis of women’s experiences of freedom and constraints that occur as their husbands participate in men’s shed programs in Denmark and New Zealand. The research focusses on empowerment, gender identity and well-being and the data was accessed through focus groups and individual interviews.

The research found that women were empowered by being able to have freedom and to participate in social activities whilst their partners were at a men's shed. It also found women's role reinforced their responsibility for the socio-emotional work in the relationship, affirming traditional gender relationships between the men and women.

Jose-Manuel Muñoz-Rodríguez, Sara Serrate-González and ***Ana-Belén Navarro*** examine in their paper 'Generativity and life satisfaction of active older people: Advances (keys) in educational perspective'. The article outlines the cognitive and psycho-social benefits for older learners who are involved in a higher education program at the University of Salamanca in Spain. The research explores the generative interest and life satisfaction of a group of mature-aged university students and sought to verify whether the years linked to the program and the rate of participation in other types of social agencies and institutions have a positive impact on these older learners.

Our final paper comes from China, author ***Chunlin Yao*** presents 'A case study of Chinese adult learners' English acquisition in a blended learning environment' English acquisition in a blended learning environment. In this paper, the author examines the impact of adult learners' responses to an adult English language class using blended learning pedagogy. In addition this paper outlines the history of adult learning in China and examines its rapid development. The findings from the study indicate that a blended learning environment can improve Chinese adult learners' English language acquisition, especially with regard to their practical English abilities.

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Are we all on course?
A curriculum mapping comparison of three Australian university open-access enabling programs.

Dr John Andrew O'Rourke
Edith Cowan University

Dr Bronwyn Relf
University of Newcastle

Dr Nicole Crawford
University of Tasmania

Sue Sharp
Edith Cowan University

The curricula in higher education not only provides guidance and direction for students, but aligns with industry standards to safeguard quality offerings in specific programs. While there has been increasing focus on the importance of the curriculum particularly for first year university students, very little is known about the curriculum and design principles that exist in open-access enabling programs in Australia. In the following paper, a comprehensive examination of the curriculum of three large open-access enabling programs is presented. The research team explored the curriculum design via a rigorous *mapping exercise to establish potential principles to guide enabling curriculum design. In developing the curriculum-mapping tool for this research project, it became apparent that limited attention has been given to enabling curriculum design in the academic literature. Given increasing attention towards Australian enabling education, the findings of this study emphasise the importance of clarity between the intended and the enacted curriculum, such as in unit learning outcomes and program attributes.*

Keywords: *enabling education, open access, curriculum mapping, higher education, intended curriculum, enacted curriculum*

Introduction

University enabling programs have provided an important pathway to higher education (HE) for 'second-chance' students and those from disadvantaged and equity backgrounds since their inception in the early 1970s (Hodges, Bedford, Hartley, Klinger, Murray, O'Rourke, & Schofield, 2013). In doing so they address the widening participation agenda of the Bradley Review (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008; Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011). Enabling programs have increasingly found their place in the HE landscape of Australia (48 enabling programs in 27 universities [Devlin, 2015]) and the recent Demand Driven Funding System review emphasised continued growth in this area – reporting that an additional 3000 students enrolled in enabling programs in 2012 compared to 2009 (Kemp, & Norton, 2014). Quite often enabling program development has occurred within the framework of universities, but not always under the guidance of specific faculties (Baker, & Irwin, 2015), thus criticism exists that these programs can be seen as outliers (Shah, & Whannell, 2017) within the increasingly benchmarked curricular landscape of HE (Pitman, Trinidad, Devlin, Harvey, Brett, & McKay, 2016). Despite this criticism, Kemp and Norton (2014, p. 61) suggested that given the success of enabling students in undergraduate courses (Department of Education, 2014), there would be 'more risks and fewer benefits' from the inclusion of enabling programs into the demand driven system and any associated scrutiny by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

(TEQSA). Any such move towards standardised auditing of enabling programs has been difficult, firstly by the large number and great diversity of programs on offer (Hodges et al., 2013; Kemp, & Norton, 2014) and secondly by a lack of research into what enabling curricula is and should be (Kift, 2016).

Although recent research has explored the benefits of enabling programs and how success can be measured (Bennett, Hodges, Fagan, Hartley, Kavanagh, & Schofield, 2013 Hodges et al., 2013), there is limited research that examines the curriculum design of enabling programs (with the exception of Baker & Irwin's [2016] thorough exploration of the placement of academic literacies in Australian enabling programs). While enabling educators have undertaken isolated research exploring their own practice (Burgess, & Relf, 2014; Sharp, O'Rourke, Lane, & Hays, 2014), no research exists that compares the curriculum across a variety of enabling programs. Further, very little has been written about the processes that ensure that the education provided meets the key competencies anticipated of students 'graduating' from these programs. This paper, an Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded 'seed' project, was undertaken to address these gaps and establish a deeper appreciation of the commonalities and differences between the enabling curricula offered at three large open-access university programs. The research builds on Hodges et al's, (2013, p. 6) recommendations that the unique challenges associated with teaching and learning in enabling programs be explored in more depth. Further, the study addresses the acknowledged lack of research into curriculum design within enabling programs (and HE in general) (Andrewartha, & Harvey, 2014; Barnett, & Coates, 2005). Finally, it aims to address the knowledge deficit about enabling programs, in general, identified in recent government reviews (Kemp, & Norton, 2014; Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011).

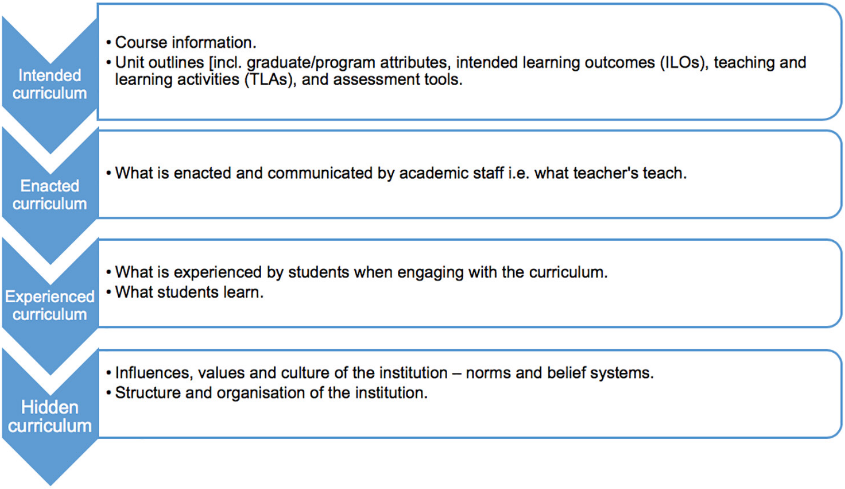
What is enabling curriculum?

Curriculum is often defined and understood in quite narrow terms, typically as the formal material that teachers deliver in order for students to gain knowledge or skills, and achieve certain learning outcomes (Ebert, Ebert, & Bentley, 2011; Foreman, & Arthur-Kelly, 2017). In such definitions, the focus is on the explicit information that course designers intend for educators to teach and students to learn. Arafeh (2016, p.3) on the other hand extends such definitions beyond the necessary course content towards the processes and interactions required to deliver the new knowledge or skill. Carpenter and Lee (2010) while acknowledging curriculum is the formal documentation of programs, argue that it is also ‘How content is presented, why, by whom, where, when, with whom and for how long’ (p. 100). Despite the ubiquity of the curriculum on the HE landscape, debate within the academic literature about the nature of it within open-access enabling programs is limited. This lack of attention is particularly concerning as the diversity of students within enabling education necessitates the development of new ways to ‘design, deliver and support’ learning (Baker, & Irwin, 2015, p. 3).

What multi-layered discussions about curricula mean within enabling education is worth reflection, particularly as program content (with exceptions) has historically focussed on developing academic literacies. Baker and Irwin (2014) in their comprehensive examination of enabling curricula, argued that the 35 Australian enabling programs reviewed could be categorised into five separate curriculum models in which language and literacies were invariably at the core of the offerings (pp. 27–29). They found that the most common curriculum genres taught and assessed were argumentative essays and scientific reports. While study skills’ such as ‘time management, study planning and becoming familiar with university culture and systems, such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) (e.g. Blackboard) or the university library’ (p. 25) were also commonplace. Not surprisingly, the bulk of Australian enabling education research to date has been qualitative with a focus on specific elements of program curriculum and design, rather than a broad sense of what the curriculum *attempts* to deliver (Crawford, 2014; Jones, Olds, & Lisciandro, 2016; Klingner, & Murray, 2012; Willans, & Seary, 2011). Thus, while the development of key competencies are necessary to progress through enabling programs, it is reasonable to suggest that the curriculum must be more than the presented content if it is to provide the transformative student experiences these programs are renowned for (Willans, & Seary, 2007).

This paper describes one component from a broader research project investigating curriculum design principles for open-access enabling programs (see Relf, Crawford, O’Rourke, Sharp, Hodges, Shah, & Katersky-Barnes, 2017). For the purpose of this broader research we adopted a definition of curriculum incorporating four inter-related aspects: the intended curriculum; the enacted curriculum; the experienced curriculum and the hidden curriculum (Arafeh, 2016) (see Figure 1 for elaboration of the inter-related parts). While analysis of enabling student surveys and staff focus groups provided information about the enacted, experienced and hidden curriculum; it was anticipated that the mapping process would not only reveal how three large enabling programs delivered competencies, but would also identify gaps and areas of improvement that may be required. Thus the intention of *this* paper is to focus on the mapping of the *intended* curriculum. The specific aims of the curriculum mapping exercise were: firstly, to develop a curriculum mapping tool suitable for comparing the intended curriculum of diverse enabling programs; secondly, to examine approaches to curriculum design in the enabling programs of three tertiary institutions; and finally to use the findings from the curriculum mapping exercise to articulate guiding curriculum principles that may benefit other open-access enabling programs.

Figure 1: Four inter-related aspects of the curriculum



Intended curriculum
- Course information.
- Unit outlines [incl. graduate/program attributes, intended learning outcomes (ILOs), teaching and learning activities (TLAs), and assessment tools.

Enacted curriculum
- What is enacted and communicated by academic staff i.e. what teacher's teach.

Experienced curriculum
- What is experienced by students when engaging with the curriculum.
- What students learn.

Hidden curriculum
- Influences, values and culture of the institution – norms and belief systems.
- Structure and organisation of the institution.

Method

Participants

Three large Australian university enabling programs, all long-term providers of enabling education, participated in this multi-institutional research project (Edith Cowan University [ECU], University of Newcastle [UON], and the University of Tasmania [UTas]). Each enabling program differed in terms of its structure of units. UON offered a broad range of discipline specific units (23 discipline specific units, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, Australian Studies Business Organisation and Management, Classical studies, Chemistry and the Life Sciences, etc.), while ECU and UTas engaged students in a program predominately built around the development of generic skills required in higher education (such as learning skills, academic writing skills, mathematics, communication skills) (see Table 1). Whilst the enabling programs at ECU and UTas included a specific academic literacies unit, UON delivered its content via discipline-based units and subsequently the learning was directed towards a more basic understanding of the pathway program they selected. ECU required students to select a humanities or science elective thus providing some initial discipline focus to their learning. Both ECU and UTas provided some contextualised learning via more flexible and open-ended assessments i.e. for example at ECU students made a choice from several topics related to their future studies. Thus, the purpose of the curriculum mapping exercise was to determine the extent to which the *intended* curriculum within these programs had the potential to deliver expected learning outcomes to students.

Table 1: Structure of open access enabling programs

	Edith Cowan University	University of Newcastle	University of Tasmania
Structure of units	4 units (skills and disciplines) 3 x generic academic skills 1 x discipline choice (from 2 choices)	4 units (discipline) Selected from 23 discipline specific programs	8 units (skills) Selected from 9 generic academic skill units
Mode	Full-time – 1 semester Part-time Online/on-campus/mixed mode	Part-time – 2 semesters Full-time – 1 semester Online/on-campus/mixed mode	Full-time 1 year Part-time 2 years Online/on-campus
Campuses	2 x metro 1 x regional	2 x regional	3 x regional
Entry into undergraduate course	Completion of 4 units	Completion of 4 units	Completion of 8 units

Curriculum mapping

As there are no formal requirements for standardisation in enabling programs, curriculum mapping with its focus on program transparency presents as a preferred tool over program benchmarking. Although Davis, Syme and Cook (2017) benchmarked key features of three university enabling programs, with a particular focus on quality, equivalence and equitability, it is difficult to imagine that the diversity of student cohorts and the necessity for enabling educators to understand and connect with their communities (Andrewartha, & Harvey, 2014), would or should result in standardised offerings to benchmark against. Thus at this point, curriculum mapping provides enabling programs with the opportunity to 'demonstrate their curricular and teaching quality to potential students' and for those teaching in the programs to 'regularly review and update their curriculum design according to student requirements' (Wang, 2015, p. 1550). More succinctly, Harden (2001) views the curriculum map as the glue that binds all program elements together. While curriculum mapping can promote 'curriculum evaluation and quality assurance' for students, it also draws up a learning journey with a prospective 'vision' of what is required by students for a promising future (Wang, 2015, p. 1553).

While being a step towards improved transparency in programs, determining how elements of the curriculum are linked via mapping provides challenges for enabling educators, as (a) typical undergraduate programs have three to four years to unpack content and employ sophisticated spiral curriculum approaches (Bruner, 1966; Harden, 2001; Woolfolk, 2011), while enabling programs have much shorter time durations (typically one or two semesters) and (b) many enabling programs (not all) have an overall focus on skill development and what might be required for future academic success, whereas undergraduate programs look longer term at what might be required beyond the course. How enabling educators present material that is accessible enough for an 'at-risk' cohort of learners in a limited time-frame, yet deep enough to provide the resilience, openness, self-discipline, integrity and authenticity that Barnett and Coates (2005) ascribe to quality curriculum, is a worthy investigation.

No curriculum-mapping tool exists specifically for enabling programs. As a result, the selection of an appropriate tool for this research needed to be based on: where and to what extent curricular outcomes could be mapped against the program syllabus; whether the model chosen was empirically sound (used in previously published HE research); and whether it provided a straightforward process that would facilitate the general aims (and timeframes) of the overall pilot project. Ervin, Carter and Robinson (2013), in an extensive search of the academic literature, identified three curriculum mapping tools that provided the type of detail that would allow for replication of the processes; Snoke (2004), Stoof, Martens, and Van Merrienboer (2007) and Sumision and Goodfellow (2004). Of these only Sumision and Goodfellow (2004) and in more recent times Joyner (2016) conducted mapping within undergraduate programs. After an extensive review by the research team, it was felt that not enough detail was provided in either of these papers to efficiently and time effectively reproduce the processes and, as such, it was felt that the evidence-based mapping tool developed by Cuevas and colleagues (presented in a series of presentations for the Southern Connecticut State University) would be suitable for our research objectives (Cuevas, & Feit, 2011a; Cuevas, Matveev, & Feit, 2009; Cuevas, Matveev, & Miller, 2010). While the model had no connection with enabling curriculum, its method of matching desired outcomes, objectives and attributes to determine the sequence and scope of the curriculum via a simplified matrix format (Arafeh, 2016) promoted a thorough approach with which to map the selected curriculum of the three participating enabling programs.

Curriculum mapping the three enabling programs

Following a modified version of Cuevas and Feit's (2011a) process, we examined the following: What students are expected to be able to do with their gained knowledge at the completion of units and the program itself (unit learning outcomes and program attributes), the documentation created to inform students of details around learning outcomes (i.e. syllabus information) and how these are realised (the unit outlines and any supporting information; that is, associated learning management systems), and unit assessments, including specifically developed rubrics. Prior to commencing the mapping exercise, mapping templates developed by Cuevas and Feit (2011a) and Arafeh (2016) were modified to suit the purpose of the project as illustrated in Tables 2 to 4.

Table 2 illustrates the template developed to map the alignment of each institution's enabling program outcomes with the learning outcomes for each unit, as described in the unit outline documentation. Information about each assessment task was placed in a separate table template (Table 3). Table 4 illustrates the template developed for mapping unit learning outcomes to assessment items. Thus, following Cuevas and Feit's (2011a) guidelines, the syllabus was reviewed to examine unit outcomes in the context of the overarching program outcomes. As each university presented quite unique offerings to their students, the units selected for mapping were core units representing those that most students were likely to encounter during their time in the different programs.

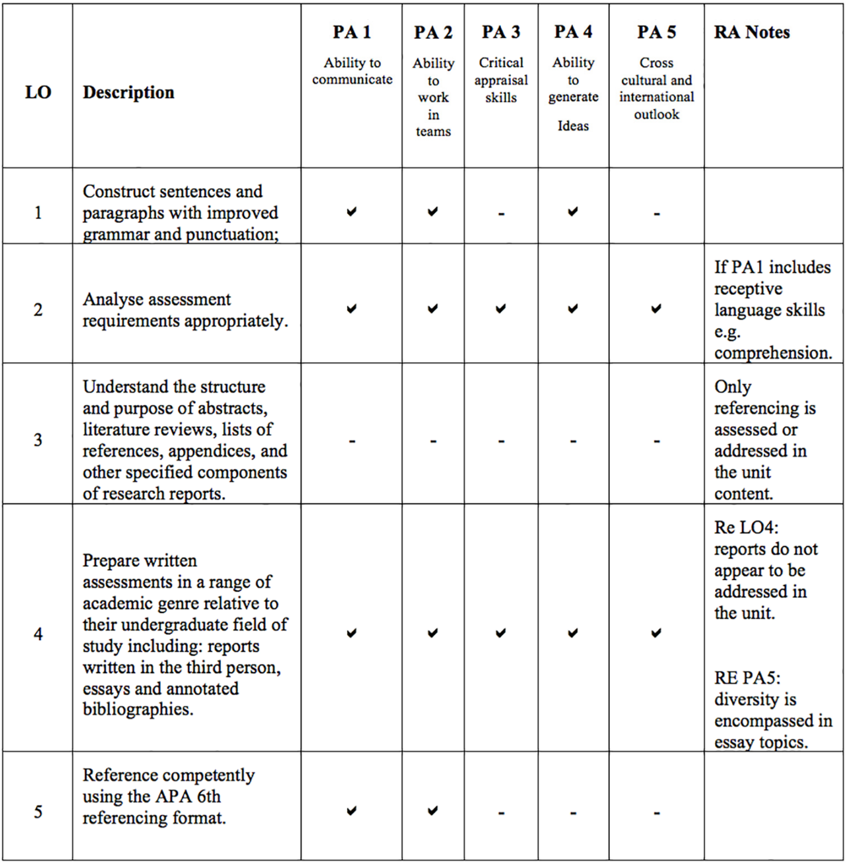
The curriculum mapping exercise was conducted by a research assistant (RA) not familiar with the enabling programs offered by the three universities, and involved determining whether unit learning outcomes and enabling program attributes were identified within curriculum documents and assessment tasks. Sumsion and Goodfellow (2004) suggest that invariably course mapping exercises are conducted by staff members who have intimate knowledge of the courses, but earlier trials by project researchers revealed that when such staff explored their own offerings there was a *blurring* of measurable objectives/learning outcomes (as described by Ervin, Carter, & Robinson, , 2013); that is, they were more likely to 'tick-off' outcomes such as 'students working collaboratively' because of in-class experiences rather than articulation of them in course documentation.

In the mapping exercise conducted by Arafeh (2016) outcomes were recorded using the term *explicitly* (states outcome overtly) (E) or *implicitly* (alluded to outcome) (I). However, in this project, given the timeframes of the pilot study and the utilisation of the unit outline as the key syllabus document, a notes section was included in the matrix to query non-aligned outcomes (see Tables 2 and 4). Additionally, previous mapping research has used the terms such as I introduced, *E* emphasised, *A* advanced and *R* reinforced, as a measure of outcome engagement, more often than not to identify the way students move through different levels of competency throughout a course (Arafeh, 2016; Hale, 2008). Given the compacted nature of enabling programs such scrutiny is not possible. Nonetheless, in this mapping exercise, the unit learning outcomes and the assessment tasks (i.e. the information presented in the unit outlines) were explored by the RA (see final column Tables 2 and 4).

Results

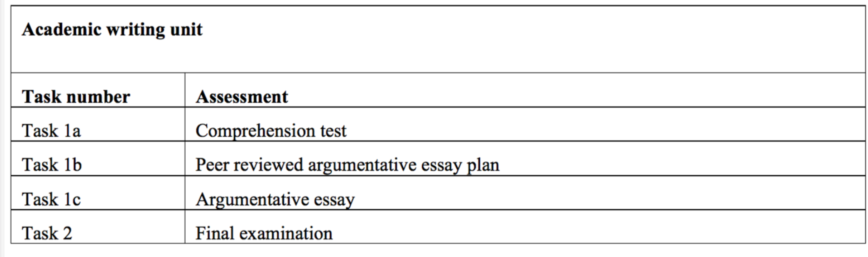
The initial exploration was to determine if the three enabling programs' program attributes were aligned with learning outcomes for core units. It is worth noting that of the three universities, only one had specifically developed program attributes for their enabling program. The University of Newcastle had a specific set of ‘enabling attributes’ that lay behind the program documentation (Relf et al., 2017) and reflected the notion of ‘fostering’ attributes rather than achieving them. Firstly, in the example presented below (see Tables 2, 3 and 4), the RA explored an academic writing unit, a standard offering within enabling programs (Baker, & Irwin, 2014) to determine if the learning outcomes of the unit were in line with expected program attributes. Secondly, the unit was mapped to determine if the unit learning outcomes were aligned with the unit assessments.

