

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF

ADULT LEARNING

VOLUME 54 ■ NUMBER 2 ■ JULY 2014



Adult
Learning
Australia

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

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

Editor: Dr Tony Brown, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology, Sydney (UTS)
Tony.brown@uts.edu.au

Editorial Board: Dr Allan Arnott, Charles Darwin University
Professor Mary Barrett, University of Wollongong
Professor Michael Christie, University of the Sunshine Coast
Dr Jane Connell, Cape Breton University, Canada
Assoc Prof Linda Cooper, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Dr Lisa Davies, University of South Australia
Professor Leona English, St Francis Xavier University, Canada
Professor Brian Findsen, University of Waikato, NZ
Dr Steven Hodge, Griffith University
Dr Vaughan John, University of Natal, South Africa
Dr Helen Kimberley, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Dr Inge Kral, Australian National University
Dr Peter Lavender, NIACE, UK
Dr Ann Lawless, University of South Australia
Ms Dorothy Lucardie, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia
Assoc Prof (adjunct) John McIntyre, University of Canberra
Dr Rob Mark, University of Strathclyde, Scotland
Dr Gregory Martin, University of Technology, Sydney
Dr Tracey Ollis, Deakin University
Assoc Prof Barbara Pamphilon, University of Canberra
Dr Donna Rooney, University of Technology, Sydney
Assoc Prof Sue Shore, Charles Darwin University
Dr Tom Short, University of South Australia
Professor Michele Simons, University of Western Sydney
Dr Tom Stehlik, University of South Australia
Assoc Prof Ruth Wallace, Charles Darwin University
Dr Peter Willis, University of South Australia
Dr Benjamin Chan Tak Yuen, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

Membership Services: Adult Learning Australia, PO Box 298, Flinders Lane, Melbourne Vic 8009
Phone: 03 9314 4632
Email: info@ala.asn.au

Printer: Snap Printing

The *Journal* is published three times a year in April, July and November. Subscriptions are \$110, which includes GST for Australian subscribers and postage for all. Overseas subscriptions are \$A185, which also includes postage.

Subscriptions, orders for back issues, advertisements and business correspondence are handled by the Membership Services. Papers for publication, book reviews and reports should be submitted in the first instance online at www.ajal.net.au 'Notes for contributors' can be found online and on the inside back cover of the *Journal*.

Opinions expressed in the *Journal* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ALA.

The *Journal* is abstracted by the *Australian Education Index*, *Educational Administration Abstracts*, *Australian Public Affairs Information Service (APAIS)* and *Current Index to Journals in Education*. AJAL is indexed by *EBSCO Education Research Complete*, *Informit Australian Public Affairs Full Text*, *ProQuest Central New Platform*, and *Voiced*, and is listed in the SCOPUS database.

It is also available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor Michigan 48106, USA. ALA members can download *Journal* papers from www.ajal.net.au Non-members can purchase papers from www.ajal.net.au

ISSN: 1443-1394

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

Volume 54, Number 2, July 2014

3 From the Editor's desk

Refereed articles

8 Diversity and achievement: Is success in higher education a transformative experience?

Robyn Benson, Margaret Heagney, Lesley Hewitt, Glenda Crosling and Anita Devos

32 How a personal development program enhances social connection and mobilises women in the community

Nandila Spry and Teresa Marchant

54 Teacher professional learning communities: Going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth

Susanne Owen

78 Expectations and reality: What you want is not always what you get

Arlene Garces-Ozanne and Trudy Sullivan

- 101 Identifying tertiary bridging students at risk of failure in the first semester of undergraduate study
Robert Whannell and Patricia Whannell

Non-refereed papers

- 121 Educational biographies in Germany: From secondary school general education to lifelong learning?
Harry Friebe
- 145 Do actions and methods in guidance for older workers exist in Spain?
María José López Sánchez and José Antonio Belso Martínez

Book review

- 170 Reflections on learning, life and work: Completing doctoral studies in mid and later life and career
Maureen Ryan (ed.), Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2012
Reviewed by Cheryl Maree Ryan

From the Editor's desk

Continuity and change



Tony Brown

The years 2014 and 2015 could become important landmarks in the restructuring of post-school, adult education in Australia. The widespread marketisation of vocational education and training (VET) has already been underway for a number of years, as has the pressure on community based adult education, which has resulted in many centres closing or being forced to radically re-order their programs. Now the new Coalition government proposes radical change to Australian higher education by cutting the government's contribution to universities, lifting the cap on student numbers, allowing universities to set fees at what the market will bear, increasing the interest rate charged on fee

loans, and by widening the number of institutions recognised as higher education institutions, and therefore receiving public funding.

These changes come forty years after the Whitlam government abolished university fees, and nearly thirty years after the Hawke government introduced the last major reforms that restructured Australia's post school education system. Around the same time the Labor government introduced first a higher education administration fee of \$250, followed soon after in 1989 by limited fees and a loans scheme known as HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme). HECS initially charged all students \$1800 with the federal government making up the shortfall.

In the late 1980s there was a different mix of publicly funded post-school institutions. Australia had a range of colleges of advanced education, institutes of technology and other higher education providers. About 70 of them received some government support, and their combined enrolments slightly outnumbered that of the 19 universities that were active at the time. The ending of the 'binary system' by converting the then Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) into Universities almost doubled the number of universities in Australia, and also led to an increase in student enrolments.

Under the Labor governments of Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard the numerical growth in those attending university continued and then accelerated when new targets to increase participation from low socio-economic (in other words working class) backgrounds were mandated. Underpinning these changes over the past three decades has been the continuing existence of a low cost loans scheme, which while creating student debt that in some cases has been large, in most cases has remained manageable. The proposed new fee structures in higher education will alter that.

Higher education offers benefits at a number of levels. It holds out the prospect of individual advance and development, of social development through scientific and technological progress, of continuing provision of those who underpin our civil society like teachers, doctors, health workers, librarians, artists, journalists and so on. It provides much more than just higher individual income.

For many it is a transformative experience, making such an impact on that person's life that it is forever changed. Even forty years after Whitlam's great changes and the opening up of higher education to new entrants, many current students are still the first in their family to go to university. Whether the universities are equipped and ready to provide the academic, social and cultural support to embrace these new entrants is debatable, but there are many examples of dedicated attempts to develop pathways and enabling programs.

Once again higher education and post-school study is the focus of many of the papers in this issue. **Robyn Benson** and her colleagues from Monash University pose the question of whether success in higher education is a transformative experience. Drawing on Jack Mezirow's concept of 'perspective transformation' they report on a longitudinal project examining how a group of students from diverse backgrounds succeeded in higher education. Their work provides important information for university staff who work in assisting students from diverse backgrounds.

Personal development is also a theme in **Nandila Spry** and **Teresa Marchant's** paper. Yet it is a very different setting and type of program. Conducted in community settings the program is focused on enhancing social connection for women in the community. Drawing on the Shine and Strength program associated with the Hillsong church the program aims to tap into the women participants' 'own gifts and talents'. The paper draws on an extensive evaluation of the program that included evaluation forms, structured interviews and observations, and argues that it has positive outcomes in vocational terms as well as in social connections.

Susanne Owen's paper focuses on Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in three different school settings. She examines the current interest in PLCs across business and educational contexts and notes the common factors considered to contribute to their efficacy before honing her view onto the three case studies. Here she identifies a number of 'pivotal' characteristics that can offer insight for nurturing learning-focused PLCs with benefits for teacher professional growth.

This issue's final two refereed papers concentrate on beginning

undergraduate university students and their expectations and experiences of initial study in higher education. From New Zealand **Arlene Garces-Ozanne** and **Trudy Sullivan** examine the gap between expectations and reality of a first year Economics cohort. Using the core introductory economics subject they set out to test whether there is a significant gap between students' grade expectations and the actual grade they received. They found that students commence with high, and over-optimistic, expectations but then modify their expectations as the year progresses. The factors that contribute to both the early high expectation and the re-setting of expectations are discussed.

In a similar vein **Robert Whannell** and **Patricia Whannell** are also interested in the first year university experience. Continuing to report on a project that has previously been discussed in this Journal they examine the attrition and progression of two cohorts of students in a tertiary bridging program at a regional university in Australia. In this paper they report on a large sample study of students moving from a tertiary bridging program into first year with the aim of recognising factors that might identify students at risk of failure. The interventions that might be employed to assist at-risk students are the subject of their discussion.

In the non-refereed section there are two papers from Europe. The first from **Harry Friebel** of the University of Hamburg writes about educational biographies in Germany and looks at the transition from secondary school to lifelong learning. Using the large longitudinal database that is the Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel (HBLP) he examines the vocational mobility of a graduating class from Hamburg and asks questions such as how they manage their education, and do career paths differ for young men and women. Given the options and restrictions contained by the social and educational institutions, what is the structure of opportunity that exists?

At the other end of the work-life span **María José López Sánchez** and **José Antonio Belso Martínez** from the Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche in Spain investigate the guidance schemes on offer for older workers. With unemployment at very high levels in Spain following the global financial crisis younger and older workers

have found gaining work to be particularly difficult. Older workers suffer discrimination in the labour market and find their periods of unemployment longer than the average. Their paper looks at the career guidance offered by a large number of employer organisations, trade unions and public employment agencies, and they conclude that there is a need to improve coordination and publicity of the services if older workers are to benefit from their availability.

Finally, this issue sees the return of book reviews with **Cheryl Ryan** reviewing Maureen Ryan's edited collection *Reflections on learning, life and work: Completing doctoral studies in mid and later life and career*. The collection tell the stories of Arts and Humanities research degree students whose age and academic pathways differ from students in the Sciences, and whose research is shaped by their life and career experiences.

Tony Brown

Diversity and achievement: Is success in higher education a transformative experience?

Robyn Benson, Margaret Heagney, Lesley Hewitt,
Glenda Crosling and Anita Devos
Monash University

This paper reports on a longitudinal project examining how a group of students from diverse backgrounds succeeded in higher education. The project explored participants' pathways into higher education, how they managed their studies, and their reflections at course completion. In this paper, the concept of perspective transformation is used to consider the extent to which their success in higher education was a transformative experience. Data from the project's first stage identified the role of perspective transformation in influencing participants' pathways to higher education, while here we focus on the impact of their university study on perspective transformation, comparing evidence of transformative experiences during study with those that led to enrolment. Analysis of participants' reflections at course completion indicated that higher education success was a transformative experience for most of them and that perspective transformation affected more participants during study than before it. Participants identified several aspects of the course that contributed to the changes

experienced in their perspectives. We consider some implications for university staff, which may help others involved with students from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: *Higher education, perspective transformation, transformative learning, student diversity, student success*

Introduction

In this paper we review the findings from a longitudinal project which investigated how a group of students from diverse backgrounds succeeded in higher education. We consider the extent to which successful study was a transformative experience for the students involved. A previous analysis of participants' comments from the first phase of this project explained their pathways into higher education and suggested that for some, the decision to enrol was not primarily the outcome of perspective transformation, but a response to other life experiences (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos & Crosling, 2010). This paper aims to establish whether the study experience itself had a greater impact on perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978) than the changes in participants' lives which led to their enrolment, and to consider implications of the findings for university staff.

Understanding the role of perspective transformation, among other factors that contribute to higher education success, is relevant as higher education moves beyond massification to universal access (Trow, 2000). In Australia, impetus was provided by the Federal Government's response to the Bradley higher education review (Bradley, 2008) which included 'an ambition that by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level will be of people from a low SES background' (Australian Government, 2009:13). A further ambition was 'to enrol and complete an additional 217,000 students at bachelor level or above by 2025, equating to 40 per cent of all 25 to 34 year olds' (p.44). Given the barriers to higher education which frequently need to be overcome for successful study, and the related changes in perspective that may be required, information about the role of perspective transformation is potentially important in guiding teaching, support and management strategies for positive study outcomes.

Project participants included students from low socio-economic groups, non-English-speaking and migrant backgrounds, regional and remote areas, students with medical conditions, and first generation university students. In this three-stage project, on-campus and off-campus participants at study commencement told their stories about their pathways into higher education. Then, while their studies were in progress, participants explained how they were managing. Finally, they reflected on their experiences at course completion (between two and four years after enrolment, depending on study mode and individual study patterns). This paper draws on findings from all stages of the project but particularly on participants' final reflections. The project, undertaken at an Australian university, adapted the research design of a similar project in the United Kingdom (Kirk, 2006).

In the following sections we explore the concept of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978) in the context of other concepts from higher education research, which may assist in understanding how students achieve successful outcomes. We then describe our research design and analyse participants' reflections on their higher education experience to identify the impact of successful study on perspective transformation, compared with its role in influencing their pathways to higher education. Finally, we discuss the outcomes of this analysis, focusing on implications for teaching and student support.

Conceptual background

Mezirow (1978) introduced the concept of perspective transformation to explain the fundamental perspective shift that occurs when individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. He originally saw perspective transformation as involving ten phases beginning with a single 'disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow, 1981), but later acknowledged that it could be a gradual, cumulative process (Mezirow, 2000).

In continuing to refine the theory, Mezirow (2000) conceptualised a frame of reference as comprising six dimensions of habits of mind (sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological and aesthetic), each expressed as a point of view and each comprising a cluster of meaning schemes. Changes to a frame of reference involving

transformation of habits of mind and points of view usually occur through critical reflection and discourse. Critical theory (Brookfield, 2005) underpins Mezirow's theory though his focus was on the personal emancipatory aspects of perspective transformation in 'everyday life' (Mezirow, 1978), rather than on social justice and the relationship of knowledge, power and ideology more generally (Habermas, 1971).

Mezirow (2003:61) commented that '[t]esting the validity of a transformed frame of reference ... requires critical-dialectical discourse', referring to discourse as dialogue involving a (rational) assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values. Earlier, Mezirow (1991) introduced three types of reflection (content, process and premise), identifying premise reflection as facilitating profound, emancipatory change through critical examination of problematic ideas, values, beliefs, and feelings and their underpinning assumptions, leading to testing of the transformed frame of reference through rational discourse. Although he moved away from the three types of reflection (Cranton, 2006), premise reflection continues to underpin the idea of critical reflection. Hence, if perspective transformation is central to successful higher education outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds, Mezirow's theory suggests that critical reflection would be pivotal.

Other contributions on aspects of transformative learning theory have included: keeping critical pedagogy central (Brookfield, 2003); acknowledging the roles of emotion and imagination in constructing meaning (Dirkx, 2001); and the need for a mature level of cognitive functioning for transformative learning to occur (Merriam, 2004). The importance of ways of knowing that extend beyond rational knowing was acknowledged in several empirical studies reviewed by Taylor (1997), along with the varying nature of the catalyst for perspective transformation (which may not always involve a disorientating dilemma), and the role of context and relationships. Acknowledging both Mezirow's rational approach and the extrarational approach of others who regard transformation as extending beyond cognitive ways of knowing, Cranton (2006:77) discussed whether rational and extrarational transformation can occur suddenly and dramatically, gradually over time, or as a developmental process, concluding that 'from the perspective of the person experiencing transformation, it is more often a gradual accumulation of ordinary experiences that leads

to a deep shift in thinking, a shift that may only become clear when it is over'. In this paper we consider that participants demonstrate transformative experiences if their successful study outcomes are related to a change in frames of reference based on critical reflection and discourse as defined by Mezirow, or extrarational processes.

Another recent idea in higher education for explaining the transformative nature of learning is the notion of threshold concepts where subject mastery 'can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something ... representing a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress ...', and which results in an irreversible shift in perception (Meyer & Land, 2006:3). In articulating this concept, resonances with Mezirow's theory were acknowledged and concerns about the rational and analytic nature of critical reflection as the primary driver expressed (Meyer, Land & Baillie, 2010). Nevertheless, much of the work on threshold concepts has differed from Mezirow's approach because it emphasises how students acquire disciplinary knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2006; Land, Meyer & Smith, 2008). While its application is broadening (e.g., Kutsar & Kärner, 2010), Mezirow's view of perspective transformation, with its critical theory foundations, appears to accommodate the wide range of transformative elements which may be relevant to the success of students from diverse backgrounds.

An important issue in identifying determinants of students' success in higher education is that perspective transformation may not necessarily be involved. We identified students' success by graduation, together with evidence of commitment to and satisfaction with study which suggested that it would contribute to changes in life direction. The concept of orientations to learning from higher education student learning research is relevant here. Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan (2005) described four key learning orientations (vocational, academic, personal and social) where for each the student's primary interest may be extrinsic (e.g., a vocational interest in obtaining a qualification), though intrinsic interest (which could involve perspective transformation) is also possible for the first three of these. Hence, success may be the result of strong extrinsic motivation, which does not involve perspective transformation. This is consistent with other concepts from student learning research,

which suggest that students may engage in deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning (e.g., Biggs, 1987; Entwistle, 2005). While deep approaches would be necessary for perspective transformation, as Race (2007:5) states, 'It can ... be argued that those learners who go far are the strategic ones, rather than the deep ones. It can be argued that they know *when* to adopt a deep approach, and when it is sufficient to adopt a surface approach.'

In this paper, we consider whether success was transformative, using concepts related to Mezirow's theory. Where perspective transformation has not occurred, ideas from student learning research may assist in explaining success. In either case, the findings have implications for teaching and student support approaches that are important for successful outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds.

Research design

The research design continued the approach of the earlier project stages, drawing on narrative inquiry to study experience as it is lived (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), recognising that 'understanding an individual's learning career depends crucially on understanding the wider biography within which it is located' (Tedder, 2007:26). This approach also supports a relational view of researcher and participant engagement (Pinnegar & Danes, 2007) that develops as students' stories unfold in a longitudinal project, resulting in a mutually constructed account of inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Brooks and Clark (2001) commented on the value of narrative for theorising transformative learning through moving from past to future; spanning psychological, social, cultural, and historical dimensions in content and form; and including cognitive, affective, spiritual and somatic dimensions. By listening to and engaging with students' voices as an integral aspect of emancipatory research (Corbett, 1998), the approach itself supports perspective transformation through critical reflection and discourse.

In this study, students entering the Bachelor of Social Work degree were invited to participate if they entered university via diverse pathways such as those noted earlier, or considered themselves as 'non-traditional' university students for another reason. As part of their degree, students complete two compulsory fieldwork placements where they are required

to work in an approved agency under the supervision of a qualified social worker. Participants told their stories at the three project phases during three semi-structured individual interviews, complemented by group meetings to explore factors contributing to their success. For each phase, interview questions were adapted to the Australian and institutional context from those used in the original study in the United Kingdom. Eleven participants (ten female and one male) completed the final interview when data collection ceased up to four years after course commencement.

Interviews were audio-taped, transcriptions provided to each participant for verification, and then analysed to identify common themes. The focus was on identifying evidence of barriers to, and enablers of, success, reflecting the project's aim (how students succeed). The explanation of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) illustrates its advantages for addressing this research question. They note its value as a flexible method, which can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches, with a theme capturing 'something important about the data in relation to the research question' which represents 'some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (p.82). Thus, we were able to record barriers to and enablers of success from participants' narratives to gain a 'rich thematic description' (p.83) of these factors and then subsequently consider these against the concepts of perspective transformation discussed earlier. Identification of themes was assisted by dialogue among members of the research team to achieve consensus.

At the final interview each participant reflected on how they viewed themselves as a learner prior to, during and after study. They commented on any changes they noticed (for example, in self-esteem, confidence, motivation and knowledge) and when and how they noticed these changes. Reflections included their most important learning experiences during the course and how their learning was best supported and developed. In the following section we consider evidence of perspective transformation based on these reflections. Participants are identified using pseudonyms that they chose.

The effects of the course on learner characteristics

Of the eleven participants, five (Alex Carole, Harriet, Lillian, Marie and

Virginia) were in their 40s. The others (Lam, Miranda, Rochelle, Sesh, Shannon and Zelin) were in their 20s or 30s.

Before the course

Participants expressed a range of views on their characteristics as learners prior to their studies. Some emphasised their limitations, but there were also indications of attributes, which subsequently contributed to success. Among the former, Marie, Virginia and Rochelle were particularly negative about their prior learner characteristics. Marie stated that she was ‘a very poor learner ... [with] a lot of cognitive deficits’. While these deficits were related to a severe medical condition, she had been ‘always lazy’ in relation to learning, doing ‘the minimum kind of work’:

I wasn't inquisitive ... I just wanted to go out and have fun ... I just thought it was something other people told me that I had to learn just to get by, to get a job. It wasn't something that I initiated myself ...

Similarly, Virginia stated that she ‘wasn’t a very good learner’ in that she ‘wasn’t motivated to stick with it’, while Rochelle commented that she had no confidence in her ability to learn.

Two students from international backgrounds, Lam and Zelin, noted their passiveness as learners before the course. Lam commented that although she was ‘a bit submissive and passive’, she was also motivated to learn and willing to seek clarification while Zelin stated that ‘in China we basically do what the lecturers say’. Shannon was similar, stating that he was always interested in learning but approached it by ‘trying to absorb as much as possible’. Sesh was also ‘really motivated to get out there and just absorb things’. She was ‘open to anything’ but also ‘felt a bit arrogant about it all’, later realising that being ‘all high and mighty about it’ was not helpful as it resulted in a superficial approach to learning. Lillian indicated her openness to learning but less obtrusively, through her interest in reading and sociology and ‘the way changes come about’. She was not focused on learning because she had worked since she left school in Year 11, but commented that she ‘probably learnt by watching other people in terms of life skills and also by ‘sheer hard work ... [and] determination’.

Harriet and Miranda were the most confident learners prior to the course, in both cases because of previous study experiences. Harriet referred to herself as a 'semi-self-motivated and self-directed learner' but Miranda was unequivocal, stating:

...my confidence in learning was good. I considered myself an effective learner right through high school and I suppose I didn't really have a huge amount of self-doubt because I write well and I think I can wing my way through a bit ... I'd already done a university diploma and a university degree before I even started the social work degree so I'd already fairly well set myself as an adult learner...

During the course

All participants except Miranda reported changes as learners during the course. Miranda stated that there were no changes in her learning style, just increased knowledge, adding, 'I guess I've been pretty well set in the way that I study and that's what's working for me.'

Seven others commented on increases in confidence and self-esteem as the course progressed, though for Virginia and Rochelle apprehension continued for some time. As an off-campus learner, Virginia attributed her lack of confidence to the absence of feedback to indicate 'how am I doing'. Key points in developing her confidence were overcoming a failed assignment that 'really knocked me', experiencing 'the most fantastic placement' which provided a sense of 'this is where I'm supposed to be', and being offered the opportunity to study at honours level which gave 'affirmation that ...[I was] doing the right thing'. Rochelle stated that apprehension continued throughout the first year but passing assignments led to increasing confidence.

Lam and Zelin both noted how their increasing participation in learning changed them. For Zelin, 'speaking out' gave her confidence, but her placement experience was 'the most important thing' as she began to perceive herself as a social worker.

Alex Carole, Marie and Lillian also noted considerable changes in themselves as learners during the course. Alex Carole's sense of social justice increased as she 'began to feel more strongly about issues'. She noted the significance of her first placement in this, and how she had

‘grown as a person’ during the course: ‘If my confidence hadn’t grown over the first twelve months I would have thought, “Just drop out...”’. Like Virginia, her response to failing an assignment made her ‘[s]urprised that I’m so persistent’. Marie found the course ‘such a shock to my system’ and was ‘overwhelmed by the workload’ but was ‘very motivated’, ‘very directed’ and noticed that her ‘learning curve just went through the roof’. She began to think ‘yeah, I’m a person of value’ as she contributed to class discussion. By the end of the first year she had become ‘more succinct’, ‘more eloquent’ and ‘more aware ... so it was a real consciousness raising’. Lillian also referred to shock in her initial reaction to university: ‘it was just such a shock that I got there ... I was crying as I drove into uni because I was just so overwhelmed and proud.’ As the course progressed, she realised that she ‘was an organised person’ who ‘loved learning’ and became a ‘more rounded person’ as she engaged with social issues.

The other three participants referred to changes in themselves as learners in different ways. Harriet, who began the course confidently and became increasingly successful, found that ‘my anxiety level actually increased’. After her early ‘arrogance’, Sesh quickly realised that ‘[y]ou’ve just got to get focused in on what you’re actually doing’. As assignment feedback told her ‘you could have done more’, she recognised that ‘I obviously hadn’t done the work that I could have done’ and thought, ‘I can do this if I get serious about it.’ Her first placement was also significant in that it ‘sort of woke me up a bit’ and her motivation ‘just went through the roof’. As her learning ‘solidified’, she became ‘really passionate’ and persistent, recognising the benefits of working collaboratively. Shannon’s learning approach also matured as he moved from ‘trying to absorb as much as possible’ to ‘let[ting] learning come more naturally’. Consequently, with increased confidence, ‘I probably didn’t devote as much time but still put the effort in to get what I needed out of it.’

After the course

Consistent with the above responses, all participants except Miranda indicated that their learner characteristics after the course were different from the beginning. Miranda repeated that she was already an established adult learner before the course, although she commented that ‘you’re a lot harsher as you get older ... I’ll cull out the things I don’t

need and then wade through them to see what I can take.’ She was also ‘more confident in the workplace now because I have an entitlement to do certain things that I didn’t have before’.

Comments by Lam, Rochelle, Sesh, Shannon and Zelin showed their learner maturity by the end of the course. Lam saw herself as a ‘reflective learner’ who was now ‘very open to learning. A very proactive learner. I seek for clarifications and I also seek any criticism.’ Zelin regarded herself as ‘sort of like a researcher’ because she had progressed to a Master’s degree. Rochelle felt ‘capable to learn to succeed’ while Sesh was more aware of the need for depth. Shannon had become ‘an easier learner, a more relaxed learner’: ‘I was able to integrate my learning more because I was better at my work as a social worker I think.’

Alex Carole, Harriet, Lillian, Marie and Virginia all noted the impact of their learning on their personal characteristics. Alex Carole learned that she was ‘a good worker and can accept criticism as a learning process’ and not take it too personally. The course gave her the skills ‘to advocate on behalf of herself’, which she could not do before. She was ‘still learning’ but her personal growth had been ‘enormous’: ‘I look back now and think, WOW, you have come a long way, Alex Carole.’

Lillian felt pride in her achievements:

I’m proud of myself that I’ve been able to change my career at such a late stage in life and I guess I’ve learnt how determined I can be and if I say I’m going to do something, I’ll do it.

Similarly, Virginia commented ‘I could’ve walked away from it and I chose not to ... [so] I sort of feel I took my own future into my own hands.’ She noted the resulting empowerment, along with a growth in self-confidence ‘in terms of my ability to learn’ and an awareness of ‘knowing how much I don’t know’.

Harriet became ‘[a] more confident learner, an even more excited learner, a more directed learner’, finding that the course ‘actually finally provided a framework for my learning’. She became more assertive, and was empowered and validated by her qualification (‘I feel fantastic; there are no boundaries for anyone’). Her anxiety disappeared. During the course she realised how ‘it was impacting on ... my identity’ with

the result that ‘really what I feel now is ... a sense of wholeness and integration’.

The changes noted by Marie were also considerable:

I’m a lot more independent as a learner. I was a very anxious learner... I used to really underrate myself terribly, which was a real problem. I used to think I was very inadequate. I don’t feel I’m so inadequate any more ... Can you use the word cathartic? ...because I recognised in myself I can do things without panicking and I can be regarded as a competent person and that’s how I really want to be regarded ... I’ve always thought of myself as incompetent.

When did changes occur?

Of the ten students who indicated change as learners during the course, most identified specific experiences. Only Lam and Rochelle suggested that the changes were predominantly gradual, with Rochelle commenting on developing confidence from passing assignments.

Harriet, Marie and Alex Carole referred to a combination of gradual change and specific experiences. Harriet noted the impact of course design and implementation, particularly the use of online groups so ‘we were very socially connected’, chunking of assignments into small components and getting ‘a few marks fairly quickly’, and lecturer support and encouragement. She felt that ‘getting HDs [High Distinctions] ... [is] a huge thing’ and when she began to receive them ‘the neat idea of having a string of HDs’ was a ‘pivotal moment’ for her. When she was offered the opportunity to study at honours level and her supervisor told her ‘you could be going on to do a PhD and you could get a scholarship’, ‘she really blew the top off my expectations’ because ‘that was just beyond imagining for me’. Although she moved ‘back and forwards between believing that I could do that and believing that I couldn’t’, her supervisor’s comments motivated her and when she won the prize for being ‘the top honours student’ she felt ‘I can do all of those things now’.

For Marie, the gradual development of learner independence was punctuated by overcoming life obstacles, including her illness and her husband moving overseas for employment. Then, in her final year, her

marriage broke down and

... my son dropped out of uni ... [with only] half a semester left of his music degree and he's just kind of doing nothing and my daughter is pretty shattered by the whole thing so there's a lot of grief and loss issues there for her as well as me.

Furthermore, she 'was just thrown in at the deep end' at her final placement with little supervision, and had to 'sink or swim'. Her successful completion resulted in the cathartic experience described earlier.

Alex Carole identified her first placement, the experience of living in Malaysia, failing a unit and overcoming family difficulties as change points:

[My] first placement was so significant – it was everything – the people, the clients, older people and so many different groups. Living in Malaysia for eighteen months as well I became more aware of disadvantage and society ...

Failing her research unit, she recognised her drive to succeed ('it wasn't going to beat me') and she looked for another university to complete an equivalent unit. She did this successfully while overcoming legal problems related to her previous marriage and her father's death.

All other participants (Lillian, Sesh, Shannon, Virginia and Zelin) noted specific times or events, which made them recognise how they had changed. Like Alex Carole, Virginia's experience of overcoming failure which 'really knocked me ... [and] almost made me want to give up' was a significant event, even though this related to a 'silly little assignment'. Other events included her 'fantastic' first placement that made her realise 'this is where I'm supposed to be', the affirmation of the opportunity to complete an honours degree and then overcoming the withdrawal of support by 'the organisation that was going to support my thesis' which required her to 'ditch the whole thing' and begin again. In this experience, the honours coordinator's support, the other students, and a visiting professor's encouraging comments were significant.

Receiving her honours offer was also an important point for Lillian:

... I suppose that was a recognition that I could actually study. I still think deep down I have this feeling that I'm not very bright so it always buffers up against that.

Then in her final year her mother's death 'just really rocked my world', making her realise that she could not take up the offer, resulting in a hard year of study:

I got through it just through sheer determination because I couldn't stop it. I certainly wasn't going to give it [the course] up after I got that close. I just knuckled down and did it.

Sesh, Shannon and Zelin referred to specific points in the course where recognition of how they had changed occurred. Sesh noted the feedback on her first assignment that made her realise its superficiality and the impact of her first placement which she again entered with 'cockiness' but which led to a more serious and motivated approach: 'from the placement I really ... began to find my feet ... about what I liked doing.' As a result she asked her parents to fund her attendance at a conference and was influenced by a person she met there as well as by an Oxford academic who contributed to the social work course. She considered that her two placements had a 'huge' impact on her. Also important was a bullying incident involving another student, which she experienced during the course. This challenged her 'to either quit or stay' and led to increased persistence.

Shannon attributed his recognition of how he had changed as a learner to a discussion with his course peers at the beginning of his third year. He also noted the impact of both placements. In the first, 'I took my learning into practice a little bit more' while the second 'really tied it together'. Zelin, too, noted the importance of both placements in linking theory and practice and also in changing her perception of herself. Also important were first year class discussions where she was encouraged to participate by her peers.

Factors that supported and developed learning during the course

Table 1 summarises the factors which participants stated supported and developed their learning during the course. While all identified the role of family and friends, other factors were directly related to the course

or university, except for the role of the workplace mentioned by Alex-Carole and Shannon and volunteer work identified by Marie.

Table 1: *Factors that supported and developed learning during the course*

Participants	Family /friends	Peers in course	First placement	Second placement	Feedback	Lecturers/ Tutors	Other aspects of course*	Additional factors**
Alex Carole	X	X	X		X			X
Harriet	X	X			X	X		
Lam	X	X			X		X	
Lillian	X				X			
Marie	X			X		X		
Miranda	X			X				
Rochelle	X					X	X	X
Sesh	X	X	X	X	X			X
Shannon	X	X	X	X				X
Virginia	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Zelin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

*Other aspects of course: small classes (Lam and Zelin); reflective aspect of course (Lam); placements in general (Rochelle and Virginia)

**Additional factors: workplace (Alex-Carole and Shannon); language and learning support (Zelin); university resources (Rochelle); volunteer work (Marie); conference attendance (Sesh)

Is success in higher education a transformative experience?

In this section we consider the evidence of perspective transformation provided by the responses summarised above. Where perspective transformation appears to exist we discuss whether it resulted from a gradual experience or a disorienting dilemma and whether rational or extrarational factors were evident. We then compare the role of perspective transformation in influencing participants’ pathways into higher education as previously reported (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos & Crosling, 2010) with its role during the course. Then, in the following section, we suggest some ways that university staff could support the latter.

Comments about changes resulting from their study experience by all participants except Miranda suggest evidence of perspective transformation. Changes in how participants acquired and used knowledge indicate changes in epistemic habits of mind, but for Alex Carole, Harriet, Lillian, Marie and Virginia, changes in their self-perceptions also suggest impact on psychological habits of mind. These participants were also the oldest in the group (in their 40s) perhaps indicating increased impact when learning is undertaken later in life. Changes in epistemic habits of mind appear to be particularly related to rational processes (for example, when they involve class participation and reflection) but those relating to psychological habits of mind (such as Alex Carole's and Virginia's responses to overcoming failure) seem to involve extrarational processes.

