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EDITOR'S DESK

Basking in the warmth of the London sunshine, I am reflecting on the similar challenges facing us all in this global village. The challenges relating to organisational transformation, for example, the subject of a conference in which I have just participated, are just like ours on the other side of the globe – leadership, cultural change, responsiveness, resistance and so on. It all sounded so very familiar. Easy to listen to the rhetoric, difficult to translate into effective practice! And it is a global village because I was sitting mindlessly enjoying breakfast one morning in a Sheffield hotel when suddenly in walked an academic friend from a different campus of my Australian university with whom I used to team-teach in adult education a decade ago but had not seen for a number of years. She was attending a different conference from mine. Small world indeed!

This issue continues the historical sweep through the decades of this long-standing adult education journal. In the previous two issues, we peeped at November 1965 (40 years ago) and April 1976 (30 years ago) – this one focuses on volume 26, number 2, July 1986 (20 years ago).

By this time, Barrie Brennan at the University of New England was the journal editor. Still published three times a year, subscription stood at A$21. The hallmark of the issue's contents was variety – all centred on the theme of *Adult education in Asia and the Pacific*. There was the usual editorial; followed by four articles on various aspects of adult education practice in the region; an interview transcript of the editor with David Sloper (a senior lecturer at the UNE) on significant trends in non-formal education in the Asia-Pacific region; two further articles on particular programs (TUTA courses for Asian and Pacific trade unionists and external studies for nurse teachers in the Pacific); a report of a study tour of Indonesia; a "From the journals" section reporting on three journals; an "Off the bookshelf" review section; a "feedback" page; and a "Positions in the field" on the inside back cover. Quite a mix! Quite informative!

The first article was interesting from an historical point of view, written by the founding chair, from India, of ASPBAE (the Asian and South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education). It furnished a useful review of the organisation's first 22 years: what had been achieved, the problems faced and the challenges of the future. The second article was by an Israeli academic, visiting Australia, on the development of national identity and the role of adult/continuing education in this process. The third article was by an Australian consultant on a large-scale training program in Indonesia and its attempts to transfer responsibility for future implementation to the Indonesian trainers. The fourth was by a Zambian lecturer analysing the concept of participatory research in adult education. These international perspectives were illuminating in what the editor called the "first thematic number to cover a geographically international theme" (p.2).

Twenty years on, we discover in this issue variety and some international contributions. Surprise? Not really. That is the nature of adult learning. Four refereed articles are included that embrace a range of topics and contexts. **Rob Townsend** grapples with the

thorny concept of social capital. He raises the issue of adult education transforming individuals via access to new knowledge and skills, but can it impact on the social cohesiveness of groups, communities and regions in society? The author argues it is time that access and equity policies and strategies, which lie at the centre of adult, community and public education in Australia, are significantly reviewed in the context of a culturally diverse twenty-first century. **Marguerite Cullity** writes about mature-aged students in universities, a significant group within the Australian sub-degree and undergraduate commencing cohort. Claiming that not much is known about their social backgrounds and factors that affect their participation, she explores the demographic characteristics of those who participate in these programs. Her belief is that an understanding of mature-age student characteristics can assist program organisers in designing effective alternative entry courses for unmatriculated, return-to-study and equity group mature learners.

From social capital and social backgrounds to assessment in adult continuing education, **James Athanasou** provides a case study on examinations for solicitors seeking accreditation. He employs the Rasch model for illustrating that many of the items in the examination were redundant. He contends that this analysis holds important implications wherever formal assessments are used in adult education and training contexts. Positioning theory is examined in the fourth article by **Diana Phillips** and **Barbara Hayes**. The authors use this theory to explore how professional identity is formed in midwifery – in practice settings where each individual 'positions' herself/himself within entities of encompassing people, institutions and societies and where conversations are conducted either privately or publicly. In unravelling these conversations, the authors claim that positioning may be applied as an analytical tool by educators to interpret the emerging meanings and themes in their discussions with students, reflective journals by students and in meetings with preceptors/midwives.