Table 2: Template for alignment of unit learning outcomes (LO) and enabling program attributes (PA)



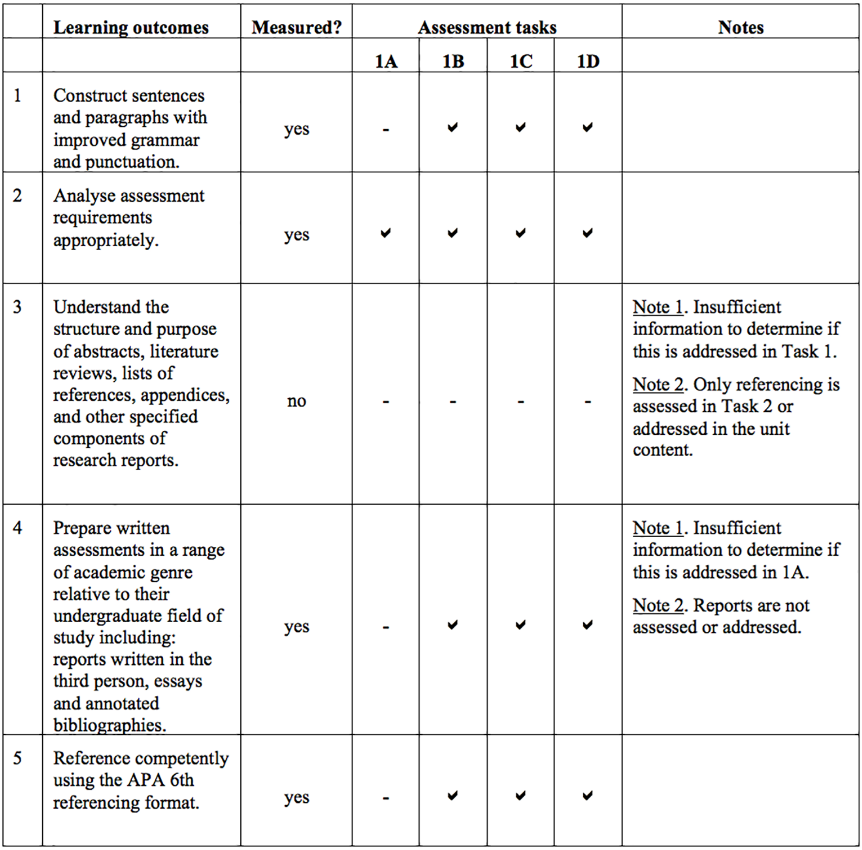
LO	Description	PA 1 Ability to communicate	PA 2 Ability to work in teams	PA 3 Critical appraisal skills	PA 4 Ability to generate Ideas	PA 5 Cross cultural and international outlook	RA Notes
1	Construct sentences and paragraphs with improved grammar and punctuation;	✔	✔	-	✔	-	
2	Analyse assessment requirements appropriately.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	If PA1 includes receptive language skills e.g. comprehension.
3	Understand the structure and purpose of abstracts, literature reviews, lists of references, appendices, and other specified components of research reports.	-	-	-	-	-	Only referencing is assessed or addressed in the unit content.
4	Prepare written assessments in a range of academic genre relative to their undergraduate field of study including: reports written in the third person, essays and annotated bibliographies.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Re LO4: reports do not appear to be addressed in the unit. RE PA5: diversity is encompassed in essay topics.
5	Reference competently using the APA 6th referencing format.	✔	✔	-	-	-	

Table 3: Template for unit learning outcomes



Academic writing unit	
Task number	**Assessment**
Task 1a	Comprehension test
Task 1b	Peer reviewed argumentative essay plan
Task 1c	Argumentative essay
Task 2	Final examination

Table 4: Template for alignment of unit learning outcomes (LO) and assessment tasks



	Learning outcomes	**Measured?**	**Assessment tasks**				**Notes**
			1A	**1B**	**1C**	**1D**	
1	Construct sentences and paragraphs with improved grammar and punctuation.	yes	-	✓	✓	✓	
2	Analyse assessment requirements appropriately.	yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	
3	Understand the structure and purpose of abstracts, literature reviews, lists of references, appendices, and other specified components of research reports.	no	-	-	-	-	Note 1. Insufficient information to determine if this is addressed in Task 1. Note 2. Only referencing is assessed in Task 2 or addressed in the unit content.
4	Prepare written assessments in a range of academic genre relative to their undergraduate field of study including: reports written in the third person, essays and annotated bibliographies.	yes	-	✓	✓	✓	Note 1. Insufficient information to determine if this is addressed in 1A. Note 2. Reports are not assessed or addressed.
5	Reference competently using the APA 6th referencing format.	yes	-	✓	✓	✓	

Overall, the exercise revealed that for the units mapped, the unit learning outcomes and program attributes were generally aligned, and most content was assessed appropriately. What was noticeable, however, was that outcomes requiring students to demonstrate an understanding of more abstract concepts such as ‘understanding and appreciating the university’s learning environment’, ‘academic integrity’ and ‘ethical conduct’, or the way in which a subject operates or plays a role within society at large, were rarely measured. Secondly, there was a number of outcomes and attributes not measured within the presented curricula which appear to be integral to student success. Examples of these included online communication, the ability to research and understand different academic sources, and the pragmatics of scholarly behaviour (practical skills such as note-taking, presentation strategies).

Discussion

Enabling educators have been productive in recent times in describing small-scale overviews of the good practice that exists (Burgess, & Relf, 2014; Sharp et al., 2014), while highlighting the uniqueness of enabling programs compared to undergraduate offerings (Hodges et al., 2013); it is now time to provide clarity on what is being delivered and how this impacts student learning and later success. Enabling programs are unique entities within the university setting (Hodges et al., 2013) and thus the adoption of undergraduate program/graduate attributes (as evidenced in two of the three universities in this mapping exercise), is an indication that more thought needs to be given to the relationship between the *intended* curriculum and the expected outcomes for their students. As Wang (2015, p. 1556) identifies as a shortcoming of HE curriculum mapping; universities focus specifically on what the students are being made to learn – rather than what they are learning. She suggests that it is only when students exceed the limits of their study that their learning is enriched. Thus, enabling education operates within the tension between set-skill development, and the broader curricula question, ‘why we do what we do’?

Being informed by the curriculum mapping results and integrating and re-casting each institution’s principles (see Relf et al, 2017, p.16), the research team derived a set of six underlying principles for the intended curriculum as presented below. It was the research team’s intent that these could provide clearer direction for enabling educators:

Principle one: Enabling curricula foster the development of a foundational level competence in key academic writing, research and communication.

Principle two: Enabling curricula foster the development of a foundational awareness of salient knowledge across relevant academic content areas.

Principle three: Enabling curricula foster the development of a foundational understanding of academic integrity and ethical conduct requirements in the university context and more widely.

Principle four: Enabling curricula foster the development of a foundational ability to successfully engage with the university teaching and learning environment.

Principle five: Enabling curricula foster the development of a foundational ability to work in teams, specifically to effectively collaborate and contribute within small groups in order to develop academic skills.

Principle six: Enabling curricula foster the development of a cross-cultural and international outlook, specifically the ability to engage productively and harmoniously with diverse cultures considering alternative cultural perspectives.

The term foster appears prudent in underpinning principles for curriculum design in enabling programs because it characterises the developmental nature of enabling programs and separates their aims and outcomes from those expected from undergraduate programs. Undergraduate program attributes are aligned to curriculum built around professional standards; and designed for students on a continuum of learning growth over a three to four year period.

The curriculum mapping exercise additionally revealed that the three institutions generally measured unit outcomes and program attributes effectively. However, those outcomes that explored a broader outlook (such as global perspectives) or self-regulatory skills (such as time management, co-operative interactions with fellow students) often remained unmeasured in the presented curricula. While acknowledging that such intangibles when presented as unit outcomes or program attributes warrant more thought in terms of measurement, Ervin et al., (2013, p. 310) point out that outcomes and attributes that are acceptable across all university programs are too generic for enabling programs and do not allow such programs to clearly demonstrate what constitutes the *intended* curriculum. Barnett and Coates (2005) might describe this as a curriculum missing the element of *knowing* and *being*; that is, for what purpose are we learning these skills? These elements, that can appear external to content of courses/units, are nonetheless integral and may be the *raison d'etre* for much course content. Without close observation of enabling program staff delivering unit material, the curriculum mapping process described herein struggled to determine whether more intangible content was delivered to students.

Given the paucity of research surrounding enabling curriculum design, Table 5 presents thoughts surrounding the gaps identified in the mapping exercise and suggestions for consideration.

Table 5: Curriculum mapping findings and curriculum design suggestions

Enabling curriculum designers should:	**Curriculum mapping results**
Develop enabling program specific graduate outcomes that reflect the developmental nature of these programs.	ECU and UTas used program attributes designed for undergraduate and post-graduate students. These attributes do not reflect the developmental stage most enabling students are at. Mandated university attributes do not set a tone that captures the nature of enabling programs, nor highlight the education pathway enabling students may be on. UON with purposefully constructed program attributes was able to align 89% of content to these attributes, while ECU could only align 69%.
Explicitly articulate the enacted curriculum in unit documentation to reveal content that is sometimes 'hidden'.	In some instances aspirational goals (such as global citizenship often included in program attributes) were rarely mentioned in course documentation.
Present the intended curriculum so that students are clear about program expectations and unit content.	Unit outcomes were not always measured in assessment items (on average 37% of unit learning outcomes were not measured). While not all assessments measure all outcomes, and this finding may reflect anomalies of the mapping process, course designers should be cognisant that assessments represent what students are expected to learn and demonstrate.
Recognise that there are many sources and repositories of documentation that support the student learning experience.	Unit documents did not always convey pathways to program attributes and learning outcomes. Enabling program designers need to ensure that students are able to locate or are guided towards supporting material that relate to course learning (such as assessment rubrics) via the unit outline.

Limitations

The limitations to this study need to be considered before generalisations can be made. The three enabling programs reviewed in the study had different curricular approaches (from a skills focus to a discipline specific focus), and while being representative of the diversity of enabling programs within Australia, no specific curriculum mapping tool existed to map their *intended* curriculum. As such, to determine the validity and reliability of the modified version of Cuevas and Feit's (2011a) mapping tool, a thorough pilot test using a larger sample would be necessary (Ervin et al., 2013). Secondly, this study was undertaken within a twelve month time frame, with this component being the initial undertaking. This did not allow the type of in-depth curriculum mapping that is necessary to fully articulate design principles for enabling programs in general. The findings of this overview would need to be confirmed in a larger study involving other university and non-university enabling programs to develop a clearer appreciation of what is offered in the enabling education field.

Conclusion

In light of gathering interest in the success of enabling programs (James, 2007; Seary, Willans, & Cook, 2016; Whannell, Whannell, & Bedford, 2012) and the need for a deeper appreciation of the learning opportunities enabling programs present (Kemp, & Norton, 2014), it is revealing that there appears to be little guidance towards thorough examination of enabling curriculum in the academic literature. Further complicating movement towards extensive mapping of enabling programs is that there is little evidence of methodological rigour and validity of tools associated with this process in HE environments (Ervin et al., 2013) and none that relate to enabling education. Finally, as Wang (2015) argues, mapping or benchmarking is not what is required, perhaps curriculum that matches a series of competencies addresses the universities view of the world, but may not meet an individual's requirements in an increasingly complex world. Thus, it would appear that more attention is required if enabling educators throughout Australia are to identify the gaps, opportunities, and nuances that exist in the variety of offerings presented to their students.

This initial foray into identifying aspects of curriculum in three separate university enabling programs revealed that these programs need to be clearer on the outcomes expected of students by establishing specific program attributes rather than simply aligning student efforts with university-wide graduate attributes. Additionally, the mapping exercise revealed that the intangibles of the programs such as a deeper understanding of the processes of learning were not always presented in course material and that this aspect of ‘knowing and being’ (Barnett & Coates, 2005) is critical for the student group that invariably make up enabling programs. Thus, while the efficacy of enabling programs throughout Australia in achieving university-ready skills and literacies is being increasingly appreciated (Hodges et al., 2013; Kemp, & Norton, 2014; James, 2007), in a climate moving towards increased transparency and accountability (Bennett et al., 2012; Shah, & Wannell, 2017), enabling educators could articulate with more clarity what it is that underpins the intended curriculum in course related documentation and how this prepares students for a competitive global community.

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Nannagogy: Social movement learning for older women's activism in the gas fields of Australia

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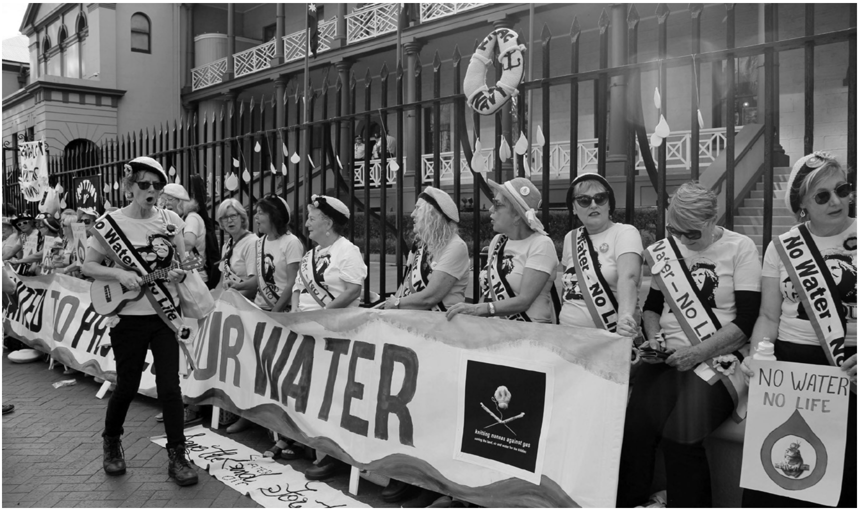
In this paper, we explore the concept of Nannagogy, an innovative pedagogy of informal adult learning enacted by the activist 'disorganisation', the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed (KNAGs). The 'Nannas' are predominantly older women who undertake non-violent direct action using fibre craft, knit-ins, lock-ons, and occasional street theatre to draw public attention to the negative environmental impacts of unconventional coal seam gas extraction ('fracking') and of fossil fuel mining. We identify the characteristics of Nannagogy as a hybrid system of lifelong / later-in-life learning and a complex pedagogy of informal learning that can be understood through social movement learning theory (SML) drawing on Paolo Freire's (1970) original concept of 'conscientisation'. Nannagogy is an act of radical adult education that has its antecedents in feminist collective learning strategies such as consciousness raising as well as the formal education strategies of action learning and communities of practice. Nannagogy is highly effective adult learning practice at the intersection of adult learning theory and social movement theory. Data presented in this paper were collected with active KNAG *members in Australia as part of a PhD study using surveys, interviews, document analysis of social media (Facebook posts, digital videos, e-news bulletins) and researcher autoethnography. Framing activist adult learning as social movement learning locates environmental and climate justice struggles within lifelong learning practices and enables researchers to better understand the complex processes of informal, situated and often spontaneous adult learning for creating and sustaining movements for social, environmental and political change.*

Keywords: *Knitting Nannas Against Gas, social movement learning, Nannagogy, activism, lifelong learning, informal learning, active ageing.*

Introducing the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed

> *We came we sang, we sashed [for International Women's Day] … and after weeks of hard work and [then] hours of sitting on the hard, hard concrete we needed to get out of the hot sun and get something to eat and drink and a Nanna nap! Nothing is too hard for Nannas … and we never give up.*

(Comment posted by Rosie Lee, Lismore Loop, 10 March, 2019 Facebook)



'United to Protect our Water' – 101 Knitting Nannas use their 'No Water No Life' sashes for soft lock-on to the bars of NSW Parliament House, International Women's Day, 2019. Photo: Dominique Jacobs (Gloucester KNAG Loop) reproduced with permission.

Martin Place
UNITED TO PROTECT OUR WATER
CENTRAL COAST KNITTING NANNAS
NO WATER NO LIFE
KNITTING NANNAS HUNTER LOOP NO C.S.G
KNITTING NANNAS GRAFTON LOOP
SYDNEY Knitting Nannas & Friends
NO COAL

'United to Protect our Water' –The Knitting Nannas rally on International Women's Day, 2019 (Martin Place, Sydney, Australia)

Photo: Dominique Jacobs (Gloucester KNAG Loop) reproduced with permission.

Most of our learning as adults comes from daily experiences – socialising with friends; learning how to do new tasks; performing Internet searches; and getting together as craftivists to challenge the expansion of carbon polluting industries in Australia. The Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed (popular acronym KNAGs, and referred to in this paper as the Nannas) are an Australian movement of older women activists initially brought together by the threat of coal seam gas (CSG) mining in the north coast New South Wales town of Lismore in 2012. A few concerned women joined an existing environmental group in support of anti-CSG movement 'Lock The Gate', where they learned strategies for non-violent direct action (NVDA). However, these women became frustrated by the inherent and unacknowledged sexist and ageist attitudes expressed by male activists. According to founding member, Clare Twomey, they were expected to make the teas and take minutes. In her acceptance speech for the Ngara Institute Activist of the Year Award, on behalf of the Nannas, Clare Twomey describes how the Nannas self-devised their alternative activism as a form of 'guerrilla surveillance'. Small groups of women went out into the countryside, parked by roadsides with their knitting, folding chairs, and thermoses to 'scope out the works'; that is, watch and record mining company, Metgasgo, truck movements (Ngara Institute, 2018). Initially knitting was a way of productively passing the time but it soon became a way of expressing a form of environmental activism that older women could engage in. As Liz Stops (2014, p.10) comments, 'The name ... was purposefully devised. "Knitting" and "Nannas" are words that immediately conjure a nostalgic image of older women exuding trust and love.' Their "Nanna-ness" is a form of strategic or tactical essentialism that communicates their identity and purpose with great clarity. Collectively, they refer to themselves as a determination of Nannas.

Nannas can be found all over Australia in groups known as loops. They are not a formal organisation, rather they position themselves as a 'disorganisation', indicating their internal learning processes take the place of any formal organisational structure. In consciously avoiding incorporation as a legal entity, they claim greater freedom to be "cheeky" as explained in a July 3, 2018 post on their Facebook page, Knitting Nannas Against Gas:

> *Facebook wants our ABN. ABN? A bothersome Nanna? Awful bottom noises? A bloody nuisance? Assuming bankers notice? Abysmal boring names? Auntie's being naughty? Authoritarian bastards naked? Send us your ABNs. We'll send the best to Facebook and the ATO. NB. The Nannas are a disorganisation. We are not incorporated. It gives us the freedom to be cheeky, and we are only answerable to ourselves.*

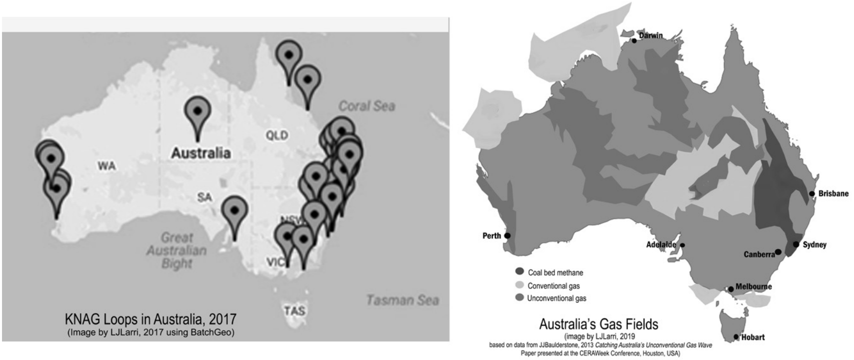
Every Nanna who joins a loop brings skills that are acknowledged collectively. The Nannas express an ethos of drawing on individual strengths and capabilities and of supporting one another emotionally, socially and physically, including explicit recognition of themselves as ageing women facing growing frailty. Nannagogy honours a firm, if not always visible, tradition of older women's knowing and being in inventive ways, drawing on creativity to perform effective, collective, connected and very public, social action.

From 2012 to 2018, the Nannas grew from one loop, to over thirty identified loops, most along the east coast of Australia with some in Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory. (The Northern Territory is also home to the anti-fracking women's group, the Growling Grannies.) Figure 1 shows a map of loop locations compared with a map of unconventional coal seam gas resources presented by the mining corporation Santos at the 2013 CERAWeek Conference in Houston, USA (Baulderstone, 2013). It is no surprise that

Nanna loops are closely associated with the location of gas fields and fracking sites.

Figure 1: Map of loop locations compared with map of unconventional coal seam gas resources

KNAG loops in Australia, 2017 *Catching Australia's unconventional gas wave*


Coral Sea
QLD
Australia
WA
SA
NSW
Great Australian Bight
VIC
TAS
Tasman Sea
KNAG Loops in Australia, 2017
(Image by LJLarri, 2017 using BatchGeo)
Darwin
Brisbane
Perth
Adelaide
Canberra
Sydney
Melbourne
Hobart
Coal bed methane
Conventional gas
Unconventional gas
Australia's Gas Fields
(image by LJLarri, 2019
based on data from JJBaulderstone, 2013 Catching Australia's Unconventional Gas Wave
Paper presented at the CERAWeek Conference, Houston, USA)

(Map produced by LJ Larri using BatchGeo) *(J. Baulderstone, Santos, CERAWeek Conference Houston, USA 2013)*

All Nannas are both witnesses to and protestors of the environmental destruction of regional and rural landscapes due to mining. They are not affiliated with any political party. Their purpose, explained in the 'Nannafesto' is 'to annoy all politicians equally' (see https://knitting-nannas.com/philosphy.php). Their sitting, knitting, and plotting causes considerable concern outside the offices of politicians and corporations associated with the fracking industry. To be fair, they do warn 'frackers to beware [of] women with a sparkle in their eyes and very sharp pointy sticks in their hands' (Knitting Nannas Against Gas Facebook post, May 25, 2018).

Nannas stick firmly to the principles of non-violence and they deliberately represent the 'many who cannot make it out to protests – the elderly, the ill, the infirm, people with young children and workers'. This is explained in their 'Nannafesto', which is a clear, ethical philosophy that underpins their Nannalution (*What are you knitting? A revolution!*). Keeping their fingers busy they hold knit-ins and every year get together at a Nannual Conference. They offer Nanna Hugs and comforting cups of tea in the Nanna-tent; make Nanna-Vision Videos (e.g. a Nanna Wrap/Rap and parody-performances of songs including 'Sadies the Cleaning Ladies – Cleaning up the political pigsty'); and spread Nanna News through social media. Nanna Eve Sinton publishes a free weekly e-news, the *Fossil Fool Bulletin* that monitors fossil fuel industry activities in Australia. Their online sites include crochet and knitting patterns. They are totally committed to learning as a foundation for activism declaring, ‘It's never too late to teach an old dog new tricks. Nannas ears and eyes [are] wide open’.

Nannas are doing what American Philosopher Donna Haraway (2016) calls ‘staying with the trouble’, and ‘making kin’. Nannas are highly creative – as well as crafty – and have embraced their own language to communicate their actions and intent, riffing humorously on terms associated with knitting and with stereotyped images of ageing women. Haraway (2016) says that it matters what language we use to think ideas and move these ideas into the public realm. The Nannas have been remarkably successful in creating a new language to explain themselves to their communities, and have done this without a formal hierarchy or incorporation.

Understanding Nannagogy

The Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed are a new phenomenon in Australian activism. They are ageing women who work collectively across the nation without a formal organisational structure (by contrast with the Country Women’s Association, which equally concerns itself with quality of life issues in rural landscapes). Activism offers ageing women the opportunity to be active and engaged informal learners. In this paper, we argue that the learning and educational work of Nannas can be understood through contemporary research work on craftivism (craft + activism) and through the application of social movement learning (SML) theory. New directions for adult learning research and analysis include inquiries into gender, identity and community-based action and activism in a time of rapidly changing environmental conditions in Australia.

Adult learning for social action and activism has been a consistent topic for exploration in this Journal. Branagan and Boughton (2003) use Newman’s three categories of learning (instrumental, communicative and emancipatory) to argue for more studies in social movement learning. They signal that active social movements are key features of a learning society critical to the major challenge of the twenty-first century; that is, ‘helping society overcome a fallacious and un-interrogated acceptance of the benefits of economic growth’.

Ollis' (2008) analysis of individual adult learning through activism identifies differences between circumstantial and lifelong activists. She extends previous analysis by adding a spiritual or embodied dimension stressing the importance of mind–body emotional connection (i.e. passion, anger, frustration) in adult activist learning that fuel 'a desire to change the world, drive motivation and action'. In 2011, Ollis integrates theories of situated learning, communities of practice and habitus (drawing from Lave & Wenger; and Bourdieu) to argue the importance of such insights for building capabilities for effective activism towards the critical work of sustaining life on Earth. Taking this further, Ollis and Hamel-Green (2015) consider the specific activist learning occurring in the contested site of CSG mining. They find that most CSG protesters are circumstantial activists having been drawn in by necessity in order to save their rural lands and communities. Our research partially supports this finding with 55% (36) of survey respondents reporting they had never done anything like this before.

Lear's (2013) exploration of older rural women's learning processes in becoming community activists sheds light on issues relevant to our research for this demographic; that is, gender, identity and place. There is much informal and experiential learning for these women 'emerging from relative obscurity of the backrooms, kitchens and traditional supportive roles as farmer's wives and mothers to become community activists, leaders and change agents'. The difference is their processes are very much individual and not attached to a social movement.

Moving from the individual to the collective, Walter (2012) adds the dimension of frames or cultural codes as powerful creative mechanisms for provoking transformative social change. He highlights the power of satirical humour used by environmental groups, in particular the Raging Grannies, Canadian older women's activist movement established in 1987 (Roy, 2007). As you will see, this resonates with the Nannas (note that the Nannas were not aware of the Raging Grannies when they began).

We see Nannagogy as a highly creative, collective learning system, similar to a systematised curriculum except that this pedagogy exists wholly within the realm of informal learning. Nannas have deliberately taken a group approach drawing on individual member strengths to craft a social movement that became active across the nation within a few years (2012–2019). Nannagogy gives status to gender and infirmity and to women's creativity. What does it mean to craft something? Metaphorically craft can represent traditionally, women-centred forms of connection and collaboration, that of drawing threads together in which home-based activity becomes visible in the public sphere as deliberative actions, and gives voice both physically and visually to women's place in the environment of contestation.