Although Lam, Rochelle, Alex Carole, Harriet and Marie referred to gradual change, eight participants (including Alex Carole, Harriet and Marie) referred to specific change points. These events may be seen as disorienting dilemmas. They encompassed personal crises (Lillian and Marie), overcoming failure (Alex Carole and Virginia) and other transformative occurrences, including placement experiences.

In our prior analysis of participants' pathways to higher education (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos & Crosling, 2010), we found evidence of perspective transformation before enrolment in the accounts of seven of the current participants, with Alex Carole, Marie and Sesh influenced by a disorientating dilemma and Harriet, Lillian, Rochelle and Shannon indicating gradual transformation of psychological habits of mind. The evidence of perspective transformation by all but one participant during the course appears to suggest that the experience of study success had a greater impact on perspective transformation than the events that led to enrolment. For those students who experienced changes in psychological as well as epistemic habits of mind, these changes had considerable impact. For example, Harriet stated:

... the ... thing that's been incredibly powerful about this course is that I have found my path in a huge way. The whole course has just been transforming for me, astonishing and transforming ...

Comments such as this, along with others that convey a profound psychological (emotional) component in transformation, provide

support for evidence of its extrarational aspects, though they frequently exist alongside (rational) critical reflection associated with Mezirow's explanation of perspective transformation. Amongst the range of course experiences, those (such as placements) that appeared to have a powerful impact on learners beginning to perceive themselves as social workers, may be more likely to involve critical reflection and discourse. They also recall the irreversible shift in perception associated with the idea of threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006), which is relevant to how students acquire disciplinary knowledge. However, as indicated earlier, a broader conceptualisation of perspective transformation that can encompass the various developments of Mezirow's theory and has its foundations in critical theory, is probably more useful for accommodating the range of transformative elements which may be relevant to the success of students from diverse backgrounds. Nevertheless, the idea of threshold concepts remains useful when the focus is specifically on course-related aspects of success.

While higher education success appeared to involve transformative experiences for most participants, Miranda's responses suggest that perspective transformation is not necessary for success. Using the concept of orientations to learning (Beaty, Gibbs & Morgan, 2005), Miranda's experience indicates that success may result from strong extrinsic motivation that does not involve perspective transformation. Comments such as 'I guess I've been pretty well set in the way that I study and that's what's working for me' and 'I cull out the things I don't need and then wade through them to see what I can take' illustrate a strategic learning approach (Race, 2007) that is not transformative. Nevertheless, Miranda was successful in terms of the way we defined it in this study: she graduated from the course and showed evidence of commitment to and satisfaction with study which suggested that it would contribute to changing her life direction. Reflecting her strategic approach, these changes were to do with 'entitlement' in the workplace as a qualified social worker and the increased confidence that came with that.

Implications for support by university staff

The change points identified by participants other than Miranda, together with the factors which supported and developed learning during the course, highlight several ways that university teaching and support staff can contribute to perspective transformation. For teaching staff, this includes strategies for fostering transformative learning such as those suggested by Cranton (2006) for empowering learners and fostering self-reflection and self-knowledge. Participants' comments point to the importance of group work and practical learning through professional placements. A range of support strategies provided by teaching and support staff may impact positively on epistemic or psychological habits of mind. These include the suggestions in Table 2, which have been compiled from participants' responses.

Table 2: *How teaching and support staff can assist perspective transformation*

Strategies	Examples
Facilitate peer interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement orientation and student group activities, including virtual activities for mature-aged students studying remotely or with limited face-to-face attendance opportunities.• Design learning opportunities to facilitate student interaction (e.g., small groups).
Facilitate practical learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create environments to facilitate learning from real or simulated experiences.• Offer class activities (e.g., role plays) and practical placements in professionally-oriented courses.
Offer feedback and encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide prompt, regular and comprehensive feedback on assignments.• Offer personal support.
Offer flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design and implement flexible admissions and selections processes.• Advise and support students to change study mode and study load when required.• Offer flexible assessment arrangements, sick leave, deferment and intermittence, family-friendly timetabling and recognition of prior learning.

<p>Facilitate student-centred access to information and services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with providing pre-and post-entry course and careers information to all students, including examples of students from non-traditional pathways who succeeded in their studies. • Prepare and disseminate targeted information to families of first generation students, explaining what university study involves. • Bring academic and technological literacy services, financial advice and support and counselling direct to students, providing services based on students' perception of their needs. • Facilitate professional development so that teaching and professional staff can work together to provide a consistent student support approach.
--	--

Although university staff cannot influence all the factors that contribute to perspective transformation, they can assist students to overcome personal and structural barriers to success. The strategies for university staff suggested above are also likely to assist students like Miranda even if they do not result in perspective transformation.

Overall, the participants' experiences and the above implications reinforce the body of literature in adult education that discusses effective adult learning, while pointing to further potential for exploration in relation to the role of perspective transformation. In learning contexts, the findings are consistent with the emphasis on the importance of dialogue and the principles and practices that Vella (2002) suggests to begin, maintain and nurture dialogue. More broadly, the experiences of the older participants relate strongly to the key assumptions about adult learning developed by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s, including the assumptions that an adult's self-concept develops from dependence to self-direction; that experience becomes an increasingly useful resource for learning; that adult students' readiness to learn is closely associated with moving from one developmental stage to the next; and that adult students have a life-centred orientation to learning which focuses on immediacy of application (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2011). Knowles' model includes the role of motivation, with the assumption that the most potent motivators are internal pressures such as increased job satisfaction or self-esteem, compared to external motivators such as

better jobs, promotions or higher salaries. This parallels the concept of orientations to learning (Beatty, Gibbs & Morgan, 2005), which could be explored further in the context of perspective transformation.

The impact of study on these students, and Virginia's use of the word 'empowerment' to describe its effect on her, highlight the role of critical theory in informing the design of adult learning, both in its social emancipatory aspects, as well as the more personal elements reflected in Mezirow's theory. Recent developments in awareness of the social context of learning have further emphasised the importance of recognising the 'power dynamics' involved in learning, as Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007:430-431) note when they comment on the importance of knowing 'the backgrounds and experiences of our learners not only as individual learners, but also as members of social and culturally constructed groups such as women and men; poor, middle-class and rich, black, white and brown.' These researchers highlight the importance of this issue to teaching, learning, planning and administration, which has implications for all staff in the ways they interact with the adult students that they encounter.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the extent to which success in higher education was a transformative experience for a group of students from diverse backgrounds. Conclusions are based on students' stories during the final phase of a longitudinal research project, which followed their progress from enrolment to graduation. They are informed by aspects of Mezirow's theory (including contributions from others), and some related concepts from higher education.

Data from the first project stage (Benson, Hewitt, Heagney, Devos & Crosling, 2010) identified perspective transformation in influencing participants' pathways to higher education. Analysis of participants' reflections at course completion indicated that success was a transformative experience for all but one participant, and that perspective transformation affected more participants during the course than before it. Comments from some participants indicated changes in epistemic habits of mind, but changes in the self-perceptions of the older students also suggest the impact of the study experience on psychological habits of mind. However, the experience of the

student who succeeded in the course but did not show evidence of perspective transformation indicates that success can occur without a transformative experience. Despite this, staff strategies that support perspective transformation may also assist these students and perhaps even impact on higher levels of achievement. Further investigation of factors affecting perspective transformation among other groups of students from diverse backgrounds could explore this issue further.

These findings may assist others involved with students from diverse backgrounds. They include implications for aspects of course design that encourage interaction and critical discourse among students. They also recognise the importance of a life-centred orientation in learning and the need for immediacy of application, assisting with the development of epistemic habits of mind. Staff can also consider strategies to support changes in psychological habits of mind, helping students to overcome personal and structural barriers to their participation in higher education.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Australian Department of Education, Science and Technology's Higher Education Equity Support Program for funding this project and for the research support provided by Cathi Flynn and Yolande McNicoll. We thank Kate Kirk from Manchester Metropolitan University for the research design on which the project is based and we especially thank Alex Carole, Harriet, Lam, Lillian, Marie, Miranda, Rochelle, Sesh, Shannon, Virginia and Zelin for sharing their stories with us.

References

- Australian Government (2009) *Transforming Australia's higher education system*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Beaty, L., Gibbs, G. & Morgan, A. (2005) 'Learning orientations and study contracts' in, Marton, F., Hounsell, D., & Entwistle, N. (eds.) *The experience of learning: Implications for teaching and studying in higher education*, 3rd (Internet) edition, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, 72-86, <http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/EoL.html>
- Benson, R., Hewitt, L., Heagney, M., Devos, A., & Crosling, G. (2010). 'Diverse pathways into higher education: Using students' stories to identify

- transformative experiences' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50:1, 26-53.
- Biggs, J. (1987) *Student approaches to learning and studying*, Melbourne: ACER.
- Bradley, D. (Chair) (2008) *Review of Australian higher education: Final Report*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101.
- Brookfield, S. (2003) 'Putting the critical back into critical pedagogy' in *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1:2, 141-149.
- Brookfield, S. (2005) *The power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Brooks, A. & Clark, C. (2001) 'Narrative dimensions of transformative learning' in, Smith, R.O. et al. (eds.) *Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Adult Education Research Conference*, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Clandinin, D.J. & Rosiek, J. (2007) 'Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions' in, Clandinin, D.J. (ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 35-75.
- Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (1990) 'Stories of experience and narrative inquiry' in *Educational Researcher*, 19: 5, 2-14.
- Corbett, J. (1998) "'Voice" in emancipatory research: Imaginative listening' in, Clough P. & Barton L. (eds.) *Articulating with difficulty: Research voices in inclusive education*, London: Sage, 54-63.
- Cranton, P. (2006) *Understanding and promoting transformative learning*, 2nd edition, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dirkx, J.M. (2001). 'The power of feelings: Emotion, imagination and the construction of meaning in adult learning' in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 63-72.
- Entwistle, N. (2005) 'Contrasting perspectives on learning' in, Marton, F. Hounsell, D. & Entwistle, N. (eds.) *The experience of learning: implications for teaching and studying in higher education*, 3rd (Internet) edition, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, 3-22, <http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/EoL.html>
- Habermas, J. (1971) *Knowledge and human interests*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Kirk, K. (2006) 'Diversity and Achievement: How non-traditional students succeed in Higher Education' in *Learning & Teaching in Action*, 5: 1, 10-13.
- Knowles, M., Holton, E.F. & Swanson, R.A. (2011) *The adult learner*, 7th edition, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kutsar, D. & Kärner, A. (2010) 'Exploration of societal transitions in Estonia from the threshold concepts perspective of teaching and learning' in, Meyer, J.H.F., Land, R. & Baillie, C. (eds.) *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense, 383-397.

- Land, R., Meyer, J.H.F. & Smith, J. (eds.) (2008) *Threshold concepts within the discipline*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.
- Merriam, S. (2004) 'The role of cognitive development in Mezirow's transformative learning theory' in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55: 1, 60-68.
- Merriam, S.B., Caffarella, R.S., & Baumgartner, L.M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*, 3rd edition, Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, J.H.F. & Land, R. (2006) *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Meyer, J.H.F., Land, R., & Baillie, C. (eds.) (2010). *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.
- Mezirow, J. (1978) 'Perspective transformation' in *Adult Education*, 28: 2, 100-109.
- Mezirow, J. (1981) 'A critical theory of adult learning and education' in *Adult Education*, 32: 1, 3-24.
- Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000) 'Learning to think like an adult' in, Mezirow, J. & Associates (eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 3-33.
- Mezirow, J. (2003) 'Transformative learning as discourse' in *Journal of Transformative Education*, 1: 1, 58-63.
- Pinnegar, S. & Danes, J.G. (2007) 'Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative' in, Clandinin D.J. (ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 3-34.
- Race, P. (2007) *The lecturer's toolkit: A practical guide to assessment, learning and teaching*, 3rd edition, Abingdon: Routledge
- Taylor, E.W. (1997) 'Building upon the theoretical debate: A critical review of the empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative learning theory in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48: 1, 34-59.
- Tedder, M. (2007) 'Making a choice? Insights from using a life history approach to researching access students' in *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 9: 2, 26-35.
- Trow, M. (2000) *From mass higher education to universal access: The American advantage*, Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education.
- Vella, J. K. (2002) *Learning to listen, learning to teach: The power of dialogue in educating adults*, revised edition, Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

About the Authors

Robyn Benson is an Adjunct Senior Lecturer (Educational Design) in the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences at Monash University, Australia, with a background in adult education, distance education and e-learning. Her research focuses on the improvement of students' learning experiences, with reference to implications for educational design and academic professional development.

robyn.benson@monash.edu

Margaret Heagney is a student equity consultant and Adjunct Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. Her current research interests are access and retention of undergraduate and postgraduate students from diverse backgrounds, equitable selection systems and the impact of rising tuition costs on the access and participation of students in under-represented groups.

margaret.heagney@monash.edu

Lesley Hewitt is a former social work lecturer at Monash University whose teaching and research interests include interpersonal violence and life course development. Lesley is currently researching the history of sexual assault services in Victoria and working in the area of recreation and disability.

lesley.hewitt55@gmail.com

Glenda Crosling is Professor and Dean of Quality at Sunway University in Malaysia, and Adjunct Associate Professor in the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), Monash University, Australia. Currently, Glenda's research interests are transnational higher education, innovation and creative thinking.

glenda.crosling@monash.edu

Anita Devos is an Adjunct Research Fellow, and former Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University. Anita's research focuses on social equity issues in post secondary education, and in employment. She now works as a consultant to organisations on staff and student diversity issues.

anita.devos@monash.edu

How a personal development program enhances social connection and mobilises women in the community

Nandila Spry
Hillsong CityCare, and Southern Cross University

Teresa Marchant
Griffith University

Gender equity and the empowerment of women is a significant international issue. Successful adult education programs are vital to enhance women's situation. Lessons learned from a personal development program provided for thousands of women are analysed. The program is conducted by community service providers in Australia and internationally, with an Australian evaluation reported here. The three phase evaluation included 500 participants, with pre- and post-tests for a sample of 161, structured phone interviews with 53 and third-party observations from six organisations. The value includes multiple measurements over time, in a thorough evaluation with mixed methods, along with policy and practice implications. Key adult learning issues canvassed include the role of empowerment, adult education and transformative learning. Key findings included that women's self-esteem, emotional intelligence, purpose and mobilisation increased, with the latter evident in vocational outcomes and social connection. Some women expressed interest in facilitating the program

for other groups. As one facilitator observed ‘the program really empowers women to tap into their own gifts and talents’. Lessons learned encompassed improvements to the program including sustainable social networks, since for these women purpose in life and mobilisation were intertwined with social connection and helping other women.

Keywords: *community, empowerment, evaluation, personal development, self-esteem, women.*

Introduction

Gender equity and empowering women are significant international issues. The personal development program analysed here in Australia has international impact and contributes to these issues. The following is organised to touch on women’s empowerment, adult education and program topics of worth, strength and purpose with expected outcomes in mobilisation. The comprehensive mixed method, multi-phase evaluation is explained next. Adult learning’s impact on mobilising women is explored, followed by implications for policy and practice and limitations and future research.

Women’s personal development in an international context

Personal development involves a dynamic process where individuals seek purpose (Wuff, 1996). An underpinning philosophy is the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights: every individual has ‘the right to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (UN, 1948:24). In many parts of the world women are vulnerable (UN, 2004). The UN (2005) Millennium Development Project Goal 3 offers some solutions by promoting empowerment. Employment and business start-up programs empower women and alleviate poverty in developing nations (Kabeer, 2005). In contrast, Australia is relatively wealthy and egalitarian (Banks, 2007), taking in a number of immigrants to form a multicultural society. However, Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged as are various ethnic minorities. Despite Australia’s extensive national welfare, poverty, domestic violence and homelessness

still exist. Australia has vulnerable groups of women, represented in this research. Other more socially advantaged women are also represented but this advantage does not necessarily preclude them from suffering psychosocial issues or benefitting from personal development. Further, even in high income countries such as Australia women suffer gender inequality (Gerecke, 2013).

Contested notions of empowerment

Empowerment is a process of helping individuals to identify as active agents on behalf of themselves and others (Beteta, 2006). When empowerment for women is addressed, greater meanings and possibilities ensue (Porter, 2013). Developing and mobilising women is a legitimate exercise (Pollack, 2000). Groups can be mobilised, reducing women's isolation by enabling them to develop mutual support. A sense of community confirms women's experience, develops a women-based value system and challenges inequality (Willie, Ridini & Willard, 2008).

However, empowerment is contested in the literature (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010; Whiteside, Tsey & Earles, 2011). Empowerment is theorised to consist of three components: intrapersonal, interpersonal and taking action (Bay-Cheng, 2012). An integrated conceptual framework includes individual and collective empowerment and a path towards empowerment which includes, but is not limited to, mobilising (Hyung Hur, 2006). Empowerment is subject to debate in the feminist literature focussing on whether personal (subjective) empowerment is true empowerment, as it is not political and lacks critical social action (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Peterson & Lamb, 2012). This focus on subjective empowerment contrasts with earlier notions of social change (Rappaport, 1987). Empowerment can be achieved by participation in programs such as the one evaluated here. However participation does not guarantee empowerment. Creating a personal feeling of subjective empowerment might not translate to increased power over unequal distribution of resources (Riger 1993). This lack of change in the essential power structures of society may well explain feminists' frustration with the current scenario where women may be more sexualized and less liberated than ever, even though it is believed by some that the work of liberation and empowerment is done (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). This program does not have overt political or feminist

aims but aligns with the tradition of adult education in Australia in that it intends to achieve what Willis (1991: 74) identified as 'increased self-esteem, empowerment, optimism and hope. It embraces a sense of confidence ... and a desire to collaborate for human betterment'. These values underpin the program.

Riger (1993) argued that empowerment came to be viewed as agency, mastery and control rather than relational connectedness: yet connection is important to empowerment. Still, agency, mastery and control may be useful skills and attitudes in today's world and the program aims to assist women to develop them through decision making, problem solving and goal setting. A parallel issue is that the term has been co-opted by policy-makers, so that empowerment is managed from on high, losing some of its political, feminist edge (Batliwala, 1994; Kabear, 1999). Cornwall and Anyidoho (2010:145) offer reasons why this co-option might be the case: 'its softened edges make "women's empowerment" eminently more palatable to a broad-based development constituency than the harder talk of "gender equality"'.

Another issue is measurement. There are no agreed measures of empowerment, partly because it is used in many disciplines at different levels of analysis, with varying intent (Narayan, 2005). By definition, it depends on the context (Zimmerman, 1995). Women's lives are complex, cutting across many different domains and roles (Davies, 1996), where empowerment has different meanings in different contexts. Therefore for this research, empowerment for women may mean different things at varying times in a range of situations and roles. For example, empowerment for women with degree qualifications in full time work would differ from migrant women in ethnic communities or women in domestic violence refuges or detention centres.

Personal development and adult education in Australia

Australia has a long history of adult education for women. Some examples are: goal setting for isolated women (Terry, 1991); communication and assertiveness programs for migrant women (Hughes, 1996); literacy programs for Indigenous Australians such as young mothers or those in correctional facilities (Kildae & Yow Yeh, 2000); literacy and language for Sudanese women (Turner & Tilbury

Fozdar, 2010); refugee mothers (Riggs et al., 2012); and the Clemente Course to empower poor and marginalised women with humanities education (Gervasoni, Smith & Howard, 2013).

Adult learning concepts applied to the program

The program reflects the original values of adult education in achieving social change rather than the instrumental business aims of human resource development that have captured the field in more recent history (Brown, 2010). Transformative learning is a useful concept that engages with notions of empowerment. In transformative learning, individuals change their frames of reference through critically reflecting on the assumptions behind their beliefs, habits of mind and viewpoints (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow's ideas were first developed in the 1970s when he worked with women returning to study or work. His ideas have been well supported (Kitchenham, 2008). Taking these ideas further, feminist educators go beyond consciousness raising at the individual level to what Freire (1972 in Hughes, 1996:103) calls 'conscientisation', which means challenging women to connect what they learn about themselves to the wider context of power structures, with the ultimate aim of achieving social change. However, the program does not have this explicit purpose.

The program embodies some empowerment ideals even if informed by other literature besides feminist pedagogy. The process and content considers the beliefs, values, gender and learned ways of behaving that motivate the group, based on an effective model formulated by Irvin Yalom (Ormont, 1972). This process accords with a cardinal principle of adult learning in eliciting and respecting participants' responses (Brookfield, 1998). The program was designed by professionals and is delivered by a range of facilitators. In this regard it matches Chan's (2009) description of differences in adult education compared to school education where teachers both design and deliver programs. Facilitators have first completed the program as participants and some have formal qualifications in group work. They are carefully selected and trained to deliver the program according to the set curriculum in a formal guide, to maintain the integrity of the program and its aims. However, the program is provided in different situations and facilitators are conscious of where participants are placed. For example, the issues and concerns

raised by women from refugee detention or domestic violence refuges are very different from those addressed by young, educated women in other community contexts.

Practical details of how the program is provided

The program is community based, voluntary and originated in Sydney. Over 2,000 church, community and cultural groups implement the girl's and women's versions in 35 countries, translated into seven languages. The girl's version commenced in 1997 and informed the women's version which was created in 2007, with an estimated 3,000 participants since. The program is free of charge, voluntary and is provided in 90 minute workshops, once a week over seven to eight weeks. The workshops are based on the core topics of worth, strength and purpose and use experiential activities to deliver a message of value. Adult learners have a life centred orientation (Knowles, Holton & Swanston, 2011). This is utilised in the program in that activities are focussed on practical concerns of women. Adult learners are also self-directed (Knowles et al., 2011) although this is less evident in the program in that it has a structured curriculum with set activities to convey the main message. It may well be more didactic than principles of adult learning would recommend.

The program is provided through ice breakers, creative exercises, interactive games, deportment activities, discussions and role plays, with a view to building personal skills, embracing challenging situations rather than avoiding them, persevering through challenges rather than giving up, living an active and engaged life; confidently putting forward personal ideas, thoughts and opinions and exploring self beliefs. Handouts for each session are purposeful, illustrated and depict significant concepts and principles. For example, in a session about emotions, including anger, a small visual prompt illustrates the traffic light concept with the words stop, think and choose in red, orange and green. An aesthetically pleasing environment is created to reinforce the message of value. Refreshments create a friendly, non-threatening social setting.

Program content and theoretical underpinnings

In terms of content, the three foundational topics of worth, strength

and purpose are aligned with interventions to develop healthy self-evaluation by encouraging individuals to value and appreciate themselves (Australian Psychological Society, 2008), with strengths-based learning (Staron, Jasinski & Weatherley, 2006). Hughes (1996) noted the challenge of avoiding a deficit approach to women who choose to engage in personal development which, by virtue of the program title, may imply that women need improving or fixing, even though this is anathema to feminist pedagogy. The program is advertised as a personal development community program with an inspirational, practical and experiential approach to learning, emphasising each women's worth.

In evaluating the program, it was necessary to equate the three topics of worth, strength and purpose with concepts and scales in the literature (Galanou & Priporas, 2009). The underpinning concepts were self-esteem, emotional intelligence and purpose-in-life. A fourth concept of mobilisation was added for this research as a potential outcome. Individuals make fundamental evaluations about their worth and capabilities, including self-esteem, which refers to Maslow's (1959) understanding of value. Women with low self-esteem allow too much of themselves to be negotiable, struggle to care for themselves and experience life as stressful (Rogers, 1994). Strength relates to emotional intelligence or individuals' knowledge of their emotions (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1995). Purpose is defined as 'a stable and generalisable intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self' (Bronk et al., 2009: 503). All of self-esteem, emotional intelligence and purpose contribute to positive life outcomes (Burrow, Sumner & Ong, 2013; Liu, Wang & Lu, 2013; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004; Orth, Robins & Widaman, 2012). A fourth concept, in the research rather than the program, was mobilisation. Similar to thriving, it is a positive state marked by going forward (Quinn, Spreitzer & Brown, 2000). It relates to optimism in taking an active stance in the world rather than being a passive recipient (Seligman, 1995). The goals and strategies of mobilisation fall under the umbrella of empowerment.

Evaluation

Education professionals need to be proactive in evidence-based and

research-informed approaches to practice (Hamlin, 2007). This research used Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) four-level evaluation: reaction, learning, behaviour and results. Evaluation beyond reaction is time consuming and labour intensive, but reliable evaluation is essential (Grohmann & Kauffeld, 2013). For community programs, evaluation may be required by funding bodies but obstacles exist to producing effective reports (Treiber et al., 2013). The questions addressed in the research were thus:

1. Who participates and how do they react?
2. What is the impact on learning in terms of self-esteem, purpose and emotional intelligence?
3. What are the implications for mobilisation, including beyond the program?
4. What lessons can be learned for implementing and evaluating programs such as this?

Method

Critical realism underpinned this research, which utilises verifiable statistical information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, it is also informed by a feminist standpoint, putting women at the centre. From this perspective, meaning is constructed from the results (Harding, 1991). The method was mixed with a large quantitative core component and a small supplementary qualitative component (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). There were three data collection phases: a pre- and post-test, structured phone interviews and written third-party observations from facilitating organisations. The pre- and post-test were entirely quantitative, interviews were highly structured and predominantly quantitative and third party observations were qualitative. Participants were recruited through community service providers and with flyers in the local area, all in Sydney. Ethics approval was obtained from the relevant research institution.

Measures

The pre- and post-test measured self-esteem, emotional intelligence, purpose and mobilisation. The Rosenberg (1989) Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) measured worth. The Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)

measured appraisal, expression, regulation and utilisation of emotion (Schutte et al., 1998). Ten EIS items were chosen to match the strength concept. The psychological wellbeing inventory includes a purpose-in-life subscale (Ryff & Singer, 1998) of ten items. A new scale was created for mobilisation with nine items. A five-point Likert scale was used for all measures. Both pre- and post-test collected data about vocational situation. The pre-test included a question about psychosocial issues. The post-test collected immediate post-program reactions. Phone interviews were conducted after three to six months, with a structured schedule. Responses were organised around the program concepts. Third-party written observations were gathered from six organisations.

The total number of women starting the program was 500. Of these, 61.0 per cent completed the pre-test. Within this a matched sample of 161 completed the post-test (52.8 per cent). Reliability was established with Cronbach's alpha (Sekaran, 2003), with the acceptable level being 0.7 (Manning & Munro, 2007). Cronbach's alpha for self-esteem ($r=0.86$), purpose ($r=0.81$) and mobilisation ($r=0.85$) represented good reliability. For emotional intelligence reliability was lower ($r=0.69$), but possibly acceptable (Birks, McKendree & Watt, 2009).

Results

In terms of who participated, the largest group were from the church (60.2 per cent), with the rest from different community groups such as a domestic violence refuge, a refugee detention center and an Arabic community group (Table 1).

Table 1: *Groups (n=161)*

Source	n	%
Church	97	60.25
Domestic violence refuge	20	12.42
Urban care	11	6.83
Indian group	10	6.21
Chinese group	10	6.21
Arabic group	7	4.35
Refugee detention centre	6	3.73

For age, the highest numbers were in their twenties (43.4 per cent), followed by 31 to 40 years (28.5 per cent). For marital status, 75.2 per cent were not with a partner. Around half had university degrees (51.6 per cent). According to the question about previous history of psychosocial issues, 28.0 per cent recorded psychosocial issues, including sexual abuse (5.0 per cent), depression (4.3 per cent), domestic violence (3.7 per cent), substance abuse (3.1 per cent), other mental illness (2.5 per cent) and other (9.3 per cent). Thus a picture emerged of a typical participant from a church group, 20 to 30 years old, single, with a university degree. Some may have experienced previous psychosocial issues but they would still be considered advantaged in terms of qualifications and social connection. On the other hand, other cohorts had relatively low qualifications and came from diverse groups including English not being the first language and in detention. To test these differences, participants from non-church groups were combined into one and compared with the church group. A chi-square test showed differences between the groups on education ($\chi^2 = 12.53, df = 4, p < 0.014$), with more university qualifications in the church group and more trade and technical qualifications in the non-church group. A one-way analysis of variance found that the church group was higher on purpose ($F(1,303) = 19.25, p < 0.000$) and mobilisation ($F(1,303) = 23.95, p < 0.000$).

The next question was participants’ reactions. Mean scores ranged from 3.51 for time spent on each topic to 4.09 for facilitators. Given that all scores were above the midpoint, program delivery was deemed effective. The second research question was learning, where differences in self-esteem, purpose, emotional intelligence and mobilisation for the matched sample were measured (Table 2).

Table 2: Self-esteem (SE), emotional intelligence (EI), purpose and mobilisation for pre- and post-test (n = 161)

	SE 1	SE 2	EI 1	EI 2	Purpose 1	Purpose 2	Mobilisation 1	Mobilisation 2
Mean	35.04	39.40	34.55	37.07	28.35	31.41	31.22	33.56
SD	6.51	5.29	5.15	5.36	5.55	4.66	5.69	5.83
Median	35.00	39.40	35.00	38.00	28.35	31.41	32.00	33.55
Skew	-0.251	-0.291	-0.457	-0.638	-0.154	-0.426	-0.200	-0.383

% change		12.60		8.60		10.80		4.80
----------	--	-------	--	------	--	-------	--	------

All of self-esteem, purpose, emotional intelligence and mobilisation improved with the largest gains being in self-esteem and purpose. The Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to test these differences, due to skew and kurtosis (Manning & Munro, 2007). Self-esteem (median = 39.40, $z = -8.34$, $p < 0.000$), emotional intelligence (median = 38, $z = -5.44$, $p < 0.000$), purpose (median = 31.41, $z = -6.72$, $p < 0.000$) and mobilisation (median = 33.55, $z = -5.72$, $p < 0.000$) all significantly increased.

Mobilisation was apparent in other ways. There was task-focused mobilisation in changes to vocational situation such as taking up further study or gaining employment. The post-test showed 32.0 per cent in training or studying which was 5.9 per cent higher. Unemployed or seeking work decreased (down to 3.9 per cent from 6.8 per cent). The interviews also provided evidence for task-focussed mobilisation where 21 of 53 (39.6 per cent) reported moving into study or work. Of note was that six (11.3 per cent) started their own business. Interviews also featured social connection, with 15 (28.3 per cent) mentioning a desire to help other women, sharing the message of value with others and taking the program into other groups. Community integration and avenues for social interaction were noted, for example:

It confirmed and encouraged my desire to help other women, I would love to take the program to the Arabic community, I want to share the message with other women because it has impacted me so much.

I have an awareness of possibilities and have established a relationship with other women who are vulnerable in life.

In terms of up-skilling, 47 interviewees (88.7 per cent) recognised that new skills were learnt, including, for example:

I learnt patience and how to react to others; seeing the value in others regardless of circumstance or appearance; implementing healthy boundaries; self-awareness; confront difficult situation instead of ignoring it.

Regarding observations from family or peers, 36 (67.9 per cent) reported others noticing changes. Interview comments also revealed (as a percentage of 73 comments): agency for self-initiated change (30.1 per cent), worth and value (28.8 per cent), confidence (17.8 per cent), self-awareness (15.1 per cent) and goal setting and purpose (8.2 per cent). Third-party observations supported these findings with participants acquiring a variety of skills in helping with anger issues, self-care and creating a happier family environment. For example one facilitator observed:

Some powerful testimonies came out of the groups with women discovering a new found sense of hope and purpose for their lives and the lives of their families.

Another facilitator commented on healing:

I feel greatly blessed to be equipped to facilitate such a powerful message of hope, empowerment and long term healing to some of the most vulnerable women in our society.

There was a 'ripple effect' for participants and their relationships with others. Participants who originally felt disempowered went on to undertake further studies or to seek employment. For example another facilitator comment was:

... the program really empowers women to tap into their own gifts and talents. The program equips and skills women to tackle self-doubt through offering them strategies to address and identify past behaviours and unhealthy beliefs that hinder them from reaching their goals and dreams for the future.

Discussion

The program was effective, with women gaining self-esteem, emotional intelligence and purpose as contributors to mobilisation. Different groups benefited including the educated and purposive along with the vulnerable including domestic violence, minority ethnic groups and those in detention. There was high satisfaction with delivery, content and facilitators. The social aspects of mobilisation were evident, including the intent to be trained as facilitators and continuing to

meet in groups. There was improvement in task mobilisation towards training, employment and business start-ups.

Implications for women's development

The research is significant in linking academic work with policy and practice (Treiber et al., 2013) including for government and community service organisations locally and internationally, as the program is provided in numerous countries. Adult education in personal development can be subject to evidence-based evaluation. This contributes useful knowledge for governments who rely on community groups to deliver services (Sheppard, Fitzgerald & Gonski, 2001).

Community service providers assisting the unemployed to find work could incorporate education such as this to prepare women for vocational training and employment, if low self-esteem, lack of purpose and limited social connection inhibit them. Rainey (2006) noted the need for a strong relational focus in assisting the unemployed. Social connection might alleviate depression, loneliness and lack of peer support (Willie et al., 2008). For this program, there are opportunities to partner with community service providers in vulnerable communities with chronic social issues, such as Indigenous Australians in remote and regional towns desperate for rehabilitation.