Two papers come from different educational contexts in Nigeria and Kuwait. **N.S. Okoroma** reviews, from the literature, the implementation of national education policy in Nigeria, and explores the gap that can occur between policy and its implementation. The paper recommends the discontinuation of the National Policy on Education fashioned after the American system and the adoption of the model practised by Asian countries such as Japan, China and India which takes the culture of the people into consideration. **Eissa Alansari** reports on the implementation of cooperative learning in various continuing education courses within Kuwait University. From interviews with 200 university teachers, the author found that three-quarters believed that implementation had been successful. The paper presents a series of recommendations to improve further the educational standard of the Centre in Kuwait University.

This issue contains two short research reports-in-progress, one by **Ann Lawless** on exploring radical wisdom in Australian higher education, and the other by **Tom Short** in New Zealand on unlocking the Da Vinci code of human resource development. Four interesting book reviews follow.

Can I conclude by encouraging anyone who wants to write to do so, who is undertaking a research project to think about developing it into an article for publication (this is particularly worthwhile if you are doing a higher degree), and who wishes to volunteer to review books to contact one of the editorial team of this Journal? You would be significantly contributing to the development of our profession in doing any of these things, and you would be developing your own skills and confidence in writing. We would love to hear from you!

Roger Harris
Editor

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Adult, community and public education as primary sites for the development of social capital

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This article reviews current literature and discussion about the policies and sites of Australian adult education and training and their potential impact on the development of social capital in a regional context. The review stems from a current research project examining the impact of participation in adult education by people from diverse cultural backgrounds in a regional town in northern Victoria. There is evidence that adult education can transform individuals via access to new knowledge and skills, but can it impact on the social cohesiveness of groups, communities and regions in Australian society? Access and equity policies and strategies form the centre of adult, community and public education in Australia and it is time for these to be significantly reviewed in the context of a culturally diverse twenty first century society.

International perspectives on adult education

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines adult learning as encompassing general, vocational, enterprise and higher education and training across all types of learning sites. In 2003, the OECD published comparative research on adult education policies and practices in nine countries in Europe and Scandinavia which contends that, despite reform agendas occurring within adult learning policies and practices in most countries, there are persistent inequities in the provision, access and outcomes of adult education and training (OECD 2003).

Similar research in Australia and internationally evaluates adult education and training reforms against established policies and practices targeted at specific groups of individuals within a society, including the unemployed, 'discouraged workers', early (forced) retirees, women returning to work, youth, indigenous communities and people with disabilities (Noonan, Burke & White 2004; Evans 2003; Stevenson 2003; James 2001).

Empirical research of adult education and training in most western democratic countries reveals differing levels and outcomes in educational participation based on social class, gender, (dis)ability and age (Evans 2003). The OECD report provides a policy framework that, it argues, assists governments in addressing these issues. Starting with recognition of a 'rights' based framework, a philosophy that people have the right to access adult education at any time, could encourage individuals to engage with adult learning during their 'whole of life' using incentives that recognise adult education as economic, social and personal development (OECD 2003). Others go further than the OECD in stating that the development of learning environments where the acquisition of knowledge, experience and skills is valued must occur within a framework of major social change (Noonan, Burke & White 2004; Finger & Asun 2001).

Australian adult education systems

The elements of public adult education and training in Australia are three distinct sectors: Adult and Community Education (ACE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). The ACE sector is characterised by the provision of general education courses, vocational education and training programs and recreation/lifestyle courses. Adult and community education sites tend to be publicly owned, community-based and at a neighbourhood level. A recent development is the emergence of larger 'colleges' of adult education which are increasingly delivering VET programs to meet the needs of so-called 'hard to get to' communities and groups.