Our methodology for understanding is to take a comprehensive, bird's eye view of Nanna learning as a whole. We too, do a bit of knitting, in this paper looking at Nannagogy first as a clever form of craftivism and secondly a sophisticated form of social movement learning. The purpose of social movement learning theory is to better understand linkages between levels of individual, group and movement learning. Social movement learning theory works through the lenses of the micro, meso and macro, lending itself to the argument that learning is greater than the sum of the parts.

A mixed method descriptive case study approach of a 'multisite bounded system' is used to understand the learning processes of the women in the network (Merriam, 2014, p. 49). The data presented in this paper are drawn from information collected with active Nannas in Australia including written (online) survey data, one-on-one interviews, and document analysis of social media in the public domain (Facebook posts, digital videos, e-news bulletins). Researcher autoethnography is also included in this paper to enable readers of the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL) to glimpse the details of environmental destruction that are the ultimate focus of all Nannagogy. Both authors have been offered the title of Honorary Nanna – recognition of the relational ethics in using autoethnography. We have both been close to the action, affected by it but maintain a purposeful distance in order 'to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better' (Ellis et al, 2011). The research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, James Cook University.

The key question for this PhD study has been to determine what motivates and engages older women to be Knitting Nannas so that they become environmental champions in actively contributing to the transition to low-carbon economies. Relevant sub-questions are:

1. Who are the Knitting Nannas and what are their characteristics?

2. What is it that women learn about through being a Knitting Nanna?
3. What are the implications of the Knitting Nannas' experiences for later in life environmental adult education?

Data collection is currently ongoing. To date, an online survey completed in 2017 yielded 69 responses from Nannas across 23 of the existing 37 loops. Most (41%, 15) were from NSW loops; 14% (5) from Queensland and one each from WA, ACT, and NT. There were none from the two Victorian loops. Women spent an average of 30 minutes completing surveys. The survey attracted respondents who have been in the movement since inception in 2012 (6 years) with a representative spread across 3 to 6 years involvement (86%, 59). Nannas range in age from 45 to 84, with a majority being 50 to 74 (88%, 61). The data indicated that respondents represented both originators of loops (25%, 15) and those who joined an existing loop (75%, 44). Some 25 women offered to participate in follow-up interviews. Some of these have been conducted (7) either face-to-face or online using Evear video capture with Skype. Additional qualitative data from social media sources allows for triangulation of findings.

Nannagogy as a form of craftivism

The Nannas see knitting as an umbrella for all forms of craft and have realised they are part of a worldwide movement drawing on traditional female arts for undertaking social and environmental protest. The practice has the name craftivism (see Greer 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Press, 2018) and is generally understood as a means for making connections between people who wish to live in a more just and safe world. Both craft and activism take energy and commitment, and as neither activity precludes the other, 'activists can be crafters, and crafters can be activists' (Greer, 2014). The Nannas trace a link to the French Revolution Les Tricoteuses who would knit at the base of the guillotine in silent protest at their enforced exclusion from political participation (Stops, 2014 p. 8). Close (2018, p. 870) comments that the connection of craft and politics by women occurred 'long before and long after the Arts and Crafts Movement famously theorised this association at the turn of the 20th century'. There is a thread to be drawn from the Suffragette's banners and sashes through to sewn and knitted banners or flags at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (Berkshire, England, 1982–2000). Australian women at the Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp (near Alice Springs, 1983) made similar visual protests (Clarke, 2016, p. 301). More recently, the Nannas yellow, black and red sashes and t-shirts proclaiming 'No Water, No Life' (International Women's Day, Sydney, 2019).

Fitzpatrick (2018, p. 3) considers that craftivism today is more specific and developed. She writes,

'Craftivism is both a strategy for non-violent activism and a mode of DIY citizenship that looks to influence positive social and political change. This uniquely 21st Century practice involves the combination of craft techniques with elements of social and/or digital engagement as part of a proactive effort to bring attention to, or pragmatically address, issues of social, political and environmental justice. Craftivism can take the form of acts of donation, beautification, notification or be deployed for its individual capacity building and therapeutic benefits, or for its ability to strengthen social connections and enhance community resilience.'

The Nannas use their craftivism in all the different forms mentioned by Fitzpatrick (2018). Examples include Knot the Gate; that is, the Nanna-version of Lock the Gate leaving yellow threaded triangles across fracking well sites; staging knit-ins outside local politician's offices; soft handcuffs for symbolically linking Nannas at protests; knitted tube-shaped covers for chains so protestors can lock-on in greater comfort; berets, banners, sunflower badges and scarves in yellow and black as part of the Nanna uniform; character costumes like Brynhildr who wears a knitted horned Viking helmet and carries shield and sword; playful yellow and black character finger puppets; and Chooks Against Gas, which are crafted soft toys representing chickens that are given away to children of families affected by toxic fugitive gases produced from fracking.

Nanna loops create viable opportunities for older women – a group not usually visible or vocal due to both age and gender stereotyping – to engage in eco-activism and active ageing around Australia. Nannas take the traditional knitting circle from the private realm quite literally out into the open. Knitting enables peaceful activism that is sympathetic to older women's physical capacities and engagement interests (Stops, 2014; Ngara Institute, 2018). Knitting groups support women who wish to exercise their democratic rights to be heard and challenge a system they feel is the antithesis of sustainable life now and for future generations. Knitting groups are sites for situated learning and the development of a community of practice.

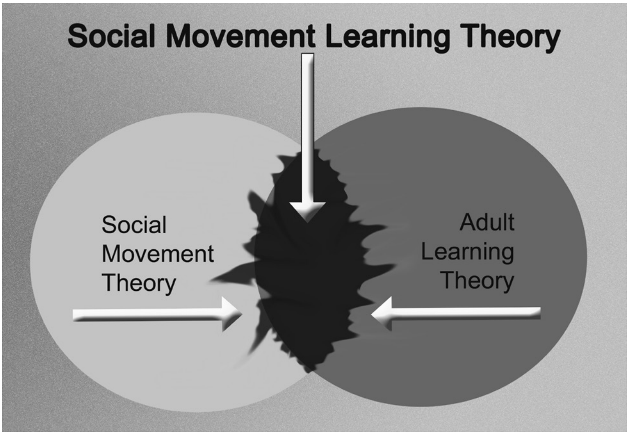
The Nannas know that sitting and knitting by a roadside, in a field, at a blockade, or outside a local politician's office, enables them to have many productive learning conversations, to share knowledge of coal seam mining (unconventional gas mining) and environmental impacts, gain a deeper understanding of their communities, and strategise and reflect on what they were learning. These processes are further supported by online networking as an expression of what Siemens (2008) and Downes (2012) call Connectivism – learning in and through a digitised world of active participants in conversation. The epitome of self-directed adult learning accessible anywhere, anytime literally in the palm of one's hand! This active connectivism is also crafty, and the media are catching onto the craft language of the Nannas evidenced by the excerpt from an Illawarra Channel Nine TV News report covering of Illawarra KNAG (IKNAG) knit-in outside local State MP, Gareth Ward's office, March 18, 2019. Reporter Brittany Hughes said in her report:

> *Protestors have spun a yarn in the hope of unearthing the effects of underground mining. A group of Knitting Nannas gathered outside MP Gareth Ward's office in Kiama today – calling to protect the region's water supply. It may look like a peaceful protest but these women mean business ... The group says residents are being stitched up [video of KNAGS holding up their very long yellow and black knitting] concerned [that] long-wall mining is affecting Sydney's drinking water catchment which supplies water to 5 million people in towns such as Kiama [video of Warragamba Dam].*

Nannagogy as a form of social movement learning

Environmental activism is acknowledged as providing opportunities for purposeful and transformative learning. Social movement learning (SML) theory is emerging as a useful framework for understanding the connection between adult learning theory and social movement theory. Informal adult learning is critical to the impact and success of all community activist groups but particularly to the Nannas, who deliberately eschew any formalised organisation. Social movement learning theory sits at the intersection of adult learning theory and social movement theory, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Social movement learning theory



Social movement learning (SML) is a relatively new area for educational investigation. In their State of the Field report, Canadian researchers Hall, Turray, Chow, Parks and Dragne (2006, p. 5) wrote that ‘a deeper understanding of the educational dimensions of social movements will be of use to social movement organizations and activists’ and also, as it turns out, to adult education researchers. Social movements are ‘pedagogical spaces for adults to learn and transform their lives and structures around them’ (Hall, 2004, p. 190 in Kluttz, & Walter, 2018, p. 96); they are engines of social and structural change.

In the case of the Nannas, their express, collective purpose is to ‘peacefully and productively protest against the destruction of our land, air, and water by corporations and/or individuals who seek profit and personal gain from the short-sighted and greedy plunder of our natural resources’. The Nannas form of action is to ‘sit, knit, plot, have a yarn and a cuppa, and bear witness to the war against those who try to rape our land and divide our communities’ (quoted directly from the Knit the Dream Nannafesto at https://knitting-nannas.com/philosphy.php). Nannas achieve their purpose by engaging in a mix of informal learning processes that can be analysed through social movement learning theory.

For Kluttz and Walter (2018, p. 96), ‘we understand social movements in part as identity movements through which both individuals and the collective engage in cognitive praxis to learn new identities, create new knowledge and take action for social change’. Social movement learning processes are complex, dynamic, and messy; constantly shifting from the individual to the collective and back again. They are dependent on specific social, cultural and historical contexts. Our research has identified the adult learning strategies that Nannas employ, in dis/organising themselves, form a hybrid system of lifelong / later-in-life learning that draws from social learning movement theory and its forerunners including Paolo Freire's (1970) concept of 'conscientisation'; radical adult education, feminist collective learning strategies (in particular, 'consciousness raising groups); as well as strategies applied in human resource management for organisational learning (such as action learning and communities of practice). Gender and identity are foremost; hence the term we use is 'Nannagogy'".

Kluttz and Walter (2018, p. 98) have expanded on Scandrett, Crowther, Hemmi, Mukherjee, Shah and Sen's work (2010) to conceptualise learning in the climate justice movement – a similar context to the work of the Nannas. Three levels of learning are delineated. These are: Micro (individual, interactive); Meso (frame, minimum thematic universe); and Macro (culture–ideology, hegemony). Applying this framework as an analytical tool to the Nannas has proved useful. Additional overlays of adult learning theories explain the dynamics in greater detail. We draw specifically on communities of practice and situated learning (Wenger, 2011); action learning (Revans in Zuber-Skerritt, 2001; McGill, & Beatty, 1995); and Connectivism (Siemens, 2008; Downes, 2012).

In terms of furthering our understanding of the relationship between learning and effective activism Scandrett et al. (2010, p. 125) argue that investigating the intersection between adult learning theory and social movement theory 'can lead to a synthesis which accounts for both learning and social commitment'. Historically, adult learning theory concentrated on understanding individual experiences of learning. However, social movements are collectives of individuals who share the same or similar ethical outlooks (e.g. they are concerned about environmental, social and/or cultural justice). For Eyerman and Jamison (1991), social movements can be described by their cognitive praxis, as learning communities of individuals engaged in the purposeful generation and distribution of knowledge. Social movements, because they are formed from groups of like-minded people, create cognitive (and by dint of location, physical) spaces for social learning.

Theories of social movements have always had a strong interest in the nature of collectives since collective movements first attracted research attention the 1970s, della Porta and Diani (1999) found that the common characteristics of social movements were that they were composed of informal, interactive networks of people who shared similar beliefs; acted in solidarity with each other; focussed their actions on a source of conflict (e.g. the devastation of regional landscapes by fracking) and were willing to use forms of protest to effect social, political and economic change. Social movement learning refers to (a) learning by persons who are part of a social movement; and (b) learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of the actions taken or becoming aware of the existence of a social movement, such as the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed (Hall, & Clover, 2005; Hall et al., 2006). Learning is often informal, and incidental or planned, but in the case of the Nannas, this informal learning is highly directional and purposeful, in that Nannas are learning with a firm political aim in their (collective) mind. For example, in order to become social media savvy Nannas have invited guest experts to their meetings and share their knowledge in upskilling one another.

The recent ‘cultural turn’ in social movement theorising that focusses on ‘the cognitive, cultural, symbolic, networking and “framing” activities of movements’ (Scandrett et al., 2010, p. 126) has opened analytical spaces where adult learning and social movement theorising can intersect. Meaning the context of environmental activism is fertile ground for further investigating adult learning, especially as ‘education always takes place within a changing socio-economic reality driven by systemic tensions and this reality both constrains and creates opportunities for learning’ (Scandrett et al. 2010, p. 216)

In undertaking our analysis of older women’s environmental learning, we were immediately struck with how much the learning processes of the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed align with the concept of lifelong learning. It was Ettore Gelpi, one of the foremost theorists of lifelong learning, who said that adult learning is best understood within the conflicts and contradictions of any wider context, and ‘in every society there is some degree of autonomy for educational action, some possibility of political confrontation, and at the same time an interrelation between the two’ (Gelpi, 1979, p. 11, quoted by Scandrett et. al., 2010, p. 128). In Australia, we understand that lifelong learning is part of maintaining our robust democracy, and the Nannas demonstrate this in their multitude of threads and stitches!

Applying Kluttz and Walter's (2018, p. 98) levels of analysis in social movement learning, data collected from survey results indicate Nannas are learning individually and interactively at the micro level of classification. This is characterised by acquiring new knowledge through participatory activities and actions:

> *[I learnt] more about the impact of mining on human health, particularly the health of children. [I know] more about biodiversity, how it works and what sustains it. [I learnt] more details of how invasive and poisonous CSG drilling and extraction is [and have] more interaction with local Aboriginal women about how it affects them.*

Nannas variously reported learning new social media skills, how to play the ukulele and learning about mining production, financing and international connections, local geology, water systems and the workings of local, state and national government bureaucracies.

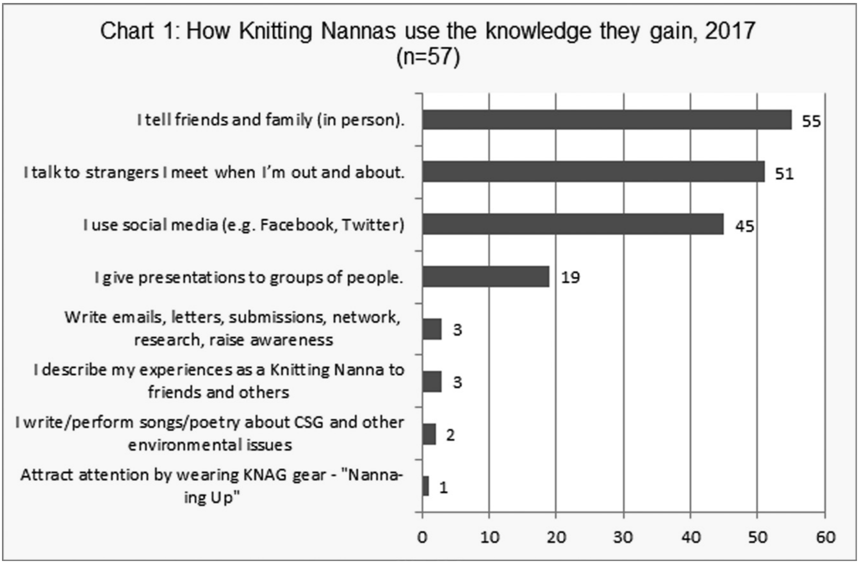
> *[Before Nannahood] I never knew about CSG or how much damage was being done to our air, water and land. I always thought of myself as a conservationist and environmentalist, but this opened a whole new world.*

As the Nannas talk together to inform each other:

> *My knowledge is fed every time someone stops and fills us in on what is happening elsewhere. General exposure to the issues, constant conversations, keeps me informed much more than I would be otherwise. I have learnt so much about CSG and how it is extracted, and the threat it poses to the environment. Once your eyes have been opened, they cannot be closed! I have become far more environmentally aware since becoming a Nanna, much more politically aware, and I've learnt to crochet!*

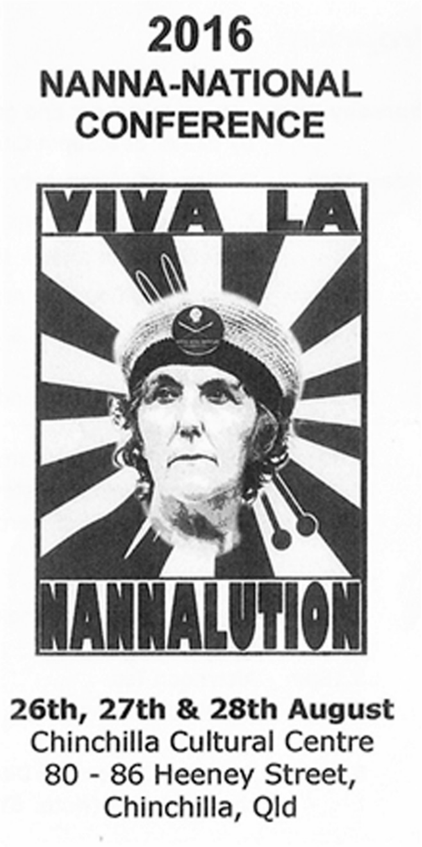
Learning at the meso level includes transformative learning, identity change, identity construction, reframing and reorientation of one's world view. Acting in congruence with their 'Nannafesto', Nannas together sit, knit, plot, and bear witness with the intention of annoying all politicians equally. They also explicitly wish to represent the many who can't be there to actively protest, and to express their individual and collective agency in participating in active citizenship. Nannas who participated in the survey indicate that 'fighting Big Gas need not be stressful. It can be quirky and fun. I've learned that groups of committed and persistent ladies can achieve much'. In learning activism skills, 'I have so much respect and empathy with so many women, and have learnt how to communicate on so many new levels'.

Data collected on macro level learning is presented in Chart 1. Knitting Nannas use the knowledge they have gained to raise awareness primarily by talking to friends and family (96%, n=55) and talking to strangers when they are out and about (89%, n=51). They are active users of social media (79%, n=45) and a third have become public speakers giving presentations to groups of people (33%, n=19). Although only one respondent mentioned drawing attention by wearing the KNAG gear, all KNAGs do this and refer to it as 'Nanna-ing Up'. They dress in individualistic versions of yellow and black – the colours of the 'Lock the Gate' movement. Some Nannas have added red in solidarity with Indigenous communities fight to prevent mining on Country.



Nannas hold annual conferences getting together with invited speakers and these 'Nannuals' are very productive sources of individual and collective learning.

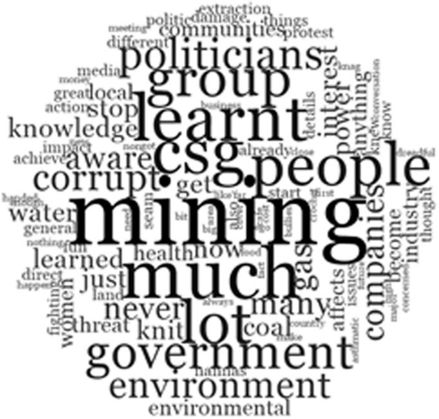
Figure 3: 'Viva La Nannalution' – 2016 Nanna – national conference program cover


2016
NANNA-NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
VIVA LA
NANNALUTION
26th, 27th & 28th August
Chinchilla Cultural Centre
80 - 86 Heeney Street,
Chinchilla, Qld

(Artwork: Rosie Lee, Clare Twomey and Angela Dalu. Reproduced with permission)

At macro level learning, Nannas analyse their collective experiences reframing meso level learning to more greatly understand the hegemonic social and cultural forces playing inside and outside their movement; to consider matters of Australian politics, gender, race, and class consciousness. Nannas research and learn about powers outside the movement through information gathering and experience, and in their Nanna way, form informal agreements and undertake actions with allies, and create networks with like-minded groups.

Figure 4: Word cloud – What women learnt that they didn't know before, 2017

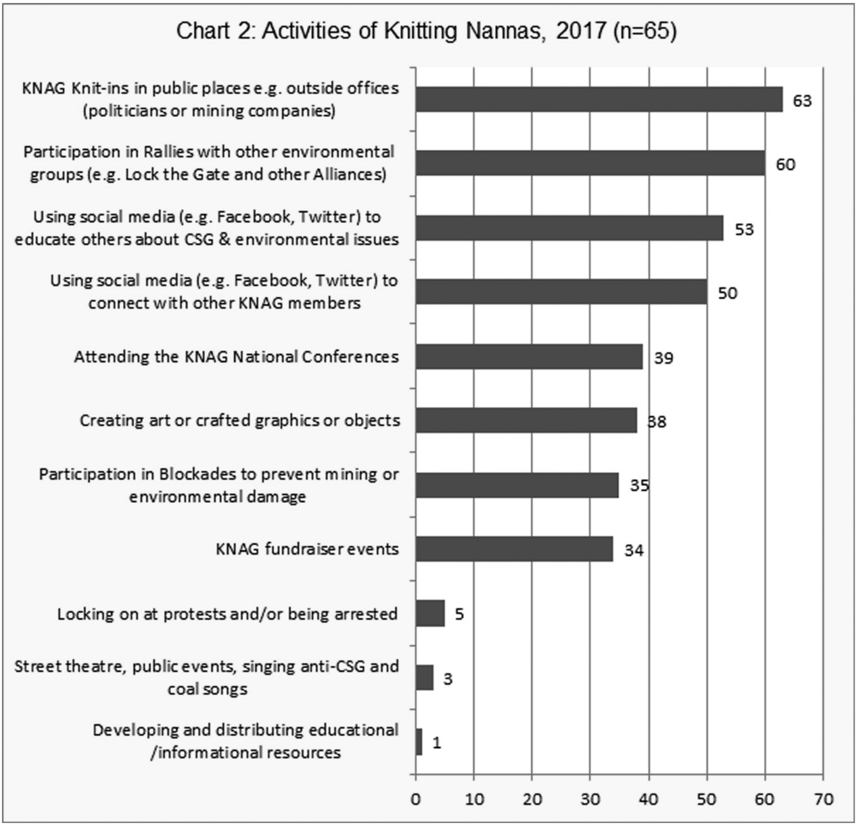


The word cloud based on survey data in 2017 (Figure 4) shows that learning has primarily been about mining, CSG, politicians and government. Nannas report having learnt 'just how powerful a non-violent direct action group can be; and a lot more about how self-serving and absolutely untrustworthy some politicians are; how low some businesses and politicians will go for the sake of such little return and the disregard they have for the future, the environment and where we grow our food'; and 'how corrupt governments and corporations can be and the knowledge of lies and cover-ups within parts of the media'.

When Nannas hear the 'personal stories of people affected by mining – the emotional cost does not seem to be given consideration by governments and mining companies. This has led me to feel even less regard for our politicians than I had before'. And when Nannas realise 'disturbing facts about attacks on the environment' they learn 'mining companies … have governments in their pockets'. Once Nannas become 'much more knowledgeable about the threats of mining and CSG' they 'are able to talk to others about these threats more articulately'. And they report becoming saddened 'by the degree of [revealed] corruption in our government and major parties'.

Chart 2 indicates that the majority of participating Nannas surveyed have taken part in KNAG Knit-ins in public places such as outside offices of politicians or mining companies (97%, n=63); have joined actions with other environmental groups (92%, n=60); have used

Facebook and Twitter to educate others about coal seam gas, fracking and environmental issues (82%, n=53); and have used social media to connect with other KNAG members (77%, n=50). Over half the women surveyed attended KNAG annual conferences (60%, n=39); created art or crafted graphics or objects (58%, n= 38); participated in blockades to prevent mining or environmental damage (54%, n=35); and contributed to KNAG fundraiser events (52%, n=34). Five women (8%) reported 'locking-on' to gates or machinery to prevent removal at protests and being arrested.



In our analysis, the range of capabilities developed by women through engagement with the Nannas include (and it is a long list): active citizenship, justice advocacy (social, environmental, climate), confidence in public speaking, craftivism, critical reflection, knowing legal rights and negotiating with authorities, NVDA, social media and networking skills, and use of essentialist strategic and tactical planning. It is important to note that compassion and action are features of how the Nannas implement their 'Nannafesto'. They offer a supportive and calming influence to other protesters encouraging them in non-violent actions; they send water and give comfort to rural families affected by exposure to toxic gases and whose rivers and groundwater have been contaminated by fracking (see https://knitting-nannas.com/philosphy.php).