Taking into account broader social ecology (Weinstein & Shuck, 2011), women's development does not occur in isolation from other women or context. Women indicating a desire to help others is a sign of their capacity (Varkey, Qureshi & Lesnick, 2010). This is evidence of the relational aspects of women's empowerment (Pollack, 2000) and supports building a healthy community for an active citizen base (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006; Varkey et al., 2010). This women's program and the girl's version operate internationally and therefore may contribute to international goals for female empowerment (UN, 2005).

In terms of program topics and theoretical underpinnings, worth seemed to be a good fit with self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989). Strength needs to be related more closely to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) in terms of identifying and managing individual's and others' emotions. Purpose was a close fit with purpose-in-life (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Mobilisation was conceptualised and observed in both 'soft'

social connection and 'hard' utilitarian modes. Justifying investment in women's development programs to neo-liberal governments may need more emphasis on hard mobilisation (McRobbie, 2011) or in this case, vocational outcomes.

Implications for evidence-based practice in adult learning evaluation

Turning next to implications for evaluation, the research confirmed Collins' (2011) observation about the messy reality of practice in that not every woman persisted with the program, around one in four experienced psychosocial issues and some were in detention and therefore constrained by circumstances that limited mobilisation. As Pollack (2000) noted, creating social connection is time consuming. The present research concurs with Treiber et al. (2013) that conducting effective evaluation is difficult. It required substantial resources, women were not obliged to continue and afterwards were not available for follow up in the same way as participants in workplace learning (Benseman, 2013) or formal certificate programs (Rainey, 2006). It is also challenging to evaluate tangible, longer term results. As Hughes (1996) notes, it is difficult to measure wider community impact. Learning was evident in improved self-esteem and so on. Short term behaviour changes were noted but the results potentially include wider-reaching measures such as less demand on community services, public health and welfare.

Implications for adult learning

Further development of the program could focus on learning transfer. The transfer factors most likely to be viable for community programs are climate, support and follow up (Grossman and Salas, 2011). In terms of support, the finding that some women were self organising into groups after the program is particularly salient to sustained outcomes. There is a double positive impact of social connection in its own right and to reinforce transfer (Van den Bossche, Segers & Jansen, 2010). Further, social connection captures the potential for social change inherent in notions of empowerment (Hyung Hur, 2006) and adult learning (Brown, 2010).

Rigorous evaluation of the type utilised here could be automatically built into programs in order that evaluation beyond the 'happy sheet'

reaction becomes routine. Pre- and post-testing should be included in every program. Regarding longer-term follow up, groups enabling social connection beyond the workshops could be used to gather data about subsequent changes in women's lives. Social networking sites might prove useful here.

Limitations and further research

As with all research there are opportunities for improvement and further investigation. An experimental design with random assignment to intervention and control groups (Neuman, 2011) or Solomon four group design (Clark & Shadish, 2008) could be utilised. The method relied on self-reports, although triangulation was partially achieved with third-party observations and asking whether participants' significant others had noticed changes. Ideally, 360 degree feedback would be deployed (Brown, McCracken & Hillier, 2013). In-depth, face-to-face interviews would add richness with detailed stories of women's personal learning journeys. One voice that could be heard more in this research is the facilitators', particularly in view of Brookfield's (1995) ideas about critically reflective teachers. That is, that facilitators should review their practice and critically consider the influence of assumptions from their history as learners, as well as through the eyes of participants, colleagues and the literature.

Being conducted in one city means that results may not generalise elsewhere. One of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia is Indigenous Australian women (Banks, 2007). They were not specifically investigated in this research but programs such as this may prove beneficial, with appropriate cultural adaptations (Whiteside et al., 2011).

Conclusion

The program was well received. Increases in all of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, purpose and mobilisation were evident. Women connecting socially in a purposeful group environment, steered by a carefully selected and trained facilitator, experienced positive change. Greater investment in community networks that support social connection and mobilisation seem indicated. Implications and contributions include the complexity of conducting and evaluating live community education and a thorough evaluation using mixed methods.

Policy and practice implications for governments and community service providers locally and internationally include mobilising women to achieve training, employment, better family relationships and other positive outcomes. Program improvements include enhanced focus on emotional intelligence, along with facilitating learning transfer through self-organising groups. More attention might be given to results from a utilitarian perspective for funding and accreditation purposes, but overall, evidence from this research indicates that adult education plays a role in mobilising women for social connection and purposive outcomes that may serve to address the global issue of empowering women.

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to acknowledge the main sponsor of the ShineWOMEN program, Hillsong CityCare for taking part in this research, as well as the volunteer facilitators including J. Chavarie, L. Shields, A. Ayunungthyas and C. Smith. There were also six organisations where this research was carried out that provided generous access to their clients who participated in this Program. We would particularly like to thank all the women who participated in ShineWOMEN.

References

- Australian Psychological Society (2008) *Helping girls develop a positive self image*, viewed 29 Jan 2012, <<http://www.psychology.org.au>>.
- Banks, G. (2007) *Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in Australia*, Address to the Second OECD World Forum Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies, Istanbul Turkey June, viewed 6 September 2013, <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/64584/cs20070629.pdf>.
- Batliwala, S. (1994) 'The meaning of women's empowerment: New concepts from action', in Sen, G. (ed.), *Population policies reconsidered*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bay Cheng, L. (2012) 'Recovering empowerment: De-personalizing and re-politicizing adolescent female sexuality' in *Sex Roles*, 66: 11-12, 713-17.
- Benseman, J. (2013) 'Recruiting and retaining learners in workplace literacy programs in New Zealand' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 53: 1, 7-25.
- Beteta, H. C. (2006) 'What is missing in measures of women's empowerment?' in *Journal of Human Development*, 7: 2, 221-41.

- Birks, Y., McKendree, J. & Watt, I. (2009) 'Emotional intelligence and perceived stress in healthcare students: A multi-institutional, multi-professional survey' in *BMC Medical Education*, viewed 6 June 2010, <<http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6920/9/61>>.
- Bronk, K. C., Hill, P. L., Lapsley, D. K., Talib, T. L. & Finch, H. (2009) 'Purpose, hope and life satisfaction in three age groups' in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4: 6, 500–10.
- Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*, San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (1998) 'Critically reflective practice' in *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 18: 4, 197–205.
- Brown, T. (2010) 'Teaching adult education history in a time of uncertainty and hope' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50: 3, 497-517.
- Brown, T. C., McCracken, M. & Hillier, T. (2013) 'Using evidence-based practices to enhance transfer of training: assessing the effectiveness of goal setting and behavioural observation scales' in *Human Resource Development International*, 16: 4, 368-89.
- Burrow, A. L., Sumner, R. & Ong, A. D. (2013) 'Perceived change in life satisfaction and daily negative affect: The moderating role of purpose in life' in *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14: 4, 1-14.
- Chan, B. T. (2009) 'Conceptualising adult and continuing education practice: Towards a framework for research' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 49: 1, 9-33.
- Clark, M. H. & Shadish, W. R. (2008) 'Solomon four-group design' in, P. J. Lavrakas (ed.), *Encyclopedia of survey research methods*, London: Sage.
- Collins, J. (2011) 'Strategy of career interventions for battered women' in *Human Resource Development Review*, 10: 3, 246-63.
- Cooper, R. K. & Sawaf, A. (1997) *Executive EQ*, New York: Putnam.
- Cornwall, A. & Anyidoho, N. A. (2010) 'Introduction: Women's empowerment: Contentions and contestations' in *Development*, 53: 2, 144-49.
- Davies, K. (1996) 'Capturing women's lives: A discussion of time and methodological issues' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19: 6, 579-88.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4th edn, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Foster-Fishman, P., Fitzgerald, K., Brandell, C., Nowell, B., Chavis, D. & Van Egeren, L. (2006) 'Mobilising residents for actions: The role of small wins and strategic supports' in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 38: 3-4, 143-52.
- Galanou, E. & Priporas, C. V. (2009) 'A model for evaluating the effectiveness of middle managers' training courses: Evidence from a major banking organization in Greece' in *International Journal of Training and*

Development, 13: 4, 221–46.

- Gerecke, M. (2013) *A policy mix for gender equality? Lessons from high-income countries*, Geneva: International Labour Organization, viewed 13 Jan 2014, < <http://www.ilo.org> >.
- Gervasoni, A., Smith, J. & Howard, P. (2013) 'Humanities education as a pathway for women in regional and rural Australia: Clemente Ballarat' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 53: 2, 253-79.
- Goleman, D. (1995) *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, 10th edn, New York: Random House.
- Grohmann, A. & Kauffeld, S. (2013) 'Evaluating training programs: Development and correlates of the Questionnaire for Professional Training Evaluation' in *International Journal of Training and Development*, 17: 2, 135–55.
- Grossman, R. & Salas, E. (2011) 'The transfer of training: What really matters' in *International Journal of Training and Development*, 15: 2, 103–20.
- Hamlin, R. (2007) 'An evidence-based perspective on HRD' in *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 9: 1, 42-4.
- Harding, S. G. (1991) *Whose science? Whose knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hughes, K. P. (1996) 'Education for liberation? Two Australian contexts' in, S. Walters & M. Linzi (eds.) *Gender in popular education. Methods for empowerment*, University of the Western Cape, viewed 11 Jan 2014, <<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED398449> 102-117>.
- Hyung Hur, M. (2006) 'Empowerment in terms of theoretical perspectives: Exploring a typology of the process and components across disciplines' in *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34: 5, 523-40.
- Kabeer, N. (1999) 'Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment' in *Development and Change*, 30: 3, 435-64.
- Kabeer, N. (2005) 'Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal 1' in *Gender and Development*, 13: 1, 13-24.
- Kildae, T. & Yow Yeh, L. (2000) 'Empowering the people: When education is more than just words' in *Fine Print*, 23: 4, 6-10.
- Kitchenham, A. (2008) 'The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory' in *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6: 2, 104-23.
- Kirkpatrick, D. L. & Kirkpatrick, J. (2006) *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*, 3rd edn, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton E. F. & Swanson R. A. (2011) *The adult learner*, 7th edn, Burlington: Elsevier.
- Liu, Y., Wang, Z. & Lu, W. (2013) 'Resilience and affect balance as mediators between trait emotional intelligence and life satisfaction' in *Personal and*

- Individual Differences*, 54: 7, 850-5.
- Manning, M. & Munro, D. (2007) *The survey researcher's SPSS cookbook*, 2nd edn, Sydney: Pearson Education.
- Maslow, A. H. (1959) *New knowledge in human values*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P. & Caruso, D. R. (2004) 'Emotional intelligence: Theory, findings and implications' in *Psychological Inquiry*, 15: 3, 197-215.
- McRobbie, A. (2011) 'Reflections on feminism, immaterial labour and the post-Fordist regime' in *New Formations*, 70: Winter, 60-76.
- Mezirow, J. (1997) 'Transformative learning: Theory to practice' in P. Cranton (ed.), *Transformative learning in action: Insights from practice: New directions for adult and continuing education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 5-12
- Narayan, D. E. (2005) 'Measuring empowerment: Cross disciplinary perspectives', Washington: World Bank, viewed 11 January 2014, <www.publications.worldbank.org>
- Neuman, L. (2011) *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Boston: Pearson Education.
- Ormont, L. R. (1972) 'The theory and practice of group psychotherapy: Irvin D, Yalom' in *Psychoanalysis Review*, 59: 643-46.
- Orth, U., Robins, R. W. & Widaman, K. F. (2012) 'Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102: 6, 1271-88.
- Peterson, Z. D. & Lamb, S. (2012) 'The political context for personal empowerment: Continuing the conversation' in *Sex Roles*, 66: 11-12, 758-63.
- Pollack, S. (2000) 'What is missing in measures of women's empowerment? Conceptualizing women's agency and empowerment' in *Women and Criminal Justice*, 12: 1, 75-89.
- Porter, E. (2013) 'Rethinking women's empowerment' in *Journal of Peace Building and Development*, 8: 1, 1-14.
- Quinn, R., Spreitzer, G. & Brown, M. (2000) 'Changing others through changing ourselves: Transformation of human systems' in *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9: 2, 147-64.
- Rainey, L. (2006) 'An evaluation of resilience and employability in disadvantaged adults' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 46: 3, 383-400.
- Rappaport, J. (1987) 'Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention: Toward a theory for community psychology' in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15: 2, 121-48.
- Riger, S. (1993) 'What's wrong with empowerment' in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21: 3, 279-92.

- Riggs, E., Block, K., Gibbs, L., Davis, E., Szwarc, J., Casey, S., Duell-Piening, P. & Waters, E. (2012) 'Flexible models for learning English are needed for refugee mothers' in *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52: 2, 397-405.
- Rogers, C. (1994) 'Toward a modern approach to values: the valuing process in the mature person' in *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 68: 2, 160-7.
- Rosenberg, M. (1989) *Society and the adolescent self-image*, (revised edn) Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, viewed 20 Jan 2009, <www.norton.com/college/psych/psychsci/media/rosenberg.html>.
- Ryff, C. D. & Singer, B. (1998) 'The contours of positive human health' in *Psychological Inquiry*, 9: 1, 1-28.
- Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, J. T., Golden, C. J. & Dornheim, L. (1998) 'Development and validation of a measure of emotional intelligence' in *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25: 2, 167-77.
- Sekaran, I. U. (2003) *Research methods for business*, 4th edn, New York: Wiley.
- Seligman, M. (1995) *The optimistic child: A revolutionary approach to raising resilient children*, New York: Griffin Press.
- Sheppard, I., Fitzgerald, R. & Gonski, D. (2001) *Report of the inquiry into the definition of charities and related organisations*, Canberra: Department of Treasury, viewed 3 August 2013, <www.cdi.gov.au/report/pdf/21_chap11.pdf>.
- Staron, M., Jasinski, M. & Weatherley, R. (2006) *Life based learning: A strength based approach for capability development in vocational and technical education*, Sydney: International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning, viewed 13 January 2014, <<http://lrrpublic.cli.det.nsw.edu.au>>.
- Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2010) *Handbook of mixed methods in the social sciences*, 2nd edn, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Terry, R. (1991) 'Examples of community education practice in Western Australia' in *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 31: 2, 115-18.
- Treiber, J., Kipke, R., Satterlund, T. & Cassady, D. (2013) 'The role of training in the evaluation of public programs' in *International Journal of Training and Development*, 17: 1, 54-60.
- Turner, M. & Tilbury Fozdar, F. (2010) 'Negotiating "community" in educational settings: Adult South Sudanese students in Australia' in *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 31: 4, 363-82.
- United Nations, (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, viewed 10 Sept 2012, <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr>>.
- United Nations, (2004) 'The global situation of young people' in *United Nations Economic Social Affairs World Youth Report 2003*, viewed 24 Jan 2011, <<http://social.un.org/index/WorldYouthReport/2003.aspx>>.

- United Nations, (2005) *United Nations Millennium Development Goals*, viewed 18 July 2012, <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>>.
- Van den Bossche, P., Segers, M. S. & Jansen, N. (2010) 'Transfer of training: The role of feedback in supportive social networks' in *International Journal of Training and Development*, 14: 1, 81–94.
- Varkey, P., Qureshi, S. & Lesnick, T. (2010) 'Empowerment of women and its association with the health of the community' in *Journal of Women's Health*, 19: 1, 71–6.
- Weinstein, M. & Shuck, B. (2011) 'Social ecology and worksite training and development: Introducing the social in instructional system design' in *Human Resource Development Review*, 10: 3, 286–303.
- Whiteside, M., Tsey, K. & Earles, W. (2011) 'Locating empowerment in the context of Indigenous Australia' in *Australian Social Work*, 64: 1, 113–29.
- Willie, C., Ridini, S. & Willard, D. (2008) *Grassroots social action: Lessons in people power movements*, London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Willis, P. (1991) 'Community education in Australia: reflections on an expanding field of practice' in *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 31: 2, 71–87.
- Wuff, D. (1996) *Psychology of religion: Classic and contemporary*, New York: Wiley.
- Zimmerman, M. A. (1995) 'Psychological empowerment: issues and illustrations' in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23: 5, 581–99.

About the Authors

Nandila Spry, MSd, is the Shine and Strength Global Developer for Hillsong CityCare. Her role over the past 10 years has entailed developing and coordinating personal development life skills programs for high school students and women, as well as providing training across the globe for potential facilitators. The programs are now running in over 35 nations including in India and South Africa and have been translated into several languages. Nandila completed this research as a doctoral student at Southern Cross University.

Teresa Marchant, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the Griffith Business School, Griffith University. She specialises in training and development and conducts research in gender, adult learning and career development.

Contact details

*Dr Teresa Marchant
Gold Coast Campus,
Griffith University, Qld, 4222.*

t.marchant@griffith.edu.au

Teacher professional learning communities: Going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth

Susanne Owen
University of South Australia

Professional learning community (PLC) is a current 'buzz' term in business and educational contexts, seemingly referring to anything from decision making committees to regular meeting groups or collegial learning teams. This paper explores the concept of a PLC within three significantly innovative schools, based on an examination of the relevant literature and also focusing on surveys and interviews. Findings indicate that, while there is broad consistency across the literature and within the innovative school cases in terms of core PLC elements of shared vision and values, collegiality, joint practical activities and student learning data, teacher inquiry and leadership support and opportunities, there are some pivotal PLC characteristics which heighten the professional learning impact. In this paper, using vignettes from the case study schools, these pivotal characteristics are related to developmental phases of PLC establishment. This offers valuable insights about nurturing more learning-focused PLCs, with significant benefits for teacher professional growth and ultimately for

student learning.

Keywords: *Professional Learning Community, PLC, teacher professional learning*

Introduction

Social, economic and political pressures are evident at a global level regarding the key role of education in ensuring children and adults have the skills and knowledge for living and working in a rapidly changing world. High-level educational outcomes for students are being increasingly linked with quality teachers and there is a need for ongoing professional learning to ensure that teaching practices are updated within an era of considerable educational reform. Significant school innovations include transformations in the role of learners and of teachers, organizational and pedagogical restructuring, and utilizing resources differently such as in terms of technology and learning spaces. There are generally also significant changes in curriculum content in innovative contexts, including more interdisciplinary approaches and also possibly including a focus on competencies and values (OECD, 2011). The establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs) has been indicated as effective in building skills and knowledge for working in innovative contexts across teacher and leader teams and networks, and also within online contexts and school and pre-service and postgraduate university study programs (Meiers & Buckley, 2009).

The research literature indicates considerable consistency in the key characteristics of teacher PLCs. Participants working together regularly over an extended timeline, shared values and vision, practical activities focused on student learning, taking an inquiry stance, being reflective and collaborating and sharing experiences, are characteristics which are consistently highlighted. Leadership support and opportunity for distributed leadership within teams are additional characteristics of many PLC models (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace & Greenwood; 2005; Johnson, 2009; Coburg & Russell, 2008; Scott, Clarkson & McDonough, 2011; Mockler & Sachs, 2002; Owen, 2005).

Despite this apparent agreement and the proliferation of education

situations which have established PLCs, closer examination of the characteristics highlighted by various researchers indicates that there are varying degrees of emphases. Understanding this may help to account for the differential degrees of PLC impact on student and teacher learning (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). There are also frameworks which consider the developmental stages of PLCs, thereby enhancing understanding and providing insights for leaders and PLC team members (Mulford, 1998; DuFour, 2004).

This paper examines the PLC models and developmental stages in more detail within the context of three highly innovative schools.

Professional learning community background and theoretical models

Greater understanding about PLCs may be contextualized within situated learning models and the communities of practice literature (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Lave, 1993; Wenger, 1998). In education, Barab & Duffy's (2000) situated learning model or situativity theory is relevant because 'colleagues work together on a real problem which involves team members in supporting each other...scaffolding and breaking a task into manageable sections when issues are complex. [It involves] coaching, modeling, collecting data and examining student work... highlighting cognition as distributed over people and artefacts' (Owen, 2004: 5). Barab and Duffy's situativity theory or situated learning model highlights psychological and anthropological approaches. The psychological perspective is about cognition and meaning occurring through situated activities in practice fields resembling real life situations while the anthropological view is focused on learning within actual communities of practice. 'Meaning, solutions and interactions gained ensure that the individual's entity is inseparable from the community and community members take responsibility for the learning of others in the group' (Owen, 2004: 5).

The broadly-based community of practice literature is consistent with Barab and Duffy's situativity model, particularly within the anthropological focus. Authentic learner activities for the individual are located in community such that 'developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skillful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping and giving meaning to the

latter' (Lave, 1993: 65)

Lave (1993) and Wenger's (1998) work regarding communities of practice, while not specifically focused on teachers, has particular relevance to PLCs established in education settings. Wenger (1998) acknowledges the range of communities in which individuals participate on a daily basis but he defines communities of practice more specifically. He uses three dimensions of *purpose* (joint enterprise and values renegotiated by members over time); *functions* (mutual engagement binding long term members and newcomers into a social entity and commitment to shared ideas); and *capability* (shared repertoire of communal resources including artefacts produced over time). Knowledge is created, shared, organised, revised and passed on within and among these communities. In a deep sense, it is by these communities that knowledge is 'owned' in practice' (Wenger, 1998).

While Wenger and Snyder (2000) highlight that Communities of Practice arise naturally and are essentially self-sustaining in nature, Wenger (1998) also indicates that there are considerable processes involved in leadership nurturing of the community. Support processes include creating time for member activities and nurturing a collegial and learning-focused culture. Other supports include provision of resources including involving outside experts and funded conferences and study programs to continue to bring in new ideas and guard against insularity.

Another significant aspect relevant to the anthropological perspective is the concept of reproduction of the community as new members work alongside competent others in the community of practitioners. Lave (1997) indicates that newcomers within these communities begin as apprentices on the periphery and gradually move towards the centre of the community as they acquire the beliefs of others. This results in individual values and practices becoming merged with those of the community. However there is more to the process than newcomers being continuously inducted into the existing group over an extended timeline because they also bring in new ideas. This helps to ensure that regeneration and ongoing learning is occurring.

Teacher PLC frameworks background

Teacher professional learning community models are closely aligned

to the community of practice literature involving characteristics of collegiality, practical tasks with a focus on student learning, and being research-oriented for the purposes of improving practice. These aspects are reflected in the following definitions of professional learning communities:

...small groups of teachers who come together as a team to help one another improve student learning. The team members share and reflect on their practice and personal experiences, observe each other's practices, and study and apply research and best practices together (Education Northwest, 2012: 3, citing Sather & Barton, 2006).

...a group of people who take an active reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented and growth-promoting approach towards the mysteries, problems and perplexities of teaching and learning (Edwards, 2012: 26, citing Mitchell and Sackney, 2000).

Scott, McDonough Clarkson's (2011) literature review of key elements regarding teacher PLCs generally highlights consistency of characteristics. Their work focuses on four researchers (Bolam et al., 2005; Johnson, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Coburg & Russell, 2008). All of these researchers characterise teacher PLCs as explicitly or implicitly being about shared values and vision, a focus on student learning, taking an inquiry stance, making teaching more public, sharing experiences and expertise, willingness to experiment with alternative strategies, and engaging in reflective dialogue. Having collective responsibility for pupil learning, attending to school teaching-learning challenges, and having inclusive membership and mutual respect and support for teachers were other PLC characteristics identified by most of these researchers. However, goal setting and designing action plans, having formal and widespread leadership, and engaging in-depth interaction about how students learn (regarding content, pedagogical principles, curriculum content) were PLC characteristics noted variously by only one of the four researcher teams.

Consistent with community of practice features outlined previously, the leadership aspect is of particular interest, especially for school-

based PLCs. This aspect incorporates support from leadership for PLCs, the notion of distributed leadership and the role of team members in building their own leadership skills and those of others in their group. Kruse, Louis and Bryk's (1995) work generally aligns with previously-outlined teacher PLC characteristics in terms of reflective dialogue, trust and respect, shared norms and values, and collaboration and collective focus on student learning. However their work also specifically highlights many aspects associated with leadership support such as 'supportive leadership', 'deprivatisation of practice' (eg observing teaching and formal methods to share expertise and support marginal teachers), 'socialisation and support for new teachers', 'time to meet and talk', 'teacher empowerment' and 'establishing communication structures'. Similarly, DuFour's (2004) model is consistent with the previously-outlined PLC characteristics but particularly emphasises leadership support and teacher empowerment. The model has a significant focus on goal setting, continuous improvement and ensuring that students learn, also data and results.

Beyond student learning, teacher professional learning through collaboration is a key characteristic in each researcher's list of characteristics, although with details being made more explicit in some models. For example, DuFour's (2004) model additionally emphasises action research and also collective professional learning as a key characteristic of the PLC, including provision of some very specific details within a rubric. Other researchers (Hargreaves, 1992; Head, 2003; Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth, 2000, 2001; Jarzabkowski, 2001) also provide a similar focus about supporting professional learning through collaboration. They caution that collaboration based on contrived collegiality, conviviality and congeniality may be an impediment to professional learning. There are challenges for working in a professional learning community which deprivatises teaching and is characterised by common goals and builds interdependence. The key is building a culture which goes beyond the work group and is open to new ideas and guarding against insularity. Continuous professional learning and debate is essential (Stoll et al., 2006; Fullan, 1993). Grossman et al.'s (2000, 2001) work documenting the formation of an interdisciplinary secondary teacher PLC indicates key aspects of processes in collaborative professional learning. Challenge and debate regarding various educational perspectives are an important part of the

learning process.

Indeed, several researchers highlight that PLCs do not just happen because teachers are working together and there are actually developmental phases. Mulford (1998) summarises the predictable stages of group development as ‘forming’ (polite), ‘storming’ (conflict over power), ‘norming’ (social cohesion and willingness to share), ‘performing’ (increase in task orientation and feedback), ‘transforming’ (group learns from feedback and may change tasks or ways of doing them), ‘dorming’ (resting to prevent burnout) and ‘mourning’ (group dissolution). Mulford (1998) also emphasizes the important role of the school leader to ensure that PLCs go beyond the ‘forming’, ‘storming’ and ‘norming’ phases and really focus on ‘performing’ and ‘transforming’ stages. Similarly, Du Four’s (2004) work has ‘pre-initiation’, ‘initiation’, ‘developing’ and ‘sustaining’ stages, with a significant leadership aspect included. For example, for the ‘action research’ PLC aspect (a key focus for teacher inquiry and professional learning), the pre-initiation stage is about individual teacher classroom experimentation without training, support structures and evaluation processes. However, at the sustaining level, ‘action research’ is characterized as involving ‘topics...from the shared vision and goals of the school. Staff members regard action research as an important component of their professional responsibilities. There are frequent discussions regarding the implications of findings as teachers attempt to learn from the research of their colleagues’ (DuFour, 2008: 2).

While some research into teacher PLCs and developmental stages has occurred, this has not been conducted in significantly innovative schools. An overall research project was established to examine teacher professional learning and PLCs in some innovative schools, including specific examples of teacher learning and evidence of impacts on student learning. The overall research question was: In what ways are characteristics of PLCs evident in the professional learning processes occurring in significantly innovative case study school contexts and what are the learning impacts for those involved? The current paper is focused on highlighting some key components for professional learning within PLCs and developmental stages.

Research methods

The current research involved a case study approach to explore the experiences of various teachers and teams involved in PLCs within significantly innovative schools in one Australian state. A purposive sample was used with three schools, which are part of an international project (OECD, 2012). One case study school was a specialist senior secondary context catering for 15 to 19 year olds. There was also a reception to year 7 school involving those aged about 5 to 13 years and a secondary school where the innovation at that time included students aged 12 to 15 years of age. The case study approach was used to enable a detailed exploration of teacher professional learning experiences within their PLCs, thereby enabling the researcher 'to go deeper into the motivations for respondents and their reasons for responding as they do' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 27).

School documentation, interviews and focus groups were the research methods used. Documentation included examining submissions made by each of the schools to an OECD Innovative Learning Environment project. Additionally, school documentation included further examining the results of a PLC survey of 58 staff across the three innovative schools. The survey involved primary and secondary teachers mostly having over 20 years of experience in general or specialist subject areas and frequently working in interdisciplinary teams within the school's innovative context. The staff survey involved a five point Likert scale in relation to commonly-accepted PLC characteristics such as shared vision, collaboration, data focus, and leadership (based on Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). The survey included specific aspects such as 'Reflective Dialogue: Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face' and 'Collective Focus on Student Learning: Teachers assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels and that teachers can help them'. Response choices for the fifteen items were 'not at all', 'somewhat', '50%', 'To a large degree', and 'To a great extent'. The schools had previously collated the results and this data was part of their documentation which was further analysed by the researcher using manual processes.

Ten semi-structured interviews and two focus groups were conducted,

with one focus group of three people occurring at one of the schools involved and one focus group of two people at another school. Volunteer staff and each of the school leaders were interviewed. A total of 15 teachers and leaders from across the three schools were involved. Interview/focus group questions related to the changing role of the teacher, models of school-based professional learning and the importance of professional learning and professional learning communities in supporting innovation. While specific questions varied according to the interview process, indicative question areas included: Can you describe models of school based professional learning communities which are occurring? In what ways do these professional learning community opportunities support professional learning? What are the advantages? What are the challenges of school based learning communities? Can you give a specific example of your own professional learning from others in the PLC, changes made in your teaching practices and any specific evidence of impacts on students and their learning?

The interviews included a discussion of the DuFour (2008) professional learning community developmental stages for eleven PLC aspects such as *Overall PLC Development*, *Mission*, *Shared Vision*, *Shared Values*, *Goals*, *Collaborative Culture* (teachers working together), *Collaborative Culture* (administrator/teacher relations), *Parent Partnerships*, *Action Research*, *Continual Improvement*, and *Focus on Results*. The rubric stages for which descriptors were provided were 'pre-initiation', 'initiation', 'developing' and 'sustaining'. For example, for *Overall PLC Development*, at the 'pre-initiation stage' the descriptor was 'The school has not yet begun to address a particular principle of a PLC' while for the Initiation Stage, the descriptor indicated there had been 'an effort' but no impact as a 'critical mass'. However for 'Developing Stage', the descriptors indicated there was a critical mass endorsement of the principle and 'members are beginning to modify their thinking and practice..Structural Changes are being made to align with the principle'. For the 'Sustaining Stage', the descriptor indicated that 'the principle is deeply embedded in the school's culture. It represents a driving force in the daily work of the school. It is so internalised that it can survive changes in key personnel'.

Interviews were digitally recorded with manual notes also taken.

Transcriptions were then provided to the interviewees for amendment/ additional information. Manual analysis of key themes occurred through in-depth reading, segmenting of each transcript and then clustering, ‘memoing’ and coding the emergent themes and sub-themes (Punch, 2009: 174).

This paper outlines the findings within three vignettes which are representative of the findings in regard to the three Australian case study schools included in the research. Pseudonyms are used for the schools involved and where individual names were cited in the interviews, that name is replaced by [...] in the texts cited in this paper.

Findings

Southern Hills Secondary

....a really rich environment of discussion with ideas coming from all sorts of discipline perspectives because we’ve all got different backgrounds, different training and bringing that together...People are talking about their research or might be just talking about their own philosophy of education or just their own experiences in the classroom, things that worked and didn’t work or things they’d like to try out...a genuine interaction, cross-fertilisation and a genuine professional respect.... Discussions we have here are much deeper. They’re ongoing because time is provided for that (Teacher interview 7).

Southern Hills Secondary is a purpose-built, technology-rich, 350 student specialist senior high school established within the past decade, with innovation being key to its educational approach since its establishment ten years ago. A topics-focused interdisciplinary curriculum including big picture ‘fertile questions’ is used and there are individual student learning plans and multi-year level daily tutor groups. Professional learning is a high priority and includes teachers working in teams and co-planning, as well as funded external conference attendance, overseas/interstate site visits and action research study teams. Workday-scheduled interdisciplinary team meetings for co-

planning and team teaching and assessing occur on a tri-weekly basis to ensure new ideas are constantly introduced and discussed. Time to meet with interested staff and templates for reporting are provided following conference attendance and visits to other sites.

Many of the action research study groups and interdisciplinary teams seem to be operating in a manner that reflects the characteristics of PLCs including shared vision, collaboration, joint involvement in practical tasks and student learning data, leadership support and distributed leadership, and also inquiry and responsibility for collegial learning. For example, the survey indicated 80-90% respondents (to a large degree, great extent) having shared values about all students being able to learn, collaboration and collective engagement focused on data and student learning, and leaders being supportive. Similarly, for the PLC characteristic of *collective engagement in practical tasks focused on data and student learning*, (including survey aspects of interdependent teaching, collaboration and producing materials and collective focus on student learning), 80-96% highly positive ('to a large degree', 'to a great extent') responses were received. Regarding *leadership support and distributed leadership encouragement*, for specific survey aspects about socialising newcomers, supportive leadership, time to meet, physical proximity and teacher empowerment, all were again highly positive ('to a large degree', 'to a great extent') for over 70% of respondents for each measure.

Of particular interest for this current paper about teacher professional learning are the PLC characteristics related to collaboration and teacher inquiry and learning. Highly positive survey responses ('to a large degree', 'to a great extent') were received for all aspects, including for deprivatisation of practice (80%), trust and respect (69%) and collective focus on student learning (80%). For *teacher enquiry* involving taking risks and openness to improvement, there was a 97% highly positive ('to a large degree', 'to a great extent') survey response.