ACE participants are significantly older than students in other post-secondary education and over eighty per cent (80%) of all participants are enrolled with community providers (Clemans, Hartley & Macrae 2003). A recent account of research strategies for ACE in Victoria reveals 'regional participation rates … higher than their metropolitan counterparts' and 'the importance of ACE in rural areas, and particularly for country women' (Walstab & Teese 2005: 5). This sector is characterised by a lack of comprehensive research about the activities and outcomes of 'not so' formal adult education programs, including activities offered by Universities of the Third Age (U3As), recreation, leisure and personal enrichment activities (Clemans, Hartley & Macrae 2003).

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia is now characterised by a national framework of Training Packages and qualifications linked specifically to industry needs. Programs are managed and delivered by large multi-campus TAFE providers or a plethora of small to medium-sized private companies and Registered Training Organisations, which train in-house workforces or deliver programs to niche client groups.

The Higher Education (HE) sector has become increasingly 'vocationalised' in recent decades with the most popular courses linked to industries such as information technology and business management/marketing, or to professions such as medicine, law, nursing, teaching and social work. Participation in higher education also reveals a focus on economic outcomes with the most popular courses being Management and Commerce with external and multi-modal courses now making up over 20 percent of all courses (DEST 2004). Table 1 illustrates a comparison of participation in adult education and training in Victoria, reflecting the commonalities and differences between the sectors.

Table 1: Participation rates in the Victorian adult education sectors (ACFE 2003; DEST 2004; NCVER 2005)

	ACE 2002 %	VET 2004 %	HE 2004 %
Women	74	45	46
Men	26	55	54
Indigenous	5	1	1
Non-English speaking background	8	24	22
Non-citizens	n/a	1	28
Employment-related	43	76	n/a
Personal development	57	17	n/a

These data and other information released by governments and research agencies outline the extent of individual participation in adult education, but do not provide any indication of how this participation impacts on broader social and economic processes (ACFE 2003; DEST 2004; NCVER 2005).

The impact of adult education and training reform on regional communities

Reform agendas in adult education and training in Australia since the mid-1980s have concentrated on competency-based vocational education and training and the expansion of higher education into outer-urban and regional areas. In the 1990s, the Federal Labor Government, in partnership with the union movement, understood national competency-based training as not only necessary to reform vocational training and work in Australia but as an integral part of a social justice strategy. The unions believed that a national training system underpinned by acknowledging worker skills and knowledge in a more flexible and user-friendly training environment would have the ability to attract a wider range of participants.

Women, disadvantaged young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and regional and remote communities could be encouraged to participate in this new vocational training system. More importantly, their skills and knowledge and the subsequent qualifications gained would be recognised throughout Australia (ANTA 1994). It was believed by governments that training reform via greater participation in education and training by a wider range of groups could deliver employment flexibility and future economic growth in Australia (ANTA 1994).

Higher education reforms over the past ten to fifteen years have included the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme and fee-for-service places as funding mechanisms for all major program areas and the expansion in the number of higher education institutions servicing populations living within so called 'rust belt' areas of major cities and urban sprawl suburbs. There has also been growth in multi-sector adult education and training institutions and the expansion of Australian higher education programs and services into most Asian countries.

The ACE sector in Australia has been relatively untouched by these reforms because the goals of ACE programs are not recognised as being so closely linked to economic imperatives. In recent years, more ACE organisations have delivered VET programs, usually in situations where there are no other VET providers in the vicinity or where funding is offered for specific rural and remote groups and communities. This lack of policy review and reform means that little research has been conducted into the same issues and factors that impact on the VET and Higher Education sectors of adult education and training. The ACE sector is different from the VET and HE sectors in Australia in that the States and Territories each have different philosophical and funding arrangements, and it has only been since the mid-1990s that participation and outcomes for this sector have been measured by State/Territory and Commonwealth governments. There is a substantial amount of 'other' adult education activities occurring in all sectors that goes unreported (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001).