A morning in the Pilliga with the Nannas

In conclusion, and to illuminate Nannagogy in action, we present an autoethnographic account written by Larraine in August 2017, when she was attending the third Nannual conference in the town of Narrabri, New South Wales. As an Honorary Nanna, Larraine was invited to visit the endangered Pilliga State Forest in the company of thirty Nannas.

About thirty of us are being guided by two younger environmental activists, Dan Lanzini and Jo Holden. I'd say they're in their mid-thirties and their knowledge, commitment and passion is impressive. They've made it their mission to spend as much time as possible in the Pilliga bearing witness to CSG mining company Santos fracking operations hidden deep in the forest. Nannas tell me this is not easy. Jo is a mother of young children. Her husband and family support her as much as they can. Dan often camps for days in the Pilliga but has to leave for contract work so that he can keep coming back. He seems very independent and alone.

We begin our tour, stopping at CSG extraction well sites, vents and flares. Forest clearings bounded by high mesh fences; industrial metal structures; eerie silences punctuated by intermittent buzzing, clicking, hissing; the occasional CCTV; faint chemical smells (not the fresh forest air you'd expect). Getting too close makes you feel sick and headachy. The Nannas have come prepared and put on their face masks. I've got mine. A local Gomeroi man who's come along on the tour tells us he remembers exploring and camping in the forest as a child. That was thirty years ago and that's how long it's been since the first wells and flares were put in by Eastern Star (bought out by Santos). The day before we heard from Gomeroi women about how sacred the Pilliga is to them. They described it as their heartland, their responsibility to protect and care for. A highly significant Dreaming site, it's said to contain an underground gigantic crocodile – safe as long as it stays where it is, but with catastrophic consequences if set free. How prophetic! I'm struck by the reality of dispossession, stolen lands, loss of life purpose.

'What are they doing with the CSG from this well?' asks a Nanna. 'Nothing' says Dan, 'It's just for show when they bring investors in. Been like this for years.'

At each stop, the Nannas make a point of photographing their presence – documenting the scenes so they can show others. They gather in various formations holding their knitted banners, fists raised or arms crossed in defiance. As they leave I see yellow and black woollen knotted threads across gates. Soft barriers reclaiming spaces, symbolic memorials of their anger and fulfilling their 'Nannafesto' to 'bear witness'.

Back in the cars we're heading for the dead zones. Created sixteen years ago when contaminated water from exploratory wells spilled from evaporation ponds onto huge sections of forest. Twenty-two sites in all, we only see two. I'm walking through a grey and black denuded landscape, eerily more silent than a graveyard. It feels immediately desolate. At my feet, an expanse of dead wood, grey mulch, and patches of muddy sludge criss-crossed by irrigation pipes and the odd dying bush or leafless bare tree. In the far distance a fence and thick forest beyond. The demarcation line is dramatic.

'Look down', says Dan, 'tell me if you can see any ants or other insect life or any signs of animal activity'. 'He's right' we murmur to one another, 'there's nothing alive here'. We see signs saying 'Keep out, rehabilitation area'. Despite regular attempts with water, dispersant chemicals, and bush regeneration nothing has worked, it's still a dead zone. I'm shocked at how my emotions of disbelief then sadness affect me. I've never been here before, it wasn't mine to lose and yet I feel grief and a growing sense of anger at the carelessness and irresponsibility of people who would let this happen.

Next stop Bohena Creek. Can't see an actual creek with water, just sand, but Dan explains, 'Dig down no more than an elbow length and you'll hit water'. The creek drains from the Pilliga onto nearby Namoi Valley – rich agricultural country, a major food bowl for Australia. Dan tells us the miners have been known to dump their contaminants into the sandy beds conveniently leaving a non-descript wet patch. The concern is the downstream impact when approval is finally given for the proposed 850 wells, that's one every 700 metres. The rains don't come often, but when they do Bohena Creek is big and floods into the farmlands. They rely on this and artesian water. The Pilliga is known to be a recharge site for this edge of the Great Artesian Basin. I already know that fracking uses megalitres of water and relies on government approvals to tap into natural sources. Dan tells us that each well will create 150 million litres of contaminated 'produced water'. The facts are swirling around my head, I can't understand why we're not learning from experience – preserving and protecting. With these sorts of track records, how can you trust mining companies with government approval not to contaminate precious water resources?

We talk about the many flares that would keep firing 24/7, lighting up the dark night sky. What would this do to nearby Coonabarabran Siding Springs Observatory and their international work in astronomy? What happens when there's a bushfire? The local volunteer Rural Fire Service has said it won't send crews in, too dangerous.

A grey silence descends on us all. By now all we can do is shake our heads in disbelief but Dan can't stop telling us what he knows. It spills out and we listen to all he's seen and researched. Finally, he ends and says, 'That's it! Now you know. What I can't understand is why people aren't listening and fighting this. Thank you for taking the time to see it and for listening.'

It's time to leave but before we get into our cars, the Nannas thank Dan and give him some money collected during the morning. He didn't expect it and shyly accepts. It will help pay the bills. He's a tall, lanky bloke and towers above the Nannas gathered around him. He looks down at them saying thank you. Spontaneously the Nannas close in with a huge, group hug. It's like Dan is briefly wrapped in their tender warmth and caring. He closes his eyes and I notice some tears.

The moment passes and the Nannas promise to share the knowledge and pain. Someone listened.

Conclusion

We set out on this journey fascinated to learn how an eco-activist movement of older women had grown from one small group to over thirty in only six years. Being educators we suspected it had much to do with learning. What we found were women who had been marginalised due to age and gender, who were determined to be productive and creative social change agents taking action for a low-carbon future. Our data show many of these women had never done anything like this before. Drawing on one another's strengths, learning from one another, taking time to critically reflect as they 'sit, knit and plot', these women have built an identifiable learning system consistent with domains of learning in previous literature and Social Movement Learning Theory frameworks to date. Nannagogy extends the field giving us new insights through the intersectionality of gender, identity and eco-activism. We know that gender blindness continues to be an issue in environmental education (Gough, Russell, & Whitehouse, 2017; Larri, & Newlands, 2017). Through Nannagogy we challenge social movement learning theorists and those working in social movements to be vigilant and inclusive. In the words of the Nannas (https://knitting-nannas.com/),

'There seems to be a public misconception that political activists and protesters are young, unwashed and unemployed or unemployable. Not true. Anyone can be an activist and contribute to change. Any type of action can be strong. If we get together and use our strengths, we can make change … You don't have to be a Nanna; you don't have to knit to save the land, air and water for the future generations!'

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The need for a complexity informed active citizenship education program

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While active citizenship education programs are assumed to have positive benefits for the active citizenship practice of participants (UNESCO, 2009, p. 4), there is actually little evidence that programs do (de Weerd, Gemmeke, Rigter & van Riji, 2005, p. vii). This paper discusses a research project that aimed to determine and increase the impact of an active citizenship education program that incorporates education for sustainability principles.

The inquiry's findings showed that while the program developed in graduates the active citizenship characteristics desired by Australian governments, graduates encountered significant systemic blocking factors related to power relations when they attempted to put what they had learned during the program into practice. The findings also highlighted the risk of the program producing a cohort of 'expert citizens'.

To address these findings and improve the interactions and working relationships between program graduates, paid community workers and other community members, a new program has been developed that is informed by complexity and adult education planning theory.

This new program recognises active citizenship as a 'wicked' problem, takes a systemic innovation approach, incorporates a participatory budgeting process, and supports participants to pass on their skills and knowledge to other community members.

Keywords: *active citizenship, wicked, systemic change, power*

Introduction

Active citizenship is a wicked problem (Day 1997, p. 421). Wicked problems are complex social policy problems that societies face which cannot be definitively described and that do not have definitive and objective solutions (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 155). Characteristics of wicked problems include: they are multi-causal, they have many interdependencies, attempts to address them often leads to unforeseen consequences due to their multi-causality and interdependencies, the problem and the problem's context evolve as attempts are made to address them, they require stakeholders to coordinate their approaches, and the various stakeholders have different understandings of what the problem is (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007).

Active citizenship education

One of two different understandings of active citizenship generally underpin an active citizenship education program: a communitarian notion of citizenship or a civic republicanism notion of citizenship (Annette, 2009, p. 152). The communitarian approach to citizenship education focusses on learning through volunteering and community service (Annette, 2009, p. 152). In contrast, the civic republican approach focusses on learning through civic engagement and non-formal [non-electoral (Jedwab, 2002)] political participation (Annette, 2009, p. 152).

While the three levels of government in Australia have expressed interest in citizens developing citizenship characteristics associated with a civic republican notion of citizenship, they each have a different understanding of what characteristics are important. At a local government level, the Local Government Association of South Australia (n.d.) recognises that the success of local government community engagement processes ‘rests on the need for a community well educated about civics and well informed on key issues affecting the community’. South Australian Local Government recognises the need for citizens to know what local government does and how they can be involved in the strategic planning and agenda setting for their local area (Local Government Association of South Australia, 2010).

At a state level, the former Premier of South Australia noted that while developing the civic leadership capabilities of citizens is a challenge (Weatherill, 2007), doing so is required if true partnership working between citizens and governments is to be achieved (Weatherill, 2009). A civic leadership capability considered particularly important by the former South Australian Premier was the capability of citizens to make a considered judgement rather than just providing their own opinions; citizens need to consider all the relevant information, understand differing points of view, and consider the needs of the community above their own self-interests (Weatherill, 2009).

The Australian Government's education for sustainability (EfS) strategy recognises that if Australia is to address unsustainability and promote sustainable development, education and learning needs to focus on developing ‘informed and involved citizens who are able to engage with complex issues and understand the need to balance competing interests’ (Department of Environment and Heritage, 2007, p. 4). To achieve this aim the Australian Government’s EfS action plan focussed on developing the capability of citizens to: understand connections between environmental, economic, social and political systems; undertake collaborative visioning processes; think critically and reflect on personal experiences and world views; challenge established ways of interpreting and connecting with the world; effectively participate in decision making processes; and effectively work in partnerships (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009, p. 9).

The active citizenship capabilities desired by the Australian Government align with the key elements of EfS that are recognised in the literature: imagining a better future, systemic thinking, critical thinking and reflection, participation in decision-making, and working in partnerships (Tilbury, & Wortman 2004, p. 11). According to the literature, it is assumed that if programs contain these EfS elements:

1. graduates become active participants and decision-makers in change processes (Tilbury, & Wortman, 2004, p. 9), and
2. graduates are able to influence the organisations and the wider society that they interact with (Tilbury, 2007).

There is global interest in taking an EfS approach to active citizenship education. In 2002, to encourage the world to take action on education for sustainable development, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005–2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The importance of EfS has resulted in a new pillar of learning being recognised: 'Learning to transform oneself and society', with active citizenship education being considered a key component of this pillar (UNESCO, 2009, p. 4).

Impact on active citizenship practice

Despite this interest in active citizenship education, there is little evidence that active citizenship education programs have an impact on active citizenship practice (de Weerd et al., 2005, p. vii). In fact, Brinkerhoff (2006a) considers there to be little evidence that training in general leads to valuable performance results:

> *'... by many research estimates, only 15 out of 100 people that receive new training eventually use it in ways that produce valuable performance results.'*
>
> (Brinkerhoff, 2006a, p. 303)

Insights from Brinkerhoff (2006b) also bring into question the ability of graduates from active citizenship education programs to influence the organisations and the communities they interact with as their ability to influence will depend on a complex range of system factors:

> *'There is always something else at work that interacts with the training, and enhances its effects or impedes them.'*
>
> (Brinkerhoff, 2006b, p. 22)

> *'Best estimates are that 80 percent or more of the eventual impact of training is determined by performance system*

> *factors, while the remaining 20 percent or so is driven by variations in the quality of the training intervention itself and the characteristics of the learner, such as inherent ability and motivational values.'*
>
> (Brinkerhoff, 2006a, p. 304)

Being a wicked problem, active citizenship (Day, 1997, p. 421) by definition is influenced by a multitude of intertwined and adapting causal factors (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007). It is therefore questionable, given this complexity, if active citizenship practice can effectively be addressed through a single education program.

Contribution of this paper

This paper contributes to the evidence on whether active citizenship education programs have an impact on the active citizenship practice of participants. It discusses a research project that aimed to determine and increase the impact of a community-based active citizenship education program that incorporates the key elements of EfS. Given that key elements of EfS were incorporated into the program it was expected that the two EfS assumptions would apply: graduates would become active participants and decision-makers in change processes (Tilbury, & Wortman 2004, p. 9) and would be able to influence the organisations and the wider society that they interact with (Tilbury, 2007).

The structure of this paper is as follows. After describing the program that is the focus of the inquiry, the research project that was undertaken is outlined. Next, the literature and theories that were applied to the inquiry's summarised data are reviewed. The paper then discusses the key research finding: that despite the program enabling participants to develop the active citizenship characteristics desired by the three levels of government in Australia, graduates were unable to implement much of what they had learned due to a range of system factors. To address this finding it is reasoned that the nature of both the interactions and the working relationships between graduates and paid community workers, and graduates and other community members needs to be improved. It is shown, by referring to the literature, that this could be achieved if the program incorporated a complex adaptive system (Lichtenstein, & Plowman 2009, p. 618) and participatory budgeting approach

(Schugurensky, 2009, p. 57). The paper concludes by describing a new program that has been developed to address the weaknesses of the original active citizenship education program.

The program

The Community Capacity Builders (CCB) Community Leadership Program is the program that was at the centre of this research study. CCB has been delivering this active citizenship program as the training component of the City of Onkaparinga's Leadership Onkaparinga Program since 2006. The City of Onkaparinga's leadership program is delivered to groups of approximately 20 residents in the Council area who have diverse education and employment backgrounds but are all actively engaged in the development of their community.

During the CCB program, each participant applies the program's 20 topics to any community issue or opportunity of their choice and progressively develops a collaborative project addressing their chosen community issue or opportunity. Prior to this study, summative program evaluations had shown that the CCB program achieves its three target learning outcomes: participants acquire the skills and knowledge required to develop collaborative community capacity building projects; bridge their projects to the strategic plans of governments and participate in community governance activities.

All of the key elements of EfS that are recognised in the literature (Tilbury, & Wortman 2004, p. 11) are incorporated into the program. During the program participants imagine a better future by exploring a range of community visioning models and techniques. They create a vision for the future for their issue or opportunity in collaboration with other community stakeholders and develop strategies and action plans to achieve preferred futures. Participants undertake systemic thinking by exploring communities as systems and by investigating the shift to integrated local area planning and networked governance. They explore the interrelationships between different perspectives for building community capacity and the need to balance human, social, economic and environmental impacts when making decisions and taking action. Critical thinking and reflection are encouraged by challenging participants' existing ways of interpreting the world as they explore global strategic directions and trends, overseas models and initiatives, the tendency for people to preserve their own beliefs and to focus on positions rather than interests, and community issues and opportunities from seven community capacity building perspectives. These seven perspectives are a health, education, welfare reform, business, sustainability, collaborative planning and decision-making perspective. Participants' active engagement in decision making is incorporated into the program. They explore international participation frameworks; analyse methods and techniques for engaging with different types of stakeholders and explore the techniques and processes commonly used by governments for community engagement. The program has a strong focus on developing skills for working in partnership. It enables participants to cultivate collaborative leadership skills, design collaborative processes and develop a collaborative project.

The working in partnership EfS principle is a key component of the CCB program's design as the program has been created to be delivered in partnership with government. The government partner is encouraged to integrate the CCB program with initiatives they develop such as community visioning and planning forums, mentoring programs, community leadership networks, additional workshops using local guest speakers and site visits to local community initiatives and infrastructure.

The research project

To explore if the two EfS assumptions hold for the CCB program, a longitudinal research project was undertaken with the City of Onkaparinga to answer the questions:

- How does participation in the CCB program impact on the community leadership practice of participants and on their ability to influence the groups, organisations and communities that they interact with?
- What are the enabling and blocking factors participants encounter?
- How can the social impact of the CCB program be increased?

The inquiry's methodology included conducting biannual semi-structured interviews with nineteen program graduates for two and a half years. NVivo 8 software was used to transcribe the graduate interviews and undertake line-by-line open coding. As categories emerged during the coding, theoretical ideas from the literature were applied to the summarised data to determine the influence of the CCB program on graduates and the organisations and communities that they interact with, and how to increase the program's social impact.

The nineteen graduates interviewed were participants in the first three CCB programs delivered with the City of Onkaparinga. During the three programs, the Council progressively integrated additional initiatives with the CCB program. The CCB program that provided the training component of the first Leadership Onkaparinga program was delivered between November 2006 and May 2007. This first Leadership Onkaparinga program just consisted of the CCB program, a visit to a Council public library, and two non-scheduled speakers organised by the Council. The second Leadership Onkaparinga program commenced in February 2008, finished in July 2008, and consisted of the CCB program, afternoon workshops and library visit organised by the Council, and a Council developed mentoring program. The third Leadership Onkaparinga program commenced in March 2009, finished in August 2009, and consisted of the CCB program, afternoon workshops, library visit and mentoring program organised by the Council, and site visits to infrastructure and community centres within the City of Onkaparinga.

Literature review

The theoretical ideas that were applied to the summarised data drew on insights from education, political science, public administration, democracy and complexity science literature. Three areas of interest emerged from the coded data that the literature was applied to: the perceived power imbalance between paid workers and active citizens; the risk of active citizenship education programs creating an elite group of expert citizens and the need to improve the nature of both the interactions and the working relationships between paid workers, active citizens and other community members.

Perceived power imbalance

The theory of street-level workers has informed the findings from the research project. Street-level workers are public sector and non-profit workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and have considerable influence on citizens through their substantial discretion in how they implement public policy (Lipsky, 2010).

Wildemeersch (2007), and Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele (2007), have identified a power imbalance between street-level workers and citizens. While they initially considered the social learning that occurs when citizens engage in participatory planning processes with paid workers to be emancipating and empowering, after conducting research in a variety of contexts they came to believe such processes just replace traditional forms of coercion with new technologies of persuasion and normalisation (Wildemeersch, 2007, pp. 102–103; Wildemeersch, & Vandenabeele, 2007, p. 25). As Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele (2007, p. 25) state:

> *'Participation sometimes produces strong commitment of the actors involved, but also at other occasions, lots of refusal, resistance, and sometimes resignation when eventually, the procedures of collaboration turn out to be complex, bureaucratic, and expert-driven. We experienced in our youth policy planning research how the involvement of young people in the planning process sometimes ended up with a concentration of the power in the hands of the professional planning experts who understood best the rules of the game. Many youth-workers did not feel attracted by what they experienced as non-transparent and time-consuming procedures taking their energy away from the 'real participatory thing' namely engaging in youth-work activities with the youngsters.'*

In a similar vein, research by Levy (2018) into the interactions of public servants with members of the general public found that public servants resist public input and preferred to see decisions made by elites like themselves (Levy, 2018). The importance of addressing such perceived power imbalances between public sector workers and citizens was brought to the fore in 2004 when the findings from the British independent inquiry into how to increase and deepen political participation and involvement was released (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 39).

Before the British Power inquiry it was believed British citizens had become apathetic about political participation (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 41). The inquiry uncovered citizen apathy in relation to political participation was a myth; British citizens had not disengaged from political participation, they had just disengaged from the processes and institutions of formal democracy (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 41).

The inquiry discovered lack of influence to be the one prevailing disengagement factor, which showed up through all strands of their investigation (Power Inquiry, 2006, p. 73):

> *'... the very widespread sense that citizens feel their views and interests are not taken sufficiently into account by the processes of political decision-making. It cannot be stressed enough the depth and extent of this perception amongst the British public. Many, if not all, of the other accepted explanations presented here could also be understood as variations on this theme of weak citizen influence.'*

This citizen disengagement is even more prominent today than it was at the time of the Power Inquiry. In many western countries, trust in government and the appeal of democracy continues to decline (Donaldson, 2017). As at 2017, only 11% of Australians consider Australia's current system of government to be working (Donaldson, 2017) and only 60% of Australians consider democracy to be the preferable form of government (Roggenveen, 2017). For Australians aged 18–29 this situation is even worse with only 52% considering democracy to be the preferable form of government (Roggenveen, 2017).

Cervero and Wilson (1994) address such power imbalances in their theory of adult education planning. They recognise that when there is an asymmetrical power relationship, the planning of educational programs is most likely to serve the interests of those with power (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 264). Cervero and Wilson (1994, p. 261) suggest that the most appropriate adult education planning approach to address this situation is to counteract it.

Risk of creating expert citizens

The findings from this research project have been informed by the political theory of expert citizenship and republican elitism. Bang (2005, p. 160) refers to the term 'expert citizenship' to describe new forms of informed citizen activism that take shape in multi-stakeholder governance networks and partnerships (2005, p. 160). Because Bang (2005, p. 160) considers these expert citizens to be a 'relocation of republican discourse into the exercise of political authority and leadership' he refers to this new expert citizenship as 'republican elitism'.

To be included in this republican elitism, citizens require a certain level of skills and capabilities, with those who will not, do not, or cannot gain these skills and capabilities running the risk of being excluded from participation in networks and partnerships (Bang, 2005, p. 160). Further contributing to this potential exclusion, expert citizens are considered to lack the political solidarity required to address the exclusion of their fellow citizens; they are more concerned with having an impact on policy development and implementation that assists their own projects than in assisting others in the community to engage in governance decision making (Bang, 2009, p. 131).

Bornstein and Davis (2010, p. 41) and the Australian Public Service Commission (2007) highlight the harm associated with creating expert citizens. Bornstein and Davis (2010, p. 41) stress the need for a significant percentage of people and not just a few appointed or elected elites to be engaged in leadership efforts to address problems if society is to be more adaptive and resilient. The Australian Public Service Commission (2007) takes a similar view emphasising that in order to address a specific complex wicked problem all people whose behaviour needs to change have to be engaged in the collective decision-making processes required for addressing the problem. Carson (2012) has specifically highlighted this risk in association with citizenship education programs, stating: ‘I reckon the Deweyan and Jeffersonian call for an educated citizenry may lead, intentionally or inadvertently, to *elite* engagement.’

The creation of expert citizens can also be detrimental to democracy. According to Dahl (1998, p. 38), five criteria are required for all citizens (not just a few expert citizens), in order to achieve an ideal democracy: effective participation, equality in voting, enlightened understanding, control over the agenda, and inclusiveness. To achieve the criteria of effective participation all citizens must be given the same opportunity to express their views during policy development (Dahl, 1998, p. 37). Equality in voting requires all citizens to be given an equal and effective opportunity to vote on decisions about policies and for each vote to be counted equally (Dahl, 1998, p. 37). Enlightened understanding requires all citizens to be given the opportunity to learn about alternative policies and the likely consequences of each one (Dahl, 1998, p. 37). To achieve control over the agenda, all citizens must have the opportunity to choose which matters and how matters should be placed on the agenda (Dahl, 1998, p. 38). Inclusiveness requires all adult permanent residents be given the full rights of citizenship implied in the first four criteria (Dahl, 1998, p. 38).

Need to improve interactions and working relationships

Complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory has informed the findings from the research project as it provides practical insights into how to improve the interactions and working relationships between street level workers, active citizens and other community members. CAS are systems, such as communities (Amadei, 2015, p. 4), that are composed of semi-autonomous agents that can self-organise/recombine through adaption into new capabilities (Lichtenstein, & Plowman, 2009). According to CAS theory, under certain conditions interactions between these interdependent agents produce system level order (Lichtenstein, & Plowman, 2009, p. 618) as the agents interact and learn from each other, change their behaviour, and adapt and evolve to increase their robustness (Gillis, 2005, p. 10).

In addition to improving relationships between diverse stakeholders, a CAS approach is required for addressing active citizenship more generally. This is due to CAS approaches being recommended for tackling wicked problems (Davies, Mulgan, Norman, Pulford, Patrick, & Simon, 2012, p. 8) because they confront the multi-causality, interdependencies and evolving nature of wicked problems (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007).