Regarding professional learning involving *collaboration* and *teacher inquiry*, consistent with Grossman et al. (2000, 2001), teachers and leaders talked about the interdisciplinary nature of the PLC teams and debate requiring teachers to 'really argue the toss about why you do the things you do and how you do them' (Leader interview 1). Regarding

planning and teaching in teams, one teacher indicated that: ‘I don’t know that I necessarily would have stopped and questioned what I was doing so much...I think I feel more challenged to try different things’. The interviewee indicated that teacher inquiry is supported through structured action research groups for all staff ‘to engage in reflection on their practice...gathering some data and doing something with this, observe and then report back...true inquiry (Leader interview 1).

Furthermore, nearly all interviewed teachers indicated in PLC rubrics examined regarding the collaborative culture and action research that their schools and teams were working at the ‘sustaining’ stage. This related to functioning as teams to ‘work collaboratively to identify collective goals, develop strategies to achieve those goals, gather relevant data and learn from each other [using] ...interdependent efforts’. Similarly, they were indicating that they were at the ‘sustaining’ phase in regard to the PLC rubric item of ‘action research as an important component of their professional responsibilities...frequent discussion regarding the implication of findings as teachers attempt to learn from the research of their colleagues’.

As one teacher indicated in regard to the sense of responsibility for the learning of another colleague in her team:

I feel responsible that if I’ve got a good idea or a quality way of doing something I’ve got a duty to share that....I’ve got a responsibility to her and to the students to do the best possible job I can... if that means suggesting something differentpointing out there’s a better way to do it... (Teacher interview 5).

Teacher learning from the PLC is further evidenced by all teachers providing specific examples of changing their teaching practices as a result of learning from others through the PLC processes including through planning together, observing within team teaching situations and co-assessment. Individual interviewees outlined specific changes including one teacher teaching complex scientific principles who was using more role plays and practical activities: ‘hands on...they had to make puzzles and join things together’ (Teacher interview 5). Another teacher was providing more expansive explanations when introducing new concepts to

groups of students and she had also learned about using more humour in her teaching approach (Teacher interview 7). Evidence of student learning impacts from various pedagogical changes introduced by teachers included class achievement results being about 20% higher which the interviewee indicated was a result of team planning and teaching and the more active learning approaches introduced (Teacher interview 5). Other teachers noted that, following pedagogical changes, there were improvements in attendance and overall student engagement, with students involved in more task-focused discussions in group work and more students seeking additional access to the resources used in lessons (Teacher interviews 4, 5, 7).

Western Flats Primary

....there's professional learning right through the day on a daily basis because of our team teaching scenario, where teachers can bounce ideas off each other and reflect at the end of the day and for following days. So there is that learning from and with one another on that basis' (Leader interview 2).

Western Flats Primary is a 300 student, significantly low socio-economic school using updated classrooms. Significant organisational and pedagogical innovation has occurred in the past seven years. Students learn in reception to year 7 multi-age groups for a significant part of the day, with teachers working in teams and with considerable interest-based topic choices available for students. Part of the day also involves more structured literacy and numeracy times in broader year level groups. Professional learning is a high priority and includes funded external conference attendance and interstate site visits, with reporting back to other staff being a high priority. Action research study teams have recently been introduced accommodating staff interest areas. Classroom-focused teams are meeting regularly as PLCs.

The various teaching and learning teams and also the action research teams have a strong level of commitment to professional learning. Additionally, across the whole school, staff is very committed to and have ownership of the innovative curriculum and pedagogical practices. Staff has been involved in the change process and there is shared leadership. As indicated in relevant documentation about the school

culture:

Shared leadership reinforces the ownership that staff have for the success of the school in achieving improved outcomes for students...Having all staff leading gives an appreciation for the role, which has increased the sense of trust in one another, so initiatives can progress more efficiently and with great support (OECD, 2012, School B, supplementary information: 8).

Many of the action research study and interdisciplinary teams seem to be operating in a manner that reflects the characteristics of PLCs. In the staff survey, regarding the PLC characteristic of *vision and values*, aspects in the survey indicating this include shared norms and values (71% of survey responses: 'to a large degree' or 'to a great extent'); having a shared vision that all students can learn given the support of teachers (70%) and the focus on leaders being supportive and focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement and collaboration (94% to large/great extent). For the PLC characteristic of *collective engagement in practical tasks focused on data and student learning*, (including survey aspects of interdependent teaching, collaboration and producing materials and collective focus on student learning), there were over 70% highly positive responses (to large degree/great extent). Regarding the PLC characteristic of *leadership support and distributed leadership encouragement*, for specific survey aspects about socialising newcomers, supportive leadership, physical proximity, all were again highly positive (to large degree/great extent) for around 90% of respondents for most measures.

For professional learning and teacher inquiry, while formal action research teams were in the early stages of being introduced, over 90% of teachers gave highly positive responses ('to a large degree', 'to a great extent'). This suggested that openness to improvement through trying new techniques and ideas and making efforts to learn more about their profession was occurring.

Consistent with Grossman et al. (2000, 2001) regarding inquiry and collegial group responsibility for professional learning of others, Western's teachers talked about 'teachers as researchers....the value of really deeply reflecting on elements of your work (Leader interview 2). A teacher similarly indicated the importance of the learning community

representing diverse viewpoints and perspectives and really valuing and debating educational views while also supporting each other to ‘build on diversity...You can learn from another field...[being an] advocate for their own particular area but they realise that there’s a broader concept here that you fit under and you belong to...The broader pedagogical landscape makes us see that we’re connected and we need to support each other’ (Teacher interview 9).

PLC collegial learning was also evident in the specific examples given by individual interviewees. For example, one teacher indicated that planning collegially resulted in the introduction of more creative and interest-focused offerings for multi-age student groups in the classroom. Testing of students subsequently indicated struggling readers doubling or trebling their literacy scores, with all students generally making significant gains in literacy (Teacher interview 8).

Teachers highlighted the power of the principal in building a culture and love of learning and providing practical support for teacher learning. As one teacher indicated, the leader’s role at Western was about building a commitment to a positive approach to student learning and engagement but also to teacher learning. *...I love being able to follow my passion and I now want to do some heavy, deep research’* (Teacher interview 8).

The collegial culture of the school nurtured through its leadership team is further indicated in the PLC continuum rubric discussions in which teachers indicated their school being at the sustaining stage in terms of ‘Collaborative Culture: Administrator/Teacher Relations’. The rubric’s descriptor for this aspect was: ‘Staff are fully involved in the decision making processes of the school. Administrators pose questions, delegate authority, create collaborative decision-making processes, and provide staff with the information, training and parameters they need to make good decisions. School improvement is viewed as a collective responsibility’.

Rolling Hills High School

...a team of about seven or eight people [teachers]...
with the whole cohort of 120 [students], seeing them
[students] through for the three years. So as a result of
that we’ve ended up with some very strong professional

learning teams... So the sort of thing that they're doing, they [teachers] write all the integrated units as a team, so there's input from all of them. They're moderating work now as a team, so that's really helped because we've got, the teams are made up of people with different backgrounds, like some maths teachers, some science teachers, some SOSE teachers, etc, in the team. So when they're marking a piece of work for their 17 kids in their advisory [group], it's great to have some experts in that field working with them (Leader interview 3).

Rolling Hills High has been gradually introducing significantly innovative practices throughout various year levels of the school during the past few years, with about 350 students involved at the time of the research. Significantly innovative practices at Rolling Hills include a shift from the role of teachers as transmitters to being learning facilitators. Teachers also work in interdisciplinary teams focused on interdisciplinary curriculum, and students are involved in personalised learning and following their passions. Professional development is a high priority, with funded external conference attendance, interstate and international visits to other schools and class-focused PLC team meetings being involved.

Collegiality, practical tasks such as co-planning units of interdisciplinary work and deprivatisation including team teaching and observation are involved. Professional learning through the teams is an essential part of the innovation process, with teachers needing to learn new skills to be co-learners and facilitators. Supportive leadership has also been essential, including funding for external conferences and interstate and international visits to other innovative contexts and time for teams to meet and share ideas and planning. As the leader indicated, a key focus has been establishing expectations and support for professional learning conversations to build staff skills in giving explicit student feedback through peer observation and video examples, *'setting up some deliberate structures where people can challenge each other about the level at which they do that work'* (Leader interview 3).

While some of the meeting groups operating in other sections of the school and less involved in significantly innovative educational approaches were still in the early stages of becoming PLCs, these

interdisciplinary innovation teams of about five to seven teachers (focused on co-planning, co-teaching and observing and co-assessing for a particular year level of students) did seem to be operating in a manner that reflects the PLC characteristics at a high level. Regarding the PLC characteristic of *vision and values*, aspects in the survey indicating this include shared norms and values; having a shared vision that all students can learn given the support of teachers and leaders being supportive and focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement and collaboration [over 80% positive responses (50%, to a large degree, to a great extent) for each aspect and about 60% of survey responses indicating to higher level of a large degree/great extent]. For the PLC characteristic of *collective engagement in practical tasks* there were over 67%-91% highly positive responses [specifically including survey aspects of interdependent teaching (91% 'to a large degree'/to a great extent') and collaboration and producing materials (67% to large degree/great extent)]. Regarding collaboration, while many of those interviewed commented on robust discussions occurring, 'if you really disagree with something you wouldn't hold back, you wouldn't just be polite' (Interview 12), there was also some indication that 'our professional learning communities are working really well but they're still very nice – there's a lot of support but not a lot of challenge' (Leader interview 3).

Consistent with Grossman et al. (2000, 2001) regarding inquiry and collegial group responsibility for professional learning of others, Rolling Hill's teachers talked about learning from each other through observation about how to be a facilitator of student learning. As one teacher indicated: 'I learnt a lot from watching [...] and [...] in the space, working with students and their deep inquiry questioning' (Teacher interview 11).

Regarding professional learning and teacher inquiry, while formal action research teams were in the early stages of discussion, over 75% of teachers gave highly positive responses ('to a large degree'/to a great extent') which indicated that openness to improvement through trying new techniques and ideas and making efforts to learn more about their profession was occurring. While openness to improvement/experimentation were evident, PLC rubric discussions indicated that more formal action research processes were only at the initiation

stage of only some staff participating in pilot action projects with informal sharing of findings. *Continuous Improvement* systems and *Focus on Results* for students were also indicated in rubric discussions with various interviewees/focus group members from Rolling Hills as being at the initiation stage only. However, similar to Western Flats, the collaboration culture (including teachers working together and administrator/teacher relations) were indicated as being at the sustaining stage so some informal processes for teacher learning seemed to be in place as a baseline for further development.

Additionally, similar to the other case study schools, regarding *Focus on Results* for students, while Rolling Hills PLCs were seemingly in the initiation stage in systematically addressing this, individual teachers in the interviews each provided examples of their own learning from the PLC such as improvements in critical questioning skills and specific examples of individual and group learning by students. These student learning impacts included those related to academic results, social skills development, creativity, problem-solving and student independence in regard to their own learning (Teacher interviews 10-12).

Discussion

Research including document search and interviews/focus groups was conducted in three significantly innovative schools regarding professional learning communities. Generally the case study schools have established teams focused on particular classes of students and two out of three of the schools have also included formal action research teams. These teams operate as professional learning communities to support teachers in building skills and capacities appropriate to a changing role as co-learners and facilitators of student learning. Shared vision, teacher inquiry, and joint involvement in practical tasks are particularly evident in all the case study school PLCs. The leadership aspect is seemingly strong in regard to teacher empowerment, particularly within the teams. There is a high degree of support and funding provided by leadership for professional learning and an expectation that individuals supported for external conferences and visits to other sites, bring their learning back to the school and to their teams. Therefore the case study school PLCs reflected the pivotal characteristics identified by various researchers including shared vision,

strong collaboration, involvement in joint practical activities, supportive and distributed leadership and engagement in inquiry-focused and ongoing professional learning (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, Wallace & Greenwood; 2005; Johnson, 2009; Coburg & Russell, 2008; Scott, Clarkson & McDonough, 2011; Mockler & Sachs, 2002; Owen, 2005).

While all the case study school teams seem to be operating as PLCs to some degree, there are indications that different teams within any one school are at different levels of maturity in terms of operating as PLCs. This finding is consistent with the developmental phases work previously outlined (DuFour, 2004; Mulford, 1998) which identifies early PLC phases involving individuals initially operating separately, towards a process over an extended timeframe of interdependence, shared values and having a sense of responsibility for not only student learning but also collegial learning. For example, considering Grossman et al.'s (2001) specific PLC developmental framework in more detail, this model is focused on collaboration and professional learning which identifies 'beginning', 'evolving' and 'mature' stages. 'Communal responsibility for individual growth' at the beginning stage is outlined as being about believing that the teacher responsibility is to student learning (not colleagues), while at the mature level it is about commitment to the growth of colleagues and the obligations of community membership. Key process aspects identified by Grossman et al. (2001: 62) include 'forming a group identity and norms of interaction', 'navigating fault lines' (including divergent views), 'negotiating the essential tension' (between the student learning and teacher learning focus for the PLC) and 'communal responsibility for individual growth' of colleagues.

However, reflecting Grossman et al. (2000, 2001; also Shen, Zhen & Poppink's 2007 work on pseudo-community), while teachers interviewed were extremely positive about their experiences of most aspects of school-based PLCs, the survey results for the wider range of teachers in some of the case study schools indicated differing stages in relation to being at the highest level for PLC characteristics. Aspects of particular interest relate to deprivatisation of teaching, learning from collegial classroom observations, and moving beyond collegiality and a focus on student learning towards responsibility for collegial learning,

including the value of robust debate about diverse educational views. The case study schools (such as Southern Hills and Western Flat) which were longer established as innovative sites involving PLCs across the whole school, were strongly committed to their school reform vision and to transformative practices. Going beyond pivotal characteristics of PLCs such as collegiality and collaboration, robust debate and a sense of responsibility for the learning of colleagues was particularly evident, not only for some staff but widely across the PLCs and permeating throughout the school culture.

This was especially the situation at Southern Hills within the PLCs focused on particular groups of students (where staff was involved in co-planning, co-teaching and co-assessing) and also among other PLCs established which were focused on formal action research processes. At Southern Hills within the action research teams, there was an expectation that each PLC identified an area for collegial study and researched and reported on this. All staff in the survey and interviewees strongly indicated that in all of these various types of PLCs, robust debate and challenge were expectations within these groups. These processes were indicated as supporting collegial learning, professional growth and rethinking and helping to build the ongoing transformative educational practices. This robust debate and responsibility for the learning of colleagues has been part of the culture established at the school by the leadership team but this is accompanied by distributed leadership and shared responsibility within the PLCs and in other aspects of school life.

A key message arising from the overall research is that time for collegial work, funding and clear expectations are an essential part of the supports and nurturing for these professional growth-oriented PLCs to evolve and operate at the most mature levels.

Summary

While there is further analysis to be undertaken and the small scale nature of the research is acknowledged, I contend that this current work offers valuable insights for leaders in schools and in other education settings in nurturing more learning-focused professional learning communities. Through moving beyond conviviality, through 'navigating fault lines' of divergent views and 'negotiating the essential tensions',

significant benefits for teacher professional growth will occur.

As teachers examine various sources of data about improvements in student learning, co-assess student work and debate its quality and learn from each other and adopt new innovative practices with ongoing support within their teams, the ultimate beneficiaries are the students. As Grossman et al. (2001: 62) indicate, ‘negotiating the essential tension’ at the mature level involves recognition that teacher and student learning are intertwined.

Going beyond the professional learning community characteristics generally recognised, this paper provides insights into the pivotal importance of school leadership in the nurturing of teacher PLCs. Through nurturing, financial supports and clear expectations, teacher PLCs can be helped to move beyond contrived collegiality. Engagement in challenging debates within professional learning communities supports staff professional growth, more transformative educational practices and ultimately, student learning.

References

- Barab, S., and Duffy, T. (2000) ‘From practice fields to communities of practice’ in, D. Jonassen & S. Land (eds). *Theoretical foundations of learning environments*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 22-55.
- Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., Wallace, M., and Greenwood, A. (2005) *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities*, viewed 22 August 2013, <http://schoolcontributions.cmswiki.wikispaces.net/file/view/PROFESSIONAL+LEARNING+COMMUNITIES+A+REVIEW+OF.pdf>
- Coburg, C., & Russell, J. (2008) “Getting the most out of professional learning communities and coaching: Promoting interactions that support instructional improvement”, *Learning Policy Brief*, 1, 1-5.
- Darling-Hammond, L. and Richardson, N. (2009) ‘Research review-teacher learning: What matters?’, *Educational Leadership*, 66 (5), 46-53.
- DuFour, R. (2004) ‘Schools as learning communities. What is a professional learning community’, *Educational Leadership*, 61 (8), 6-11.
- DuFour, R. (2008) *The professional learning community rubric*, viewed 27 August 2013, <http://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/teachlearn/commoncore/plc-rubric.pdf>
- Education Northwest .(2012) *What the research says (or doesn't say): Improving the focus of professional development for schools*, viewed 20

- December 2012, <http://educationnorthwest.org/news/1093>.
- Edwards, F. (2012) 'Learning communities for curriculum change: Key factors in an educational change process in New Zealand', *Professional Development in Education*, 38 (1), 25-47.
- Fullan, M. (1993) *Change forces: Probing the depths of education reform*, London: Falmer Press.
- Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., and Woolworth, S. (2000) *What makes teacher community different from a gathering of teachers*, USA: Centre for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., and Woolworth, S. (2001) 'Toward a theory of teacher community', *Teachers College Record*, 103(6):9421012, viewed 22 August 2013, <https://openarchive.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Grossman-Wineburg-Woolworth.pdf>
- Hargreaves, A. (1992) 'Cultures of Teaching: A focus for change', in A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (eds). *Understanding teacher development*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Head, G. (2003) 'Effective collaboration: Deep collaboration as an essential element of the learning process', *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 4 (2), 47-62.
- Jarzabkowski, L. (2001) 'The primary school as an emotional arena: A case study in collegial relationships'. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Canberra.
- Johnson, N. J. (2009) 'Action learning and action inquiry: Exciting possibilities for teachers', *Journal for School Information Professionals*, 14(1), 4-10.
- Kruse, S.D., Louis, K.S. & Bryk, A.S. (1995) 'An emerging framework for analyzing school-based professional community' in, K.S. Louis, S. Kruse & Associates (eds). *Professionalism and community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools*. Long Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Lave, J. (1993) 'Situating learning in communities of practice', in L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine & S. C. Teasley (eds). *Perspectives on socially shared cognition*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 17-36.
- Meiers, M. & Buckley, B. (2009) *The digest: Successful professional learning*, Sydney: Institute of Teachers.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. (2nd edition). Beverly Hills, California: Sage.
- Mockler, N. & Sachs, J. (2002) *A crisis of identity: Teacher professional identity and the role of evidence based practice*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education annual conference. University of Queensland. 1-5 December.
- Mulford, B. (1998) 'Organisational learning and educational change', in A. Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., M. Fullan & D. Hopkin (eds). *International*

- handbook of educational change*, Norwell, MA: Kluwer, 616-664.
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (OECD) (2011) *Innovative learning environment – A leading OECD/CERI Program*. May: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI).
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2012) *Innovative learning environment universe case studies*, viewed 6 October 2012, <http://www.oecd.org/edu/ceri/universecases.htm>.
- Owen, S. (2012) 'Fertile questions', 'multi-age groupings', 'campfires' and 'master classes' for specialist skill-building: innovative learning environments and supporting professional learning for 'teacher engagers' within South Australian and international contexts. Peer reviewed paper presented at World Education Research Association (WERA) focal meeting within Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference, 2-6 December 2012, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, viewed 19 February 2014, <http://www.aare.edu.au/pages/static/conference.aspx?y=2012&s=50&so=&f=1>.
- Owen, S. (2004) *Situativity theory and emerging trends in teacher professional development*, viewed, 15 March 2012, <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/owe04331.pdf>.
- Punch, K. (2009) *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Scott, A., Clarkson, P. & McDonough, A. (2011) 'Fostering professional learning communities beyond school boundaries', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36 (6), Article 5, viewed 22 August 2013, <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1534&context=ajte>
- Shen, J., Zhen, J., Poppink, S. (2007) 'Open lessons: A practice to develop a learning community for teacher', *Educational Horizons*, 85 (3), 181-191.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M. & Thomas, S. (2006) 'Professional learning communities: A review of the literature', *Journal of Educational Change*, 7 (4), 221-258
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008) 'A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80-91.
- Wenger, E. (1998) 'Communities of practice: Learning as a social system', *Systems Thinker*, viewed 22 August 2013, <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>
- Wenger, E. & Synder, W. (2000) *Learning in communities*, viewed 22 August 2013, <http://linezine.com/1/features/ewwslc.htm> .

About the Author

***Dr Susanne Owen** is a part time Academic Developer and PLC/innovation researcher at the University of South Australia, while also managing an international project for the state education department in the area of school innovation. Besides leadership of national research projects in a range of disciplines and university leadership roles, she has extensive experience in schools as a teacher, leader and consultant in various curriculum and leadership areas.*

Contact details

*Dr Susanne Owen
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences & Learning and
Teaching Unit
University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, SA Adelaide 5001*

Email: susanne.owen@unisa.edu.au

Expectations and reality: What you want is *not always* what you get

Arlene Garces-Ozanne
Trudy Sullivan

University of Otago

A total of 196 first year Principles of Economics I students participated in a study examining how students' expectations about their course and grades are related to the grades they actually receive. We empirically test whether there is a significant difference between the students' grade expectations and the actual grades they receive, and examine what factors contribute to this difference. In particular, we examine how much students' expectations about their grades are conditioned by specific student characteristics, as well as by their attitude/behaviour over the semester. We hypothesise that students, like many from Generation Y, often make confident but also false predictions about their ability, but as reality sets in, they modify their behaviour accordingly and set more reasonable, realistic expectations to achieve their desired goals. We find that they are indeed over-optimistic, but there appears to be a gap between their optimism and actual performance.

Keywords: *Gen Y, undergraduate students, expectations, optimism, behaviour, grades*

Introduction

Worldwide, there is much interest in exploring the attitudes and behaviour of Gen Y (i.e., Generation Y, those people born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s), who tend to embrace technological change, accept diversity and exhibit over-confidence in what they can achieve (Campbell et al., 2004; Twenge, 2009; Kopp and Finney, 2013; Anderson, Halberstadt & Aitken, 2013). Many students of this generation typically exhibit a sense of entitlement and expect high academic grades because they “tried” and/or because they paid fees, instead of accepting a grade based on their actual performance (Twenge, 2009; Singleton-Jackson, Jackson & Reinhart, 2010). There are also those who tend to demand a lot more time and energy from professors, for example, requiring immediate attention to emails, and are more self-confident questioning and appealing grades they receive (Lippmann, Bulanda & Wagenaar, 2009; Baer, 2011).

The idea that many students believe that they are above-average and consequently have very optimistic and overconfident expectations about what they can achieve, is however, not the main issue. Having a high self-esteem is not necessarily bad. In fact, in many cases, positive self-assessments are harmless and could actually help in achieving one's goals. What we find interesting, and what we want to explore in this paper, is the apparent disconnect between students' positive self-views and their actual performance.

In this study, we examine the expectations and attitudes of a group of predominantly Gen Y university students to find out whether they possess an elevated view of their abilities and whether, when confronted with reality, they adjust their behaviour to reach their goals.

Our methodology involves surveying a group of students enrolled in a first year paper at the University of Otago. We survey the students *before* lectures begin and again mid-way through the course. Using this information, together with their final grades, we test whether there is

a significant difference between what the students *expect* to achieve and what they *actually* achieve. We also examine whether students change their attitudes and behaviour once they become familiar with the course and its requirements. In line with this objective we explore the characteristics of two types of university students – specifically, *optimistic* students and *realistic* students. For the purposes of this study, we define *optimistic* students as those students who expect to receive a higher grade than what they actually receive; and *realistic* students as those students whose expected grades are the same as the grade they actually receive or those who alter their attitude/behaviour after receiving more information.

We find that there is a significant difference between what students expect to achieve and what they actually achieve. We hypothesise that students who find the course more difficult than initially expected will change their behaviour in order to reach their goal. This does not appear to the case.

This study draws from and could be of interest to a wide range of disciplines in the fields of sociology, psychology and economics of tertiary education and also behavioural economics. Class size, lecture attendance, seating plans, school/university and lecturer characteristics, student characteristics and social background for instance, have been widely examined in previous literature as possible determinants of academic performance (see for example Arias & Walker, 2004; Van Blerkom, 1990; Margrain, 1978; Benedict & Hoag, 2004; Helland, 2007). Our study offers an examination of the association between students' attitudes, expectations and behaviour, and their academic performance. Gaining an understanding of the relationship between these factors may assist educators in better planning and structuring courses, particularly those geared towards Gen Y students.

Methods

Collection of data

Using an online questionnaire we surveyed 1288 students enrolled over two semesters in the “Principles of Economics I” (referred to in this paper as ECON1) at the University of Otago. This course is a first-year

paper which introduces the economic analysis of market economies. There are no prerequisites for entering this course apart from meeting the standard University admission requirements. It is one of seven core papers that Bachelor of Commerce students are required to complete as part of their degree. However, students who take this course come from a variety of disciplines including History, Languages, Law, Psychology, Tourism and Genetics amongst others.

At the beginning of the 13-week course, students are given a comprehensive course outline detailing the course requirements in terms of lectures, tutorials, readings, group work and assessment. As well as attending three 50-minute lectures and one 50-minute tutorial each week students participate in a study group competition where groups of students solve multiple-choice questions based on the previous week's lectures. The final mark is made up of a mid-term test (30 percent), study group competition (10 percent) and final exam (60 percent). The mid-term test and study group competition marks only count if they improve the final mark; otherwise, the final exam is worth 100 percent.

Prior to attending their first lecture, we sent an email to all students enrolled in ECON1 inviting them to take part in our survey. Students were informed that they would need to complete two online surveys relating to their expectations and attitudes about the course (the first survey, during the first week of the course, and the second survey, after the mid-semester test). Students were also advised that the researchers would need access to their academic records in order to compare their expected grade with the actual grade they receive at the end of the course. We chose to survey students doing a first-year paper given that the majority of them would be first-year students and therefore less likely to have preconceived ideas relating to the course.

We asked students what grade they expect to receive, their intentions in regard to hours of study and the importance of lectures, tutorials and readings, and some general demographic questions such as age, sex, ethnicity and year at university. We also asked them to choose from a list, the lecturer and attributes that they consider most important. At the end of the survey students were invited to comment about the course in general.

The tests

We used a standard test for the paired difference comparison of two means (McGhee, 1985) to test the hypothesis that there is no difference between the grade students expect to receive and the grade they actually receive. As well as testing the difference between the initial expected grades with the actual grades, we tested the difference between the mid-semester expected grades (i.e., expectations from the second survey) with the actual grades to determine whether students alter their grade expectations once they receive more information about the course (including how they fared in the mid-semester test). We also tested whether there is a significant difference between the initial expected grades and the mid-semester expected grades.

We examined whether students' attitudes change over the duration of the course by testing the difference between the means with respect to hours of study, and the importance of lectures, tutorials and readings.

We then used multinomial logistic (MNL) models to explore the factors that characterise students whose expected grades differ (or not) from actual grades. First we determined what factors in general affect students' grade expectations. That is, for K possible outcomes: $K1$ = Grade A; $K2$ = Grade B; and $K3$ = Grade C, we ran $K-1$ independent binary logistic regression models in which one outcome is chosen as the 'base' outcome and the other $K-1$ outcomes are separately regressed against this base outcome. For example, if outcome $K2$ (i.e., the student expects a B grade) is chosen as the base, the following equations are estimated simultaneously using maximum likelihood:

$$\ln \frac{\Pr(Y_i = K1)}{\Pr(Y_i = K2)} = \beta_1 \cdot X_i$$

$$\ln \frac{\Pr(Y_i = K3)}{\Pr(Y_i = K2)} = \beta_2 \cdot X_i$$

Note that for each possible outcome there is an identical set of regressors (X_i). The regressors include student descriptors (drawn from previous literature) and factors that capture students' attitudes, behaviour and perceptions about the course that are hypothesised in this

paper as potentially affecting students' grade expectations. Specifically:

$$X_i = \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Age}_i, \text{Gender}_i, \text{Residence}_i, \text{Ethnic}_i, \text{University}_i, \text{PreviousEcon}_i, \text{Hours}_i, \text{Lecture}_i, \\ \text{Tutorial}_i, \text{Reading}_i, \text{Easy}_i, \text{Continue}_i \end{array} \right)$$

where:

<i>Age</i>	Age of students
<i>Gender</i>	Gender of students
<i>Residence</i>	Living arrangements of students
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Ethnicity of students
<i>University</i>	Whether or not students have attended university before
<i>PreviousEcon</i>	Whether or not students have studied economics before
<i>Hours</i>	Number of hours per week students plan to study ECON1
<i>Lecture</i>	Students' attitudes towards lectures
<i>Tutorial</i>	Students' attitudes towards tutorials
<i>Reading</i>	Students' attitudes towards readings
<i>Easy</i>	Students' perception about the degree of difficulty of the course
<i>Continue</i>	Whether or not students plan to take further economics papers

Second, we examined the characteristics of different types of students: (a) those whose initial expected grades are exactly the same as the actual grades they received (*same*); (b) those whose initial expected grades are one grade level below the actual grades they received (*down1*); (c) those whose initial expected grades are at least two grade levels below the actual grades they received (*down2*); and (d) those whose initial expected grades are one grade level above the actual grades they received (*up1*). That is, for K possible outcomes: $K1 = \text{same}$; $K2 = \text{down1}$; $K3 = \text{down2}$; and $K4 = \text{up1}$, we ran $K-1$ independent binary logistic regression models, with $K1$ as the 'base' outcome. This MNL model is similar to the specification above, but here, $K1$ (i.e., initial expected grade is the same as actual grade received) is chosen as the base. The regressors are also the same, except instead of including hours of study and attitudes towards lectures, tutorials and readings, we used variables that proxy for any *change* in hours of study, and attitudes about the importance of lectures, tutorials and readings.

$$X_i = \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{Age}_i, \text{Gender}_i, \text{Residence}_i, \text{Ethnic}_i, \text{University}_i, \text{PreviousEcon}_i, \text{Hours2}_i, \text{Change1}_i, \\ \text{Change2}_i, \text{Easy2}_i, \text{Continue2}_i \end{array} \right)$$

Age, Gender, Residence, Ethnic, University and PreviousEcon are defined as previously and the remaining variables are defined as follows:

Hours2	A change in the number of hours per week that the students actually spent studying for economics
Change1	A one level change in attitude towards either lectures, tutorials or readings (e.g., from 'very important' to 'important')
Change2	A two or more level change in attitude towards either lectures, tutorials or readings (e.g., from 'very important' to 'somewhat important')
Easy2	Students' perception about the degree of difficulty of the course, after the mid-semester test
Continue2	Whether or not students plan to take further economics papers, after the mid-semester test

Results

What do we find?

Of the 1288 students enrolled in ECON1, 196 students completed both online surveys. The low response rate of 15.2 percent can be partly attributed to the requirement that students needed to complete both surveys to be included in the sample (the initial response rate was 21.4 percent) and the overall low response rate for *online* course evaluation surveys at the University of Otago (the average response rate is 22 percent and for first-year commerce papers it is 19 percent). The main concern arising from a low response rate is that the sample may not be representative of the larger population and therefore we need to be cautious when reporting the results of the survey and making conclusions arising from these results.

The descriptive characteristics of our sample are reported in Table 1. Compared with the characteristics we have available for the population, the sample is fairly representative in terms of residency and ethnicity, with fewer females and respondents aged 21-24 years and comparatively more respondents aged 16-20 years (although both these age groups fall within the Gen Y age range in which we are interested). In terms of how familiar surveyed students are with University and economics in particular, 30.1 percent of surveyed students have never been to university previously and 43.6 percent of students have not studied any economics at any level before.

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of respondents, and population statistics (where available)

Characteristics	Sample (n=196)		Population (N=1288)	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Residency				
Residents	179	91.3%	1168	90.7%
Non-residents	17	8.7%	120	9.3%
Gender				
Males	89	45.4%	714	55.4%
Females	107	54.6%	574	44.6%
Age				
16-20	160	81.6%	951	73.8%
21-24	25	12.8%	286	22.2%
25-30	8	4.1%	39	3.0%
31-50	3	1.5%	12	1.0%
Ethnicity				
New Zealand European	123	62.9%	921	60.7%
Maori, European/Maori	17	8.6%	100	6.6%
Asian	42	21.4%	263	17.3%
Other	14	7.1%	234	15.4%
Region				
Auckland/Waikato	15	7.6%	n/a	
Bay of Plenty/Gisborne	5	2.6%		
Wellington/Manawatu-Wanganui/Taranaki	20	10.2%		
Tasman/Nelson/Marlborough/Canterbury	32	16.3%		
Otago (outside Dunedin)/Southland	19	9.7%		
Dunedin	94	48.0%		
Other	11	5.6%		
Living arrangements				
Flatting	69	35.2%	n/a	
Hall of residence	93	47.5%		
Family home	30	15.3%		
Boarding/homestay/other	4	2.0%		

Studied economics previously			
No	85	43.4%	n/a
At school	101	51.5%	
At university	9	4.6%	
Somewhere else	1	0.5%	
University attendance			
1 st semester at University	59	30.1%	n/a
Attended at least one semester at University	137	69.9%	
Student loan			
Have a loan, or intend to get one	159	81.1%	n/a
Do not have a loan and don't intend to get one	37	18.9%	

The students' attitudes and expectations relating to ECON1 are reported in Table 2. These data are used in our MNL regressions, the results of which are discussed later in this section.