ACE organisations are seen as sites of 'second chance' education, empowering and transforming individuals through community-embedded learning which acts as a social contribution by engaging adult learning with everyday and localised community life (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). Evidence exists that ACE organisations deliver programs that contribute to factors other than economic and employment outcomes, such as community participation, personal wellbeing and quality of life. These programs are aimed at the enrichment of individuals, families and communities where the 'accumulation of social capital through broad participation in ACE is seen as a source of regional regeneration, neighbourhood, town or community development' (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001: 11). Clemans *et al*. (2003) reveal in their research of ACE that there is a framework of individual, community and economic outcomes that need to be measured, and Figure 1 outlines these outcomes.

Figure 1: Outcomes of participation in ACE. This table has been adapted from research by Clemans, Hartley & Macrae (NCVER 2003).

Personal domain	Public domain	Social & community	Economic
emotional and physical wellbeing	cross-cultural knowledge	social connections	productive enterprises
spiritual peace	organisational capacity	community building	increased small business capacity
maturity	community service	active citizenship	employment advocacy
sense of belonging	employability skills	activism	micro-economic development
cognitive development	self-sufficiency	cultural expression	creation of goods and services
communication skills	expanded pathways	sharing resources	savings in personal and organisational costs due to greater efficiency
enhanced personal relationships	income generation	new community groups	
creative ability	professional development	community identity	
literacy and language		empowerment	
personal choices		appreciation and respect for diversity	
recreation			

A central issue to consider when evaluating the policies and planning of public adult education and training is accepting the existence of a diversity of people and needs within a community or region (Falk 2000). This means that adult education and training programs need to acknowledge and cater for all individuals and sub-groups within communities rather than targeting generic groups of people such as; 'non-English speaking background', 'the unemployed', 'youth at risk' and 'women'.

New research priorities are required to explore all the outcomes of adult education and training that go beyond simple attendance in programs and credentialled outcomes. This new research needs to focus more on the connections between adult education and training processes and the building of human capital via individual transformation, plus the development of social capital in diversified communities and the growing of economic capital through local infrastructure and industries.

Social capital and adult education

Australian adult education rhetoric and reality reveals that 'community' is an important site for adult learning. A good deal of research and theorising continues into the 'institution' and the 'workplace' as sites of learning; however, adults live within several constructs of community. Various research studies (Cervero & Wilson 2001; Falk 2000; ANTA 2002) have found that local communities need to be involved in the planning and provision of adult education and training programs for these services to have meaning:

> ... there are significant reasons underlying the need for VET and regional and community development to work closely together and are, in fact, based on the same reasons that underlie the Kangan (1974) reforms: to fill the needs of the society of the day (ANTA: 2002: 11).

Cavaye (2001) points out that governments need to be accountable in new ways to communities about the programs they initiate, including their contribution to community organisation, cooperation and attitudinal change – that is, being accountable for the processes of interaction with communities, not just the programs and their statistical outcomes (Cavaye 2001).

The use of the term 'social capital' is one that grows in currency and alludes to the values, norms and processes within communities, networks and organisations. Coleman (1990) believed social capital

was a by-product of government-funded programs and therefore an unintentional process but one that required recognition and further research. The debate about what is social capital examines the extent to which families, communities, institutions, organisations, regions and nations are able to make commitments to one another to solve problems requiring collective action (Winter 2000: 21).

Schuller (2005) examines three forms of social capital relevant to adult education activities in a community context. Bonding social capital refers to the links within or between homogenous groups, bridging social capital to the links within and between heterogenous groups and linking social capital to the connections between people and groups at different hierarchical levels. Activities and frameworks that facilitate bridging social capital aim to acknowledge the validity of the norms, values and experiences of 'others' without having to share them. Bridging capital then contributes to what Schuller (2005) describes as 'knowledge economies', that is, the transactions that occur to build knowledge, experiences and skills, transactions that occur at adult, community and public education sites.

Measuring these forms of social capital requires agreement on a list of social capital indicators that are empirically measurable. Onyx and Bullen (Winter 2000), in their research of five communities in New South Wales, distilled eight factors associated with social capital, including participation in the local community, pro-activity in a social context, feelings of trust and safety, neighbourhood connections, family and friendship connections, tolerance of diversity and the value of life and work connections. Despite Putman's (2000) tome, *Bowling alone*, and growing literature and discussion about social capital, there is still much debate around how researchers can identify and measure these social processes and outcomes.