‘Systemic innovation’ is an approach that improves the interactions and working relationships between diverse community stakeholders, incorporates an understanding of complexity and complex adaptive systems, and is recommended as the most appropriate form of social innovation for addressing wicked problems (Davies et al., 2012). It recognises that single initiatives on their own are incapable of addressing wicked problems (Davies et al., 2012, p. 2). Systemic Innovation is defined as ‘a set of interconnected innovations, where each is dependent on the other, with innovation both in the parts of the system and in the ways that they interact’ (Davies et al., 2012, p. 4).

The need for EfS active citizenship education program to take a CAS approach has recently been recognised. The UNESCO Roadmap for implementing the post-2015 Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development has identified that creating the enabling environment for EfS to bring about systemic change is a priority area and understanding complex systems is recognised in the Roadmap as a key EfS skill (UNESCO, 2015).

Another approach that has been recommended for improving working relationships and interactions is participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is defined as 'a process in which citizens directly and democratically decide how to allocate part of a budget' (Baiocchi & Lerner, 2007, p. 8). According to Schugurensky (2009, p. 57), participatory budgeting can significantly address power differentials.

Research findings

While the coded responses from the graduate interviews showed that the program developed in graduates all of the active citizenship characteristics desired by the three levels of government in Australia, the two EfS assumptions did not hold for the program. Graduates reported that they encountered significant blocking factors when they attempted to put what they had learned during the program into practice. These perceived blocking factors were due to system factors, including: asymmetrical power relationships; a lack of participation opportunities for graduates; and the attitudes, skills and knowledge of other community members.

Asymmetrical power relationships

It was identified during the interviews that while graduates valued the support they had received from City of Onkaparinga staff (thirteen graduates reported receiving support from City of Onkaparinga staff), they perceived street-level workers generally as a significant blocking factor. The coded responses highlighted that graduates considered their encounters with street-level workers as expert driven and resisted by the workers: four of the graduates responded that workers do not value graduates' skills and knowledge, four graduates mentioned poor facilitation by a worker, three graduates identified the need for workers to engage better with the community, two graduates commented on workers giving graduates tokenistic roles and two graduates reported workers having negative attitudes towards them.

The following quotes from the graduate interviews suggest that the graduates perceived street-level workers as blocking them by controlling decision making:

> *If you don't have the power you don't get a say. It’s very worker influenced.*
>
> *She’s [paid worker] a bit of a bully in meetings and that, so she will disregard what a person will say or she will say I know you will agree this is the only way to go about fixing the problem.*
>
> *We make a decision about something ... and we set the date and parents start sourcing resources so we can do it cheap. People are getting donations and then staff have a meeting and say no that’s not going to work we'll have to do it ten weeks from then. That's really not valuing the decisions that are made at a meeting and not valuing the amount of work that parents put into something.*

The quotes below reveal that graduates consider one reason street-level workers block them is because they do not value their skills and knowledge:

> *Blasting people’s ideas; just because I don't have a badge with a title on it doesn't mean I don’t have things to say and that they are not very valuable.*
>
> *A lot of paid workers just see volunteers as providing a service ... They provide not only their time, but they provide their thoughts and their ideas and just so much more.*
>
> *They wouldn’t have listened to me because I'm not an employee.*

These findings support Wildemeersch and Vandenabeele (2007, p. 25) and Levy’s (2018) findings: that professional workers who know the rules of the game have significantly more power, workers resist public input and workers prefer to see decisions made by professionals like themselves. Given the importance of addressing power imbalances identified during the Power Inquiry (2006, p. 39), the increasing distrust in government (Roggenveen, 2017), and the decline in democracy’s appeal (Donaldson, 2017; Roggenveen, 2017), it is important that this power imbalance is addressed.

Lack of participation opportunities

It was identified during the interviews that graduates were eager to work with professional workers and were disappointed that they could not find opportunities to do so. Seven of the graduates responded that there were no opportunities to participate in government decision making, four graduates mentioned that the Council could make better use of participants after the program, three graduates identified that there were no opportunities to participate at a participation level that they believed worthwhile, and one graduate commented that they considered opportunities to participate in meaningful government decision making were only for the elite.

The quotes below illustrate the lack of participation opportunities that graduates perceived:

> *I haven't been aware of any opportunities to participate in any community forum stuff.*
>
> *One of the biggest disappointments … I certainly got the impression that as successful participants in the program we would be looked at by Council as potential facilitators … that didn't happen.*
>
> *We often talk about this. There's almost like a deflated feeling because we get inspired so much by what's going on overseas [network governance] and the opportunities aren't here.*
>
> *I don't think I'm in the loop. I feel like if I was to present myself they would say "who are you". If the opportunities were there, I'd be there, because it really interests me.*

The graduates expressed desire to participate with workers in community forums and network governance opportunities aligns to the 'expert citizen' form of active citizenship described by Bang (2005, p. 160). The knowledge and skills that the graduates acquired from undertaking the CCB program has provided them with the skills and capabilities expert citizens require in order to effectively participate in governance activities that focus on achieving political outcomes (Bang, 2005, p. 160).

Attitudes, skills and knowledge of other community members

Graduates reported during the interviews that they were blocked when they attempted to share what they had learned during the program with other community members. Eight of the graduates responded that they encountered people who do not like change and do not appreciate new ideas when they attempted to pass on what they had learned, and five graduates encountered members in their own community group or organisation that blocked them when they attempted to implement what they had learned.

The following graduate quotes suggest that graduates perceive this difficulty to be linked to the attitudes, skills and knowledge of community members:

> *Many of them are people that are really, really set in their ways, and to try and change these people's attitudes is a very, very slow educational process.*
>
> *It's important that we can communicate with the rest of the community, our volunteers, and can relate something towards them. At the moment if I was to bombard them with the program itself I think I would lose them … I use to do lots of training when I was working and when you come out of it your full of beans and then you find your running against a brick wall because you have got the program but to bring other people along it's not that easy.*
>
> *If they don't understand it, it's "yeah but", and it's like there's no point talking to you because you have no idea what I'm talking about. So it is frustrating.*

While graduates have not portrayed the expert citizenship characteristic of a lack of political solidarity with other citizens because they are more concerned with advancing their own projects (Bang, 2009, p. 131), they have suggested that it is difficult to work with community members that have not undertaken the CCB program. Given that a significant percentage of community members need to be engaged in order to address wicked problems (Bornstein, & Davis, 2010, p. 41; Australian Public Service Commission, 2007) and that elite engagement undermines democracy (Dahl, 1998), it is important that the risk of the CCB program only producing a cohort of expert citizens is addressed.

Increasing the program's impact

Informed by these findings, the social impact of the CCB program could be increased if the asymmetrical power relationship between the CCB program participants and the street-level workers were addressed. The adult education planning approach of counteracting asymmetrical power relationships (Cervero, & Wilson, 1994, p. 261) could be assisted by including content into the program that shifts the power dynamics.

The social impact of the CCB program could also be increased by addressing the risk of the program producing expert citizens. This could be assisted if program graduates were supported to pass on what they learn during the CCB program to other community members.

To address the asymmetrical power relations and the risk of producing expert citizens, the interactions and the working relationships between graduates and street-level workers, and graduates and other community members needs to be improved. According to CAS theory this could be achieved if favourable conditions are established (Lichtenstein, & Plowman, 2009, p. 618) that enable stakeholders to learn from each other, adjust their behaviour, and increase their robustness by adapting and evolving (Gillis, 2005, p. 10). Incorporating systemic innovation and participatory budgeting approaches into the program would contribute towards these favourable conditions (Davies, et al., 2012; Schugurensky, 2009, p. 57).

The new program

In response to the inquiry's findings, CCB has developed a new five-unit, project-based active citizenship education program that is embedded in a participatory budgeting process. The participatory budgeting process provides program participants, street-level workers and community members with the opportunity to directly and democratically decide how to allocate a pool of funds towards active citizenship learning experiences that are developed by participants during the program (Baiocchi, & Lerner, 2007, p. 8).

Unit 1 of the new program is titled 'Active Citizenship'. During this unit participants explore: the communitarian and civic republicanism citizenship approaches (Annette, 2009, p. 152), why active citizenship is considered a wicked problem (Day, 1997, p. 421), the concept of street-level workers (Lipsky, 2010) and the decline in support for democracy (Roggenveen, 2017).

Unit 2 'Understanding Solution Ecosystems' focusses on taking a systemic innovation approach to strengthen active citizenship in communities. It includes the key EfS skill of understanding complex systems (UNESCO, 2015) and the systemic innovation tasks of researching and mapping the ecosystem of initiatives and innovations in a community that are contributing towards active citizenship (Davies, et al., 2012).

Unit 3 is titled ‘Social Movements’. During Unit 3, social movements are explored as a form of counterpower that involves social actors challenging ‘the power embedded in the institutions of society for the purpose of claiming representation for their own values and interests’ (Castells, 2015, p. 5). A range of social movement types is explored, including: reform, revolutionary, redemptive, alternative and resistance movements (Little, McGivern, & Kerins, 2016, p. 923).

‘Community Organizing’ is the focus of Unit 4. During this unit participants compare power from the conflict and the consensus community organising approaches (Ohmer, & DeMasi, 2008). They also develop a power map. Power maps show the key actors that are involved with an issue, defines the power they have in relation to decisions and resources, and analyse relationships between the actors (Noy, 2008, p. 4).

Unit 5, ‘Community Education’ addresses the identified need for program participants to share what they learn during the program with other community members. During Unit 5, participants take a learning experience design approach to develop an active citizenship learning experience that incorporates some of the active citizenship capabilities that they have covered in previous units. Learning experience design is defined as ‘the process of creating learning experiences that enable the learner to achieve the desired learning outcome in a human centered and goal-oriented way’ (Floor, 2018).

Conclusion

The research project described in this paper, has investigated if two EfS assumptions apply to an active citizenship education program. It was found that the EfS assumptions did not hold for the CCB program: graduates were not actively participating and making decisions in change processes (Tilbury, & Wortman, 2004, p. 9) and were not able to influence systems change (Tilbury, 2007).

More broadly, this paper has contributed to the evidence on whether active citizenship education programs benefit active citizenship practice.

The inquiry found that while graduates did develop the active citizenship capabilities desired by Australian governments, systemic blocking factors prevented the graduates from being able to put these capabilities into practice.

Given that active citizenship is a wicked problem (Day, 1997, p. 421), influenced by a multitude of intertwined and adapting causal factors (Australian Public Service Commission, 2007), it is probably naive to expect that an individual program can embed active citizenship practice in a community without tackling the complexity (Davies, et al., 2012, p.8). To address these findings a new active citizenship program has been developed that does recognise the complexity of active citizenship.

This new program aims to increase the social impact of the original program by: including content that shifts the identified power dynamics, creating an ecosystem of active citizenship initiatives that are developed and delivered to other community members by participants; and improving the interactions and working relationships between paid workers and active citizens. To determine if this new program has a greater social impact than the original program further research is required.

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Learning to deal with freedom and restraints: Elderly women's experiences of their husbands visiting a Men's Shed

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This article explores the effects of activities in Men's Sheds on elderly women. Specifically, it investigates the opportunities that are made available for women when their husband/partner becomes active in the Men's Shed movement; focussing on 'empowerment', 'gender identity' and 'well-being'. Five focus group interviews and eight individual interviews with elderly women were conducted and subsequently analysed through a content analysis, guided by the concepts of 'empowerment', 'gender-as-performative' and 'well-being'. The result indicates that the notions of 'self-fulfilment' and 'self-sacrifice' are central to understanding how men's participation in Men's Sheds has affected elderly women's empowerment, gender identities, and well-being. When men visit Sheds, it empowers women and offers them a sense of freedom and independence due to the women feeling less concern for their partners and a concomitantly eased bad conscience for leaving the men home alone with nothing to do when the women leave the household to pursue their own activities. Simultaneously, 'Shedding' provides new avenues for women to reproduce traditional *feminine gender roles where they are primarily responsible for the socio-emotional work within their marriage. This was demonstrated by the women's extensive engagement by which they, practically and emotionally, prioritised their husbands/partners and their new Shedding experiences.*

Keywords: *empowerment, elderly women, external well-being, internal well-being, gender roles, gender identity, Men's Shed.*

Introduction

Men's Sheds are community-based workshops that offer men, primarily men beyond paid work, somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to. Men's Sheds started in Australia in the early 1990s, and quickly spread to other Anglo-Saxon countries, including New Zealand, Ireland and the UK. Lately, Sheds have been established in Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, Germany, Malta, France, China, Kenya and the Scandinavian countries (Ahl, Hedegaard & Golding, 2017; Golding, 2015). Men's Sheds constitute a social movement that is growing rapidly; with a yearly increase of approximately 20 per cent. In 2015, there were over 1,400 Sheds around the world (Golding, 2015) and two years later, there were over 2,000 Sheds (http://mensshed.org; http://menzshed.org.nz; http://venssheds.ie; http://venssheds.org.uk). The Sheds have been found to greatly benefit older men's learning, health and well-being and social integration. 'Shedding' has been shown to be of importance to the development of a positive male identity, which focusses on responsibility, care for others, as well as for oneself (Carragher, 2013; Cavanagh, Southcombe, & Bartram, 2014; Golding, Foley, & Brown, 2007; Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey, & Gleeson; Golding, 2011; Golding, 2015; Haesler, 2015; Morgan, Hayes, Williamson, & Ford, 2007; Wilson, Cordier, & Wilson Whatley, 2013). The keys to their success, from an organisational perspective, are:

(i) Sheds offer men practical, gender-stereotypical activities

(ii) Sheds are organised from the bottom up, so service providers are kept at arm's length

(iii) No women are present in the Shed

(Ahl, Hedegaard, & Golding, 2017; Golding, 2015)

There exists a fair amount of research into the effects that membership of a Shed has on the men who attend them. However, we wish to raise the following research questions:

> *What impact does the attendance of men at a Shed have on their spouses?*
>
> *What do Sheds mean for the spouses, in terms of opportunities for learning and development?*
>
> *What impact on spouses has the fact that their husbands have somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to?*

In this paper, we explore the opportunities that have become available for women as a result of their husbands' activities in Sheds, with special attention paid to the notions of 'empowerment', 'gender-as-performative' and 'well-being'. In our study, a spouse becomes synonymous with a woman, since all our interviewees were women, and all lived in heterosexual husband–wife relationships.

With respect to 'married elderly people', previous studies have found that there is, for this group of people, a decrease in the number and frequency of social contacts for both women and men, when they retire from work (Alwin, Felmlee & Kreager, 2018; Wruz, Hänel, Wagner & Neyer, 2013; Zhaoyang, Sliwinski, Martire & Smyth, 2018). Instead, what has been observed is that increased interaction between the spouses takes place (Kulik, 2002). Research has also found that the elderly experience a higher degree of freedom with respect to their choice of whom they want to socialise with, compared to younger people (Pinquart & Schindler, 2009; Van Solinge, 2012; Zhaoyang, Sliwinski, Martire & Smyth, 2018). This opportunity to exercise one's choice regarding social friends and acquaintances seems to be more widely used by women than by men. However, it may be the case that women use this opportunity in a different manner. Women are more likely to replace the social contacts they established at their place of work with new relationships and activities (Cedergren, King, Wagner & Wegley, 2007; Felmlee & Muraco, 2009; Okamato & Tanaka, 2004). Loscocco and Walzer (2013) discuss a 'role conversion', such that older men become more family-oriented, while older women become more focussed on their own empowerment and self-fulfilment. Marchand (2018) examines the notions of 'retirement-freedom' and 'restrained retirement', and reports that women seem to experience the former to a larger extent than men. This state-of-affairs may be conceptualised as 'a return to a more youthful stage' for women, in that they find themselves fairly free from certain role obligations and other restraints on their social life. Compared to an earlier period of their lives, women now (in their retirement) enjoy more opportunities to focus on themselves and to explore their freedom (Arnett, 2015; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenburg, Frank & Verma, 2002). This is, for example, reflected in the fact that elderly women participate significantly more than men in adult education (Jenkins, 2011). For men, ordinary forms of adult education can be an obstacle to their participation (Williamson, 2000), since many of them prefer self-directed, flexible and informal activities without teachers, teaching or a schedule (Golding, 2015). Another way of describing the situation that women of this age find themselves in is to say that these women's well-being is now more subject to the operation of internal factors (for instance, their own activities), while elderly men's well-being is influenced by external factors to a greater degree (for example, by their wife's activities) (Schimmack, 2006).

However, there is another side to the coin. Compared to elderly women, elderly men often fail to adequately maintain their social relationships, their health or their well-being. As a consequence of this 'self-neglect', women's well-being and overall life-satisfaction are affected negatively, because they are often concerned for their husbands (Carr, Freedman, Cornman & Schwarz, 2014). Elderly women's concern for their husbands and their well-being is not a unique phenomenon. In many marriages (and in society at large, for that matter), women are often endowed with the epithet 'relationship expert' (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003; Sanderson & Kurdek, 1993), which leads to certain demands and expectations being made on them, especially regarding taking responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects of the marriage or relationship (Bloch, Haase & Levenson, 2014; Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky & Kim, 2014). Using Butler's (1988) concept of 'performativity', we argue that the formation of gender roles in powerful institutions, such as the institution of the family, are reproduced through the interaction between historical behaviour (gender roles throughout history) and the present discourse on gendered-positions and roles in the context of the family. Furthermore, when we take into consideration the fact that women are also often responsible for managing interactions with the medical system (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001), the unequal distribution of responsibility for the socio-emotional work between husbands and wives becomes apparent (Iveniuk, Waite, McClintock & Teidt, 2014). In the case of older married couples, this is shown, *inter alia*, by the husbands' evaluation of their marriage based on what they feel their wives do for them. In contrast, elderly wives base their perceptions of the state of their marriage on what they feel they do for their husbands (Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky & Kim, 2014).

As a consequence of the above, when the husbands of elderly women begin to visit Sheds, we might conclude, with good reason, that some of the socio-emotional burden that is carried by these women will be taken from them. However, we ask whether this is really the case? The present study adds to our knowledge about how elderly women's well-being and overall life satisfaction is affected by the activities that their spouses engage in. Moreover, by using Men's Shed as an example, this article also adds to our knowledge regarding the effects that the Men's Shed has on family dynamics and on those individuals who are most closely related to the men who attend Men's Sheds.

Conceptual framework

'Empowerment' (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000) is the first of three concepts that constitute the conceptual framework that informs the present study. 'Empowerment' refers to an individual's ability, and the opportunities that are afforded to the individuals, to exercise determination in and about his or her own life. (Rappaport also mentions organisations and neighbourhoods as being potential subjects for an analysis of empowerment, but in the present context, we focus solely on empowerment from the individual's perspective). Empowerment is considered to be a process, rather than a goal; it is one's striving to gain determination over various aspects of one's life that is of special interest when empowerment in practice in examined (Rappaport, 1987). The focus on empowerment as a process, rather than a goal, directs our attention towards structures that enable, or prevent, empowering processes from being realised (Zimmerman, 2000).

With our attention directed towards structures, 'empowerment' thereby becomes compatible with the examination of 'gender'. In this case, we draw on Butler's (1998) view of gender as *performative*. This view argues that gender is something that is ‘done’ or ‘enacted’, with reference to both a person’s/group’s social and historical contexts. With regards to ‘gender identity’ and ‘gender roles’, these concepts are understood via the repetition of acts over time. ‘Gender transformation’ is enabled by means of the arbitrariness of these acts. Thus, by acting in a non-confirmative or norm-breaking way, gender identity and gender roles can be challenged. They can, of course, also be reproduced when a person acts according to established norms. Non-confirmative or norm-breaking gender performance is linked to empowerment, since such a performance (of an act) can be seen as part of an empowering process in which a person’s gender identity and gender role (as prescribed by the social and historical context) is challenged.

The third and final concept that informs our theoretical framework is ‘well-being’. Schimmack’s (2006) division between ‘internal well-being’ and ‘external well-being’ enables us to study well-being that is derived from, in this case, the elderly women’s acts that are primarily expressions of an ambition to focus on themselves (internal well-being), but also a well-being that is derived from acts that mainly focusses on their husbands (external well-being), but increases the well-being of the women nevertheless. Consequently, internal well-being has a strong connection to empowerment and also to a performative gender that is non-confirmative or norm-breaking. On the other hand, external well-being is linked to a performative gender that is norm-confirmative.

Method

The data used in the present study was collected in New Zealand, in January 2017, and in Denmark, in January 2018. We conducted five focus group interviews with elderly women, one focus group interview in a Shed in New Zeeland and four focus group interviews in Denmark at four different Sheds. In Denmark, eight individual interviews with elderly women were also conducted. The five focus group interviews and the individual interviews included 26 participants in total. Two of the participating women were still gainfully employed, but were close to retirement. The remaining 24 women were retired and were over 65 years of age. The focus group interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, while the duration of the individual interviews averaged approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for qualitative analysis. Quotes that were originally in Danish were translated into English by the authors.

Analysis

The data that was collected was analysed by means of a concept-driven content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) which was guided by (i) the concept of ‘empowerment’ (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000), (ii) Butler’s (1988) theory on ‘gender as performative’, and (iii) the concepts of ‘internal well-being’ and ‘external well-being’ (Schimmack, 2006). This concept-driven content analysis was then used to identify overarching themes regarding the elderly wives’ experiences of their husbands visiting Sheds. The primary interest in the analysis was to interrogate the well-being of the women. By searching for expressions of empowerment and changes in, and reproductions of, gender performance, we identified aspects that could be said to influence the internal and external well-being of the elderly women. More specifically, the concept of ‘empowerment’ enabled us to focus on aspects of freedom that were expressed during the interviews. Using the theoretical lens of ‘gender as performative’, we were able to pay attention to expressions of the novel ways the women demonstrated responsibility for the socio-emotional work that was being performed in their marriages. Furthermore, we were also able to examine how the women prioritised themselves and were thereby empowered to transform their gender identity and their gender roles.

The analytical process was directed towards the latent content present in the data (Krippendorff, 2004), in which the examination of the underlying meaning of the expressed statements was made a priority. Statements that could be linked to expressed feelings of self-fulfilment, independence, freedom, relief, and similar emotions were interpreted as expressions of empowerment and also as expressions of transformative gender performance. Statements that could be linked to (i) a high degree of involvement in their husbands’ activities in the Shed, (ii) continued concern for their husbands’ well-being, and (iii) signs of self-sacrifice became expressions of reproductive performative gender. At the next stage of the analysis, we employed the concepts of ‘internal well-being’ versus ‘external well-being’ (Schimmack, 2006) in order to identify salient aspects of well-being in the initial results of our analysis, and in order to further categorise and connect ‘well-being’ to gender as performative and to empowerment.

Results

The results of this study indicate that both the notions of 'self-fulfilment' and 'self-sacrifice' are central to properly understand how the elderly husbands' activities in the Shed affects their wives' sense of empowerment, well-being, and their gender identities. This section is divided into two parts; the first part is concerned with the notions of 'self-fulfilment', 'independence', and the transformative and empowering aspects that the husbands' attendance at a Shed realised for their wives. The second part of our discussion of the results of this study focusses on the aspects of self-sacrifice and gender stereotype reproduction for the women, which can be associated with their husbands' attendance at a Shed.

The Men's Shed as an enabler of self-fulfilment, independence, and freedom for elderly wives

The sense of self-fulfilment, independence, and freedom experienced by wives when their husbands attended a Shed can be understood as a result of (i) not having their husbands at home all the time and, above all, (ii) not feeling guilty when they themselves left the household. Since the overwhelming majority of the women who were interviewed had many different activities to attend to, the biggest relief that they felt was that they were able to leave home feeling certain that their husbands would have somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to. Below is a statement taken from one focus group interview regarding the relief that was felt because of the reduced feeling of concern for her husband:

(1) You know they are not at home and are bored.

(2) Yes, exactly.

(1) And that was one thing I was worried about, how it would go, when he stopped working, because he lived and breathed for his work.

Besides the relief that was felt (as a consequence of not worrying so much about their husbands and their well-being), the elderly women also expressed satisfaction about being on their own and having the freedom to do whatever they wanted *without having to show consideration for their husbands*. In another focus group interview, the opportunity to focus on themselves was expressed:

(1) It is good to have a few hours for yourself.