Table 2: *Attitudes and expectations about the “Principles of Economics I”*

Questions relating to the course	1st survey		2nd survey	
Expect ECON1 to be				
Very easy	12	6.1%	25	12.8%
Easy	77	39.3%	95	48.5%
Fairly difficult	97	49.5%	67	34.2%
Very difficult	10	5.1%	9	4.6%
Planned hours of study per week			(actual)	(actual)
Less than 4 hours	11	5.6%	86	43.9%
4-7 hours	80	40.8%	90	45.9%
8-10 hours	86	43.9%	18	9.2%
Over 10 hours	19	9.7%	2	1.0%
Continue with economics?				
Yes	82	41.8%	76	38.8%
No	114	58.2%	120	61.2%

How important are lectures?				
They're not	0	0.0%	46	23.5%
Somewhat	6	3.1%	34	17.3%
Important	51	26.0%	29	14.8%
Very	139	70.9%	87	44.4%
How important are tutorials?				
They're not	1	0.5%	46	23.5%
Somewhat	6	3.1%	27	13.8%
Important	46	23.5%	25	12.8%
Very	143	73.0%	98	50.0%
How important are the readings?				
They're not	3	1.5%	54	27.6%
Somewhat	31	15.8%	67	34.2%
Important	87	44.4%	33	16.8%
Very	75	38.3%	42	21.4%

Grades – expectations vs reality

In Table 3 the 'expected grades' from the two surveys are presented alongside the 'actual grades' received by the surveyed students and for all students (who sat the final examination). At the beginning of the semester, more than half of the surveyed students (59.7 percent) expected to receive a grade within the 'A' range, and no students expected to fail the course. In the second survey (after the mid-semester test) a slightly lower percentage of students (56.6 percent) expected to receive a grade within the 'A' range, and once again, no students expected to fail. To put these statistics in perspective, in the last five years that the course has been offered at the University of Otago (prior to the surveys), on average, 22.7 percent of students received a grade within the 'A' range, and 23.6 percent failed.

Table 3: *Expected grades vs actual grades*

Grade	1 st survey initial expected grade		2 nd survey mid-semester expected grade		Actual grades of the sample group (n=196)		Actual grades of the population (N=1245)*	
	A	117	59.7%	111	56.6%	38	19.4%	193
B	70	35.7%	70	35.7%	74	37.8%	334	26.8%
C	9	4.6%	15	7.7%	53	27.0%	443	35.6%
Fail	0	0%	0	0%	31	15.8%	275	22.1%

*Of the 1288 students enrolled in the Principles of Economics I, 1245 sat the final exam.

Using the paired difference of means test, we find a statistically significant difference between *initial expected grades* and *actual grades of the sample group*, and between *expected grades at mid-semester* and *actual grades of the sample group*. These results suggest that a large number of our surveyed students are optimistic about their grade expectations, even after receiving more information about the course and their performance as the semester progresses. For instance, 59.7 percent of students in the first survey and 56.6 percent of students in the second survey expected an A grade, yet only 19.4 percent of students actually received an A and although no students expected to fail, 15.8 percent of the surveyed group failed the course.

There is a small difference between *initial expected grades* and *mid-semester expected grades* which suggests that after receiving more information about the course and the results of the mid-semester test, students adjust their grade expectations. However, given the results above, students remain over-optimistic about what they expect to receive.

Who is more likely to be optimistic?

We ran MNL regressions to determine whether the demographic characteristics have any effect on the probability of a student expecting a particular grade. The reference group represents the typical first year ECON1 student in our sample: female, aged between 16 to 20, New Zealand European, living in a hall of residence, has attended university for at least one semester, has studied economics previously in secondary school, considers economics “fairly easy”, does not plan to take further economics papers, plans to spend between four and seven hours per

week studying economics, and considers lectures and tutorials to be very important, and readings to be somewhat important. The MNL results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Maximum likelihood estimates and risk ratios: Students' initial expected grades

Initial expected grades Reference Category: B grade Only significant results reported		A grade		C grade	
		Coefficient (β)	Relative Risk Ratio	Coefficient (β)	Relative Risk Ratio
Intercept		0.8365		-9.6059*	
Gender	Female				
	Male	0.5971	1.8169	-4.2671*	0.0140
Residence	Hall of residence				
	Flatting	-1.4664***	0.2308	-0.3137	1.3685
	Family home	-1.6865***	0.1852	4.9222**	187.906
	Boarding/homestay/other	-2.2916	0.1011	-9.6256	0.0000
Ethnic	New Zealand European				
	Maori, European/Maori	0.3547	1.4258	-17.2407	3.25e-08
	Asian	2.2646***	9.6269	-2.2237	0.1082
	Other	1.0917	2.9792	-12.6343	3.26e-06
University	Attended at least 1 sem				
	1st sem at Uni	-0.9122*	0.4017	-2.0638	7.8755
PreviousEcon	Studied at school				
	Have not studied before	0.0198	1.0199	-0.9818	2.6692
	Studied at university	-1.0013	0.3674	3.4794*	32.4404
	Studied economics other	14.6126	2218997	12.2789	215108
Hours	4-7 hours / week				
	Less than 4 hours/ week	-0.9173	0.3996	-18.6918	7.63e-09
	8-10 hours/ week	1.2155***	3.3718	-2.4161	0.0893
	over 10 hours/ week	2.9408***	18.9301	-21.4695	4.74e-10
Continue	Not continue				
	Continue with economics	1.1466**	0.3177	1.4096	4.0944

N = 196

LR chi2 = 124.55; p = 0.0000; Pseudo R2 = 0.3888

***, ** and * indicate significant at 1 percent, 5 percent and 10 percent levels, respectively.

The MNL coefficients for an 'A' grade (0.8365) and a 'C' grade (- 9.6059) can be converted into probabilities. When we do this, we find that it is 69.77 percent likely that our typical student will expect an 'A' grade relative to a 'B' grade, and that it is only 0.01 percent likely that our typical student will expect a 'C' grade relative to a 'B' grade.

According to our results, the following characteristics are statistically significant for students who expect an 'A' grade relative to students who expect a 'B' grade: a student's residence and ethnicity, previous University attendance, intended hours of study, the perceived difficulty of ECON1 and further economic study. However, for students who expect a 'C' grade relative to a 'B' grade, the only characteristics we find to be statistically significant are a student's gender, residence and previous economic study at University.

What do these results actually tell us? A more intuitive way of interpreting these results is to examine the relative risk ratio (RRR) which compares our 'typical' student with another student who differs on one category. For example, consider a student who has all the same characteristics as our typical student, except for their ethnicity. Referring to Table 4, the RRR associated with a student who is Asian compared to our typical student who is a New Zealand European is 9.6269. This means that when all the other characteristics of our typical student are kept constant, except for ethnicity, an Asian student is approximately 9.6 times more likely to expect an 'A' grade relative to a 'B' grade.

When examining how the relative risk associated with expecting an 'A' grade vis-à-vis expecting a 'B' grade changes when *one* characteristic of the typical student changes we find that Asian students, and students who plan to study between 8-10 hours per week or for more than 10 hours per week, are *more* likely to expect an 'A' grade relative to a 'B' grade.

These results are not surprising. For decades, research has shown that Asian students generally have higher educational expectations (Brand et al., 1987; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Louie, 2004). Asian students, particularly those with demonstrated academic ability, work hard to achieve academically. They often come from favourable socioeconomic

backgrounds, and culturally, it is expected that they will do well. In terms of hours of study, students who are prepared to work harder, obviously expect to reap greater rewards, i.e., better grades.

On the other hand, students who live in flats or in their family home, or who find economics fairly difficult or very difficult are *less* likely to expect an 'A' grade relative to a 'B' grade. Generally, students living in a hall of residence have a more conducive learning environment than students who live in a flat or in the family home. For instance, most halls of residence run tutorials for the large first year courses, and senior student residents often act as mentors to first year students, helping to answer questions, giving advice and directing students towards other helpful resources. Students who do not live in halls of residence do not have the same access to these additional resources and possibly it is for this reason that they are less likely to expect an 'A' grade over a 'B' grade. Furthermore, if a student finds the course difficult, then they are less likely to expect a high grade.

When examining how the relative risk associated with expecting a 'C' grade vis-à-vis expecting a 'B' grade changes when *one* characteristic of the typical student changes we find that compared to the typical student (who is only 0.01 percent likely to expect a 'C' grade over a 'B' grade), males and those who live in their family homes are *less* likely to expect a 'C' grade over a 'B' grade, whereas students who have studied economics previously at a university are *more* likely to expect a 'C' grade relative to a 'B'.

Previous research has shown that males are more competitive, tend to be more over-optimistic, and think that they are more mathematically competent than females, and expect better outcomes (Barber & Odean, 2001; Correll 2001, 2004; Kleinjans, 2009). This supports our results which show that males are less likely to expect a lower grade than the typical student.

Students living in the family home are less likely to expect an 'A' grade over a 'B' grade and are also less likely to expect a 'C' grade over a 'B' grade. This might suggest that while the family home environment is less conducive to study than a hall of residence in terms of providing peer and tutorial support, it provides a more structured environment

compared to flatting for instance, and therefore students who live in the family home are less likely to expect a high grade ('A'), but they are also less likely to expect a poor grade ('C').

Students who have studied economics previously at university are more likely to expect a 'C' grade over a 'B' grade compared to our typical student. If students are taking a first year economics paper when they have already studied economics at university before, it suggests that they may have failed the paper (or a similar paper) previously. These students are therefore more likely to be realistic about their grade expectations. Having failed previously, they are more likely to expect a pass (i.e., obtain a 'C') rather than to do well.

Who is more likely to be realistic?

MNL regressions were conducted to determine which specific characteristics affect the likelihood of students receiving the same grade as expected. The reference group represents the typical first year ECON1 student as defined previously. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Maximum likelihood estimates and risk ratios: Difference between actual and expected grades

Difference between actual and expected Reference Category: same actual and expected grades Only significant results reported		Down1		Down2		Up1	
		Coeff (β)	Relative Risk Ratio	Coeff (β)	Relative Risk Ratio	Coeff (β)	Relative Risk Ratio
Intercept		-0.697		-0.020		-315.6	
<i>Ethnic</i>	New Zealand European						
	Maori, European/Maori	0.530	1.698	0.556	1.744	-51.177	6.0e-23
	Asian	0.730	2.075	0.612	1.845	-211.11	2.1e-92
	Other	0.986	2.680	1.885**	6.584	-22.516	1.7e-10
<i>University</i>	Attended at least 1 sem						
	1st sem at Uni	-1.05**	0.348	-3.1***	0.047	331.334	8e+143

N = 195

LR chi2 = 113.41; p = 0.0010; Pseudo R2 = 0.2430

***, ** and * indicate significant at 1 percent, 5 percent and 10 percent levels, respectively.

When we convert the MNL coefficients we find that there is a 33.25 percent probability of a student receiving a grade one level below the initial expected grade; a 49.5 percent probability of receiving a grade two levels below the initial expected grade, and 0 percent probability of receiving a grade one level higher than initially expected. These results are consistent with the over-optimism students have shown regarding the grade they expect to receive, i.e., close to 60 percent of students expect to receive an 'A' grade.

The results indicate that only two factors significantly distinguish those students who receive the same grade as initially expected from those students who do not receive the grade they initially expected – prior university experience and “Other” ethnicity. The RRR associated with prior university experience is 0.348. This means that if our typical student has never attended university before they are 0.348 times *less* likely to receive one grade level below their expected grade. This may reflect the more conservative expectations of students who have never attended university before. When *down2* is the dependent variable, the RRR is 0.047. This means that if our typical student has no prior university experience they are 0.047 times *less* likely to receive two grade levels below their expected grade, which again indicates that students who have never been to university may be more cautious about their abilities and grade expectations.

We also find that if our typical student is of “Other” ethnicity (i.e., American, other Europeans, Africans, Pacific Islanders, etc.) they are 6.584 times *more* likely to receive a grade that is two levels below what they originally expected. This suggests that students of “Other” ethnicities tend to over-estimate their ability and/or their grade expectations. The difference in university education between countries (e.g., teaching styles, grading requirements, etc.) may explain this result.

What about behaviour and attitudes?

As mentioned earlier, we find that on average, students do not significantly alter their initial grade expectations once lectures and tutorials begin. However, it is possible that instead of adjusting their grade expectations, students change their behaviour instead. For example, a student who finds the course slightly harder than anticipated may alter their study habits to achieve their expected 'A' rather than

adjust their expected grade. We used the standard test for the paired difference comparison of two means with respect to hours of study and the importance of lectures, tutorials and readings to find out whether students adjusted their behaviour between surveys.

Our results indicate that students' behaviour with respect to hours of study, as well as perceptions/attitudes about the importance of lectures, tutorials and readings, changed. However, this change in behaviour and perceptions/attitudes has minimal effect in closing the gap between expected grades and actual grades received, i.e., students' grade expectations remain statistically different from actual grades received.

Students were asked to choose from a list, the lecturer and course attributes they considered to be the most important. The results are presented in Table 6. Just over 70 percent of students consider good communication to be the most important lecturer attribute, whereas 21.4 percent think that being organised is the most important attribute with only 4.1 percent and 3.1 percent choosing accessibility and approachability respectively as the most important lecturer attribute. There is more of a spread when it comes to course attributes. Nearly 43 percent of students chose "access to detailed lecture slides" as the most important attribute, with 26 percent considering access to relevant resources and 23.4 percent choosing "a good mix of theory and practice" as the most important course attribute. Course material, which is related to the real world, is considered the most important attribute by only 7.7 percent of the students.

Table 6: Most important lecturer attributes and course attributes

Attributes	No.	Percent
Lecturer attributes		
Good communicator (easily understood, explains well)	140	71.4%
Organised (good lecture slides, handouts etc.)	42	21.4%
Accessible (office hours, time after the lecture etc.)	8	4.1%
Approachable (eg, feel comfortable talking to the lecturer)	6	3.1%
Course attributes		
Access to detailed lecture slides	84	42.9%
Access to on-line resources and additional practice questions	51	26.0%
A good mix of theory and practice	46	23.4%
Course material which is related to the real world	15	7.7 %

Twenty two students made comments about the course in general. Most of these comments related to the content of the course and the mid-semester test. For example,

“This is VERY similar to high school economics.”

“Has been a very good course. It lay the foundations of economics. Have found it very interesting! [sic]”

“The course has been useful for understanding business. Whilst some of the content has been challenging, I felt the mid-term test did not really push these limits of understanding—however I do hope I do not eat my words by getting a low mark!”

“The mid-term test was way too hard and there wasn’t enough time to finish the test.”

Discussion

Initially, students have a limited set of signals from which they can base their grade expectations: most of the surveyed students have never been to university before and a large number have not studied economics previously. It is therefore difficult for many students to know what

to expect in terms of lectures, course structure and assessments for example. We find that when faced with this uncertainty, most students tend to be quite optimistic. By mid-semester we assume that students have settled into university life (e.g., attended lectures, completed assessments and sat tests), and as rational individuals, we hypothesised that students would adjust their initial optimistic grade expectations or change their behaviour in order to achieve an outcome that was similar to their expectations. However, though grade expectations and behaviour at the mid-semester changed slightly from the initial survey, we find that students' grade expectations remain statistically different from actual grades received. Therefore, despite being faced with reality, what students *want* is still not what they *get*.

Our results also support the Gen Y argument that young people are often very confident in their abilities but are not so realistic when it comes to their expectations. A possible explanation for this result might be found within attribution theory (Heider, 1958) where 'self-delusion' occurs as a result of biased processing of signals about oneself. For instance, when processing a negative personal event, a person might make 'external attributions', i.e., blame the negative event on someone or something else, rather than taking self-responsibility, despite the signals available. Comments made by some of the students support this theory. For example: "There was not enough time to complete the test."; "The test was different from previous years."; and "Basic points were not explained properly." It is important to note however, that this kind of self-serving bias is not necessarily a manifestation of student entitlement (characteristic of Gen Y students) *per se*, rather, it may well be the students' way of coping with the general distress over grades (Baer, 2011). If external feedback, i.e., their grade is not as they expected, students then perceive such a feedback as unfair, as a means of coping and/or escaping their reality that is contrary to what they have rosy pictured. Nevertheless, we are also mindful that for some students, particularly those with low self-esteem, a grade that is inconsistent with their original high expectations could also result in self-blame: "I'm not good enough."

The over-optimism exhibited by the surveyed students ought to be interpreted with caution, however, due to the low response rate. In addition, we only estimated the changes in behaviour and attitudes from

the beginning of the semester until the mid-semester. We do not know what further changes in behaviour and attitudes may have occurred (if any) after the mid-semester, which might have altered students' behaviour and influenced their final grade.

Conclusion

The implications of our research suggest large-scale student disappointment as what students want is not always what they get. This could also result in disheartened lecturers as some students may attribute their poor performance to factors such as ineffective lecturers, rather than to their own misperceptions and/or inabilities. It may therefore be prudent for lecturers to clearly set out course requirements at the beginning of the semester, so that students can be more realistic about their grade expectations.

The shift in attitude of students towards lectures, tutorials and readings over the semester, indicates that it may also be worthwhile ensuring that the course is appropriately tailored to fit the needs of the students. As discussed above, access to detailed lecture slides and good communications skills are the most important course and lecturer attributes. Consideration of these attributes may benefit course design and implementation. Furthermore, in order to keep students from feeling distressed not only over grades but also over course requirements, lecturers need to consistently provide timely constructive feedback (Baer, 2011).

Gen Y students need to be provided with the opportunity to interact with the subject matter in alternative forms: oral, visual and hands-on explanation of material (Twenge, 2009). Since Gen Y students are also the generation born to fast-changing digital technologies, their learning styles tend to be more diverse, and to keep them engaged in learning, requires constant updating of teaching tools, methods and other academic services (Gardner & Eng, 2005; Devine, 2010). There is a need to keep pace with the latest technologies that students are familiar with, e.g., access to podcasts of lectures and other online resources; creating a webpage for the course or a class blog, etc.

As a final point, understanding why there is a difference between what

students want and what they get and then implementing even small changes in the overall course design and delivery to better address the needs of Gen Y students can help make the learning experience more enjoyable and fruitful for both lecturer and students.

References

- Anderson, D., Halberstadt, J. & Robert, A. (2013) 'Entitlement attitudes predict students' poor performance in challenging academic conditions' in *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2: 2, May, 151-158.
- Arias, J.J. & Walker, D.M. (2004) 'Additional evidence on the relationship between class size and student performance' in *The Journal of Economic Education*, 35: 4, October, 311-329.
- Baer, J.C. (2011) 'Students' distress over grades: Entitlement or a coping response?' in *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47: 3, Fall, 565-577.
- Barber, B.M. & Odean, T. (2001) 'Boys will be boys: Gender, overconfidence, and common stock investment' in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116: 1, February, 261-292.
- Benedict, M.E. & Hoag, J. (2004) 'Seating location in large lectures: Are seating preferences or location related to course performance?' in *Journal of Economic Education*, 35: 3, July, 215-231.
- Brand, D., Hull, J., Park, J. & Willwerth, J. (1987) 'The new whiz kids' in *Time*, 130: 9, August, 42-47.
- Campbell, W. K., Bonacci, A. M., Shelton, J., Exline, J. J., & Bushman, B. J. (2004). 'Psychological entitlement: Interpersonal consequences and validation of a self-report measure' in *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 83: 1, August, 29-45.
- Correll, S. (2001) 'Gender and the career choice process: The role of biased self-assessments' in *American Journal of Sociology*, 106: 6, May, 1691-1730.
- Correll, S. (2004) 'Constraints into preferences: gender, status, and emerging career aspirations' in *American Sociological Review*, 69: 1, February, 93-113.
- Devine, J. (2010) 'Five myths and realities about Generation Y' in *eCULTURE*, 3: 1, November, 136-141.
- Gardner, S. & Eng, S. (2005) 'What students want: Generation Y and the changing function of the academic library' in *Libraries and the Academy*, 5: 3, July, 405-420.
- Goyette, K. & Xie, Y. (1999) 'Educational expectations of Asian American youths: Determinants and ethnic differences' in *Sociology of Education*, 72: 1, January, 22-36.
- Helland, H. (2007) 'How does social background affect the grades and grade

- careers of Norwegian economics students?’ in *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28: 4, July, 489-504.
- Heider, F. (1958) *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kleinjans, K.J. (2009) ‘Do gender differences in preferences for competition matter for occupational expectations?’ in *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 30: 5, October, 701-710.
- Kopp, J. P. & Finney, S. J. (2013) ‘Linking academic entitlement and student incivility using latent means modeling’ in *Journal of Experimental Education*, 81: 3, 322-336.
- Lippmann, S., Bulanda, R.E. & Wagenaar, T.C. (2009) ‘Student entitlement: Issues and strategies for confronting entitlement in the classroom and beyond’ in *College Teaching*, 57: 4, Fall, 197-204.
- Louie, V.S. (2004) *Compelled to Excel*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Margrain, S.A. (1978) ‘Student characteristics and academic performance in higher education: A review’ in *Research in Higher Education*, 8: 2, June, 111-123.
- McGhee, J.W. (1985) *Introductory Statistics*, St. Paul: West Publishing Co.
- Singleton-Jackson, J.A., Jackson, D.L. & Reinhardt, J. (2010) ‘Students as consumers of knowledge: Are they buying what we’re selling?’ in *Innovative Higher Education*, 35: 5, June, 343-358.
- Twenge, J. M. (2009) ‘Generational changes and their impact in the classroom: teaching Generation Me’ in *Medical Education*, 43: 5, May, 398-405.
- Van Blerkom, M.L. (1990) ‘Class attendance in undergraduate classes: Why and when do students miss classes?’ Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 1990, in Boston, MA.

About the Authors

Arlene Garcés-Ozanne is a Lecturer at the Department of Economics, University of Otago. Arlene’s research interests are mainly in the areas of economics education, labour economics, growth and development in developing countries and empirical modelling of total factor productivity using cross-sectional, time-series and multi-country panel data. Her teaching at Otago includes Principles of Economics, Labour Economics, and the World Economy.

arlene.ozanne@otago.ac.nz

Trudy Sullivan is a Lecturer at the Department of Economics,

University of Otago. Her main research interests are in the areas of health economics and multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA). Trudy's teaching encompasses a range of subject areas and levels, ranging from first year Principles of Economics through to third year Economics of Health and Education.

trudy.sullivan@otago.ac.nz

Contact details

*Department of Economics, University of Otago,
PO Box 56, Dunedin
New Zealand
9054*

Identifying tertiary bridging students at risk of failure in the first semester of undergraduate study

Robert Whannell
Patricia Whannell

University of New England

This study presents the findings of the second phase of a project examining the attrition and progression of two cohorts of students in a tertiary bridging program at a regional university in Australia. The first phase of the study (Whannell, 2013) based on data collected up to week 5 of the bridging program identified age, academic achievement on the initial assessment tasks, the level of peer support and the number of absences from scheduled classes as being the factors which predicted attrition from the bridging program. This phase of the study examined a sample of 92 students who subsequently completed a custom questionnaire in week 12 of the tertiary bridging program and then continued into the first semester of undergraduate study. Participants at risk of failure in the first semester of undergraduate study were characterised by being younger in age, demonstrating a high incidence of absence from scheduled classes and low levels of academic achievement in the final assessment tasks in the bridging program and reporting lower quality relationships with academic

staff. The need to initiate interventions to target at-risk students prior to commencement of their undergraduate study is discussed.

Keywords: tertiary bridging program, attrition, educational transition.

Introduction

A longitudinal research project was conducted at a regional university in Australia examining the attrition and progression of two cohorts of tertiary bridging students for the period from their initial enrolment in the bridging program to the end of the first semester of undergraduate study. The findings of the first stage of the study relating to the factors associated with attrition from the bridging program have been previously reported (Whannell, 2013). The principal finding of that report, based on data collected in the first five weeks of the bridging program, were that the primary predictors of attrition were age, academic achievement in the initial assessment tasks, the quality of peer support and the number of absences from scheduled classes. The quality of academic staff support was found to be strongly positively associated with the emotional commitment and academic identity of the participant and negatively associated with scheduled class absence for those participants who dropped out.

The research question that guided the component of the research project targeting the transition from the bridging program into undergraduate study was: *What factors, measurable at the end of a tertiary bridging program, identify tertiary bridging students at risk of failure in the first semester of undergraduate study.* A focus for the study was to investigate whether the factors relevant to attrition in the tertiary bridging phase are also applicable to the quality of academic achievement during the transition into undergraduate study. A profile of a tertiary bridging student who may be at risk of poor academic performance will be developed.

The tertiary bridging program

The tertiary bridging program in which the participants involved in this

study were enrolled is conducted at a regional Australian university. It is available for on-campus study only and is completed by the majority of students in one full-time semester. It requires the completion of four courses, including one compulsory course targeting academic skills appropriate for study at the tertiary level. The only restriction on access to the program is that students must not be enrolled in secondary school and be at least 17 years of age at the time of enrolment. No academic restrictions are applied to enrolment with enrolment statistics indicating that about 45% of students have not completed secondary school. Successful completion of the program guarantees direct enrolment into most undergraduate programs at the institution.

Theoretical background informing the study

A study conducted over a number of years at the Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia (Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer, 2000) identified an attrition rate of 50% in an on-campus one year bridging program. The program did not include any academic restrictions on enrolment. It was concluded that the academic performance of the tertiary bridging students in undergraduate study was comparable to that of students who gained entry through traditional means, a finding confirmed by Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001). The Cantwell, Archer and Bourke (2001) study examined the academic outcomes of students who had gained entry to undergraduate study at the University of Newcastle through bridging programs offered at the institution. It was identified that age was a “significant predictor of academic achievement with older students outperforming younger students” (2001, p. 232). Older students have also been demonstrated to have “more confidence to solve problems that arise in their lives, more confidence to plan a desired course of action, and more confidence to appraise accurately their strengths and weaknesses” (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999, p. 50).

McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001), in a study involving students in the first semester of undergraduate study at the Queensland University of Technology, identified previous academic performance as the primary indicator of university performance. The study also identified integration into university, self-efficacy and employment responsibilities as being associated with the quality of academic achievement. The view that prior academic performance is a significant

indicator of achievement in the first year of undergraduate study has also been expressed by other Australian researchers (Burton & Dowling, 2005; Evans, 2000). The level of undergraduate achievement has also been identified as a direct predictor of persistence in continued tertiary study (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2008; Wintre & Bowers, 2007).

A longitudinal study (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005) of the first year undergraduate student experience was conducted by the University of Melbourne over the period from 1994 to 2004, with three different data collections being completed at five year intervals. The study targeted a number of Australian universities, with nine institutions participating in the 2004 data collection. The study defined three types of students, school-leavers who were aged 19 years and younger, non-traditional students who were between the ages of 20 to 24 and mature age students who were those over 25 years of age. A number of conclusions were made in the most recent study in relation to non-traditional and mature age students. It was established that mature age students “emerge as a highly satisfied group on the whole. They typically receive higher marks than their younger peers, and are slightly more positive about the way university has met their expectations” (p. v). It was also identified that mature age students “tend to have strong clarity of purpose and are more likely to seek assistance from staff” (p. v). Non-traditional students were also identified as receiving:

Marks higher than they expected during the first semester of study. This may reflect the general lack of confidence experienced by older students who often feel daunted at the thought of sharing classes with younger students after returning to study after years of being involved in home or work settings. (p. 26)

Tinto's (1975, 1993) Student Integration Model identifies academic and social integration as primary influences on the decision to abandon tertiary study. The related constructs of commitment to tertiary study and intention to persist or leave were identified on a number of occasions in the Krause et. al. (2005) study. It was identified that “females are more likely than males to say that emotional health and physical health are important decisions for considering deferring, and males are more likely to cite disliking study and thinking they might fail” (p. 19). An overall gender difference in the level of commitment

was also identified where female students demonstrate “more academic commitment and more satisfaction with their study than the males. The females are more likely to indicate that their intrinsic interest in the subject area is an important motivating factor for them” (p. 70). A difference was also identified between full-time and part-time students where “part-time students show a clearer sense of purpose than the full-time students” (p. 73). Of particular interest to the current study is the identification of a better clarity of purpose which was identified in mature age students. It was expected that this will be reflected in higher levels of commitment to the goal of completing tertiary study and improved academic performance for mature age students in the bridging program.

Cao and Gabb (2006) completed a study at the University of Victoria which examined student attrition during the first year of undergraduate study at a new generation university over the three years from 2002 to 2004. The study established that females had a higher attrition rate than males with a difference between 0.8% and 4.6% being recorded. Differences in attrition rates were also identified based upon age and socio-economic status (SES). Students between 20 and 24 years of age and those from a low SES background were demonstrated to have a lower attrition rate. Part-time students were found to have a much higher attrition rate when compared to their full-time colleagues with part-time attrition rates varying between 39% and 47% and full-time rates varying between 13% and 17%.

McMillan (2005), in a study of data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, compared young people who had dropped out of tertiary study with those who persisted and identified that:

Groups that displayed relatively *low* levels of attrition included students from language backgrounds other than English, students from small provincial cities, students whose parents have a university degree or diploma, students with high ENTER scores, and students in fields such as health and law. (p. v)

These studies identify previous academic performance as being relevant to both attrition and academic achievement in undergraduate study, which may have particular relevance to bridging program students who have generally demonstrated poor levels of academic outcomes

in secondary education. It also identifies other areas which may be relevant to the current research, including the amount of tertiary education exposure through the previous tertiary study of other family members and the differing attrition rates which may result in different tertiary programs. The McMillan (2005) study also concluded that the number of hours of paid work completed each week had an influence on attrition. No differences were identified in attrition for students who worked up to 10 hours per week, however “long hours of paid work while studying were associated with higher levels of attrition” (McMillan, 2005, p. v). A significant finding of the McMillan study was that student interests played a major role in the situation where tertiary students change course or dropout of university. It was identified that “students less commonly cited academic difficulties, difficulties juggling work and study, or financial difficulties as their main reason for changing courses or leaving the higher education sector” (p. v).

Intervention on the part of academic staff has also been demonstrated to have a positive influence on student engagement in the first year of undergraduate study. Nelson, Duncan and Clarke (2009), in a study at the Queensland University of Technology with first year undergraduate students, demonstrated that contacting students who were considered at risk of poor academic performance due to non-submission of assessment tasks had a positive influence on student retention and achievement. The contact took the form of a telephone call, the purpose of which was to identify any possible issues that the student may have and to identify additional support options which were available within the institution, such as counselling and academic services. In particular, “the at risk group who were contacted achieved significantly higher end-of-semester final grades than, and persisted...at more than twice the rate of, the at risk group who were not contacted” (p. 1). The times of the semester which were considered of particular importance, and which may also be relevant to the current study, were “the start of semester, the first four weeks, the first assignment and prior to the final assessment” (p. 1).

The Nelson, Duncan and Clarke (2009) study provides support for the view that tertiary students require additional academic and social support during the early transition period of accessing tertiary education. This view is further supported by research that examined

the university experience of mature age students at the University of Tasmania which concluded that “what happens at enrolment and university entry is less important than the orientation, academic and social support which students receive throughout the course of their studies, and their own aspirations and expectations of themselves” (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite, & Godfrey, 2004). The role of academic and social support was also identified in a study done at the Queensland University of Technology (Tindle & Lincoln, 2002) relating to mature age students in their first year of tertiary study. The study participants identified the following factors, in order of frequency, as important to their academic success: social support from fellow students, preparation before arrival at university, family support, access to on-line resources, accessibility to academic staff, and personal attitudes with students referring to their own determination and perseverance in the face of obstacles. It would be expected that academic and social support would be particularly important for students such as those in a tertiary bridging program, many of whom have a poor academic background.

Lawrence (2005) based on a review of the literature, proposed a re-conceptualisation of the tertiary student attrition/retention phenomenon. She proposed that the phenomenon comprised two different components which should be looked at separately, namely the time of the transition into tertiary study and the period after transition. It is also noted that the majority of the more recent studies which have been done in relation to the tertiary attrition phenomenon have taken a sociocultural approach. The early models, which appear heavily influenced by Tinto’s (1975, 1993) approach, present the role of the student as one in which he/she must integrate into the existing university culture. The more recent studies, collectively, appear to be proposing that the university culture should be sufficiently flexible to adapt itself to allow students to be accepted as they are upon their initial arrival. If this were the case, many of the issues associated with the transition process into undergraduate study may be eliminated, or at least reduced due to a lessening of cultural shock.