Bryson and Mowbray (2005) provide a timely warning about the linking of notions of community, social capital and public policy by exploring specific examples from the current Victorian Government's

social policies on 'Victorian communities'. They conclude that the use of terms such as 'social capital' and 'community' can be flawed unless social researchers and analysts 'scrutinise social policy and the use of evidence' in a manner that produces policy and practice that is informed by the 'best evidence available' (Bryson & Mowbray 2005: 97).

Individual transformation via adult education

The link between adult education and social capital is a new area of exploration in educational evaluation which has traditionally focused on individual transformation via the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. The recent, popular use of terms such as 'lifelong learning' and 'learning for life' has attempted to make the link between learning and the various stages of adult development; however, these terms have little meaning if they are not founded in transformative models of adult education. The re-emergence of experiential learning is one example of a transformational adult education process that links the contexts of education, work and personal development. Transformational adult education means different things depending on the specific philosophies, programs and practices in adult education and training (Arnold & Ryan 2003).

Historically, radical educators such as Freire (1973, 1993) and Illich (1976) have argued that contemporary adult education and training systems are primarily agencies of social control that are oppressive and conservative and aim to maintain a capitalist class system. Transformational education and training frameworks can and must acknowledge the familial, community and cultural experiences of individuals. Adult education and training processes can then be designed to instil a critical consciousness which is an active exploration of the personal and experiential meaning of ideas and concepts through dialogue amongst equals.

Boud (1989) described four pedagogical traditions in adult education: training and efficiency (scientific tradition), self-directed learning (andragogy), learner-centred programs (humanistic) and education for social action (critical theory). These pedagogical traditions assume a common notion that we are 'self participants in our own subjugation and domination' (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant & Yates 2003). They also accept the dualism of the 'individual' and 'society' as foundations, pulling in opposite directions. A post-modern critique of Boud's traditions rejects this notion of the self as a unitary, coherent, rational subject and proclaims the 'multi-self', the notion that subjectivity is multiple.

All adult education programs and processes contain explicit or implicit dimensions of personal change, learning that reflects different experiences and roles of the self. Foucault (1988) labelled these as 'technologies of change' where individuals interact with systems of production (work), sign systems (power in society) and with our own bodies, souls, thoughts and behaviours to attain a certain state of happiness, wisdom, acceptance, contentment and so on.

The post-modern way forward examines the self and society as concurrently produced via discursive practices (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant & Yates 2003). Self as subjectivity is multiple, a discourse embedded in the everyday, the multi-contextual, multi-cultural, multi-familial, a collection of experiences, beliefs, interactions, communities, workplaces, partners, children and personal journeys. It is this multiplicity that challenges adult education and training systems in the twenty-first century. Taylor *et al*. (2000) have examined the notion of connecting learning in the varied contexts in which we participate to reveal commonalities. This means that by linking, rather than separating, our learning experiences from varied contexts, we can begin to locate the 'truer' self that has a coherent identity, the integrated person rather than the roles we play as 'worker', 'parent', 'partner' or 'citizen'.

Adult education and training practice, therefore, needs to embrace the politics of self-location, that is, the wholeness of each individual nationality, culture, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and/or occupation. The current quest for adult education policy-makers relates to the matching of this version of the self with the access and equity philosophies, principles and practices that guide adult education program funding and delivery in Australia.

A discourse of access and equity in adult education

Putman (2004) contends that increased cultural and ethnic diversity via global immigration and differential fertility will continue unabated and that this diversity is an important economic and social asset for any country. He believes that 'to increase social capital and social cohesion, the educational process is the single most important and effective policy lever' (Putman 2004: 6). Globally, adult education and training systems are still struggling with the social and political issues of social segregation versus integration and language and cultural assimilation, all of which have been issues for many societies for decades (Putman 2004).