(2) Ha ha, that is lovely.

(1) You see, I also have my leisure activities.

It was quite difficult to get the women to talk about themselves in reference to their husbands attending a Shed, but when they did, the women's feelings of relinquishing guilt and having more time by, and for, themselves were apparent in the interviews. This was confirmed in the individual interviews, in which the women expressed what can almost be described as gratitude towards the Men's Shed:

'I have almost forgot how it was before [my husband] started visiting the Shed. Previously, he was always at home and did nothing except watch television. Now he is away 3–4 days a week, which gives me almost all the time in the world to do what I want in our household.'

Another woman stated the following when the future of the Shed came up:

'It has to go on! I have become used to having more time with myself and I cannot imagine going back to how things used to be. Well, I think that my husband also wants this to continue by the way [laughter].'

Thus, the opportunities that the Men's Shed has offered the wives were greatly appreciated and it was quite clear that the experienced benefits were extensive. The women did not seem to encounter any major problems learning to deal with the new opportunities that emerged; quite the contrary. They obviously learned to act in a non-confirmative gendered way, which allowed them to focus on empowering themselves. They, thereby, exploited their new opportunities in a manner that clearly increased their internal well-being and self-fulfilment.

The Men's Shed as a reinforcer of gender stereotypes for wives

Besides creating new and desirable opportunities for the women, the husband's attendance at the Sheds also created opportunities for wives to act in accordance with how they had previously acted within their respective marriages/relationships, or, to put it other words – they were able to act in a gender norm-confirmative way, i.e. self-sacrificing. Self-sacrifice can be understood as a result of the women's high level of engagement and involvement in their husbands' activities in the Shed. The Shed activities provided new situations where the women practically, as well as emotionally, prioritised their husbands and their new experiences in the Shed. Below is a discussion about how the men's experiences in the Shed constitute a large proportion of the topic of conversation at home:

(1) He has so much to tell me when he comes home.

(2) Yes, I have a hard time getting a word in edgewise.

(1) Ha ha, but it is so nice, and it has lasted for a long time.

(3) Exactly. I actually think that the longer [my husband] visits the Shed, the more he has to talk about.

(2) Ha ha, how will this end?

(1) But it is so nice, and I am happy to listen.

(3) Exactly, it is so nice for them.

In addition to investing time, energy, and emotion when listening to their husbands and their experiences at the Sheds, some of the women are so committed to the Shed movement that they even engage in further recruitment of more members to the Men's Shed. Below is an example of a recruitment strategy that was used by one wife:

(1) I am trying to help out as much as I can.

(2) In which way?

(1) Well, I think they have a hard time recruiting new ones.

(3) Yes, they have.

(4) Yes.

(1) Yes, although we sometimes stand down by the culture centre

and always bring with us information sheets wherever we go; it seems to be a little bit hard to get more men to come here.

The engagement in their husbands' activities in the Shed and their well-being was also shown by the fact that some wives were very much involved in trying to come up with new activities for the men to devote themselves to when attending the Shed:

(1) I have some ideas sometimes.

(2) What kind of ideas are they?

(1) Well, I sometimes say to my husband, “You can visit a museum or something, try something new”.

(3) I have also done that, well not a museum, but an excursion or something like that.

(1) But it is not easy because it is always [NAME] and [NAME] who handle everything.

(4) It is the same people always, who make it work.

(1) But it is hard for them.

(3) Yes, they cannot manage everything by themselves in the long run.

Thus, the women’s sense of responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects of their respective marriages is, to some extent, fuelled by their husbands’ attendance at a Shed. It was easier for the women to talk about what the Shed has meant for their husbands, compared to their focussing on what the Shed has meant for them. We encountered many examples concerning the ways wives were socio-emotionally engaged in their husbands’ activities at the Shed. During the interviews, it was revealed to us that the overwhelming majority of the women who were interviewed had been the active party in getting their husbands to first visit a Shed. This was highlighted during the focus group interviews, but this point was made even clearer during the individual interviews:

‘My husband is not always so energetic, so I was the one who pushed and encouraged him to go there. […] He does not need any pushing now, but in the beginning, he needed it. Now he pushes himself or his friends do it.’

Another example of ‘being the active party’ was described by a woman who saw an advertisement for a Shed in the paper and saw what potential opportunities this held for her husband:

‘It was an advertisement in the newspaper and I immediately thought it would be something for [my husband]. […] He had not seen it, of course, and he was not particularly interested in the beginning. It really required some nagging from my part for him to finally become interested [laughter] and go over there.’

The active part that the women took in getting their husbands to attend a Shed may, of course, be seen as selfish acts in that the women might have had hopes of getting more and better opportunities to focus on themselves and their internal well-being. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that this does reflect the traditional role of women as the person who assumes the main responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects of their respective marriages and/or relationships. Besides providing the women with increased freedom and independence, their husband's attendance at a Shed also resulted in a number of new restrictions, or simply new avenues along which wives could enact a traditional, caring femininity. This put a limit to their newly won independence. Such a limit could have been even more restrictive had it not been for the Men's Shed. However, we found that the wives continued to enact a norm-confirmative gender position: they show continued concern for the well-being of their husbands by assuming responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects of their respective marriages. In so doing, it is primarily the women's external well-being that is affected, which is, in turn, contingent on the wellbeing of their husbands.

Discussion

In this paper, we asked what men's attendance at Sheds meant for their spouses. Was it a means for empowerment, well-being and did it offer opportunities to transgress gender roles? Or instead were old, patriarchal gender roles recreated? The answer is, paradoxically, both. Moreover, the former was in part achieved by the latter, or conditioned by the latter. The women who facilitated the men's activities at the Sheds and patiently listened to them talking about the Shed were rewarded by increased freedom when the men stayed away from the house. When men attended the Sheds, it offered the women opportunities to devote themselves to their interests in a more liberating and empowered way without having a bad conscience towards their men. Simultaneously, it provided the women with new ways to reproduce the gender typical responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects in the marriages that serve patriarchy. The freedom that the elderly women undoubtedly feel as a result of their husbands attending a Shed is not unlimited freedom, or a return to a previous, more youthful stage of their lives, where they were subject to fewer restraints and demands (Arnett, 2015; Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenburg, Frank & Verma, 2002). Nevertheless, this sense of freedom is of great importance to these women. The social practice of their (and their husbands) lives has undoubtedly changed via the activities that the Men's Shed offers to their husbands. It has made it possible for the women to engage in social and cultural activities outside the house as well as in formal adult education, and it has offered men opportunities for informal learning, all in accordance with what the two groups prefer when it comes to learning situations (Golding, 2015; Jenkins, 2011; Williamson, 2000). Furthermore, when elderly husbands become more socially active, then a sense of freedom is bestowed upon their wives. They are free to use their own time as they wish. In terms of 'well-being', the women appear to feel both internal and external well-being (Schimmack, 2006). The internal well-being stems from their own experience of being free and able to enjoy new opportunities in life, and from a new sense of freedom that they have learned to exploit. The women included in this study, like many other older women, have a larger social network than their husbands (Cedergren, King, Wagner & Wegley, 2007; Felmlee & Muraco, 2009; Okamoto & Tanaka, 2004) and thanks to the Men's Shed, they now have more opportunity to exploit these social networks, without feeling guilty. As newly retired husbands undergo a conversion to becoming more and more family-oriented (Losocco & Walzer, 2013), the pressure on their wives 'to be available' for their husbands increases. However, when retired husbands start to attend a Shed, the pressure decreases, and wives are able to experience retirement freedom, instead of restrained retirement (Marchand, 2018). Wives are now freer to focus on their self-fulfilment and other empowering processes outside the home. This is, in part, due to their responsibility for the socio-emotional aspects of their respective marriages (essentially their husband's socio-emotional state) decreases and, to some extent, is 'taken over' by newfound friends at the Shed.

The sense of external well-being (Schimmack, 2006) that is felt by the elderly women is linked to their husbands' increased sense of well-being, since this tends to rub off on the wives. As shown in the result section, when men attend a Shed and enjoy positive experiences and provide new input for the topics of conversation at home, their wives gladly listen to them, even though this may negatively affect their own speaking space. The fact that it was easier for the women to talk about what the Men's Shed has meant for their husbands than for themselves may also be an example of a sense of well-being that is influenced by the wives' environment (i.e. their men, in this case).

However, the sense of external well-being for the woman, as discussed above, may also harbour aspects that reinforce gender stereotypes.

The women's extensive engagement in their Men's Shed activities may be understood as these women still taking on the socio-emotional responsibility for their marriages to a considerable extent (Bloch, Haase & Levenson, 2014; Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky & Kim, 2014). This responsibility has merely been relocated from the homes to the Shed. The fact that these women seem to enjoy a sense of relief from some of this responsibility by the other men in the Shed did not seem to reduce their inclination to take on extensive responsibility for their husband's well-being. It is reasonable to assume that the women would have taken on even more responsibility without the existence of the Men's Shed, but the self-sacrifice that the wives exhibit through, for example, their engagement in recruiting new Shed members may indicate that the wives still perceive that the quality of their marriages is based on what they feel they do for their husbands (Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky & Kim, 2014).

Thus, when elderly husbands had found somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to, this empowered their wives and created opportunities for them to be more independent and to act in a non-confirmative gendered way; things which increased their sense of internal well-being. At the same time, it also offered new avenues for the wives to reproduce traditional gender roles with respect to taking on primary responsibility for the socio-emotional work that is to be done within their respective marriages, thereby focussing on their husband's well-being and their own external well-being.

Conclusion and future research

We studied how men's participation at a Shed affected how their wives enacted gender, and the effects that their participation had on their wives' sense of empowerment and well-being. We were confronted with two contrasting results. First, when husbands spent time at a Shed, the wives experienced a new sense of empowerment, freedom and self-fulfilment, since they were free to pursue their own interests when their husbands were otherwise occupied. These elderly wives relinquished some of the traditional feminine caring role and focussed on themselves instead. On the other hand, we found that the women continued to care for their husband's well-being – they just re-located this caring responsibility to the Shed. They saw that it made their husbands happy and they, therefore, made every effort to help make the Shed prosper and grow. The conversation at home was dominated by their husband's experiences at the Shed – the women sacrificed talking about their own new experiences in deference to their husbands' topic of conversation, namely the activities that took place at the Shed. We found a curious co-existence of normative and non-normative enactment of gender on the part of the women, which was made possible by the traditional gender normative activities that took place in the Shed by the men.

Previous research has shown that the Men's Sheds offer men an opportunity to develop a more caring masculinity (Carragher, 2013; Cavanagh, Southcombe & Bartram, 2014; Golding, Foley & Brown, 2007; Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey & Gleeson 2007; Golding, 2011; Golding, 2015; Haesler, 2015; Morgan, Hayes, Williamson & Ford, 2007; Wilson, Cordier & Wilson Whatley, 2013), and our research shows that it offers their wives an opportunity to develop a femininity that is characterised by 'taking the initiative' and a sense of 'independence'. However, in both cases, these features are contingent on the absence of the opposite sex. When both are together, it is business as usual – at least for this age group. This raises new research questions: *Is the absence of the opposite sex a prerequisite for trying out and learning new, perhaps more fulfilling, ways of enacting gender? Does this apply for any social group, and if not, what are the differences between social groups of various kinds – keeping issues such as age, class, culture etc. in mind?* We suggest more research should be conducted in this field.

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Generativity and life satisfaction of active older people: Advances (keys) in educational perspective

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Through the theoretical framework of pedagogy and education as an instrument of social and personal development, this study addresses two key issues for the construction of a mature-older person's identity, namely, generativity and life satisfaction. The main aim here is to explore the generative interest and life satisfaction of a group of mature-older university students and verify whether the years linked to the program and the rate of participation in other types of social agencies and institutions have a positive impact on both constructs. The sample comprised 347 subjects, who were administered the Loyola Generativity Scale – LGS and the Satisfaction with Life Scale – SWLS. The results show that level of education and rate of participation have a positive influence on generative interest, while health, marital status and time linked to the higher education program have a positive effect on life satisfaction.

Keywords: *generativity, quality of life, adult education, ageing, university programs for seniors*

Introduction

There are currently different approaches to coping with the ageing process in the best and most appropriate way. Those initiatives involving a return to university for older individuals today encompass programs of scientific, cultural, technological and social education, constituting an effective way of improving active ageing, a better quality of life, and avoidance of dependence (Ortiz-Colon, 2015).

This research is informed by the notion that university programs for seniors, such as the one that has been held at Salamanca University for more than twenty years, are an educational and instructional strategy designed to respond to a series of social, cultural, educational and personal objectives. They include the following highlights (Lorenzo, 2003; Serdio, 2015): favouring personal development from the perspective of lifelong training; furthering a better understanding of one's own environment to make the most of society's options in education, culture and leisure, and improving the quality of life of older people through the knowledge and relationships forthcoming within the university setting and driving the development of interpersonal and intergenerational relationships, facilitating the sharing and transfer of knowledge, experiences and values.

Specifically, the Inter-University Program for Seniors is a project involving scientific, cultural and social development designed to provide a university education for people over the age of 55. It is a regional initiative that pursues the same goals and applies the same academic structure across the universities in the autonomous community of Castilla y León (Spain). Each student enrolling in the program, which extends over three academic years and involves a total of 240 hours, studies a series of subjects taught by university lecturers in the different branches of knowledge, encompassing humanities, science, history and arts, in all cases adopting a dynamic and topical perspective. At the end of the three years, students may remain in the program over the subsequent years through academic itineraries lasting around 40 hours per course.

The theoretical approaches and perspectives reflected in the text, supported by the empirical results found in the study, seek to explore the effect that university programs have on the life satisfaction of older people in the development of generative attitudes understood to be the interest in guiding and ensuring the well-being of future generations (González-Celis, & Mendoza, 2016; Villar, López, & Celdrán, 2013).

Theoretical and conceptual underpinnings

Older people today, their profile, and their personal and social characteristics have all changed in recent years, insofar as developed countries are concerned. This change has gone together with an increase in numbers, a higher quality of life in developed countries and, therefore, longer life expectancy, with the enjoyment of better and more robust health. We are therefore witnessing a higher life expectancy and quality of life among older people, with the ensuing increase in the number of active older people (IMSERSO, 2012).

In view of this, for some time now educational actions and thinking linked to adulthood and old age have been reappraising their lines of interest, initiatives, studies and educational practices (Azofeifa, 2017; Díez, 2016; Serdio, 2015; Sianes-Bautista, 2015). What were once aspects associated with leisure, such as free time, care and entertainment have now made way for approaches that, although may admittedly not have greater educational purpose, do have a broader scope and complexity for the development of an adult's identity. The so-called knowledge society and learning and instructional models associated with the principle of lifelong education, which allow access to knowledge at any age and within any scenario (and even the possibility of building and handling knowledge), enable older individuals to take part in the educational processes; building their own personal and collective identity, whereby we may refer to a new culture of adulthood that, in turn, requires identifying and studying new ambits of knowledge, whose educational drift is heading in directions of great pedagogical interest.

These are the different active ageing or successful ageing programs, targeting older people, which have been reviewing their approaches and rationale (Fernández, García, & Pérez, 2016). Indeed, these programs pursue objectives that seek a student's active, critical and even transformative involvement, and not simply the assimilation of content. Therefore, the contents are conceptual, procedural and attitudinal, including current research topics such as learning content. In methodological terms, approaches such as service-based learning and problem-based learning have become part of the fabric of these programs through active, participative and collaborative learning strategies, with these and other active learning initiatives being appraised through the specific norms for assessing any system of teaching and learning.

These principles associated with objectives, content and methodologies are preceded by a rationale linked to spheres of knowledge that although not pedagogical per se, but instead pertaining to the field of Psychology, from different areas of development, gerontology, social, etc. – open pertinent perspectives and theoretical frameworks for Pedagogy, permitting an understanding of older people through their possibilities of change and learning. One of them is generativity, understood not only as an older person's contribution to the common good and social development, but also involving a component of personal satisfaction and development (Hofer, Holger, Au, Polácková Solcová, Tavel, & Wong 2014).

There are three moments that we can single out in the development and study of generativity. In first place, the original elements that began to give shape to generativity were described by Erikson (1970; 2000), who linked it to maturity, whose practice provides support for dealing with the stage of old age in adulthood, encompassing aspects such as care, procreativity and productivity. It refers to a mature person's need to feel wanted, and how maturity requires the backing of everything life has produced and should be safeguarded. The idea is to nurture it through care and attention in relation to others.

More recent studies approach the concept by addressing not only biological or family-related aspects, but also technical issues related to skills, as well as procedural and cultural features, considering the collective's potentialities and cultural manifestations, which Kotre has referred to as collective meaning systems (Kotre, 1984). Along with Kotre, McAdams (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998) adds generativity as a key element in the process of identity building, proposing a multifaceted model of generativity. In turn, Bradley (1997) refers to the generativity status model, including the concept of the vital involvement of the self in relation to others, and of inclusiveness, extending the concept to those people on the fringes of society.

Finally, the current discussion, closer to empirical studies on adult development, situates the debate around particularly relevant aspects, opening research perspectives and possibilities for other fields of knowledge, as in our case involving Pedagogy. The interaction between stagnation and generativity (Van Hiel, Mervielde, & De Fruyt, 2006), studies on adult rejection and the vital need for generative practice (Peterson, & Duncan 2007), developmental studies on generativity (Stewart, & Vandewater 1998), their connection with psychological well-being and the performance of certain roles (Evans, 2009); studies on the intergenerational and transgenerational aspects associated with generativity (Ochoa de Alda, 2004), or basic research studies on the theoretical maturity of the concept itself, mark out the path for conducting research from other scientific fields, proposing 'the construct of generativity as one of the more suitable candidates for the conceptual integration of studies on adult development' (Zacarés, & Serra 2011, p. 85).

Understanding generativity or a generative action from an educational perspective requires returning to the inevitable primary processes of education in which we encounter the human, biological and social roots of an older person that needs culture to live. We therefore understand education to be a component of identity and as an event in their network of interactions, for their empowerment (Gonçalves Barbosa, & García del Dujo, 2016). It is that same need that contains certain concepts that are essential for understanding the generative action from a pedagogic viewpoint. The first of these is the concept of identity, which is linked to an older person through the always unfinished business of their education. To speak of an older person's identity is to refer to identities in plural, an adult self that has been moulded by its adjustment to the different settings and people in which and with which they have coexisted, where the older person seeks to respond to those personal and social contributions to which generativity refers (Miralles, & Alfageme, 2015).

Throughout their lives and in a shared journey with the process of identity building, adults have experienced a double process: an original, almost inalterable one of building an idea of oneself; the other, changing, discontinuous, in that becoming a person is not something that is set in stone, inalterable, but instead requires minor processes of identity rebuilding, where the generative aspect in older people lies at the core of understanding their existence and, in short, their life.

That is where the concept of bonding, with the other and with other things, acquires its central role. Not only about the concern of the people with whom they coexist and for whom they wish to bequeath worthy futures, but also understood in relation to older people's social processes of participation, interaction and activation. Speaking of generativity and older people means doing so not so much as a simple problem, of purely time management on the older person's part. It is a complex human and social issue, of conflicts of interest in the adult and decision-making, whose responses are not considered in terms of mere relationships, but instead in complex binding narratives, based on attachment, between adults and different times and places, events and social life processes. They are all elements that, from an educational point of view, explain generativity in older people and lay the foundations for it (Ruiz, Calderón, & Torres 2011). This allows overcoming the negative view of the final stages of adulthood, insofar as a resource to be managed, and becomes understood as an active, productive agent that is personally and socially involved.

We would be unable to make sense of the above if we did not interpret an adult's primary education processes from a necessary psychosomatic, biological–cultural unity, broken down from its different manifestations and dynamisms. Some scholars (Kotre, & Kotre 1998; González-Celis, & Mendoza, 2016) differentiate between four types of generativity: biological, family-related, technical and cultural. According to our own view and interest, namely, an educational perspective, it is precisely the interconnection between the biological, technical and cultural that enables us to perceive the scope that generativity may have in an adult for educational purposes. 'Culturally speaking, generativity involves both tradition and innovation, both retaining what seems valuable and transforming what needs to be improved, with the common goal of fostering the well-being and development of future generations' (Zacarés, & Serra, 2011, p. 86). Studies in adulthood call for approaches from multidimensional perspectives of human life, accepting the indissolubility of the biologically determined and culturally demanded adult to truly imbue the generative activity with meaning. The cultural demand associated with age transforms the adult into a capable, responsible, mature and proactive individual.

This requires reconsidering the adult's generative practice with a view to understanding it through its mediating role in social and educational practices, in short, in cultural practices and not only personal ones, associated with the merely biological side of oneself and the other.

This convergence enables us, in turn, to overcome an objective view of culture, as a framework for understanding generativity, and locating it in terms of an adult person's primary development process, encompassing the possibility and process of cultural incorporation, which in a mature stage of adult development and evolution are linked to quality of life (Villar, 2012).

The convergence of generativity, autonomy and responsibility is endorsed insofar as everything that implies generative action by the older person is determined by their capacity for autonomy and their level of responsibilities as basic, core concepts in any process of individual personal construction. Because adults are autonomous, capable of adjusting their own behaviour, they may be responsible, free, and conscious of the personal and social consequences their actions may have (Ruiz, Bernal-Guerrero, Gil, & Escámez, 2012). Based, therefore, on autonomy, responsibility is a value to be found in an adult's consciousness, enabling them to think, manage, value and guide any action or practice in terms of generativity.

Prior studies conducted along these lines have reported that more generative individuals have a higher level of education and academic attainment (McAdams et al., 1998), and this usually involves caring people that take part in social and community institutions (González-Celis, & Mendoza, 2016). It is also important to mention studies that have shown that adaptive mechanisms on health and generativity have a positive impact on social ties (Arias, & Iglesias, 2015; Lang, Staudinger, & Carstensen, 1998). It would be interesting to explore the effect that taking part in an educational program has on both generative interest and on satisfaction with life.

We present a study whose purpose is to explore the generative interest and life satisfaction of a group of mature-older university students and verify whether the years the students have been linked to the university program and the rate of involvement in other kinds of social agencies and institutions have a positive effect on both constructs. From our perspective, we stress the need to discover the extent to which these types of educational initiatives help develop generative attitudes and develop the mature-older person's personal and social identity, and how all these impact upon people's satisfaction and improve their quality of life.

Accordingly, there are two specific objectives underpinning this study:

- To verify the nature of the generative interest and life satisfaction of a group of mature-older university students and whether they differ depending on gender, level of education, marital status and subjective health.
- To discover whether involvement in the program, depending on the years linked to it and the degree of participation in other kinds of institutions, signals more or less generative interest and life satisfaction.

Method

The chosen design for the research is of a quantitative nature using a non-experimental method (Kerlinger, & Lee, 2002), resorting to the descriptive-correlational method through the study of surveys (Berends, 2006). The descriptive parameters were based on an analysis of frequencies. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to identify the differences in generativity and life satisfaction according to gender, level of education, marital status and subjective health. Finally, ANOVAs were also used to discover whether taking part in the program indicates more or less generative interest and satisfaction with life. All the statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS 22.0 program, accepting a 95% level of significance.

Participants

The people taking part in these university programs for mature-older people generally share a common interest in keeping their minds active as a way of preventing cognitive impairment and responding to the everyday need to occupy the free time provided by their present socioeconomic and cultural circumstances (e.g., early or pre-retirement, unemployment, etc.) (Serrate, Navarro, & Muñoz 2017). Although these kinds of programs initially catered for people over the age of 65, who had mostly passed the age of retirement, those currently taking part in the program are increasingly younger adults that are still of working age and combine these types of activities with others of a diverse nature, such as working for voluntary associations. The participants' profile in terms of sex reveals a prevalence of women over men, and about education there are both those people with no higher education that are attending university for the first time and those that already have occupational training or further education.