The previously reported first stage of this research project (Whannell, 2013) examined the student experience from enrolment to the end of the tertiary bridging program. A logistic regression analysis, based on data ($N = 295$) obtained from a questionnaire administered in week

3 and the first assessment tasks completed in week 5, identified the following factors as being significantly associated with attrition from the bridging program:

- Age, with older participants demonstrating a lower attrition rate;
- Absence from scheduled classes, with lower attrition associated with lower levels of absence;
- Academic performance at the first assessment task, with better performance being associated with a lower attrition rate;
- The quality of peer support, with higher levels of support being associated with a lower attrition rate. (Whannell, 2013: 294)

The literature reviewed and the findings from the first stage of the current study (Whannell, 2013) identify a number of factors that may influence the quality of the outcomes for tertiary bridging program students as they transition into undergraduate study. Age and the quality of previous academic achievement were identified as being associated with attrition in tertiary study and would be expected to be relevant to the quality of academic achievement in the first semester of undergraduate study for tertiary bridging students. The quality of social support was also expected to play an important role in the transition process and be reflected in the quality of academic results achieved. Other factors, such as gender and the number of hours of outside work completed, may also be relevant.

Method

The aim of this study was to identify factors measurable in the final weeks of the tertiary bridging program that could be used to identify students at risk of poor academic performance in the first semester of undergraduate study. For this reason, a quantitative approach was employed involving the completion of a questionnaire that facilitated measurement of a number of variables that the literature indicated may potentially be predictive of the level of academic performance in the first semester of undergraduate study.

This study utilised the same custom questionnaire as that used in the first stage of the research project (Whannell, 2013). The data analysed for this report was collected by a questionnaire completion in week 12

of the tertiary bridging program in a lecture of a course compulsory for all students. The week 12 data collection involved 92 participants who subsequently enrolled in undergraduate study at the same institution in the following semester.

The questionnaire was composed of an introductory demographics and study behaviours section, followed by a series of Likert-style items using a five point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Five Likert scales, comprising a total of 30 items, were provided by the questionnaire and are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Peer Support	8	0.872
Emotional Commitment and Identity	7	0.882
Family Support	6	0.893
Staff Support	5	0.809
Academic Self-Efficacy	4	0.773

The Cronbach's alpha values reported (Whannell, 2013) demonstrate a high level of internal reliability for each scale.

The family, staff and peer support scales included items such as "My family are supportive of my desire to attend university", "I have developed good relationships with other students at university" and "Academic staff are supportive of my attempt to complete university study". The emotional commitment and identity scale included items such as "I feel proud of being a university student", "I am strongly committed to pursuing my educational goals" and "I like going to university". The academic self-efficacy scale included items such as "I consider myself to be a good student" and "I am a good note-taker in lectures". The academic self-efficacy scale was intended to address skills applicable to successful tertiary study.

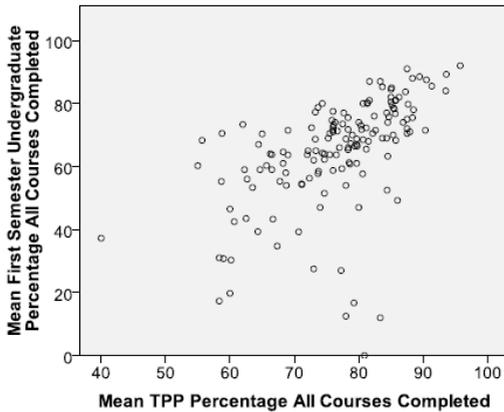
Findings and Discussion

Undergraduate achievement

Figure 1 shows a scatterplot comparing the final mean achievement

for all courses completed in the bridging program with that in the first semester of undergraduate study for the participants who completed the week 12 questionnaire in the bridging program who continued on to undergraduate study.

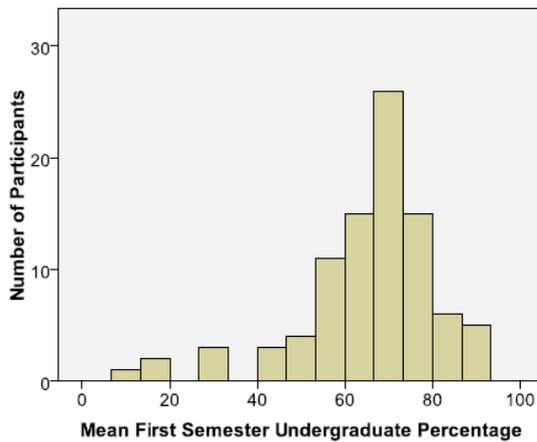
Figure 1 – Scatterplot comparing final mean bridging program achievement and first semester mean undergraduate achievement ($N = 92$)



The final mean achievement in the bridging program correlated well with the overall mean result for courses in the first semester of undergraduate study ($\rho = .607, p < .001, N = 92$). The level of correlation provides support for the view that achievement in the bridging program is acting as a good guide to the students' capacity to cope with the academic requirements of undergraduate study and to achieve at that level of education.

Figure 2 shows the data distribution for the mean achievement for all courses completed in the first semester of undergraduate study for these participants.

Figure 2 – Histogram of first semester undergraduate results for participants who completed week 12 bridging program data collection ($N = 92$)



While the data distribution includes a number of low outliers, the distribution is close to normal for results above 40. Results below 40 were considered outliers and were removed from the dataset to allow for a correlational analysis using Pearson’s r and multiple linear regression to be conducted.

Previous research examining the first year undergraduate experience have indicated different qualities of outcomes based upon gender (Cao & Gabb, 2006; Krause, 2005), the number of hours of work completed outside university and whether the student was the first-in-family to attend university (McMillan, 2005). In this study, there was no significant difference in academic achievement based on gender, with males ($\bar{X} = 68.8, s = 9.6, N = 32$) demonstrating very similar results compared to females ($\bar{X} = 69.6, s = 10.1, N = 54$): $t(84) = 0.358, p = .721$. A Spearman’s correlation between the number of hours of work outside university and the level of mean undergraduate achievement for the participants was very low and not statistically significant ($\rho = .020, p = .880, N = 57$) indicating no association between these

factors. Note that, of the participants who reported their outside work hours, 55% indicated they did not engage in this activity at all. Those who were the first in their family to attend university demonstrated a somewhat lower level of academic achievement ($\bar{X} = 62.5, s = 18.1, N = 53$) when compared to other students ($\bar{X} = 67.1, s = 14.8, N = 39$). However, the difference in achievement was not statistically significant ($t(90) = 1.3, p = .198$). While the literature review suggested that gender, the number of hours of outside work and first-in-family status may be associated with differences in the outcomes for the participants, this study has not provided any substantive evidence to support this view. These findings support those of the previously reported first stage of this study (Whannell, 2013). Table 2 shows the Pearson's r correlations for the variables from the week 12 bridging program data collection with the mean achievement for the first semester of undergraduate study.

Table 2: Pearson's r correlation coefficients – week 12 scales versus undergraduate achievement

Measure	Emotional Commitment and Identity	Family Support	Peer Support	Staff Support	Self Efficacy	Hours Study	Scheduled Classes Missed	Age
Undergraduate Result	.009	.013	.137	.113	.026	.195	-.375**	.251**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Sample size range = 82 to 85

Similar to the analyses previously reported of the data collected during the initial weeks of the bridging program (Whannell, 2013), the number of scheduled classes missed and age appear as predictors of the quality of academic achievement for participants in the first semester of undergraduate study. The correlations indicate that as age increases achievement is higher, supporting previous research (Cantwell, Archer & Bourke, 2001; Krause, Hartley, James & McInnis, 2005). Achievement was reduced for those students who demonstrated higher absenteeism.

A standard multiple linear regression was performed using the mean result obtained in the first semester of undergraduate study as the dependent variable and the final mean bridging program result, number of scheduled classes missed and age as the independent variables.

The purpose of the regression analysis was to determine the relative strength of influence of these factors on the level of undergraduate achievement for the participants. The multiple correlation coefficient ($R = .670$) was significantly different from zero, ($F(3,80) = 21.733, p < .001$) while 42.8% of the variation in the mean undergraduate result was explained. The final bridging program result ($t = 6.337, p < .001$) and the number of scheduled classes missed ($t = -2.193, p = .031$) made a statistically significant contribution to the model. Age ($t = 1.577, p = .119$) was found to not provide any significant unique contribution to prediction. The coefficients table is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Coefficients table – Regression with undergraduate result as independent variable

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	9.770	9.274		1.054	.295
Mean Bridging Program Result	.717	.113	.547	6.337	.000
Scheduled Classes Missed	-.737	.336	-.195	-2.193	.031
Age	.141	.089	.137	1.577	.119

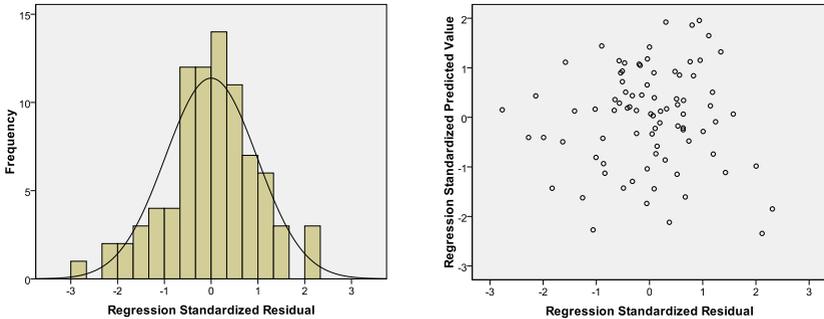
The relative influence of each of the predictor variables on the mean undergraduate result is given by the Beta values. The higher the Beta value, the greater the relative influence of that variable, with negative values indicating that as the predictor value increases, the value of the undergraduate achievement will reduce. The standardised Beta weights indicate that the dominant contribution to improved academic achievement is the mean bridging program result, while the number of scheduled classes missed has a negative effect on achievement. The equation of prediction for the analysis is given by:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Mean Undergraduate Achievement} \\ & = .717 \times \text{Mean TPP Achievement} - .737 \times \text{Classes Missed} + .141 \times \text{Age} \end{aligned}$$

This result supports the findings of previous studies (Burton & Dowling, 2005; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), where the primary predictor of achievement in the first semester of undergraduate study was the quality of previous achievement. In this case, the mean result in the assessment tasks completed at the end of the tertiary bridging program.

The assumptions of the regression model were tested by examining the distribution of standardised residuals and the scatter plot of standardised predicted values versus standardised residuals, which are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Undergraduate result regression plots



The distribution of the standardised residuals is close to normal, while the standardised predicted values versus standardised residuals distribution is close to random, indicating homogeneity of variance. This indicates that the assumptions required for a valid regression analysis are met and the dataset was suitable for linear regression.

First semester undergraduate failure

This section will examine the data available at week 12 of the bridging program with a view to identifying the factors that may be predictive of students who are at risk of academic failure in the first semester of undergraduate study. To facilitate the analysis, the mean result for each participant for all courses studied in the first semester of undergraduate study were coded to distinguish between those students who had achieved a mean result of 50% or better and those who failed to achieve at this level. The coding identified 12 participants who did not achieve at the required level and 79 who did. This coding was then used as the grouping variable for the conducting of an independent samples t-test for each of the summated Likert scales from the week 12 data collections and the overall mean result in the bridging program. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Independent samples *t*-test – Week 12 bridging program summated scales by undergraduate passing result

Measure	Levene's Test		t-test		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Family Support	.647	.423	1.604	89	.112
Peer Support	1.279	.261	.417	89	.678
Staff Support	2.435	.122	3.171	89	.002
Emotional Commitment and Identity	.485	.488	1.690	89	.095
Academic Self-Efficacy	1.277	.261	.777	88	.439
Final Bridging Program Result	2.184	.143	2.951	89	.004

The scales which demonstrated violation of Levene's Test were analysed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test, with the results shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney U-test – Week 12 bridging program data by undergraduate passing result

Measure	Age	Hours Study	Hours Paid Work	Classes Missed
Mann-Whitney U	310.5	448.0	382.0	255.0
Z	-1.922	-.098	-1.077	-2.579
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.922	.281	.010

These results indicate that significant differences exist for the levels of staff support ($\bar{X}_{<50\%} = 22.9, s_{<50\%} = 2.1, \bar{X}_{\geq 50\%} = 25.7, s_{\geq 50\%} = 3.1, d = 1.06$), age (Mean Rank $_{<50\%} = 61.3$, Mean Rank $_{\geq 50\%} = 85.9$), the number of classes missed (Mean Rank $_{<50\%} = 61.9$, Mean Rank $_{\geq 50\%} = 43.4$) and the final bridging program result ($\bar{X}_{<50\%} = 68.2, s_{<50\%} = 11.1, \bar{X}_{\geq 50\%} = 78.1, s_{\geq 50\%} = 8.2, d = 1.01$) based upon the participants' achieving an average of 50% in the first semester of undergraduate study. The emotional commitment and identity variable was just outside the cut-off for significance at the 95% confidence level. It will be remembered that, with one exception, these risk factors are identical to those identified as risk factors of attrition from the bridging program (Whannell, 2013). In the week 3 data collection the level of staff support was not significantly different between those who dropped out of the program and those who completed. However, a difference close to that for statistical significance

at the 95% confidence level was identified in the level of peer support. In the week 12 data collection, this situation has reversed and there was a significant difference in the quality of perceived staff support.

While a logistic regression analysis would have been beneficial to provide a more in-depth analysis to quantify the influences of predictor variables on academic failure in the first semester of undergraduate study, the size of the dataset does not allow for this to be done with confidence. The dataset includes only 12 cases of participants failing to achieve the required 50% mean result on their undergraduate courses. This small number of cases would not allow for a statistically reliable logistic regression analysis to be completed (Babyak, 2004). A much larger study using participants from a number of universities or over a much longer time period would be necessary to achieve the required sample size for this to be done successfully.

Conclusions

This analysis identifies the profile of a bridging program student at the finish of their tertiary bridging program who may be at risk of achieving poorly in their first semester of undergraduate study. Those participants at risk were characterised by:

- Being younger in age;
- Demonstrating a high incidence of absence from scheduled classes;
- Reporting lower quality relationships with academic staff; and
- Lower levels of academic achievement in the final assessment tasks in the bridging program.

When the findings of the initial component of the research project targeting attrition from the bridging program (Whannell, 2013) are considered in association with the results reported here, it is apparent that the consistent factors which predict the quality of outcomes for tertiary bridging students are the quality of academic achievement, the age of the student and the number of scheduled classes missed. Similarly to previous studies (Cantwell, et al., 2001; Krause, et al., 2005), older students have been identified as having improved outcomes in undergraduate study. The quality of supportive social relationships has been identified as being important. However, the source of support which maximises the likelihood of academic success appears to change

over the course of study. While support from peers is associated with reduced attrition during the transition into the bridging program, it is the support of academic staff which is associated with better academic performance during the transition into the first semester of undergraduate study.

Of particular interest is that the factors identified do not require sophisticated approaches to measurement. Age, high levels of absence from class and academic achievement are able to be measured within the ongoing activities of the bridging program. The measurement of the quality of relationships with staff could also be accomplished with a small questionnaire incorporated as a part of the final assessment task in the compulsory academic skills course. In this study, the quality of staff relationships were measured utilising a five item Likert scale.

The implication that these findings have for practice within the tertiary bridging program is that identifying students at risk of poor academic performance in the first semester of undergraduate study appears to be a relatively simple task and one which should be attempted. This process would be best undertaken immediately the final assessment results are available. At-risk students would then be passed onto the support staff responsible for first year students who would then initiate the institutional processes, similar to those described by Nelson, Duncan and Clarke (2009), to support these students during their first semester of undergraduate study.

The study has identified age, class absence, the quality of staff relationships and bridging program academic achievement as the variables that predict poor academic achievement in the first semester of undergraduate study at the institution where the study was conducted. However, there are limitations on the generalisability of these findings. The opportunity exists to repeat this study using a much larger sample size that incorporates a variety of delivery methods across different institutions to determine if the findings reported here are applicable more widely. It is also the case that, while this study may provide a profile of the tertiary bridging student who is at risk of poor academic performance during the transition into undergraduate study, it does not provide insight into the form that intervention to address the issue should take. Further research would also be appropriate in this

area.

It must also be said that, of the 92 students who commenced undergraduate study, only 12 (13%) achieved a mean result on all undergraduate courses of less than 50%. The overall attrition rate for the university where this study was conducted for all students has been recorded as high as 25%, with a higher figure being demonstrated for first year students. While attrition rate and failure rate are not synonymous, a 13% failure rate for these students, considering their academic background, is a remarkable achievement.

References

- Abbott-Chapman, J., Braithwaite, J., & Godfrey, J. (2004). *Promoting access, increasing opportunities for university education: A study of mature-aged students from disadvantaged regions*. Canberra: DEST Retrieved from http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/AoFD5B3D-6F1A-47C6-B681-1C172B90DE9B/2392/mature_access_report.pdf.
- Archer, J., Cantwell, R., & Bourke, S. (1999). Coping at university: An examination of achievement, motivation, self-regulation, confidence, and method of entry. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 18(1), 31-54.
- Babyak, M. (2004). What you see may not be what you get: A brief, nontechnical introduction to overfitting in regression-type models. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 66(3), 411-421.
- Burton, L. & Dowling, D. (2005) *In search of the key factors that influence student success at university, in Higher education in a changing world*. Proceedings of the 28th HERDSA Annual Conference, Sydney, 3-6 July 2005.
- Cantwell, R., Archer, J., & Bourke, S. (2001). A comparison of the academic experiences and achievement of university students entering by traditional and non-traditional means. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 26(3), 221-234.
- Cao, Z., & Gabb, R. (2006). *Student attrition at a new generation university*. Paper presented at the Association for Research in Education Conference, Adelaide, Australia.
- Cooper, N., Ellis, B., & Sawyer, J. (2000). *Expanded future opportunities provided by a bridging course at a regional university campus*. Paper presented at the 4th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Brisbane, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Evans, M. (2000). *Planning for the transition to tertiary study: A literature review*. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 9(1), 1-13.
- Grebennikov, L., & Skaines, I. (2008). University of Western Sydney students

- at risk: Profile and opportunities for change. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 14(10), 58-70.
- Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R., & McInnis, C. (2005). *The first year experience in Australian universities: Findings from a decade of national studies*. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Lawrence, J. (2005). Re-conceptualising attrition and retention: Integrating theoretical, research and student perspectives. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 2(3), 16-33.
- McKenzie, K., & Schweitzer, R. (2001). Who succeeds at university? Factors predicting academic performance in first year Australian university students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20(1), 21-33.
- McMillan, J. (2005). *Course change and attrition from higher education* (Vol. LSAY Research Report Number 39). Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Nelson, K., Duncan, M., & Clarke, J. (2009). Student success: The identification and support of first year university students at risk of attrition. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Tindle, E., & Lincoln, D. (2002). *Mature age students in transition: Factors contributing to their success in first year*. Paper presented at the 6th Pacific Rim, First Year in Higher Education 2002, The University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2 ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Whannell, R. (2013). Predictors of Attrition and Achievement in a Tertiary Bridging Program. *The Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 53(2), 280-301
- Wintre, M., & Bowers, C. (2007). Predictors of persistence to graduation: Extending a model and data on the transition to university model. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 39(3), 220.

About the Authors

Dr Robert Whannell is currently employed as a Lecturer in Science Education at the University of New England in Australia. He was a lecturer in a tertiary bridging program from 2006 to 2011 and has been engaged in teaching introductory undergraduate mathematics courses. His current research focus is in relation to the transition experiences of tertiary bridging students into undergraduate study.

Email: rwhannel@une.edu.au

Patricia Whannell was a lecturer in a tertiary bridging program for a number of years. She has been involved in the delivery and coordination of core academic skills courses. She is currently employed as a lecturer in Health Education at the University of New England. Her primary research interests are in developing academic self-efficacy in students in transition.

Email: pwhannel@une.edu.au

Contact details

Robert Whannell,
School of Education
University of New England,
Armidale, NSW, 2350

Educational biographies in Germany: From secondary school general education to lifelong learning?

Harry Friebe

University of Hamburg

This article addresses the change in the transitional process from secondary school general education to gainful employment within the framework of societal modernisation processes in Germany.

We analyse the relationship between the options for and restrictions upon individual educational mobility under the conditions imposed by the various socially institutionalised educational segments, which comprise a structure of opportunity.

The database for our study consists in the longitudinal findings of the “Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel” (HBLP) from 1980 to 2007, which examined the processes of vocational education mobility for a sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979.

How do these people manage their educational strategies? What do they experience in terms of vocational education and continuing education within the institutional structure of opportunity? Do the career paths differ after gender?

Keywords: *Vocational training, Educational Biography, Vocational training mobility, Continuing education, Vocational education policy, Germany.*

Introduction: Educational institutions and individualisation of vocational training mobility

The German education system is currently undergoing a process of transformation in order to meet the challenges of a globalised market. Additional topics such as lifelong learning and demographic change are also being addressed. Transitions between school and the working world have become longer and more uncertain due to the structural changes of modern society. They can include multifaceted, open-ended search processes and carry multifarious opportunities and risks for those trying to navigate them. Through the 1980s, the classic “two threshold model”ⁱ was still considered the standard biographical pattern, i.e. graduation, vocational training, employment (cf. Dietrich et al. 2009). Increasingly, for a growing share of graduates, this is being replaced by a complicated and open-ended multi-threshold process.

The point of origin for this change is an educational “system” that is divided into three separate “closed shops” with exclusive entrance requirements:

- the dual vocational training segment (dominant for male teenagers);
- the (full-time) vocational school segment (dominant for female teenagers); and
- the university segmentⁱⁱ.

Starting in the early 1980s, the vocational education mobility of young adults in Germany began to increase. This trend towards a change in the use of vocational education was and continues to be publicly debated,

especially the combination of vocational traineeship with academic studies. In 1983, only 8 percent of apprentices in the dual system of vocational training were also qualified for university entry. By 1998, “this figure had grown to 17 percent” (Jacob 2004, p. 116). In 1983, 13 percent of first-year students had completed a vocational education program; by 1991, 29 percent had (cf. HIS 1998; also Lauterbach/Weil, p. 110; also Arbeitsgruppe 1994, p. 544). Vocational education mobility is no fringe phenomenon; from an educational policy perspective, it has become an increasingly important topic. In his study “Vocational Education in Upheaval”, Baethge wrote that “the central focus is on the category vocational mobility, which is vitally important for both one’s individual professional career as well as for the safeguarding of the human resources in a modern economy. Institutionally, vocational mobility means that the borders between educational fields must be permeable and flexible. Individually, it manifests itself in the way teenagers acquire the skills necessary to independently organise their educational biographies within the context of lifelong learning” (Baethge 2006, p. 7). Permeability and equivalence in the structurally conservative vocational education institutions are the central requirements necessary to achieve an increase in individual vocational education mobility.

Based on the longitudinal findings of our Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel ⁱⁱⁱ (HBLP), we reconstruct the complex processes of vocational education mobility within a biographical context. The aim is to transform the singular “vocational education” into the plural “educational processes” as well as to bring the otherwise insular segments of vocational education closer together. The object of analysis is a sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979.

Within the framework of a multiple step sequence, we explore the educational and continuing education processes of the gainfully employed members of the sample. We begin in section 1 by describing our survey sample and the experiences of its members in the various vocational education segments. In section 2, we focus on the relationship between vocational education and continuing education. Section 3 deals with discontinuities and other risks during one’s vocational training and career periods. It’s important to note that our inquiry into vocational education mobility is directed toward the

relationship between the institution and decision-making (Hillmert 2007, p. 71): How are one's educational, occupational and continuing education biographies influenced by the institutional opportunity structure on the one hand (cf. Albert 2007) and individual decisions on the other? In section 4, we focus on the graduating class cohort's accounting of their educational participation and discrimination. Our conclusions in section 5 point to necessary educational policy reforms in Germany.

Sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979: Educational and vocational training mobility

We have followed our research sample for more than 25 years, posing questions regarding their education in the context of vocational qualifications, occupation and familial status. We define the sample theoretically, describing it as a “modernity sample” (cf. Friebel et al. 2000 and 2008) because the members' life courses and biographies have been heavily influenced by modern societal structural changes in complex ways. The members of the sample:

- were “children” of the German educational expansion in the 1970s, which means they had additional educational opportunities;
- were “poor cousins” of the labour market crisis in Germany at the beginning of 1980s and thus experienced more labour market restrictions;
- are representatives of a generation from the high birth rate era, having been born between 1959 and 1964 (“baby boom”), which means more intense competition.

This interlinking of additional educational options and more labour market restrictions under conditions of increased competition and crowding-out has shaped the graduating class of 1979 as a so-called modernity sample. The survey sample is a randomly generated cluster selection. Three different types of schools were selected in each of three Hamburg neighbourhoods with varying social structures. Using randomly generated numbers, the sample was taken from lists of the graduating classes. The first survey round was conducted in 1980 with 252 people, and the 18th round took place in 2007 (the time between rounds was approximately one and a half years) ^{iv}.

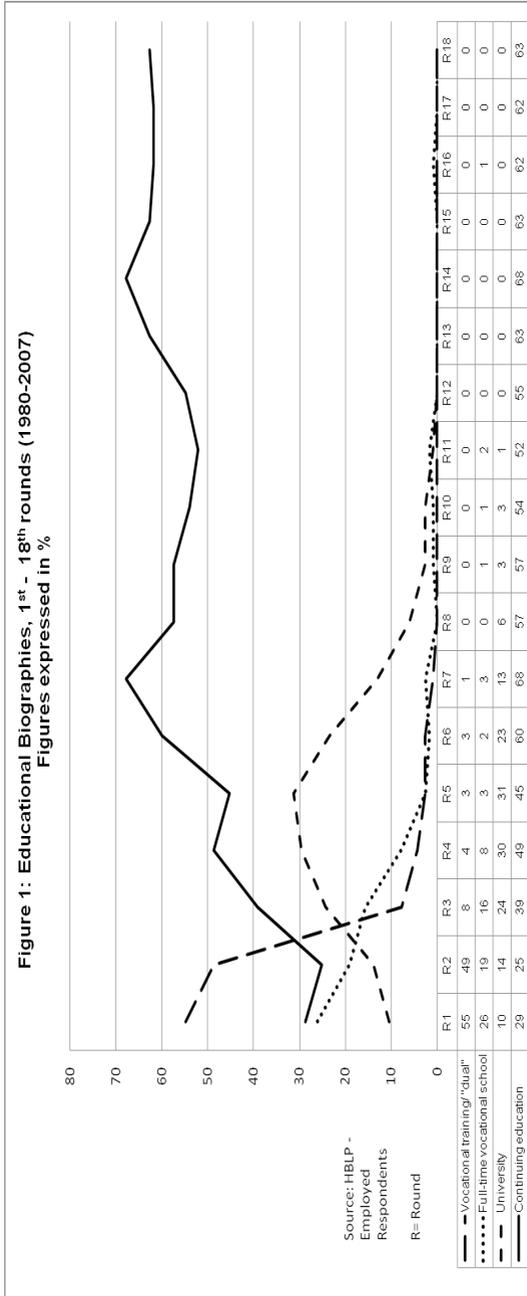
Within the constraints of socially institutionalised educational segments functioning as opportunity structures, we examine the relationship between the available options and the restrictions on individual educational participation. For our methodology, we rely on the approach used in the origin of life course theory, Elder's famous study "Children of the Great Depression" (cf. Elder 1974). In that study, Elder developed a theory with fundamental principles regarding the unity of individualisation and institutionalisation over an entire lifespan – simultaneously encompassing the logic of the subject (individuals shape their own lives on the basis of their decisions and actions within the realm of their possibilities) and the logic of the structure (an individual's life course is embedded within and affected by the historical period in which it is lived) of the life course.

The vocational training mobility^v of the sample is particularly impressive. We distinguish between three separate paths of vocational education mobility:

- Path A: Non-academic horizontal mobility, meaning additional vocational training in the dual or full-time vocational school segment followed an initial vocational training that was likewise non-academic, especially in another occupational field.
- Path B: Non-academic vertical mobility, meaning an initial non-academic vocational training was followed by additional training, primarily for mid-level positions such as technicians, master craftsmen and business administrators.
- Path C: Academic vertical mobility, meaning an initial vocational training in the dual or full-time vocational school segment was followed by university studies, primarily in the same occupational field as the vocational training.

We discuss the vocational training processes and the mobility paths from two perspectives. Figure 1 documents the occupational qualification processes throughout the entire period of the research study. Afterwards, we discuss the structural correlations between the highest educational degree one achieves and one's mobility path.

Figure 1: Educational Biographies, 1st – 18th Rounds (1980 – 2007)



The process analysis in Figure 1 makes distinctions according to the three vocational training segments on the one hand and participation in continuing education ^{vi} on the other. Here we briefly analyse the progression of vocational training participation from a biographical perspective:

- In the first interview round (1980), nine-tenths (91 percent) of the cohort had entered vocational training.^{vii} Dual vocational training programs dominated (55 percent), while 26 percent of the sample had begun vocational training in the full-time vocational school segment and 10 percent had begun studies at a university.
- In the third round (1983), the rate of participation in the three segments had undergone radical changes. Altogether, just under half of the cohort (48 percent) was still participating in vocational training. 24 percent were at a university, 16 percent were in the full-time vocational school segment, and the vocational trainee group had dropped to just 8 percent of the total.
- By the seventh round (1991), the percentage of those pursuing vocational training had decreased to 17 percent. At this point, the group consisted nearly exclusively of university students (both traditional students as well as those pursuing the so-called second and/or third educational route for adults).

Continuing education participation during the course of this research study can be divided into three phases. In the first, there is a nearly continuous rise in participation from the first (1980) through the seventh (1991) round, an indication of the transition from the phase of pursuing an initial vocational qualification to the phase of increasing continuing education activities. However, there is an inter-temporal reduction in continuing education levels between the eighth (1992) and thirteenth (2000) rounds. In the final phase, starting in the fourteenth round (2001), the level of participation rises again to approximately the level in the seventh round.

In the following section, we focus our attention on the connection between the highest level of vocational education achieved ^{viii} and

vocational education mobility. Approximately two-fifths (42 percent) of the sample successfully completed only one vocational training program. The remaining 58 percent (!) successfully completed at least two vocational training programs.

- The most common cumulative progression was Path C (academic vertical mobility), which was the route taken by 25 percent. This path is a highlight of consecutive vocational training advancement in Germany: the practical experience-based expertise gained from an initial vocational training is then expanded upon via a corresponding theoretical specialisation (Kraus 2006, p. 151). Below^{ix}, we have integrated cases for both the standard and the second educational routes – in universities and technical colleges – demonstrating academic vertical mobility:
 - Male (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Shipping agent; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration
 - Male (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Administrative supervisor; 2nd training = Lawyer
 - Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Precision mechanic; 2nd training = Chartered engineer (2nd educational route via a technical university)
 - Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Assistant tax accountant; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration (2nd educational route via a business secondary school)
 - Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Architectural draftswoman; 2nd training = Chartered engineer (2nd educational route via a technical college)
 - Female (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Bank clerk; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration

The pursuit of multiple related consecutive vocational qualification opportunities such as vocational training combined with university studies is a typically male path.

- The second most common route, at 20 percent, is the cumulative

progression of Path B (non-academic vertical mobility). This group is represented predominantly by skilled tradesmen and specialised professionals in positions of medium occupational status. After initial vocational training in the dual and/or full-time vocational segments, they pursued non-academic vocational titles such as technician and business administrator.

- Female (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Machinist; 2nd training = Mechanical engineering technician
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Medical assistant; 2nd training = Medical technician
- Female (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Bank clerk; 2nd training = Business administrator
- Male (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Interior decorator; 2nd training = Technician
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Wholesale and export merchant; 2nd training = Business administrator
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Auto mechanic; 2nd training = Technician

This vertical non-academic mobility matches the classic consecutive careerism model of German vocational training (Drexel 1996, p. 68). It is the layering of qualifications on top of one another, based on the traditional occupational arc from apprentice to journeyman to master craftsman. However, it also has equivalents in other occupational fields and economic areas. Males and females are represented nearly equally in this path.

- The cumulative series of Path A (non-academic horizontal mobility) is relatively rare (10 percent). This category of mobility is usually typified by a progression from an initial non-academic vocational training to a second non-academic one that is not occupationally connected to the first. In its typical form, it can be seen as qualification through “invalidation”: the originally acquired qualification is never actually professionally utilised, and the new

vocational training basically replaces and invalidates the first.

- Female (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Early childhood educator; 2nd training = Retail saleswoman
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Dental assistant; 2nd training = Real estate saleswoman
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Display designer; 2nd training = Clerk
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Dental technician; 2nd training = Administrative assistant
- Male (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Upholsterer; 2nd training = Nurse
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Concreteer; 2nd training = Executive judicial officer

Path A is more likely to be taken by females. The path is a symptom of the crisis-ridden development of vocational training since the 1980s.

All three paths signal that the working world is currently undergoing a rapid modernisation process.

Attempts to pursue skills that we refer to as “bridge qualifications” make up another important component of vocational training mobility. These are explicit or implicit measures for the acquisition of secondary school diplomas (the second educational route), thereby expanding the availability of career choice options in the context of general education or vocational and vocationally-oriented organised learning processes. These belatedly acquired school diplomas function as bridges “to other banks” of vocational training mobility.

Approximately half of those who left school in 1979 without an *Abitur* (high school diploma) were able to eventually acquire one or more graduation certificates. These findings can be viewed as evidence of the significant vocational mobility potential for those who – thanks to the social closure of the civic school, civic institutions and the civic “middle”

– were considered condemned to continue struggling to complete their vocational training even into their fourth decade of life “due to the extremely long vocational training periods” (Friedeburg 1992, p. 475).

Continuing education in the educational biography context

Turning again to Figure 1, we see the continuity of the rising rate of participation in continuing education through the 7th round (1991). What follows, from the 8th (1992) to the 13th (2000) rounds, is an upward trend for women who became mothers (cf. Friebel 2014).