The cohort consisted of 347 mature persons (aged 55–65) and older ones (over 65) enrolled on the courses for those aged 55 and over, called Inter-University Program for Seniors, at Salamanca University, selected by non-probabilistic casual or incidental sampling. This program started 25 years ago. Their ages ranged between 55 and 89, with an average age of 68.03 (SD = 6.57); 66% were women (230 participants) and 34% men.

In terms of marital status, there was a prevalence of married persons (57%), widows/widowers (22%), and a lower percentage of single people (13%) or those separated or divorced (8%). In terms of level of education, 39.7% had secondary studies, 30.5% had primary studies, and a similar percentage had higher education (29.8%). Most of the participants lived with their families (65.5%), and 33.2% lived alone.

Regarding the time spent in the program, over half the sample has been involved for less than five years (60.1%), which means that 39.8% have been linked to this university program for more than five years. The participation rate shows that 45.1% of the sample tends to carry out activities at least once a month, 25.1% takes part once or twice a week, while 24.3% state that they never participate in an institution or association. There are, nonetheless, 5.5% that take part daily (22%). Neighbourhood associations and senior day centres (19%) are the focus, and to a lesser extent, 4.6%, political associations and labour organisations.

Instruments

Generativity was measured through the Loyola Generativity Scale – LGS (McAdams, & St. Aubin,1993 validated by Villar, López, & Celdrán, 2013) with a view to studying generative interest in the adult population. It comprises 20 items with a four-point Likert-type answer scale (where 0 = never and 3 = almost always). The overall score ranges from 0 to 60 points, and the higher the score, the greater the generative interest. The LGS's internal consistency was 0.81.

Degree of well-being was assessed through the Satisfaction with Life Scale – SWLS developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). It consists of five items related to major aspects of life with which respondents should express their degree of agreement or disagreement. The five items constitute a single factor. The participants answered using a Likert-type scale graded from 1 to 4 (where 1 = fully disagree and 4 = fully agree). The scores range from minimum satisfaction with life (5) to very high (20). The SWLS's internal consistency was 0.68.

Data were gathered on gender, marital status (with four options: single, married, separated/divorced, and widowed), level of education (with three levels: primary, secondary, and higher) and time enrolled on the program (with two options: less than five years and more than five years). Besides the questions on these sociodemographic variables, information was gathered on health, specifically on subjective health. The participants were asked to rate their state of health on a Likert-type scale graded from 0 to 4 (where 0 = very poor health and 4 = very good health). Five items were also included to score social participation in institutions and associations (neighbourhood, religious, senior day centres, voluntary institutions, or political association and labour organisations); the rate at which they attended was scored with a three-point format (occasionally during the month, once or twice per week, and daily).

Procedure

The data were gathered through individual self-administration among individuals over the age of 55 in Salamanca enrolled on the University Programs for Seniors. Out of the 397 questionnaires distributed during class-time, only 347 were completed. The sample had previously been informed of the purpose of the study, and they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of their answers. They all had to provide written acceptance of their willingness to take part in the study.

Results

Generative interest and life satisfaction

With a view to responding to the proposed objective, an analysis was made of the generative interest (measured according to the LGS scores) and life satisfaction of the cohort taking part in the study. The mean score obtained was 33.66 (SD = 6.71) in generative interest, ranging from the lowest score of 20 to the highest of 53. In turn, the life satisfaction of this group of mature university students was fairly high (M = 10.33; SD = 2.66). In addition, a correlation analysis was conducted to verify whether generative interest correlates with life satisfaction among these mature students, whereby it was found that generativity is positively associated with life satisfaction (r = 0.23; p = 0.01).

To check for differences in the generativity variable depending on the level of education, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted that revealed significant differences (F1.319 = 3.69; p = 0.01), with people with a higher level of education showing higher scores than those with primary studies (35.03 vs. 31.90). The same statistical test was used to compare the means in the scores for generative interest depending on marital status, with no significant differences found between those that were married and those that were not (F1.332 = 0.43; p = 0.50). No differences were found either between men and women (F1.345 = 0.22; p = 0.88) or between those who perceived their health to be fair or poor and those who considered it to be good (F1.340 = 0.03; p = 0.85).

Table 1: Sociodemographic variables, subjective health, generativity and life satisfaction

VARIABLES		Factor					
		Generativity			Life Satisfaction		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Gender	Male	117	33.63	5.81	117	10.31	2.85
	Female	230	33.52	7.01	225	10.34	2.56
Marital status	Married	190	33.85	6.20	189	10.71	2.57
	Not married	144	33.36	7.19	140	9.82	2.69
Subjective health	Poor/Fair	73	33.76	6.70	73	9.40	2.67
	Good/Very good	269	33.60	6.59	269	10.58	2.61
Level of Education	Primary	99	31.90	5.47	98	10.31	3.08
	Secondary	130	33.56	6.97	127	10.41	2.53
	Higher	94	35.03	6.99	94	10.06	2.41

Further ANOVAs were conducted to verify the existence of differences in the level of satisfaction of life considering the different sociodemographic variables. No statistically significant differences were found between men and women (F1.340 = 0.10; p = 0.92), or across levels of education (F2.316 = 0.46; p = 0.63). However, significant differences have indeed been found in terms of subjective health (F1.340 = 11.66; p <0.01), and marital status (F1.340 = 9.31; p <0.01). Those people that perceive their health as good or very good feel more satisfied with their lives than those that consider their health to be fair or poor (10.58 vs. 9.40). In turn, married people show higher levels of satisfaction than those are not married (10.71 vs. 9.82).

Generative interest, life satisfaction and participation

The second objective proposed seeks to discover whether taking part in this university program, depending on the years of enrolment and the degree of social participation in other kinds of institutions and association, is indicative of greater or lesser generative interest and life satisfaction. The results of the ANOVAs did not reveal any significant differences in generative interest according to the time enrolled on the program (F1.342 = 1.26; p = 0.28). Nevertheless, a comparison between the means for generative interest and the rate of participation in different associations revealed significant differences (F1.234 = 6.80; p = 0.01), with those people taking part in associations on a weekly or daily basis recording higher scores than those that do so only once a month or that have never been involved in community activities (35.58; 34.57; 31.39).

Neither were there any statistically significant differences in life satisfaction depending on the rate of participation in social institutions or associations (F2.229 = 0.85; p=0,42), but there were differences in terms of the time enrolled on the university program (F1.336 = 3.88; p = 0.05), with greater satisfaction among those students that had been linked to the program for more than five years.

Table 2. Participation, generativity and life satisfaction

VARIABLES		Factor					
		Generativity			Life Satisfaction		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Rate of participation	Occasionally during the month	57	31.39	6.19	57	10.09	2.57
	1 or 2 per week	106	34.57	6.72	103	10.49	2.38
	Daily	72	35.58	6.85	72	10.67	2.71
Years in the programme	Less than 5 years	208	33.11	6.48	203	10.08	2.28
	More than 5 years	135	34.25	6.85	135	10.67	3.15

Discussion, conclusions and future research

The results obtained suggest that the mature students taking part in the study, or at least a significant number of them, have a high generative interest, which shows they constitute a populational group that is committed to contributing to the common good and social development. The scores recorded for this construct are comparable to those reported in previous studies (Cheng, 2009; Villar, 2012). Specifically, those students with studies in higher education prior to joining the program for mature people have a higher generative interest than all the others, which is consistent with previous studies (McAdams et al., 1998), although it has not been confirmed in other more recent studies along these same lines (Villar et al., 2013). This finding may be explained because people have a sense of having acquired greater knowledge through higher education that imbues them with the necessary competence to pass on their experience and knowledge to future generations.

In relation to similar studies (Grossbaum, & Bates, 2002; Hofer et al., 2014; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan 1993; Villar, 2012; Villar et al., 2013), it is noted that generativity is positively correlated with well-being, specifically with life satisfaction. Mature older students record high satisfaction with life, and this is particularly expressed by those with a better subjective perception of their own health and those that are married, with these results being consistent with previous studies on the effect that adaptive mechanisms have on health and the impact that generativity has on social ties (Arias, & Iglesias, 2015; Fernández-Ballesteros, García, Abarca, Blanc, Efklides, Moraitou, Kornfeld, Lerma, Mendoza-Numez, Mendoza-Ruvalcaba, Orosa, Paul, & Patricia 2010; Lang, Staudinger, & Carstensen, 1998), and is an advance on other studies, such as the one by Villar et al. (2013) in which, with a similar cohort, no significant differences were found either in terms of the perception of health or according to marital status. In turn, not finding differences in terms of the level of education suggests that life satisfaction does not depend on having more or fewer qualifications in the participating sample of mature older people.

It has also been found that the more generative people are those who take part on a regular basis in social and community organisations, as reported in prior research (González-Celis, & Mendoza, 2016). Nevertheless, there is no evidence to show that time linked to the program for mature students is indicative of a greater generative interest. The length of time enrolled on the program does not appear to have an influence on the interest in contributing to the social contexts, whether family or community, in which they participate. This aspect, nonetheless, has indeed been shown to increase the life satisfaction of mature older students. Accordingly, the longer the students have been enrolled on an educational program such as the one being currently organised by universities, the greater the life satisfaction. This finding explains the ever-higher percentage of students that remain linked to university programs for older people after five or ten years following their initial enrolment (Valle, 2014).

In this sense, we propose that, if older individuals with higher generative interest are those that participate more frequently in institutions and social and community organisations, and that continuous long-term participation in university programs for seniors increases satisfaction with life, we need to keep in mind both findings when it comes to developing curricular plans that complement both constructs. That is, where the study makes sense by evidencing the need to integrate complementarily generative and intergenerational activities and initiatives to benefit the community, from university programs with seniors in collaboration with social organisations and institutions. Findings of this study allow us to think about the need to design university programs for senior linked to the social framework, where there is a chance for older adults to feel an active part of society, increase their attitude of contributing to the program after a series of years and achieve positive levels of satisfaction with life – an issue that has been proved as one of the main benefits obtained by students engaged in this program in the long term. Therein lies the importance of highlighting the need to conduct longitudinal rather than transversal studies, that will enable us to more effectively decide if the same group of students increase their generative interest over the years.

Nevertheless, older people involved in educational programs today want to continue learning, enjoy good health, and adopt an enterprising approach to new projects that will give them a more prominent role in society and help them to ensure a better future for the next generations (Abarca, Chino, Llacho, González, Vázquez, Cárdenas, & Soto, 2008; González-Celis, & Mendoza, 2016).

This series of conclusions, together with our results, opens another line of research that, in our opinion, may and should have a place in educational theory and practice involving older people. Generativity is linked mainly to our socio-relational nature. Others inform the generative behaviour of older people. Nonetheless, this relational narrative cannot forgo its continuity with all other living beings, as we would be adopting a limited and inconclusive educational approach to generativity. The cultural condition we referred to earlier requires accepting the necessary responsibility toward the other, toward biodiversity, to truly ensure the sustainability of the quality of life of future generations, seeking to develop a sense of responsibility and active participation among older people for resolving environmental issues. This implies a dialectical approach that enables older people to contextualise their generative action, understanding all nature of thinking through the principles of responsibility and justice.

Nothing of what has already been described or concluded has any meaning from a human approach of breaking with all expressions of life surrounding a human being, in a sense of pertaining to the living world. Explaining generativity through the relationship between education, culture and life involves delving into the inevitable fabric of existing biodiversity, to establish schema of interconnection, of ties, between one, the other and the other. In other words, responsibility as the educational platform for generative action acquires full meaning when it identifies the webs of interdependence of a human being, in the case of an adult, and their living environment, as key elements. This ultimately involves modifying the dominant paradigm of interpreting human action and relationships as the sole elements of communication, creating a paradigm of communication that is binding and interdependent of all those aspects that are part of the living world, contributing to a new arena for moral deliberation and responsibility, based on our being living species more closely belonging to the fabric of life. An example of this involves the programs of voluntary environmental work that are organised in some of the university courses for older people.

Limitations of the study

The scope and generalisation of this paper's results and conclusions are constrained by certain issues. Firstly, the sample's representativeness is one of them, as the selection method means that the results cannot be considered representative of the mature-older population. Furthermore, given that it is a correlational study, the direction of the relationships cannot be accurately determined. Considering all the variables from a longitudinal perspective and enlarging the study sample would lead to a more in-depth analysis of the value of the mature-older people's characteristics together with the degree of participation as the factors driving satisfactory ageing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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A case study of Chinese adult learners' English acquisition in a blended learning environment

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The study uses a pre-test, post-test experimental randomised control group design to examine the effects of a blended learning environment on Chinese adult learners' English acquisition. At the initial stage the study constructed a blended learning environment composed of three parts: task-based online learning, group-based peer learning and class-based traditional learning. Then the study chose two classes with no significant difference in their English abilities as experimental class (EC) and control class (CC) randomly. During the following term one teacher taught the EC and the CC with a blended learning environment or a traditional learning environment, respectively. At the end of the term, the study examined the learners' English abilities in the aforementioned classes. This study found that learners in EC significantly outperformed those in CC, especially in English writing abilities. The findings indicate that a blended learning environment can improve Chinese adult learners' English acquisition, especially their practical English abilities.

Keywords: *adult learner; English acquisition; Blended learning environment*

Introduction

In China adult education is not compulsory. Currently it is an important way for individuals to improve their working abilities. Adult learning in China was established as early as 1949, the year of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. In the first decade, adult education served as the most important strategy to eliminate illiteracy. Unfortunately, from 1966 to 1976 Chinese society veered into a different direction. At that time, formal education in China was transferred into a 'moral cultivation institution'. As a result, the Chinese government forbade adult education. In 1978, the Chinese government re-established the adult education system. From that time on, tertiary adult education in China has developed quickly. In the 21st century, society is developing fast and science and technology are renewing rapidly. The nations are keeping pace with the era are required to be continually learning. Regarding this trend, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2010) issued its *National Ten Year Educational Reform and Development Program (2010–2020)*. One of the three goals that the program established was to cultivate a learning society by 2020.

The *13th National Five Year Plan* (National Development & Reform Commission, 2016) reaffirmed the significance of lifelong learning, including expanding the channels of continuing education and lifelong learning; promoting education information; developing distance education and expanding the distribution of quality education resources. From then on, the numbers of adult students quickly increased. According to data issued by National Bureau of Statistic of China (2017), there were 12,293,212 adult learners studying in over 1500 universities.

Another important goal for adult education is to improve the quality of education. According to the People's Republic of China, adult college graduates are required to complete their adult learning tasks by studying and working part-time within three to four years. They must complete all the courses that other college students are required to complete.

Foreign language (English) acquisition is a compulsory course for adult college students. As adult college students lose the critical period of learning a foreign language (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994) and they are in different learning environments with other students (part-time working and learning versus full time learning), the challenges that they face, and the strategies and resources they use to overcome those challenges, might be different from those that younger learners usually experience. In addition, previous studies have verified that adult learners are different to younger learners in terms of their working memory (Mackey, & Sachs, 2012). More recently, the Chinese education authority issued a requirement for English acquisition. According to the *National Requirements for College English Teaching and the Guideline of College English Teaching (draft)* (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017), one of the important tasks for college students' English language acquisition is to 'cultivate practical abilities of the target language'. Therefore, improving Chinese students' English language abilities – especially the practical abilities – is a heated topic for Chinese scholars and Chinese education authorities.

In June 2016, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2016) delivered the 13th Planning of Education Information. This document states that a blended learning environment is a potential way to foster practical abilities in a foreign language:

> *'An online combined with offline learning environment is more convenient for lifelong learning and building a learning society … it is suggested to offer an online combined with an offline learning model for learners to improve their foreign language acquisition and their foreign language practical abilities.'*

Suggestions from the *13th Planning of Education Information* are untested hypotheses. Therefore, this study will examine whether a blended learning model can improve Chinese adult learners' English language acquisition, especially their practice abilities.

Literature review

The concept of 'blended learning' (also called hybrid learning, technology-mediated instruction learning, web-enhanced instruction learning, mixed-mode instruction learning) emerged in 1960s as computers emerged. Initially, blended learning was applied in companies due to its effectiveness, adaptability and flexibility. After it gained widespread attention and became popular, blended learning was accepted in traditional education institutions. Currently, it is an increasingly prevalent term used to describe the combination of web-based technologies and face-to-face teaching, when comparing to more traditional course structures (Bonk, & Graham, 2006).

Usually blended learning brings together traditional physical classes with elements of virtual learning (Garrison, and Kanuka, 2004). It strengthens deep learning and practice abilities (Lou, Chen, Tsai, Tseng, & Shih, 2012). In recent years, blended learning is studied through the disciplines paradigm, as defined by Neumann, Parry and Becher (2002), such as in mathematics education (Trenholm, 2006), nursing education (Smith, Passmore, & Fraught, 2009), business education (Arbaugh, Bangert, & Cleveland-Innes, 2010), and rheumatology education (Stebbings, Bagheri, Perrie, Blyth, & McDonald, 2012).

Some scholars (Bekele, & Menchaca, 2008; Garrison, & Vaughan, 2008; Miyazon, & Anderson, 2010; Neumeier, 2005; Shih, 2010) focus their studies on blended learning and learning English as a foreign/second language. Neumeier (2005) puts forward a definition of blended learning and a framework of parameters for designing a blended learning environment. The parameters in his framework include six aspects: mode (focus on mode, distribution of modes, and choice of modes); model of integration (sequencing of individual modes, and level of integration); distribution of learning content, objectives and assignment of purpose (parallel or isolated); language teaching methods (use of teaching methods in each of the modes employed); involvement of learning subjects (interactional patterns: individual versus collaborative language learning activity, variety of teacher and learner roles, and level of autonomy), and location (classroom, home, outdoors, computer room institutional settings). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) believe that the core elements of a blended learning framework are composed of three parts: social, cognitive and teaching presence. They outline seven blended learning redesign principles, and give detailed examples such as an online syllabus, a lesson plan for the first week, discussion forums, assessment rubrics and other practical ideas and tips for designing a blended learning environment. They also explain the professional development issues essential to the implementation of blended learning designs and present six illustrative scenarios of blended learning design. Bekele and Menchaca (2008) investigate students' motivation, participation and satisfaction in a blended learning environment. They find that a blended learning environment is more a group and/or project-focussed learning environment. Their study shows that some 45% of studies report positive results in a blended learning environment, whereas 55% report no significant differences. Shih (2010) establishes a blended teaching and learning model combining online and face-to-face instructional blogging. He examines the effects of his teaching and learning model and finds that his model can enhance student satisfaction by motivating them to learn effectively, as his model offers peer and instructor feedback, and has characteristics such as free access, ease of revision, and interesting learning materials. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) examine the efficacy of learning to write in three blended learning environments in formal university education – forums, blogs and wikis, respectively. Their study reveals students' positive perceptions of the blended course design for online writing: wikis being the most favourable followed by blogs and forums.

Traditionally English language education in China prefers structural teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method or the audio-lingual method. Before the 1990s, the grammar-translation method dominated English education classes in China. In this learning environment, teachers explain language knowledge to learners while learners try to remember all the language points. The grammar-translation method emphasises teaching knowledge rather than cultivating language abilities, especially oral and written abilities.

In the beginning of the 21st century, the blended learning environment was established in some universities in China. Many Chinese scholars have studied the effectiveness of a blended learning environment in foreign languages learning; the factors that influence performance in a blended learning environment, and the weakness of a blended learning environment in China. They found that as online learning can lighten learners' feeling of anxiety, a blended learning environment can improve the learners' listening abilities and speaking abilities (Hou, 2010), learning motivation (Wang, 2011), learning effectiveness and learning interests (Jin, Zhang, & Shen, 2012). At the same time, a blended learning environment can ease the learners' sense of isolation and strengthen their communication abilities (Shao, & He, 2014). Another study (Liu, & Zha, 2009) revealed that the learning strategy is the sole factor that affects learning performance. There are also some scholars studying the impediments of a blended learning environment. Shen (2013) designed and analysed three kinds of blended learning environments. He summarised the barriers to participate in a blended learning environment in China, including the lack of a smartphone, poor learning software, low speed of campus Wi-Fi, and students' lack of self-control.

All the aforementioned studies in China take regular Chinese college students as their research subjects. Adult students in China are different from regular students in many aspects. Usually they have stronger self-control and their study time is fragmented. Theoretically a blended learning environment is more beneficial to adult students. However, studies on the English language acquisition of Chinese adult students in a blended learning environment are rare. The sole study in this field was conducted by Yao (2017), which compares the differences between adult learners with better academic performance and those with worse academic performance in four aspects of English language acquisition. It finds that a blended learning environment in some ways can help learners overcome anxieties and cultivate autonomous learning abilities; those with better academic performances in English language acquisition have low levels of anxieties and strong autonomous learning abilities.

Previous studies have verified that a blended learning environment can improve regular college students' English learning performance (Hou, 2010) and help adult learners overcome anxieties and cultivate autonomous learning abilities (Yao, 2017). From the aforementioned literature, the current study gleans its first hypothesis that a blended learning environment can improve adult learners' learning performance. The *13th Planning of Education Information* delivered by The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2016) believes that a blended learning environment is a potential way to foster learners' foreign language abilities. However, no one has verified this statement. Therefore, our second hypothesis is that it is easy for learners to improve their practical abilities (such as writing abilities) in a blended learning environment. Finally, the current study proposes the following two hypotheses.

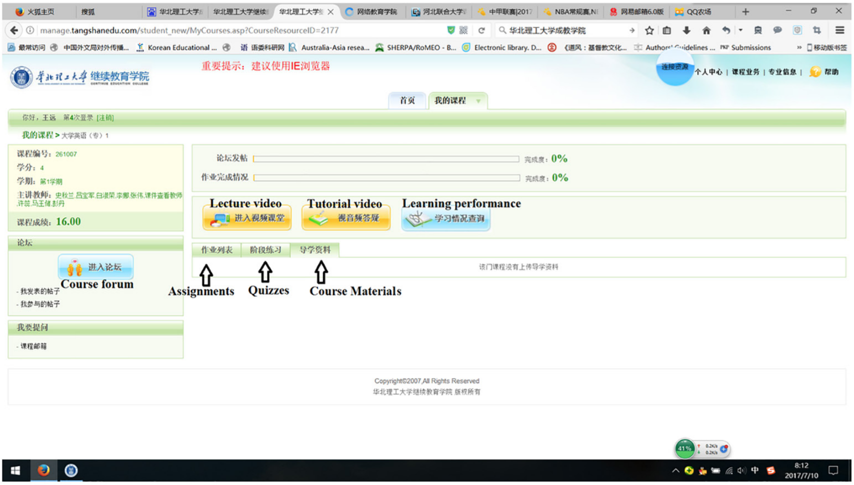
Hypothesis one: Compared with traditional learning environments, a blended learning environment can improve learners' learning performance.

Hypothesis two: Among varied language abilities, it is easier for learners to improve their practical abilities (such as writing abilities) in a blended learning environment.

Blended learning environment in current study

In recent years the Chinese Higher Education Press offers an online learning platform to its customers, which is composed of some interfaces such as lecture videos, tutorial videos, learning performances, assignments, quizzes, course materials, and course forums (see figure 1). This online learning platform offers an opportunity for building a blended learning environment.