As part of the problem-centred interviews we conducted parallel to the standardised questionnaire surveys, mothers and fathers provided typical complementary reflections of their personal environment during the family formation phase of their lives:

- Mother: *“When the first child came, I had to put all continuing education activities on hold... for the family.”*
- Father: *“When the first child came, I had to take part in as much continuing education as possible... for the family.”*

Women who become mothers take part in significantly fewer continuing education opportunities than men who become fathers. Mothers participate less frequently in professional continuing education and training events in the workplace, and in general they plan to attend continuing education events less frequently. Effectively, the exclusionary process is both external and individual!

In order to clearly discuss these gender-specific findings as well as our additional continuing education analyses, we converted the complex variables of continuing education participation, as illustrated in Figure 1, into a simple index that illustrates the rate of continuing education participation. This index classifies respondents into one of two broad categories of continuing education participation, based on the 18 rounds of data points obtained over the course of the study:

- Participation rate “rather low” – Participation in 9 or fewer rounds = 36 percent
- Participation rate “rather high” – Participation in at least 10 rounds = 64 percent

In Figure 2, we document the extent to which one's everyday environment affects the frequency of one's participation in continuing education. While just 42 percent of women who became mothers during the observation period are represented in the category with a "rather high" rate of participation, 68 percent of the men who became fathers are. However, continuing education is indeed "feminine" for women who did not become mothers; 95 percent of them are represented in the category "rather high".

Figure 2: Rate of Continuing Education Participation in the Context of Living Environment

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Living Environment	Rate of Continuing Education Participation	
	rather low	rather high
Women without children	5	95
Mothers	58	42
Men without children	44	56
Fathers	32	68
Total	36	64

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

The growing importance of continuing education is reflected in the data assembled by the Continuing Education Reporting System, a representative survey of participation in continuing education in Germany. In 2012 the rate of participation in continuing education (49 percent) was more than twice as high as it was in 1979 (23 percent), the year our sample graduated. This triumph of continuing education participation rates must be tempered by the realisation that selection and segmentation are the providers of structure when it comes to participation in continuing education. Here are just two examples that point to the uniformity of our sample results and representative studies (cf. Bundesministerium 2012):

- Selection: There is a positive linear relationship between the type of graduation certificate attained in 1979 and the rate of participation in continuing education. 74 percent of those with an *Abitur*/high school diploma are represented in the "rather high" category, along with 65 percent of *Realschule*/secondary intermediate school

graduates. This compares to a participation rate of just 50 percent among those without a certificate qualifying them for further education.

- **Segmentation:** An even more significant positive relationship exists between company size and the rate of participation in continuing education. 73 percent of those who work in companies with more than 100 employees fall in the “rather high” category, as opposed to just 53 percent of those in firms with up to 100 employees.

During the problem-centred interview portion of our study, sample members expressed messages of individualisation that were diametrically opposed to the institutionalisation (selection/segmentation) of continuing education as presented above. We posed the question “*Why does one take part in continuing education?*”, and we received two typical responses from the subjects:

- “*Because I love to learn! ...I want to get to the bottom of the matter.*” (Motivational aspect)
- “*In principle it comes from me; I have to make that decision ...definitely.*” (Decision aspect)

Indeed, the concept of the subject as “the planning office” of one’s own biography is precisely the modernity metaphor of individualisation (cf. Beck 1986). Governing norms seem to fade in this perspective, and institutions seem to lose their influence as a shaper of behaviour.

Figure 3: Rate of Continuing Education Participation by Occupational Qualification

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Rate of continuing education participation	Highest occupational qualification*			Vocational training mobility			Control variable: Occupational continuing education support = Company supported			Total	
	Dual vocational training	Additional Qualification	University degree	No further training	Path A	Path B	Path C	No, never	Yes, sometimes		Yes, regularly
Rather "low"	58	25	20	53	50	25	16	91	55	6	36
Rather "high"	42	75	80	47	50	75	84	9	45	94	64

* Excerpt

Path A: horizontal mobility

Path B: non-academic vertical mobility

Path C: academic vertical mobility

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

Our preliminary reflections on the relationship between the individualisation and institutionalisation of participation in continuing education point to the complexity of the question regarding the relationship between vocational training mobility and participation in continuing education. In Figure 3, we have documented the essence of this issue – expanded with regard to professional support for continuing education participation. The chart presents us with three positive linear relationships:

- Highest level of professional qualification: The higher the level of professional qualification, the higher the proportion that falls in the “rather high” category of continuing education participation.
- Vocational education mobility: The higher the status of one’s vocational education mobility path, the higher the proportion that falls in the “rather high” category of continuing education participation. Those with no vocational education mobility represent the group with the highest proportion in the category

“rather low”.

- The company as advocate for continuing education participation*: The higher the level of support for continuing education by one’s employer, the higher the proportion that falls in the category “rather high”.

Although these relationships seemingly represent total confirmation of the institutionalisation thesis, the subject remains the active agent in this context!

Discontinuities: Unemployment and university and/or vocational training dropouts

We also analyse our sample’s unemployment experiences from the 10th (1995) through the 18th (2007) interview rounds. We do not take previous periods of unemployment into account here, because unemployment experiences during the transitional phase from school to work do not provide us with any insights. We have constructed a three-level index of unemployment experience during the survey period:

- No unemployment experience = 74 percent
- One to two periods of unemployment = 18 percent
- Three or more periods of unemployment = 8 percent

We have also reconstructed the vocational and/or university study discontinuities of our sample throughout the entire study period:

- No discontinuities = 87 percent
- At least one discontinuity = 13 percent

Our analysis of the relationship between unemployment experience and discontinuities in university studies or vocational training showed no significant correlation. However, based on selected socio-demographic variables, we can note that:

- Women, especially mothers, were more likely to have experienced unemployment. Distributions by type of graduation certificate are not available.
- Men, especially fathers, were more likely to have experienced vocational training and university study discontinuities.

The key findings on the relationship between vocational education mobility and discontinuities in educational and occupational

biographies are illustrated in Figure 4. Although the deviations of each of the highest professional qualifications and qualification paths from the average values are rather small, some differences are still quite noticeable. Overall, most of those who are represented in mobility Path B have been spared from discontinuities.

Figure 4: Discontinuity Experience by Occupational Qualification

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Discontinuity Experience	Highest occupational qualification *			Vocational training mobility			Total	
	Dual vocational training	Additional Qualification	University degree	No further training	Path A	Path B		Path C
<u>Unemployment</u>								
No, never	66	85	74	78	58	85	66	72
Yes, up to twice	17	15	17	10	33	15	22	18
Yes, more than twice	17	0	9	12	8	0	12	10
<u>Dropping out of university studies and /or traineeship</u>								
No	83	91	80	80	75	91	84	83
Yes	17	9	20	20	25	9	16	17

* Excerpt

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

This non-academic vertical advancement pattern is typical of the “German model” of intra-generational advancement, especially the progress from positions like skilled workers and clerks that require qualifications that can be obtained in the dual system to more advanced positions such as engineers, master craftsmen, specialists, etc. Structure is provided by a variety of “highly institutionalised, demanding continuing education courses which are shaped to reinforce employees’ vertical mobility processes, especially those leading to positions as engineers and master craftsmen” (Drexel 1996, p. 68). As we emphasised in the discussion on continuing education practices in the previous section, the biography of this advancement pattern and the vocational education mobility pattern of Path B is especially receptive to continuing education.^{xi} In addition, we note that sample members in Path B have above average tenures with their companies and quite often work for companies with more than 100 employees. It is likely that this is an employment type that is particularly well integrated in the labour

market in general and within the respective companies in particular. We have classified this group as a segment of the “core workforce” – the ideal of the so-called normal labour relationship (Mückenberger 1989, p.158).

People whose highest vocational qualification is a “dual” diploma present a counterpoint to those with additional qualifications (Path B). And the qualification through “invalidation” represented by mobility Path A implies a greater likelihood of unemployment experiences. Ultimately, those for whom dual vocational training represents their highest professional qualification are also particularly vulnerable to multiple periods of unemployment. The mobility Path A group also has a disproportionately large number of educational and training discontinuities.

The middle ground of experiences between the opportunity-rich Path B on the one hand and the risk-laden Path A – including those with dual vocational training – on the other is generally where representatives of vertical mobility Path C can be found. This is particularly true for those with general academic studies and those without a second vocational training.

Assessment and educational biography perspectivity

The HBLP subsample of employed subjects assesses its educational and work biographies overwhelmingly positively. There are generally only minor variances with regard to one’s highest professional degree obtained and one’s mobility path. Using the following three variables:

- satisfaction with one’s professional future;
- utility of the qualifications obtained in one’s (most recent) vocational training; and
- satisfaction with one’s income,

We have constructed an assessment of the factors that are influential for professional “success” on the basis of the findings of the 18th survey round (2007).

Figure 5: Balancing of Vocational Training and Occupational Biography

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

	Occupational future satisfaction		Usability of the acquired qualification			Income satisfaction	
	Generally satisfied	Generally unsatisfied	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
All employed respondents	73	27	17	45	34	59	41
<u>Vocational training mobility</u>							
• No further training	71	29	17	54	28	59	41
• Path A	67	33	17	58	25	73	27
• Path B	80	20	24	19	57	52	48
• Path C	74	26	16	52	32	63	37
<u>Highest occupational qualification *</u>							
• Dual vocational training	71	29	20	54	26	61	39
• Additional qualification	80	20	24	19	57	52	48
• University degree	78	22	11	55	34	64	36

*Excerpt

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

We have documented this assessment of “success” in Figure 5:

- Approximately three-quarters (73 percent) of the sample members consider themselves “generally satisfied” regarding their professional futures.
- The most positive responses came from representatives of mobility Path B and those with academic training, regardless of whether this came via mobility Path C or if one’s sole professional qualification is a college degree.
- The least satisfied with their professional futures are those who followed mobility Path A.
- Approximately a third (34 percent) of the sample members can apply “very many” of the skills they learned in their (most recent) vocational training to their current occupation. Those who followed Path B were far and away the most likely to indicate that they still used “very many” of the skills they had acquired.
- More than half (59 percent) of all respondents indicate that they are “satisfied” with their current income situation. Surprisingly,

the representatives of Path B were least likely to fall under this category. And in another surprise, representatives of Path A expressed the highest rate of satisfaction with their incomes.

Based on our findings, we observe that the so-called individual benefits of the various educational strategies, for which we took three variables into account, do not significantly differ overall.

Final Considerations

Compared internationally, Germany has a low rate of university attendance and a dual vocational training system that remains dominant (cf. OECD 2012). In the face of internationalisation, this education system needs upgrading. In place of the traditional “vocations”, core qualifications and knowledge-based work skills (cf. Schneeberger/Nowak 2000) are necessary. New job profiles should be flexibly designed so that they can take future developments into account. The dual vocational training in Germany certainly offers a number of advantages, but it is neither sufficiently prepared for an institutional modernisation process nor does it offer the affected individuals sustainable mobility opportunities.

In 2009 a legal basis was established in Germany for young, professionally certified adults to study at a university without the traditional university authorisation (*Abitur*/high school diploma). Since then, “non-traditional students” (cf. Nickel/Duong 2012) have had the opportunity to achieve more educational justice via the so-called third educational path. Whether this also leads to greater parity between professional and general education in Germany remains to be seen.

Two significant short remarks to conclude:

- Although young women increasingly graduate with better school marks than young men in Germany, their risks in the education and job markets remain higher nonetheless. In particular, women’s assumption of the traditional role upon starting a family leads to a considerable decline in their lifelong learning. Conversely, men who become fathers increase their participation in the continuing education.
- The transition from school to vocational training and work has

become both more complex and more opaque, and lifelong learning has become both more common and more essential in a knowledge-based society. Furthermore, the interviewees' cohort has a higher affinity for continuing education than generations before did. However, continuing education also has to fit in – between the biographically determined demand over one's life-course (logic of the subject) and the supply of continuing education offered up by society (logic of the structure).

References

- Albert, E. (2007) *How Does the Educational System Influence the Transitional Process from School to Work?* (Wie beeinflusst das Bildungssystem die Übertrittsprozesse von der Schule in den Beruf?). Zürich.
- Arbeitsgruppe Bildungsbericht am Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung (1994.) *The Educational System in the Federal Republic of Germany. Structures and Developments at a Glance* (Das Bildungswesen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Strukturen und Entwicklungen im Überblick), Reinbek.
- Baethge, M. (2006) The German Educational Schism (Das deutsche Bildungsschisma), in : *SOFT-Mitteilungen* Nr. 34, S. 13- 27.
- Beck, U., (1986) *Risk Society* (Risikogesellschaft), Frankfurt/Main.
- Bellmann, L., Hall, A. and Janik, F. (2008) *Abitur and then? Reasons for a Double Qualification* (Abitur und dann? Gründe für eine Doppelqualifikation), Nürnberg.
- Beicht, U. (2009) *Improvement of Educational Opportunities or Pointless Holding Pattern?* (Verbesserung der Ausbildungschancen oder sinnlose Warteschleife?) in: BIBB-Report 11.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009), *Vocational Training 2015* (Berufsausbildung 2015), Gütersloh.
- Breen R. and Luijckx, R. (2004) Conclusions, in: Breen R., (ed.) *Social Mobility in Europe*, Oxford, pp. 383 – 410.
- Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung/ tns infratest. (2012) *Continuing Education Participation in Germany – Data on AES 2007* (Weiterbildungsbeteiligung in Deutschland – AES 2012 Trendbericht), München.
- Dietrich, H, u.a.(2009) *Education in the Dual System and Vocational Preparation Measures* (Ausbildung im dualen System und Maßnahmen der Berufsvorbereitung), in: Möller, J./ Walwei,U. (ed.), *Labour Market Manual 2009* (Handbuch Arbeitsmarkt 2009), Bielefeld.
- Drexel, J. (1996), *The Relationship Between Continuing Education and Advancement* (Die Beziehung zwischen Weiterbildung und Aufstieg), in:

- European Vocational Training Journal* (Europäische Berufsausbildung – Zeitschrift), Nr. 8/9, S. 67 bis 74.
- Elder, G.H. Jr. (1974) *Children of the Great Depression*, Social Change in Life Experience, Chicago.
- Friebel, H. u.a. (2000) *Educational Participation: Opportunities and Risks* (Bildungsbeteiligung: Chancen und Risiken), Opladen.
- Friebel, H. (2007) Family Foundation as a Breaking Point? (Familiengründung als Sollbruchstelle?), in: *DIE-Zeitschrift*, 1, S. 42-46.
- Friebel, H. (2008) *The Children of the Educational Expansion and “Lifelong Learning”* (Die Kinder der Bildungsexpansion und das „lebenslange Lernen“), Augsburg .
- Friebel, H. (2014) *Context dependence of continuing education* (Kontextabhängigkeit der Weiterbildung), in: Weiterbildung, Heft 1, pp 16-22.
- Friedeburg, von, L. (1992) *Educational Reform in Germany* (Bildungsreform in Deutschland), Frankfurt/M..
- Giddens, A. (1995) *The Societal Constitution* (Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft), Frankfurt/Main.
- Heinz, W.R. (2009) Structure and agency in transition research, in: *Journal of Education and Work*, 5, pp. 391 – 404.
- Hillmert, S. and Jacob, M. (2004) *Qualification Processes Between Discontinuity and Careers: The Structure of Multiple Trainings* (Qualifikationsprozesse zwischen Diskontinuität und Karriere: Die Struktur von Mehrfachausbildungen). In: Hillmert, S. / Mayer, K.-U. (eds.): *Born in 1964 and 1971: New Investigations into Training and Occupational Opportunities in West Germany* (Geboren 1964 und 1971. Neuere Untersuchungen zu Ausbildungs- und Berufschancen in Westdeutschland). Wiesbaden, S.65-89.
- Jacob, M. (2004) *Multiple Trainings Courses in Germany* (Mehrfachausbildungen in Deutschland), Wiesbaden.
- Kraus, K. (2006) *From Job to Employability? (Vom Beruf zur Employability?)* Wiesbaden.
- Kruse, W. (2009) *Europeanisation: Challenge for Vocational Education in Germany* (Europäisierung: Herausforderung für die Berufsbildung in Deutschland), in: Heidemann, W. / Kuhnhenne, M. (eds.), *The Future of Vocational Education* (Zukunft der Berufsbildung), Düsseldorf, S. 39-46.
- Lauterbach, W. and Weil, M. (2009) *Training Paths into the Labour Market. Are Multiple Training Programmes Worthwhile for Career Entry?* (Ausbildungswege in den Arbeitsmarkt. Lohnen sich Mehrfachausbildungen für den beruflichen Aufstieg?) In: Fend, H. / Berger, F. / Grob, U. (eds.), *Life Courses, Life Management and Life Happiness. Results of the Life Study* (Lebensverläufe, Lebensbewältigung, Lebensglück. Ergebnisse der Life-

Studie), Wiesbaden, S. 101-122.

Menard, S. (ed.), (2007) *Handbook of Longitudinal Research*, Houston State University.

Mückenberger, U. (1989) The Change in Normal Labour Relations under Conditions of a "Crisis of Normalcy" (Der Wandel des Normalarbeitsverhältnisses unter Bedingungen einer „Krise der Normalität“). In: *Trade-Union Monthly* (Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte) Nr. 4, S. 211-223.

OECD (2012) *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, Paris.

Pollak, R. (2010) *Scant Movement, Great Inequality* (Kaum Bewegung, viel Ungleichheit), Berlin.

Schneeberger, A. and Nowak, S. (2000) *Modernisation of the Dual Vocational Training System. Problems and Strategies in 7 European Countries* (Modernisierung dualer Berufsbildungssysteme. Probleme und Strategien in 7 europäischen Ländern), Wien.

Schuller, T. (2013) The positive Effects of Lifelong Learning are Evident, in : *DIE, Journal for Adult education, Benefits of Lifelong Learning*, Bonn.

Sekretariat der ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (2008) *University Recognition of Knowledge and Skills Acquired Outside of Higher Education (II)* (Anrechnung von außerhalb des Hochschulwesens erworbenen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auf ein Hochschulstudium (II)), Bonn.

Solga, H. (2009) *Knowledge Society: Paradigm Shift in Occupational Education* (Wissengesellschaft: Paradigmenwechsel in der beruflichen Bildung), in: W. Heidemann/M.Kuhnhenne (ed.), *The Future of Vocational Education* (Zukunft der Berufsausbildung), , pp. 21-38.

Szydlík, M. (2004) *Multiple Training Programmes and Their Implications for Employment* (Mehrfachausbildungen und ihre Folgen für die Erwerbstätigkeit), Wiesbaden.

Zimmerli, W. (2009) *The Roadmap to Educational Policy: The Future of Education in Switzerland* (Roadmap der Bildungspolitik: Zukunft Bildung Schweiz), Bern.

About the Author

Dr. Harry Friebel is Professor for Sociology of Education at the University of Hamburg, Germany since 1996. He is leader of the research group “Continuing education in the life-course”, University of Hamburg. His main focuses in research and teaching are Educational and biography research, methods of empirical social research, gender and boys research. He is speaker of the expert committee “Boys” in the National Forum on Men in Germany.

Contact Details

Dr Harry Friebel,
University of Hamburg,
WISO-Faculty,
Von-Melle-Park 9, 20146 Hamburg, Germany.

Email: Harry.Friebel@wiso.uni-hamburg.de

Endnotes:

ⁱThe first threshold is from school to vocational training, and the second threshold is from vocational training to employment.

ⁱⁱWe include advanced technical colleges in this category.

ⁱⁱⁱIn the 1980s, the research project was introduced as the “Hamburg Youth Study” (cf. Friebel 1983). Now that the project has been ongoing for more than a quarter century and the members of the sample are no longer quite so young, it has been renamed the Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel (HBLP).

^{iv}138 students who finished one of three school forms (secondary general school/*Hauptschule*, secondary intermediate school/*Realschule* and high school leading to the university entrance qualification/*Gymnasium-Abitur*) in Hamburg in 1979 have taken part in all 18 interview rounds. In this article, we report exclusively on the 115 employed members of this sample, as we need current employment data in order to balance the educational biographical data in section 4. The research was carried out analytically on multiple levels, i.e. via both (quantitative) questionnaires and (qualitative) intensive interviews.

^vWe define vocational training in multiple fields as the successful completion of additional vocational training after acquisition of an initial degree which qualifies one for an occupation.

^{vi} The graph for continuing education participation represents both vocational and non-vocational continuing education activities.

^{vii} The ranks of those not pursuing vocational training in the first round consisted primarily of male *Gymnasium* graduates who were fulfilling their military or civil service requirements and of those who were either pursuing a transition to a vocational preparation year (“transitional system”) or who had entered the workforce immediately after leaving school without any vocational training.

^{viii} In view of the small number of cases in the sample, we must limit our attention to selected vocational education degrees; thus, those that did not pursue any vocational training (3 percent) and those without a degree higher than a full-time vocational school training (4 percent) are explicitly excluded from this specific discussion.

^{ix} Here we illustrate each of the mobility paths with six real-life examples from the sample – quantitatively analogous to the real gender-specific distribution.

^x We included the variable “company sponsor” in the figure as a control variable to demonstrate the extent to which this provider of structure (i.e. opportunity structure) intervenes in the relationship between biography and vocational education mobility.

^{xi} This assumption is further supported by the finding that this group has received the highest level of company support for its continuing education activities; all of the members of this group listed their companies as a sponsor of their continuing education activities.

Do actions and methods in guidance for older workers exist in Spain?

María José López Sánchez and José Antonio Belso Martínez

Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche

Older people suffer discrimination in the labour market, in that their chances of finding employment if they lose their jobs are small, and the longer someone is out of the labour market, the harder it is to return. Although they often do possess the technical and transferrable skills required, these are not always recognised. Those who remain in work also encounter discrimination. They are unlikely to receive ongoing training and encouragement for career development, especially if their existing skills and qualifications are at a low level.

This paper is focusing on the Spanish situation, looking at the actions and methods in careers guidance for older workers. For this purpose 52 websites of Spanish trade unions were visited during 2010. Using the main findings of 131 questionnaires from 48 employers' organisations, 41 trade unions and 28 public employment services from across the country, we look at guidance from a macro and micro perspective: how guidance is provided and who the main beneficiaries are.

We conclude that in the Spanish labour context, there is a specific need to improve the coordination and effective publicity regarding existing guidance services and their accessibility. Evidence shows that those who make least use of the careers guidance services are the older workers aged 50 to 55 years, and no special attention is given to meeting their needs.

Keywords: *Old workers, careers guidance, active labour market policies, social partners, Spain*

Introduction

Guidance, as one of the active labour market policy (OECD 1993) is not only an individual practice (Clayton et al. 2007). It is also more than a “face-to-face interview” (Plant 2001) and in 1992 the Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings (SCAGES 1992) differentiated up to eleven activities related to guidance. Five more have since been added (Ford 2001, 2002, 2007). It is therefore pertinent to refer to a broad concept of guidance, including one-to-one interviews, group sessions, self-help information, advocacy, referral, counselling, advice, etc, aimed at a varied group that includes young people searching for their first job, long-term unemployed older people, active workers who want a change of professional career, etc.

Older workers are a high risk group in terms of discrimination and social exclusion (Bendick Jr. et al. 1997; Haight 2003; Clayton et al. 2007). Employers are often reluctant to hire older workers or to retain them as their views of this collective are based on negative stereotypes all over the world (Gilsdorf, 1992, Hively 2004; Kirk and Belovics 2005). Lundberg and Marshallsay (2007) concluded in a study about older workers’ perspectives in South Australia that ‘a substantial majority of older workers believe that older workers face discrimination in the workforce, but less of them report discriminatory attitudes from their colleges and employers.

In the case of older people, the holistic approach of guidance can have a special added value (Sultana 2004; Clayton et al. 2007). This is true to

the extent in which it helps them to rejoin employment, to enter the job market for the first time at an advanced age, to change their professional career and to retain workers about to undergo early retirement.

In some cases, the Third Age is defined as 50 or more, or even as low as over 45. At the European Union, when talking about older workers, we are referring to those over 55. Over 45 years is commonly used in the case of Spanish labour market. This is also common in other Mediterranean countries like Italy and France (Clayton et al 2007)

National information, advice and guidance policies present various key goals in accordance with the context to which it belongs. If we look at the Spanish labour context, said goals can be condensed into two: helping the unemployed to find employment and providing special attention to the more disadvantaged groups (women, over-45s, long-term unemployed, etc.) and secondly, providing guidance and advice services for workers at their work place. At present, the aspects most influencing the preparation of policies in Spain include the existence of specific collectives who require greater efforts in careers guidance and advice.

Since 1998, with the European Employment Strategy, which involved the putting into practice of active market labour policies, Spain has shown significant progress in the area of social dialogue regarding the treatment said collectives are to be given on the labour market. As we shall see, proof of this is that new and recent initiatives have been created for the provision of careers guidance, advice and information services in Employers' organisations and Unions. But the question is: are these guidance services designed and implemented to meet older workers' needs?

Some progress in Spanish employment policy for older workers

Economically active population comprises all persons of either sex above a specific age who furnish the supply of labour for the production of economic goods. Looking only at men aged over 65, the countries with highest activity rates are in Africa (for instance, Malawi with 83.47%, Mozambique 82.76%, Tanzania 82.15%) and those with the lowest activity rates are in the EU. The lowest is Hungary with 0.91% followed

by Belgium 1.65% and Luxembourg with 1.83% (NationMaster 2010). The situation in other developed countries such as Australia is very similar to other EU countries. The activity rate for men over 65 in this country is 7.54%, in Denmark is 9.41%, in Sweden is 6.62%, 6.59% in Italy, being the case of Spain only 3.04%. Workers over 65 in other non EU countries, such as the United States and Canada, face a slightly better situation to those who live in the countries already mentioned, being 13.49% and 9.41% respectively (NationMaster 2010).

Focusing from now on the situation of workers over 54 in the EU, it is pertinent to say that Europe started to tackle the challenges caused by the ageing of the workforce since the middle of the 1990s. Accordingly, the 2001 Stockholm European Council set the activity rate target for 50% of the 55-64 age group to be implemented by 2010. Although the European Bureau of Statistics (Eurostat 2007) reported that the gap from the 50% had diminished from 13.2 percentage points in 2000 to 5.3 percentage points in 2007, most Member States had to step up their effort.

In Spain, although the activity rate of the 55-64 group has improved in the recent years, in 2007 was still under the target (44.6%) and under the European (EU27) average (44.7%) (Eurostat 2008). Taking into consideration only the male old workers, Spain widely reached the objective. The problem comes when considering female old workers whose activity rate is about 30%. Consequently when analysing employment discrimination or problems for this target group, gender issues are especially relevant in this country (Susó 1997; Perez and Nogareda 1995).

In 2010 the activity rate for workers over 55 years in the EU27 was 49.7%. In Spain the situation was slightly over the EU average reaching 50.8% (Eurostat 2011) and above the Stockholm activity rate target for the 55-64 age group. But when looking at the employment rates for workers over 55, the situation becomes different. Whereas in the EU27, the average employment rate is 46.3% for this age group, in Spain it is set under the European average, at 43.6%. During that year, there were 12.208.918 people over 55, representing 26.55% of the total population, and 4.463.355 of those belonged to the 55-64 age group (INE 2010).

From September, 2013 the activity rate of the 55-64 age group in the EU28 is 54.6% (54.5 % in Spain) and in the OECD is 59.8%. Countries such as Australia and United States are above these figures, with 63.7% and 64.3% respectively (OECD 2014).

The Spanish current employment situation of older workers is worthy of consideration. It is well-known that the population is gradually getting older and the effects of this ageing process are becoming especially apparent in the working population, which, in the coming decades, will be significantly reduced (Gruber and Wise 2001). On the other hand, one of the main problems facing employment in Spain today is the discrimination against older workers, who are systematically thrown out of their jobs and increasingly treated as a group of people of reduced worth who have lost their capacity for employment.

The action taken by the Spanish government regarding employment and social affairs includes information and guidance services specially geared to the unemployed, but also to user communities with specific needs: women, young adults, the disabled and immigrants. Other authorities, economic and local corporations, provide guidance and counselling for self-employment and the establishment of business. Government resources tend to be used to deliver information and guidance in the form of a series of schemes, encounters and workshops, as well as subsidies for different kinds of collaborating agencies (e.g. NGOs, social partners, not-for-profit entities).

The main efforts along the lines of professional guidance are geared to the unemployed, young people without experience, the long-term unemployed and unemployed over 45. The other negatively affected collectives, which include young adults, are also given special treatment. However, when they find a job, guidance loses importance to the point where it ceases to exist. Furthermore, older people rarely use the few guidance services available and are often unaware of their existence as a result of their difficult access (e.g. some services are provided over the Internet and consequently aimed at younger people).

The framework of action of the Spanish National Action Plan for Employment (PNAE) includes the start-up of measures aimed at finding employment for people over the age of 44 and their maintenance in

employment even after the age of 65. In particular, the PNAE for 2002 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales 2002) proposed the following measures as part of its guideline 3: Employment for older people:

- Reform for partial retirement making it possible for retired people to work, with a reduced pension while doing so.
- Change in the way retirement pensions are calculated, in such a way that those who continue to work after the age of 65 receive a higher pension.
- To motivate employers to employ older workers, a new system for reducing social security contributions.
- If workers over the age of 55 are dismissed as part of lay-offs, the employer has to pay a part of the social security contributions until the worker reaches the age of 61.

Besides these measures, there are three types of programmes aimed at increasing the employment of this group of people:

- Programme for Active Employment Income (RAI): the unemployed over the age of 45 that have been registered as such for more than 12 months and have no income can apply for this type of income as long as they undertake to carry out actions in favour of gaining employment.
- Employment Workshops: programmes that combine employment with training.
- A set of measures aimed at this group's participation in professional training.

As it has been said before, where the Spanish rate of activity improved during the years in which European Strategy for Employment had been applied, mainly thanks to the greater participation of women, the 55-64 age group did not made such good progress towards the objectives set forth in Lisbon and Stockholm. In 2004, the rate of unemployment for people between 55 and 64 years of age was 41.2%, an increase of 7.2% in comparison with 1997. For the first time, the PNAE 2004 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales 2004) included objectives for the rate of activity that was to be reached in 2005 as part of the plan to reach full employment by 2010. The age group of 55 to 64 was expected to reach a rate of activity of 41.7% (0.5% more than in 2004).

Although the priorities for the PNAE 2004 do not make any particular reference to older workers, they are considered in three of its guidelines: Guideline 5: to increase the supply for labour and promote a longer working life; Guideline 8: to make employment profitable by means of incentives to make it an attractive option; and Guideline 9: to regularize undeclared employment. Finally Spain met the target reaching 42.3% (INE 2008)

The Qualifications and Vocational Training Law (BOE 2002) meant a step further in giving relevance to guidance provision to workers, since it literally includes “supplying adequate information and guidance on vocational training and employment qualifications to any interested individual”. This law came into force in 2002, but in real practice it is being firmly implemented although slowly.

Proof of this is that for the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, the priority collective for careers guidance and advice is the unemployed owing to the fact that they receive the greatest amount of social benefits. For the social partners, the main target group is the unemployed, followed by the unemployed over 45 (young adults) and, finally, employed workers. Evidence shows that by age groups, those who make most use of the careers guidance services are the younger individuals (21-25 years), while the over-45s constitute the collective that least benefits from this type of programme (OECD 2002).

More specifically, through educational and employment authorities, five measures have been designed to guarantee access for all target groups. For workers, employed and unemployed, these three: personalised citizen service centres without the need for prior appointments, publication and distribution of leaflets, books, etc. and information on the Internet. One possible explanation for why adults are less willing to use these guidance services could be the fact that the services are not easily accessed by said target group.

The most recent progress on active ageing taken by the Spanish Government was an active employment measure in order to elevate the retirement age that has been falling since the 70's and was stabilized at the age of 62 until 2005, as it is stated in the Report on the Spanish national strategy with relation to the pension system (Ministerio de

Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales 2005). Three years later, the average of the retirement age reached 63.66 (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2008) and 67 in 2011, the second highest in the European Union, only after Ireland, Finland and the United Kingdom (68) (Eurofound 2012).

In the framework of the agreements between the government and the social partners on labour market and social security measures, Spain has introduced a package on incentives both to employers and workers to continue employment. All workers who postpone the retirement for one or more years after the age of 65, until 70, will have additional increments in their pension, two per cent for each extra year independently of the contributed years, or three per cent to those who have paid more than forty years of contributions.

Besides the advice and information services that depend on central government, there are other entities that also provide guidance services through collaboration with social partners and other non-profit entities. There are many varied services to suit the corresponding objectives and groups. The main instruments for their implementation are as follows:

- Public subsidies for careers guidance through Instituto Nacional de Empleo (INEM).
- Collaboration agreements with public and private entities (social partners)
- Private initiatives.
- Subcontracting to specialised companies.

In this paper we focus in the Public employment services depending on Central Government, and the social partners: Employers' organisations and Trade Unions, as guidance providers.

Methodology

The methodology is based on a combination of techniques aimed at gathering qualitative and quantitative information, including the revision of 52 Spanish websites of Trade Unions visited during 2010, and the statistical analysis data obtained from 117 interviews made all over the Spanish territory to 48 Employers' organisations, 41 Public Employment services and 28 Trade Unions, during 2011 and 2012.

The statistical treatment of the data was carried out using statistical package SPSS for windows v.18.

Qualitative analysis: Looking at Spanish Trade Unions' websites

There is a range of public policies related to older workers in play, as Taylor (2002) admits, and guidance and training programmes for older workers is in fact included into the group of the ten main policies. Encel (2003) examined trends in labour force and the range of public policies in seven countries: Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, UK and USA. All these countries, except UK, developed with different level of extent, guidance for older workers.

In the last years, more attention has been given to older workers' needs, but it has been also stated that the methods and tools used in careers guidance had a limited application and effect (Watts and Sultana 2004; Kirk and Belovics 2005). Some authors such as Canaff (1997) Myers (1992) London (1990) went in favour of using what they call positive methods, focused in the last professional years of an individual.

Moreover, the conclusions of some studies such as the South Australian aged care workers study (Lundverg and Marshallsay 2007) conclude that older workers see themselves as needing fairer access to training programmes "to enable them to update their skills, and to keep up with the developments in technology, specially in training in computing skills updating of existing skills, and professional development training programs that would enhance specific skills in their particular field".

The role of social partners in the age management process (Gruber and Wise 2001) is widely recognised. Kirks and Belovics (2005) stated that "recognizing that the workforce predictions of the past are rapidly becoming a reality, many groups (e.g., employers, governments, agencies, counsellors) are beginning to address the needs of older workers".

The European Employment Committee highlights that 'the social partners have a key role to play in the implementation of the policy of ageing. It is important that employers, workers and their representatives are deeply involved in developing new programmes since this will

ensure a better match with the actual problems facing old workers in their workplaces or unemployed people'. (OECD 2002)

To understand what kind of actions and methods are used by guidance providers in Spain and in order to find specific guidance programmes addressing older workers' needs, it is first convenient to understand the role of the social partners, Employers' organisations and Trade Unions, in the process.

Spanish Employers' organisations are voluntary business associations with the purpose of defending business interests. Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (CEOE) is the main Spanish business confederation representing enterprises of all sectors of economic activity.

They are normally constituted according to sectors and location, and they group together in larger associations. Although they do not offer specific guidance services, they provide services of this kind to the various centres according to the circumstances and requirements of each industry or geographical area, e.g. in careers guidance workshops, industry studies or studies of the regional job market, etc. The provision of guidance services depends on public funds.

The Unions participate more actively in the implementation and provision of careers guidance, advice and information services and they keep continuity in time of the service. These are the main conclusions after visiting 52 Trade Unions' websites during 2010:

The leading Union in Spain is Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), which plays an active role through the following:

- Migrant Worker Information Centre Network (CITE in Spanish).
- Miguel Escalera Training and Employment Foundation (FOREM in Spanish): offering local, regional and national projects financed by public funds, such as:
 - Professional careers guidance actions for the unemployed
 - Guidance service for the maintenance and promotion of employment, aimed at workers.

This Union participates mainly through two types of actions:

- (i) Actions aimed at the unemployed, also called OPEA actions (Career Guidance for Employment and Self Employment Assistance - see Figure1):

The purpose is to place the unemployed in better conditions regarding the job market and achieve better opportunities for employment. The actions are carried out individually or in groups and by careers guidance professionals whose purpose is as follows:

- Report on the job market.
- Define professional objectives.
- Identify employment resources.
- Offer careers guidance.
- Provide training in social communication skills.
- Offer job hunting techniques.

In general, these types of actions are aimed at all the unemployed registered at an employment office:

- Students on professional training courses.
- The long-term unemployed.
- Those seeking their first employment.

Figure 1: What OPEAs do?

The following are a few questions you might ask yourself:

- *What do these careers guidance actions do?*
They put you in better conditions for finding employment.
- *So, what do you do? What do you offer?*
Employment information: on the job market, on training possibilities, on how to access employment, etc.
- *I'm not sure what I'm looking for, I don't know what I want to do, what jobs I can do or how to look for one. What's more, I've never been offered anything.*
If what you need is a personal plan, we'll help you, offer you guidance regarding what you need and choose an itinerary for you to follow.

- *Yes, but I get rejected from every job application and I'm sure there are people who are in better conditions than me and who know the 'right' people. And who's going to look after my family while I'm at work?*

Perhaps you need us to help you overcome your personal difficulties and raise your confidence in yourself and in your possibilities.

- *I know what I want and I have the training I need to start work, but now what do I need to know?*

Now you have to organise yourself, find out and train in what we call an active search for employment, discover your possibilities, where and how to find work and the ins and outs of a selection process.

You will learn a little about legislation, contracts and other legal documents. If you're interested, we can give you advice on self-employment.

- *Do I have to go through all the stages of the process?*

No, only the ones necessary in your case. Some actions are carried out in groups and others individually, but always with a supervisor who offers advice and guidance. The actions have different durations.

Source: www.ccoo.es

(ii) Actions aimed at workers: guidance for holding down employment and obtaining promotion at work:

CC.OO. has started up an information and careers guidance system for employed workers taking part in their continuous training courses. The system offers information and advice for holding down employment and obtaining promotion at work, increasing training and even changing employment. This helps prevent the negative circumstances that affect employment and anticipate changes by means of an analysis of the personal and professional situation, the information about the work environment and updating competences through training. The careers guidance service provides the following:

1. Information about:

- Training (courses, subsidies, etc.)
- Professional subsidies and sectors in expansion.
- New employment areas.
- Public and private offers of employment.
- Professional profiles.
- Certificates of professionalism.
- Employment search techniques.
- Creation of companies.
- Resources in employment and training.

2. Advice aimed at the following:

- Identifying your professional profile.
- Determining your professional objectives.
- Establishing your professional career.

3. Techniques for developing your personal skills for holding down employment and/or obtaining promotion at work.

The second largest Union in Spain is Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), whose Instituto de Formación y Estudios Sociales (IFES) (Training and Social Surveys Institute) provides an integrated guidance-training service. Its socio-labour advice and information section includes the following actions:

- Preparation of informative sessions and organisation of courses on how to find employment.
- Publications to enable strategies when seeking employment.

Looking at the information on the websites about guidance programmes offered by the Trade Unions, the most common methods used by guidance providers in Spain are as follows:

- Personalised support:
 - Methods aimed at self-esteem, motivation, personal skills and the preparation of an action plan.
 - Methods aimed at finding employment, interviews, etc.
 - Methods that include advice and decision-taking at the end of a stage of search for employment.
- Group guidance and information:
 - Informative sessions on the job market.
 - Specific information by target groups: the unemployed, employed workers, by age, etc.

- Generic diffusion:
 - Electronic information: CD ROMs, websites, e-mails, etc. Guidance Service through internet started up by the Department of Employment of Andalucía for job-hunters (especially over-45s), who can arrange an appointment at the nearest careers guidance service.
 - Information campaigns in the media.

No specific guidance programmes were found for older workers. Only some specific actions for unemployed over 45 years, especially for those suffering long-term unemployment.

Quantitative analysis: macro and micro perspectives

As Greco (2007) stated, guidance can be analysed from a macro and micro perspective. Macro perspective looks at the guidance providers: who they are and how they do it. The micro perspective, analyses who takes benefits of the guidance services, this is, the demand.

For that, we designed a questionnaire (containing 24 questions) to be used in face to face interviews with guidance providers all over Spain. A sample of a minimum of three Employers' organisations, three Public Employment services and three Trade Union associations per region was selected. In reality it was easy to conduct more than three interviews in some regions whereas in some others it was not possible to get any (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Distribution of valid questionnaires per Spanish Region*

	Employers Organisation	Public Employment services	Trade Unions
Andalucía	3	1	2
Aragón	2	0	0
Asturias	1	2	2
Baleares	2	5	3
Cantabria	3	3	3
Castilla La Mancha	4	3	1
Castilla León	4	1	2
Cataluña	3	5	2
Extremadura	2	2	2
Galicia	3	0	0
La Rioja	2	4	2
Madrid	5	1	1
Murcia	3	3	2
Navarra	3	1	2
Com. Valenciana	3	7	2
País Vasco	5	3	2
TOTAL	48	41	28

Source: Compiled by authors

The interviews were conducted at the guidance providers' place and there was only one interview per institution, normally made to the person in charge of the service.

There were 117 valid questionnaires: 48 from Employers' organisations, 41 from Public Employment services and 28 from Trade Unions.

Two types of questions were asked:

- To understand who the main beneficiaries are. For that, attention was paid to the gender and age of the participants in the guidance actions, accessibility, level of education, professional category and their motivations and interests. In

this case, guidance is analysed from a micro perspective, this is, the demand.

- To understand how guidance is provided. For that we looked at the accessibility of the service, the methods and tools, the human and web resources, evaluation of the service and follow-up. These findings are used in the macro analysis, in order to study the provision of guidance, what in economic terms is called the supply.

Firstly, the descriptive analysis shows the following conclusions about the beneficiaries (also called clients or participants) of the guidance services in Spain:

- 92% of interviewed agreed that people over 50 to 55 are those who less use the careers guidance services in Spain, followed by individuals from 16 to 21 years.
- There are no significant gender differences, although women seem to use guidance services more than men (in Employers' organisations: 54% women, 46% men; in Public Employment services: 57% against 43%; in Trade Unions 55% and 45%). When looking at older workers (over 55) the difference does become important. In this case, more men participate in guidance actions (77% of men against 23% of women)
- People with a low level of education and with a lower professional category are those who more benefit from the guidance services in Spain.
- Guidance is most demanded from workers in the service sector (mainly tourism and shop keepers). Workers from the primary sector are who benefit the least.
- The 86% of interviewed said that it is the client who decides by himself/herself, to follow a guidance programme. The training courses are also in many occasions (55%) a way to inform and encourage people to look for guidance. Employers and Trade Unions admitted that signposting from the Public employment services is also effective (47% and 63% of them respectively). It was remarked by 87% of interviewed that there is a real need for better coordination among institutions.

- The 77% of interviewed admitted that the main interest of the guidance participants are: employment searching techniques, followed by job promotion (43%) and training courses supply (39%). Technological changes, professional mobility and competences auto-evaluation, are in general, of very low interest.

Secondly, the conclusions of the macro analysis shows:

- 72% of interviewed said that the most common way to promote guidance services is through web pages, followed by the edition of flyers and leaflets (68%)
- Most of the interviewed institutions have a guidance team composed by psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists and psycho-pedagogues. In many occasions it is easy to find a wider multidisciplinary team including other specialists (for instance in starting-up news business, self-employment, etc).
- The size of the team varies depending of the type of provider. Average size for Employers' organisations and Public Employment services is three people. For Trade Unions the average size is not very representative, because we found Trade Unions associations with one guidance provider, such as FOREM-Asturias, whereas other services like Andalucía Orienta-UGT with one hundred seventeen.
- In Employers' organisations and Public Employment services, interviewed people said that around 28% of the guidance providers had a fixed employment contract. The rest (72%) had a temporal contract. In Trade Unions, the situation is the other way around, 57% has a fixed contract and 39% temporal.
- The web site is commonly used in guidance services: 74% of the Public Employment services and 66% of the Employers' Organisations admitted to use it for guidance. In the case of Trade Unions, the percentage is lower: 54%.
- 79% of the institutions are concerned about client satisfaction (72% of the Employers' Organisations, 76% of the Public Employment services and the 89% of the Trade Unions). The majority use a questionnaire after the guidance action is ended.

- 72.6% of them implement a follow-up system through telephone or electronic mail. Not significant differences among guidance providers (70% of employers' organisations, 73% of public employment services and 75% of Trade Unions)
- About tools and methods: individual interviews and group sessions are the most successful methods in guidance. Telephone and internet are also used but not very frequently. This result needs to be explained with more detail (see Tables 2-4). The interviewed had to choose among:
 - Individual interviews
 - Group sessions
 - Specific module in training courses
 - Internet
 - Telephone
 - Leaflets and flyers
 - Other.

In Employers' organisations, 75% of the interviewed provided guidance through individual sessions, but only 56% through group sessions. Leaflets and flyers are not frequently used (only 18% used them). And 87% admitted that they always provided guidance from their job place.

90% of the guidance practitioners working in the Public Employment services used individual interviews, 71% provided guidance in group sessions and 56% through internet. Only 10% of these institutions admitted to provide guidance out of their job place.

In Trade Unions, all interviewed said they used individual interviews, and 61% also group sessions. With the exception of only one case, all the rest provided guidance from their job place.

Table 2: *Methods used by the Guidance Services of 48 Employers' Organisations*

	Number of answers (maximum 48)	Percentages (%)
Individual interviews	36	75
Group sessions	27	56.2
Module in Training courses	18	37.5
Internet	17	35.4
Telephone	16	33.3
Leaflets and flyers	9	18.7
Other	1	2

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 3: *Methods used by the Guidance Services of 41 Public Employment Services*

	Number of answers (maximum 41)	Percentages (%)
Individual interviews	37	90.2
Group sessions	29	70.7
Internet	23	56
Telephone	19	46.3
Module in Training courses	14	34.1
Leaflets and flyers	7	17
Other	3	7.3

Source: Compiled by authors

Table 4: *Methods used by the Guidance Services of 28 Trade Unions*

	Number of answers (maximum 28)	Percentages (%)
Individual interviews	28	100
Group sessions	17	60.7
Telephone	13	46.4
Internet	7	25
Leaflets and flyers	4	14.2
Module in Training courses	3	10.7
Other	3	10.7

Source: Compiled by authors

Finally and gathering some answers from the micro and macro analysis, this question was made: ‘Why do you think this collective.....is not using the guidance services?’ As stated before, all the interviewed agreed that the users who benefited the least were workers over 55, followed by the younger. Here some answers related to older workers:

- “This group of older workers is less motivated. This scepticism is related with low levels of education. Most of them have been working in the same job and they feel it is too late now to learn (they do not like the idea of coming back to school)”
- “In general terms, they are very responsible and serious people but with low self- confidence and self-esteem, low interest in starting up a new business and low geographical mobility.”
- “This group needs specific training in new tools and techniques to understand the labour market nowadays. They like learning for a practical purpose such as improving employability and learning specific work skills”
- “Older learners favour small groups, and one-to-one support from tutors. Learning from computers can be isolating, we know that but we are not giving them what they really need and demand”

All interviewed stated that careers guidance in order to be effective must be based on the needs of the users. It should be an “*à la carte*” service. This is also highlighted by the Valencian Community OPEA Programme experts (European Commission 2007).

Conclusions

The main efforts made as part of careers guidance, advice and information policies in Spain are aimed at the unemployed, with special attention being paid to the more disadvantaged collectives, which include unemployed over 45.

The action taken by the Spanish government regarding employment and social affairs includes information and guidance services specially geared to the unemployed, but also to user communities with specific needs: women, young adults, the disabled and immigrants. Other authorities, economic and local corporations, also provide guidance

and counselling for self-employment and the establishment of business. Government resources tend to be used to deliver information and guidance in the form of a series of schemes, encounters and workshops, as well as subsidies for different kinds of collaborating agencies (NGOs, social partners, not-for-profit entities).

The main efforts along the lines of professional guidance are therefore geared to the unemployed: young people without experience, the long-term unemployed and unemployed over-45s. The other negatively affected collectives, which include young adults, are also given special treatment. However, when they find a job, guidance loses importance to the point where it ceases to exist.

The role of social partners in the age management process is being widely recognised in the last years. In an attempt to check if this was occurring in Spain, the methods and tools used to provide guidance to workers have been listed. Looking at 52 Trade Unions websites and conducting 117 interviews to guidance institutions all over Spain, no specific actions or methods for older workers were found.

Looking at the results of the quantitative macro analysis, we can draw the conclusion that there is a specific need at national level to improve the coordination and effective publicity regarding existing guidance services and their accessibility.

In this paper we focused the attention on older people, who rarely use the guidance services available in Spain. As revealed in the Review of Career Guidance policies. Spain National Questionnaire (OCDE 202) over-45s constitute the collective that least benefits from this type of programme. In the micro analysis, we concluded that the least beneficiaries are workers from 50 to 55. They are often unaware of their existence probably as a result of their difficult access or lack of credibility. Many older workers might think that guidance services are like “going back to school” since no specific actions and methods are designed and implemented for them.

Spanish guidance services are not taking into account the age of the worker as a relevant factor. Advice and information services are clearly insufficient for meeting older workers’ needs.

In this country guidance and training programs for older workers is not satisfactorily implemented as a public policy, whereas in other countries this issue is being more widely covered (Philip, 2002). Secondly, the stakeholders such as Business Associations or Trade Unions are not either fully responding to this need.

Acknowledgements

The theoretical reflections and findings are from a research project funded by the European Union through the Leonardo da Vinci Programme named “Third age guidance: Developing and testing models of labour market guidance suitable to the needs of older people”, promoted and coordinated by the University of Glasgow. The content of this paper does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Union or the National Agency, nor does it involve any responsibility on their part. (Project Reference: UK/04/B/F/PP_162-109)

References

- Bendick Jr. M., Jackson C.W. and Horacio Romero J. (1997) ‘Employment Discrimination Against Older Workers. An Experimental Study of Hiring Practices’, *Journal of Ageing and Social Policy* 8: 4, 25-46.
- Boletín Oficial del Estado (BOE) (2002) *Ley Orgánica 5/2002, de 19 de junio de las Cualificaciones y de la Formación profesional*, no. 147, 20 Junio.
- Canaff A. L. (1997) ‘Later life career planning: A new challenge for career counsellors’, *Journal of Employment Counselling*, 34, 85-93.
- Clayton P.M., Greco S. and Persson M. (eds.) (2007) *Guidance for life working and learning in the third age*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.
- Encel S. (2003) *Age can work: The case of older Australians staying in the workforce. A Report to the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Business Council of Australia*. Accessed 24 February 2014.
- European Commission (2007) *Evaluating effectiveness and impact of the OPEA programme, established by Spanish National Employment Action for Employment 2004, in the framework of the EES*, http://www.florida-uni.es/web_es/servicios/insercion-profesional-orientacion-laboral-y-profesional-evaluacion-programa-opea/-/1/132/530/. Accessed 26 February 2008.
- Eurofound (2012) *Eurofound yearbook 2012: Living and working in Europe*, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1331.htm>. Accessed 13 May 2013.
- Eurostat Labour Force Survey (2008) http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/EU_labour_force_survey_-_ad_hoc_

- modules. Accessed 10 November 2010.
- Eurostat Labour Market Statistics (2011) http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-32-11-798/EN/KS-32-11-798-EN.PDF. Accessed 23 July 2013.
- Ford G. (2001) *Guidance for Adults: Harnessing Partnership Potential*, NICEC Briefing. Cambridge: Careers Research and Advisory Centre.
- Ford G. (2002) 'Connexions with adults: Working towards all age guidance partnerships', in J. Bimrose and H. Reid (eds.) *Career Guidance: Constructing the Future*, Institute of Career Guidance, Stourbridge.
- Ford G. (2007) 'Introduction of the Third Age Guidance pilots', in P.M. Clayton, S. Greco and M. Persson (eds.) *Guidance for life working and learning in the third age*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 125-148.
- Greco S. (2007) 'The contribution of sociology to recent theoretical perspectives on guidance', in S. Greco, P. M. Clayton and A. J. Spreizer (eds.) *Migrants and refugees in Europe: Models of integration and new challenges for vocational guidance*, FrancoAngeli, Milan.
- Gruber, J. & Wise, D. (2001) *An international perspective on policies for an ageing society*. NBER Working paper, 8, 103.
- Giltsdorf J.W. (1992) 'The new generation: Older workers', in *Training & Development*, 46: 3, 77-79.
- Haight J.M. (2003) 'Human error and the challenges of an ageing workforce: Considerations for improving workplace safety', in *Professional Safety*, 48: 12, 18-24.
- Hively J. M. (2004) *Fact sheet about older workers*. http://www.van.umn.edu/options/2b5_factsheet.asp. Accessed 24 February 2008.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2008) http://www.inem.es/inem/cifras/datos_estadisticos/index.html. Accessed 3 December 2008.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) (2010) http://www.inem.es/inem/cifras/datos_estadisticos/index.html. Accessed 26 January 2010.
- Kirk J.J, & Belovics R. (2005) 'Recommendations and resources for counselling older people', in *Journal of Employment Counselling*, 42: 2, 50-9.
- Lundberg D. & Marshallsay Z. (2007) *Older workers' perspectives on training and retention of older workers: Support document - South Australian aged care workers study*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide www.ncver.edu.au. Accessed 10 February 2014.
- London M. (1990) 'Enhancing career motivation in late career', in *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 3: 2) 58-71.
- Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Secretaría General de Empleo (2002) *Plan Nacional de Acción para el Empleo 2002*.
- Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales (2004) *Plan Nacional de acción para el Empleo 2004*.

- Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales (2008) *Informe Nacional de Estrategias para la protección social y la inclusión social del Reino de España 2008-2010*. Anexo al Informe de estrategias de pensiones. <http://www.seg-social.es/prdi00/groups/public/documents/binario/110962.pdf>. Accessed 23 May 2012.
- Myers J.E. (1992) 'Career and Retirement counselling for older workers', in D.H. Montross and C.J. Sinkman (eds.) *Career Development: Theory and Practice*, Thomas JL: Springfield, 279-290.
- NationMaster (2010) <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/profiles/australia/labor>. Accessed 3 March 2014.
- Pérez J., and Nogareda C. (1995) 'Envejecimiento y trabajo: la gestión de la edad', in *Notas técnicas de prevención edición electrónica*, 6, 366. http://www.mtas.es/insht/ntp/ntp_366.htm. Accessed 28 February 2008.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1993) *The Public Employment Service in Japan, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom*, OECD, Paris.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002) *OECD Review of Career Guidance policies. Spain. National Questionnaire*. OECD, Paris July.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014) *OECD StatExtracts. Short Term labour market statistics. Activity rates*. <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=STLABOUR#> Accessed 3 March 2014.
- Plant P. (2001) *Quality in Careers Guidance: Information, guidance, counselling*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.
- Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings (SCAGES), (1992) 'Statement of principles and definitions', in Ball C., (ed.) *Guidance Matters*. London: Royal Society of Arts.
- Sultana R.G. (2004) *Guidance Policies in the Knowledge Societies: Trends, Challenges and Responses across Europe*, CEDEFOP Panorama series: 85. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Suso, A. (1997) El empleo, los trabajadores mayores y los jóvenes. Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales, 11, 203-235.
- Taylor P. (2002) *New policies for older workers*. Bristol, The Policy Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Watts A.G., & Sultana R.G. (2004) 'Career Guidance Policies in 37 countries: contrast and Common Themes', in *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 4,105-122.

About the Authors

María José López Sánchez is an Assistant Teacher of Economics and Economic Policy at the University Miguel Hernández of Elche, Alicante, Spain.

José Antonio Belso Martínez is a Professor of Economics and Economic Policy at the University Miguel Hernández of Elche, Alicante, Spain.

Contact Details

*María José López Sánchez
University Miguel Hernández of Elche
Avda de la Universidad s/n,
Alicante Elche*

Email: María.lopez@umh.es

Book Review

**Reflections on learning, life and work: Completing
doctoral studies in mid and later life and career**

Maureen Ryan (ed.)
Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2012
284 pages

Reviewed by Cheryl Maree Ryan
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Arts and Education
Deakin University, Victoria

The title of the book immediately sparked my interest, but as soon as I randomly read some of the 22 chapters, my interest was ignited. The book simultaneously achieves and surpasses what the editor intended.

Two of Maureen Ryan's aims in producing this book include: (1) 'to show how doctoral research can be personally and socially meaningful as well as being academically rigorous and significant' (p.ix); and (2) to tell the stories of Arts and Humanities higher degree students whose age and academic pathways differ from students in Science, and whose research

is shaped by life and career experiences.

The chapters are grouped into themes, and a range of research methodologies is showcased, including, but not limited to, ethnography, auto-ethnography, action research, case study, narrative, and arts-based inquiry.

The themes are:

Taking time out to reflect in doctoral study.

The influence of life experience on research topic selection.

The influence of work experience on research topic selection.

Ways forward after the doctorate.

On face value, these themes seem unsurprising and predictable, and one might expect a matter of fact, “how to” presentation of completing doctoral studies. Not so. Instead, each of the 22 chapters is a narrative ‘of human sense-making’ (Squire 2008:43), made more intense as the telling of each narrative is a joint project between writer and reader (Ricoeur 1991).

I was captivated by each writer’s narrative. Various aspects of my own experience as a doctoral candidate were exemplified to a lesser or greater extent in each narrative. I took away at least one significant message from each narrative, something that was meaningful and resonated with my doctoral journey. I admired the writers’ sense of agency, their persistence, and creativity. Some writers detailed the research process, albeit with insights to challenges and significant results and personal learning. Others engaged in deep reflection, taking me into their personal and professional lives. Either focus was memorable and persuasive.

As much as I want to, I cannot give an overview of each narrative, however, I will share two that inspired me with my PhD and were philosophically and theoretically significant.

Loy Lichtman’s narrative of his thesis is incredibly moving. He takes a cathartic journey in completing his practice- or arts-based doctorate. It cast reflective light on his childhood, growing up in a Jewish family in Fitzroy, exploring his parents’ wardrobe and discovering black and

white photographs taken in the concentration camps in Nazi Germany. He refers to Roland Barthes's '*punctum*' to describe the impact of the photographs: he was 'pierced' by them. He adds that 'In the eventual telling of my story, my PhD, and in the handing over of those photos to the Holocaust Research Centre in Elsternwick, I became less pierced' (p.116).

Loy's PhD was a very personal project that grew as it acquired a number of different threads to become a multi-layered, non-linear postmodern interrogation and representation of what Giddens (1991) referred to as the 'individualised project' and what Loy describes as the 'malleable' face and body within the context of his digital visual arts (p.117).

He starts with the visage of Pamela Anderson, her white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and symmetrical features; an image he sees on the façade of a house in a Melbourne suburb. Her face represents the perfect and desirable face in Western culture: a popular choice in aesthetic surgery. Loy examines *Herronvolk* and what constituted 'the ideal body and face in Nazi Germany', and then contrasts and compares Pamela Anderson's visage with that idealised by *Herronvolk*. Durer's early work in researching and documenting human proportions, and using techniques not totally dissimilar to some of today's digital practices, take on unexpected significance. Loy's PhD journey results in a number of creative projects and realisations. One realisation he describes as a 'shock': that 'the gap of 500 years between Durer and my own personal experiences, my experiences as an artist and my research into different trajectories, as well as the *malleable* body, did not seem too great' (p.130).

Tanya Paterson's past, as a public servant whose 'career came crashing down' (p.153), was the catalyst for her doctoral research. Her journey as an insider researcher resonated with my research, which is from an insider-outsider perspective. Intense energy, passion and conviction are expressed in her words and honest, self-effacing accounts of her experiences as a doctoral candidate, regularly interposed with humour.

Tanya wanted to use the research to better understand her lived experience of the injustices she and her colleagues had experienced, and to give voice to her co-workers. These were worthy aspirations.

However, as an insider researcher, whose lived experience and feelings of resentment were motivating factors, her journey was bound to be fraught with challenges. She describes receiving advice at her colloquium, 'You cannot use PhD as therapy', and reflecting that 'it was the best misinformation [she] ever received' (p.157). Ever present in Tanya's narrative is her commitment to social justice and her ethical responsibility of writing and telling others' stories and her own in a way that empowers others: participants, herself, and the readers.

All of the narratives in the book convey a combination of energy, humour, passion, commitment, doubt, angst, challenge, and transformation. The power of the narratives, individually and collectively, lies in their capacity to offer different layers of meaning, to "talk" to each other, and celebrate transformation and change (Squire 2008). Reading the narratives is very much a joint project between writer and reader and, as a consequence, made all the more meaningful.

Elaine Martin's Afterword is not to be overlooked or forgotten. She describes the research in this book as 'courageous research'; a term she coined to describe '[r]esearch that is courageous and inspired by imagination', in direct contrast to research that is diffident and set 'within the limits of traditional research methods and discipline boundaries' (p.281).

Elaine Martin's summation of the meaning and purpose of a doctorate is compelling:

To complete a doctoral study that is an honest reflection of personal wisdom is a deeply empowering experience, and beyond this there is a liberation that comes with eventually being able to have an informed and passionate voice that can speak back to the questions or comments of critics, curators, colleagues and others (p.283).

This book is very much in keeping with Maureen Ryan's approach to her role as an educator and researcher. Maureen Ryan is a professor in the College of Education at Victoria University, an experienced educator, and the Director of the Gallery Sunshine Everywhere. Collaboration, community, relationships and partnerships, narratives and stories, reflection and transformation are constant themes in her work. This

book is yet another example of Maureen Ryan's commitment to giving voice to others: teachers, educators, and now doctoral candidates in the Arts and Humanities.

I believe this book is an excellent resource for doctoral candidates, at any stage of their thesis, and an inspiration for those contemplating doctoral studies. It presents the human, emotional context, or texture, an essential ingredient for anyone embedded in or about to embark on doctoral studies. I see it as a supplementary resource to two of my favourite and often-read textbooks, both of which provide dynamic, creative, contemporary guidance to thesis research and writing that is accessible and easily understood and applied. These are: Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson's (eds) 2006, *Helping doctoral students write: pedagogies for supervision* and Pat Thomson and Melanie Walker's (eds) 2010, *The Routledge doctoral student's companion: Getting to grips with research in education and the social sciences*.

The courageous research in this book is inspirational and presents the personal, emotional and intellectual investment necessary to complete a doctoral thesis. Maureen Ryan's words resonate from the beginning of the book to the last page: 'Each of these chapters comes from the heart' (p. xiii). So true!

References

- Squire, C. (2008) 'Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative', in M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (eds.), *Doing narrative research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Ricoeur, P. (1991) 'Life in quest of narrative', in D. Wood (ed.), *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and interpretation*, Routledge, London.

NOTES FOR INTENDING CONTRIBUTORS

- 1 AJAL publishes papers in two main sections – blind peer-reviewed articles that draw on research, historical examination and/or theoretical insights and contributions; and a non-refereed section which aims to help practitioners reflect on their fields of practice, policy, improve teaching and learning and so on. These articles tend to be shorter and developmental. Articles that are more appropriate for the refereed section will not be considered for the non-refereed section. Authors should indicate in which section they want their paper to appear. In addition the Journal publishes book reviews, and from time to time special sections devoted to a theme or historical event.
- 2 Refereed papers should generally not exceed 6,000 words in length.
- 3 Papers are to be submitted online via the AJAL submission area on the AJAL website www.ajal.net.au. Submission requires completion of an online form, and separate attachment of the paper. The paper should identify up to 6 Keywords, and have any author-identifying comments or references removed
- 4 Please adhere to the style outlined on the AJAL website, prior to submitting your article as this will save time for editorial staff, reviewers and authors. Preferred style is defined for:
 - Footnotes/Endnotes
 - Spelling (Australian-English)
 - Numbers in text
 - In text references
 - References
- 5 Authors are required to include, in the online submission form:
 - a) the title of the article, names(s) of the author(s) and your institutional affiliation(s);
 - b) up to 6 Keywords
 - c) an abstract of between 150-200 words;
 - d) a five-line biographical note on present position and any information of special relevance such as research interests;
 - e) complete contact details, including postal and email addresses, and telephone and fax numbers; and
 - f) a clear indication of whether you want your paper to be refereed (that is, blind peer reviewed by at least two specialist reviewers from Australia and/or overseas) - if there is no indication, the paper will be considered as a non-refereed contribution.
- 6 Any complex tables, figures and diagrams are to be supplied in camera-ready copy, in a separate file with an indication of the appropriate location in the text.
- 7 Papers are accepted on the understanding that they are not being considered for publication elsewhere. Authors of main papers accepted for publication in the Journal will receive one copy of the Journal and five reprints of their paper. Other authors will receive two reprints of their contribution.
- 8 Brief research reports and book reviews (of approximately 800 words) relating to adult and community education are welcomed.
- 10 Some issues of the Journal are thematic. While papers published in a particular issue are not restricted to the theme, intending contributors are encouraged to submit papers on themes announced from time to time.

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

Dr Tony Brown,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Technology, Sydney,
PO Box 123 BROADWAY 2007,
Australia.
Tel: +61 2 9514 3866.
Email: tony.brown@uts.edu.au.

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT LEARNING

Volume 54, Number 2, July 2014

3 From the Editor's desk

Refereed articles

8 Diversity and achievement: Is success in higher education a transformative experience?

Robyn Benson, Margaret Heagney, Lesley Hewitt, Glenda Crosling and Anita Devos

32 How a personal development program enhances social connection and mobilises women in the community

Nandila Spry and Teresa Marchant

54 Teacher professional learning communities: Going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth

Susanne Owen

78 Expectations and reality: What you want is not always what you get

Arlene Garces-Ozanne and Trudy Sullivan

101 Identifying tertiary bridging students at risk of failure in the first semester of undergraduate study

Robert Whannell and Patricia Whannell

Non-refereed papers

121 Educational biographies in Germany: From secondary school general education to lifelong learning?

Harry Friebel

145 Do actions and methods in guidance for older workers exist in Spain?

María José López Sánchez and José Antonio Belso Martínez

Book review

170 Reflections on learning, life and work: Completing doctoral studies in mid and later life and career

Maureen Ryan (ed.), Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, 2012

Reviewed by Cheryl Maree Ryan