Figure 1: The online learning platform



manage.tangshanedu.com/student_new/MyCourses.asp?CourseResourceID=2177

重要提示：建议使用IE浏览器

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学分：4
学期：第1学期
主讲教师：史秋兰,吕宝军,白淑荣,李娜,张伟,课件查看教师,许莹,马王健,彭丹
课程成绩：16.00

论坛发帖 完成度：0%
作业完成情况 完成度：0%

该门课程没有上传导学资料

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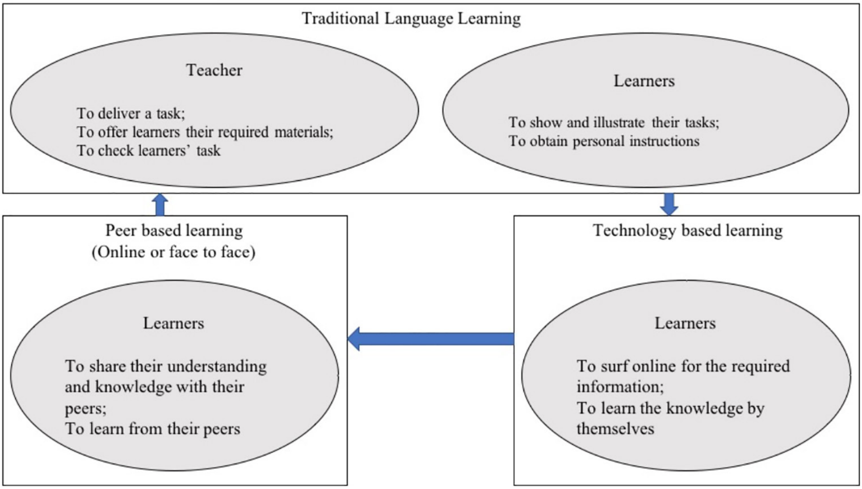
Based on the literature of blended learning and the English teaching process, this study constructs a blended learning environment, which is composed of three parts: task-based online learning, group-based peer learning and class-based face-to-face traditional learning. In the blended learning environment, a teacher delivers learning materials, such as lecture videos and course materials, and some authentic tasks (such as writing an email to English native speakers, role-playing a negotiation in English, etc.) to the learners at the beginning of a learning process. Then learners research online for the required information and required skills to finish their tasks. At the next stage, learners share their understanding and their information of the task with their peers via the course forum or face-to-face with their peers. They are required to comment on their peers' tasks and learn from their peers. If learners have any difficulties, they can ask for help from their teachers through the Tutorial video. At the last stage, learners show their tasks to their teacher and the teacher checks the learners' tasks in a traditional class. The teacher will give some quizzes to the learners through the interface or in a traditional class. If the teacher finds some mistakes or limitations on the learners' tasks, he or she will offer some personal instructions to the learners. Throughout the learning process, learners can monitor their performance through the Learning Performance interface (see Figure 2, which illustrates the new teaching model).

Figure 2: A blended learning model


Traditional Language Learning
Teacher
To deliver a task;
To offer learners their required materials;
To check learners' task
Learners
To show and illustrate their tasks;
To obtain personal instructions
Peer based learning
(Online or face to face)
Learners
To share their understanding and knowledge with their peers;
To learn from their peers
Technology based learning
Learners
To surf online for the required information;
To learn the knowledge by themselves

Research methodology

This study is approved by the Committee of Ethnics and Integrity in Research with Humans in North China University of Science and Technology. It uses a pre-test, post-test experimental randomised control group design with one experimental group exposed to a blended learning environment and a control group taught in a traditional learning environment. The study aims to find the differences of learning performance between learners in a blended learning environment and in a traditional learning environment.

Participants

The study selects participants from the School of Adult Education in North China University of Science and Technology. All students who apply for learning in college adult education are required to have completed high school education and mastered English grammar and 3000 to 4000 English words or expressions. In order to enrol in adult education successfully learners are required to pass the Adult College Entrance Examination as well. English is one of the subjects in the Adult College Entrance Examination. However, there is no minimum English score required to enrol in adult tertiary education. In order to examine adult learners' English abilities, the study examined 240 Chinese adult students' English abilities in four teaching classes with an Adult College Entrance English Test Paper in December 2016. The examination results show that adult learners' English scores range from 128/150 to 46/150 and the average score is 92/150. Two teaching classes with 60 students in each with no significant differences in English abilities as well as in English writing abilities are selected as experimental class (EC) and control class (CC) randomly. All learners both in EC and in CC had learned English for more than six years by the time they enrolled in the teaching class. The average age of the adult students in EC is 25.2 years old while 25.4 years old in CC.

Instruments

The study applies an Adult College Entrance English Test Paper as the pre-test instrument, which is composed of six parts: reading (40% of the total expected score), cloze (20% of the total expected score), writing (16.7% of the total expected score), vocabulary (10% of the total expected score), daily conversation (10% of the total expected score), and phonetics (3.3% of the total expected score). The post-test instrument in the study is constructed by English teachers, and composed of five parts: reading (40% of the total expected score), cloze (20% of the total expected score), writing (20% of the total expected score), vocabulary (10% of the total expected score), and daily conversation (10% of the total expected score). The interview outline is another instrument in the study, which offers data about the learners' attitudes toward a blended learning environment. Data obtained from the interview will be used to explain the qualitative findings in the study. The interview outline includes three questions:

1. Do you like the blended learning environment and why?
2. Do you think a blended learning environment is a better learning environment for adult learners' English acquisition than a traditional one, and why?
3. In which way, do you think the blended learning environment can be improved?

Procedures

The study comprises an experimental design. At the beginning of the study, two teaching classes with no significant differences in English abilities as well as in English writing abilities are selected as EC and CC randomly. Learners in EC took part in a one-day workshop on blended learning and on how to use the learning platform at the beginning of the semester, which guaranteed learners could access the abilities of learning in a blended learning environment. In the following semester learners in EC were taught in a blended learning environment. At the very beginning of the term the teacher of EC uploads all the teaching materials (including teaching syllabus, teaching schedule, assignments, and teaching video) to a learning platform (http://manage.tangshanedu.com/student_new/login.asp). The adult learners are required to study the subjects in the platform and discuss what they have learned with their peers on course forum interface in the learning platform or face-to-face with each other. Every 3 or 4 weeks, the adult learners have an opportunity to meet their teachers face-to-face in a traditional classroom. The teacher checks the students' acquisition and solves the students' problems or questions in their study. In the whole sixteen-week term, the adult learners met their teachers in their classroom six times. The same teacher teaches the adult learners in CC with the traditional method. That is, the students meet their teacher every week in a traditional classroom and their lecture is teacher-centred. After each lecture the teacher delivers the teaching syllabus, teaching schedule, and teaching video to the learners. These are used as the learning materials for learners to review what they have learned. At the same time the teacher also delivers some highly relevant and authentic tasks for learners as their assignments. After sixteen weeks at the end of the term students in both EC and CC participate in their final examination (the post-test). Then, the study analyses the differences of the post-test score and the writing score between EC and CC with SPSS 22.0 software. At last, an in-depth follow-up interview is conducted in order to obtain deeper insights about their opinions on English acquisition in a blended learning environment.

Data analysis

On December 2016 the study tested some adult college students' English abilities in four teaching classes with an Adult College Entrance English

Test Paper. Then the study compared the differences of pre-test scores among four classes with the help of SPSS 22.0 software. The analyses results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The pre-test results of the differences of English scores among four teaching classes

(I) class	(J) class	Mean Difference (I-J0	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	6.550*	1.807	.002	1.741	11.359
	3	12.017*	1.807	.000	7.208	16.826
	4	6.333*	1.807	.003	1.524	11.143
2	1	-6.550*	1.807	.002	-11.359	-1.741
	3	5.467*	1.807	.017	.658	10.276
	4	-.217	1.807	1.000	-5.026	4.593
3	1	-12.017*	1.807	.000	-16.826	-7.208
	2	-5.467*	1.807	.017	-10.276	-.658
	4	-5.683*	1.807	.011	-10.493	-.874
4	1	-6.333*	1.807	.003	-11.143	-1.524
	2	.217	1.807	1.000	-4.593	5.026
	3	5.683*	1.807	.011	.874	10.493

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The analysis results reveal that the differences of pre-test scores between class two and class four are nonsignificant ($p = 1.000 > 0.05$) while significant between class one and class two ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$), between class one and class three ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), between class one and class four ($p = 0.003 < 0.05$), between class two and class three ($p = 0.017 < 0.05$), and between class three and class four ($p = 0.011 < 0.05$). The study, therefore, chooses class two and class four as EC and CC. The study also examined the differences of the score in sub-parts of the pre-test (such as the score of phonetics, of writing, of daily conversation, of reading, of cloze, and of vocabulary) between class two (EC) and class four (CC) with the help of the software SPSS 22.0. The results are in table 2.

Table 2: The pre-test results of the differences of English scores between EC and CC

	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Pre-test	-.127	118	.899	-.217	1.707	-3.596	3.163
Phonetic	2.456	118	.016*	.550	.224	.107	.993
Writing	-.089	118	.929	-.033	.376	-.778	.711
Daily conversation	-3.864	118	.000*	-1.533	.397	-2.319	-.748
Reading	-.814	118	.417	-1.133	1.392	-3.891	1.624
Cloze	4.476	109.753	.000*	3.200	.715	1.783	4.617
Vocabulary	-3.167	118	.002*	-1.267	.400	-2.059	-.475

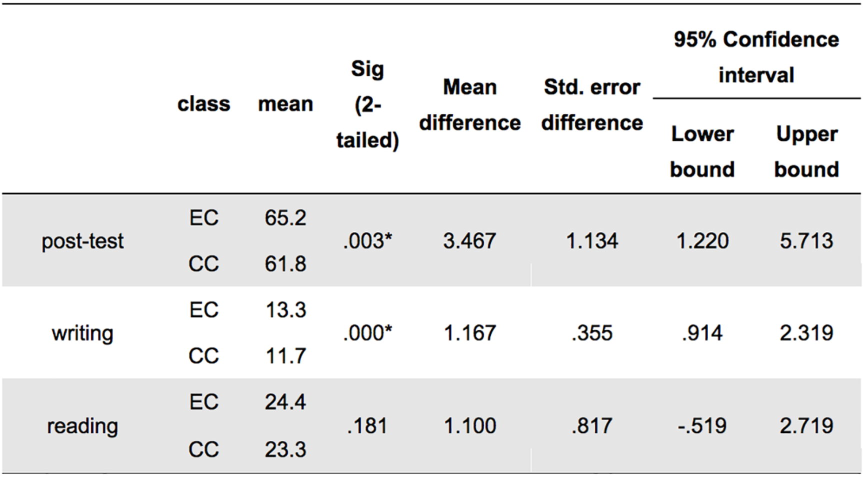
*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results illustrate that there are significant differences between EC and CC in the phonetic score ($p = 0.016 < 0.05$), the daily conversation score ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), the cloze score ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), and the vocabulary score ($p = 0.002 < 0.05$), while no significant differences in the pre-test score ($p = 0.899 > 0.05$), the writing score ($p=0.929>0.05$), and the reading score ($p = 0.417 > 0.05$). Therefore, reading scores and writing scores of EC and CC are also analysed in the post-test.

During one term of sixteen weeks adult learners in EC and CC were taught by the same teacher in a blended learning environment or a traditional learning environment, respectively. Learners both in a blended learning environment and in a traditional learning environment are required to finish some authentic tasks in their language acquisition

(EC) or as their homework (CC). For example, when the learners study the first unit Someone Waiting, they are required to role play a waiting event; studying the second unit Football they are required to perform a debating competition on the topic of Chinese football. At the end of the term, students in both EC and CC participated in a post-test (their final examination), which included five parts: reading (40% of the total expected score), cloze (20% of the total expected score), writing (20% of the total expected score), vocabulary (10% of the total expected score), and daily conversation (10% of the total expected score). After collecting all the post-test scores, the study compared the differences of the post-test scores between EC and CC. As the pre-test results show there are no significant differences in the writing and the reading scores between EC and CC, the study examined the differences between the writing and the reading scores in the post-test, either. The results are illustrated in table 3.

Table 3: The post-test results of the differences of English scores between EC and CC



	class	mean	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
post-test	EC	65.2	.003*	3.467	1.134	1.220	5.713
	CC	61.8					
writing	EC	13.3	.000*	1.167	.355	.914	2.319
	CC	11.7					
reading	EC	24.4	.181	1.100	.817	-.519	2.719
	CC	23.3					

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The mean score of the post-test, the writing, and the reading in EC and CC is 65.2 vs. 61.8, 13.3 vs. 11.7, and 24.4 vs. 23.3, respectively. Students in EC perform better than those in CC in all the aforementioned three aspects. T-test results illustrate that the differences between EC and CC are significant in the post-test score ($p = 0.003 < 0.05$) and the writing test score ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) significantly, but nonsignificant in the reading test (p = 0.181 > 0.05). That is to say, a blended learning environment can improve Chinese adult learners' English acquisition, especially English writing acquisition.

After the post-test the study interviewed ten learners from EC. They were invited to talk about their opinions about learning in a blended learning environment. The analysing results reveal that almost all learners held positive attitudes toward a blended learning environment. 'Learning English in a blended learning environment cultivates my autonomous learning abilities'; 'Blended learning fosters my abilities to choose my own learning strategies and promotes my abilities to seek academic help'; 'In a blended learning environment I do not feel as anxious as learning in a traditional environment'; 'A blended learning environment offers me the opportunity to practice what I learned in daily life'; 'In a blended learning environment students have more chances to practice English with their peers'; "It is convenient to learn English with fragmentary time in a blended learning environment'. Only one learner did not like learning in a blended learning environment. 'Without teachers' help, I don't know how to learn and what to learn'. In addition, students also pointed out some impediments to the blended learning environment. 'Sometimes I cannot access the learning platform as I cannot find Wi-Fi'.

Discussion and conclusion

The experimental study examines the hypothesis delivered by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China that instructing in a blended learning environment is a potential way to foster learners' foreign language abilities. The experimental results reveal that post-test scores and writing scores of Chinese adult students learning in a blended learning environment are significant higher than those learning in a traditional learning environment. The findings indicate that a blended learning environment can improve the learners' English performance, especially the English writing performance. The reading scores of Chinese adult students learning in a blended learning environment are higher than those learning in a traditional learning environment, but the differences are not significant. We, therefore, cannot conclude that a blended learning environment improves learners' reading abilities. The results of this study are similar to the study by Coryell & Chlup (2007), which indicated that e-learning components in adult English language classrooms are more successful.

Chinese scholars have been interested in factors affected Chinese learners' English language acquisition for a long time. A recent study (Yao, 2014) investigates the differences between learners with better English performance (top 40 among 138 learners) and worse English performance (bottom 40 among 138 learners). It finds that learners with better English performance have the following characteristics: strong autonomous learning abilities and the ability to seek academic help; low levels of anxieties; having the ability to choose his/her own learning strategies. The results of this study indicate that a blended learning environment can help learners 'overcome learning anxieties', 'cultivate autonomous learning abilities', 'foster the ability to choose their individual learning strategies', and 'promote the ability to academic help', which contributes a lot to improved performance of adult learners in English language acquisition.

A previous study (Castaneda, 2016) indicates that foreign language acquisition becomes more accessible when students receive feedback and help from various sources; in a traditional class, however, the feedback or corrections cause learners tension and anxiety, which has negative effects on their foreign language acquisition. In a blended learning environment, most of the feedback is conducted in a small group, even between two learners or a learner and his or her teacher. Therefore, learners are willing to get academic help and do not feel anxiety in their English acquisition. A previous study (Castaneda, 2016) revealed that adult learners are very self-conscious students and have an exceptionally strong sense of responsibility. In a blended learning environment, learners themselves have the responsibility to manage their learning activities, which contributes a lot to learners developing their ability to cultivate autonomous learning and choose their own individual learning strategies. With these abilities, learners will learn and practice more English. In a long run, their English performance will become better.

Traditionally in China, foreign language is taught in a teacher-centred learning environment with face-to-face instructing (Cao & Yao, 2016), in which the teacher transmits knowledge to students and students absorb the knowledge usually by rote memorisation. This kind of foreign language teaching emphasises the acquisition of knowledge, regardless of context (Celik & Ozbay, 2010), let alone knowledge practice. Another issue that needs to be pointed out is that foreign language teaching for

China's non-English-major students is usually in big classes, with more than fifty learners, and in some cases even more than one hundred adult learners. In a traditional learning environment one learner has limited opportunities to practice what she or he has learned in a lecture. Therefore, it is difficult for learners to improve their foreign language practical abilities, especially for adult learners (Castaneda, 2016). The current study, therefore, proposes a blended learning environment and a task-based teaching approach. Previous studies have proved that a blended learning environment can help learners to facilitate a simultaneous, independent and collaborative learning experience (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004); improve student attitudes towards their learning (Alexander, 2010); result in high levels of student achievement and are more effective than a traditional learning environment (Saritepeci & Cakir, 2015). Previous studies have verified that a task-based teaching approach can inspire students' learning interests and responsibilities (Vernon & Blake, 1993); motivate learners in their learning (Vernon, 1995), and foster deep learning by involving students with the interaction of learning materials (Zhang, 2009). In addition, task-based learning can develop in students the potential to determine their own goals and assume responsibility for their learning needs. In the current study learners both in EC and in CC were required to finish some tasks. However, these tasks were delivered as acquisition tasks in EC while as homework in CC. After 16 weeks the English performance, especially the writing performance, in EC was better than those in CC. From the aforementioned findings, we can conclude that a task-based learning approach in a blended learning environment is more helpful to Chinese adult learners than a task-based learning approach in a traditional learning environment. The aforementioned features of a blended learning environment and task-based learning approach meet the education goals of fostering learners' foreign language practical abilities. All the aforementioned factors contribute to the fact that learners learning in a blended learning environment perform better than those in a traditional learning environment, especially in the writing test. However, the study finds some limitations of a blended learning. It requires learner to access the Internet when they want to learn. Currently in China, especially in countryside, it is hard for learner to access the Internet through WI-FI. Therefore, the learning activities have to be suspended. Otherwise, the learning activities will become more expensive.

Looking back on the study, we find several limitations. Firstly, the study tries to examine the differences of learners' performance in a blended learning environment and in a traditional learning environment. In both learning environments, the teacher adopted a task-based teaching approach. However, tasks played different roles in these two learning environments. In a blended learning environment tasks are parts of learning activities while only homework in a traditional learning environment. Whether the different roles of tasks affect learning performance is still in the dark. When we discuss the findings in the study, it is hard to contribute the differences of English performance between EC and CC to the difference in the learning environments solely. Maybe other issues, such as the role of different tasks in the learning process, contributed to the different results. Secondly, the study tries to examine how a blended learning environment influences Chinese adult learners in all aspects of English acquisition, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking and translating. However, the study didn't find two classes that had no differences in all aspects in pre-tests. The study, therefore, only discussed the differences between EC and CC in overall scores, writing scores and reading scores. In future studies more constricted conditions should be considered and more students should be examined. Only in this way could we reveal the benefits of a blended learning environment to Chinese adult education.

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Book review

University Pathway Programs: Local Responses within a growing global trend

Cintia Ines Agosti, and Eva Bernat
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Reviewed by Juliet Austin
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This volume presents a series of case studies to provoke conversation around the topic of pathway programs – those programs which assist local or international students to enter higher education via non-traditional routes. A comprehensive series of chapters outline some of the main contours of this wide-ranging global field. The editors acknowledge that generalisations are difficult because of the myriad institutional and national contextual factors at play, and a range of terminology in use, such as foundation, enabling, year zero, to describe such programs. Usefully, the cases described begin to tease out some of these distinctions. The book is split into five sections, the first a sweep of introductory points with themes such as the importance of academic literacies and contextual influences in program design and operation. The second section is the largest and most interesting of the volume, containing eight distinct case studies relating to the impact of pathway programs on social justice and inclusion. Countries studied include Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Qatar. Sections three to five then address different aspects of pathway program provision, namely transitions from vocational to higher education, curriculum and pedagogy and finally discussions involving the internationalisation and privatisation of programs.

There are some contradictions to watch out for. The introductory section is interesting, in that it signals that pathway programs are coming to the attention of the academy, but not because of their potential to fulfil the widening participation, access and equity agenda but because they are a lucrative aspect of expanding higher education markets. According to the corporate education consultancies that are cited, (such as Study Portal and World Education News and Reviews), programs at this level were turning over $1.4bn globally in 2016 (p. 4). Corporate providers held 47% of the market in 2015, and programs have mainly proliferated in the United Kingdom (p. 4). However, it seems that independent data to corroborate these findings are not included, which speaks to the current state of affairs for this area of research. Teasing out the main drivers for the creation of pathway programs is going to need a critical understanding of how programs are being funded and shaped at the fringes of the academy and in partnership with the private sector, as well as to fulfil universities' social missions. Access and equity is clearly a priority in section two, but there is little explicit framing of the connection between pathways and matters of inclusion, or the tensions inherent in this with corporate provision, that might have more clearly paved the way for the case studies and beyond.

Similarly, the introductory title Types, Origins, Aims and Defining Traits, gives the impression that the discussion that follows will be a description of the key defining features of current pathway programs. Indeed, the editors state the objective of the book as being a showcase of various university pathways (p. 10). Alternatively, there is a discussion about the traits that the authors think should be included in a good pathway program. These are by no means poor suggestions, and the authors stress the importance of integrating cultural and contextual awareness into course design. Development of academic literacies is also discussed and is stressed as an important aspect of pathway programs. It is strange that the discussion was not labelled as such – a theoretical exploration of ideal course design elements, rather than the description and analysis of the current state of affairs that was expected. Again, this speaks to the low volume of data and research that is available in this area, so that it is not yet possible to discern any kind of patterns inherent in the creation and delivery of pathway programs, other than the crudest delineation of economic and social imperatives.

In making suggestions for what should be included in a pathway course in a vacuum of understanding about how pathways are currently operating, the editors run the risk of putting the curriculum cart before the context horse. The actionability of some of the ideas into the pathway space indicates a need for further study. For example, in the four pronged approach to develop academic literacies that the authors stress ‘must’ be included in order for a program to be effective (p. 9), it is likely that the high level meta-cognitive literacies proposed would be difficult to implement in a pathway course. This is because articulating what issues are related to identity that are intertwined with the production of texts would be especially difficult to achieve for local students without significant time, pedagogical skill and perhaps even psychological support. Such suggestions also assume that students who are enrolled on pathway courses have a different identity such as some kind of ethnic minority distinction that requires unpacking in order for success with academic literacies to take place. In practice, these kinds of discussions about how identity is embedded in texts run the risk of being misaligned for those attempting to access higher education, and may even have the effect of reproducing disadvantage rather than combating it. Therefore, the authors needed to have couched the discussion more sensitively and with a greater awareness that there is more than one suggested way of going about designing an effective pathway program. Research into whether specific kinds of literacy curriculum would even work at this level given the differing contextual forces the authors acknowledge is needed.

Chapter two is a series of broad brush arguments that connect the trend towards mass participation to the development of pathway programs. The set up of the demand driven system (the process by which the government’s caps on numbers of students that would be funded were temporarily lifted) in Australia is offered as corroboration for this claim. This is a tempting and intuitive connection to make, and indeed, this policy may have stoked enrolments indirectly in pathway programs via attempts to access undergraduate studies, although evidence for this is scant. However, the demand driven system has to date, never been directly extended to sub-bachelor programs in Australia, (Australian Government, 2019) which perhaps conveys the government's attitude toward pathway programs more clearly. Similarly, there is no mention that the Bologna Process or Australian Qualifications Framework were progressive, key standardising influences with a founding mission to provide a more coherent transition to higher education between and across all levels within and across nation states. A brief inclusion of these frameworks could have framed a tighter discussion than the one included in which a certain randomness of contextual factors involved in pathway development is emphasised.

The case study chapters are a highlight. In particular, the chapter describing the Diploma of Maoritanga at Victoria University of Wellington by Hall et al. is rich with detail. There is much that pathway course designers can learn here regarding the level of cultural literacies, and general contextual sensitivities that are required in order to maintain a successful pathway that is built on a positive affirmation of identity rather than on the mitigation of student deficits. The political nature of these types of programs is alluded to with a reference to governmental policy shifts that underscore the fiscal sustainability of courses that may be seen to threaten standards. Again, there are prompts here for much needed further research that can begin to tease out some of the important distinctions between pathways for international students and their attendant English language concerns, versus a more complex picture for domestic pathway options.

There is much in this volume to commend. The framing of the beginning chapters indicates that we need to back up a little and unpack some of the major assumptions we make about who pathways are for and what makes them distinctive before we can continue. This could start to be achieved through a greater engagement with theory. The distinction between local and international students is an important one, given that it can signal a gulf of policy and program purpose and deserves a more nuanced treatment. The authors do well to use what little scholarship is available in this emerging field, and it is necessary to scaffold our discussions by using related materials from other areas in order to move forward. However, it is also important to resist the temptation to quickly homogenise an ill-defined arena using evidence from sources that may have vested interests. This book certainly fulfils its mission as a conversation starter, and will hopefully attract further attention to this new and important area of higher education.

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