'Underpinning modern Australian society is a commitment to cultural diversity. Australia accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage…' (DFAT 2005: 1). Shared patterns of cultural meaning are important to all societies and these patterns reflect the development of norms, values, skills, understandings, attributes and characteristics that are resources for individual, communal and social action. The existence of these elements underpins all social exchanges and the development of trust and cooperation within communities and societies, that is, the development of social capital.

Culture is seen as the systems of beliefs, assumptions, sentiments and perspectives which members of a group have in common, embodied in customs, routines, roles and rituals. Cultural diversity relates to all

cultures participating equally in a society to define and shape national identity and citizenship, deriving from the understanding and sharing between different cultures and the positive value of this sharing to society as a whole (UNESCO 2004).

Access and equity strategies have been crucial elements of Commonwealth, State and Territory government policies and programs in Australia since the early 1970s. Access and equity have usually taken the form of policies and programs targeting specific groups in society and have resulted in specific legislation and regulating structures such as Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Disability Discrimination (DDA).

The link between access and equity as concepts and government policies and programs supporting cultural diversity can be seen historically in affirmative action programs, mutual agreements with other (mainly European) nations, citizenship programs and cultural festivals. However, these policies have been more a reaction to the waves of immigration to Australia linked to economic growth. Recent skilled population expansion via immigration policies continues to emphasise cultural diversity as an economic imperative rather than building on Australia's diversity as social or population policies.

Hattam and Smyth (1998) explore access and equity within a historical framework of terminology used in Australian society, such as 'a fair chance for all', 'social justice', 'equal opportunity', 'equal outcomes' and 'equality'. It is on this basis that they argue that social justice policy in Australia has tended to reflect a 'victim construction' approach where policies 'present an a-causal view of 'disadvantage' that collapses to 'in-school' strategies rather than take the struggle into the community; 'construct the oppressed as disadvantaged victims' which translates into policies that are 'essentially charitable in orientation' (Hattam & Smyth 1998: 138–139).

For over a decade, Australian adult education and training policies have stressed the need for increased access and participation by

'targeting' women, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, the disabled, Indigenous peoples and regional and remote communities (DEST 2003; DEST 2004). Shore suggests that the policies and programs which target particular groups in society assume there is a stable centre in these policies (Shore 2001). The categories of access and equity in Australian adult education and training policies assume that the stable centre or dominant discourse in Australian adult education and training is Anglo-Saxon, male, physically and mentally able, situated in urban communities and employed on a full-time and fulfilling basis.

Hattam and Smyth (1998) reflect that an understanding of access and equity in adult education requires a sociological reading which is largely absent from policy. Therefore, any evaluation and analysis of Australian adult education and training must acknowledge and indeed confront 'the discourse, practices and institutional structures of society' (Hattam & Smyth 1998: 142). These discourses are many and include nationality, culture, citizenship, inequality, marginality, poverty, worker, unemployed etc., the discourses that locate the individual within society, community and industry.

Using culture and language as definers of equity groups within adult community and public education policies is regarded as consigning these groups to a state of being 'other than' the dominant, privileged Anglo, Christian, English-speaking centre of these policies. Shore (2001) describes this as the invisible binaries of adult education and training policy, where certain outcomes are considered in terms of categories and not in terms of diversity of overall participation. Adult learning principles are framed in most western democratic societies as a liberal education philosophy and practice that is 'trying' to overcome the barriers and structures that deny 'others' access to services and resources. Shore (2001) argues that adult learning theorists, policy-makers and practitioners need to recognise our lack of critique in our own use of language, discourse and practice.

Any evaluation of diversity, social inclusion and social capital as products of adult education and training systems must include an exploration of the responses to a range of heterogenous language and literacy needs, acknowledging barriers to learning such as prior experiences and the negotiation of cross-cultural issues within adult education providers and programs. It has recently been suggested that the future of access and equity in public adult education and training in Australia is the structuring of access and equity to meet the needs of individuals rather than targeted sub-groups or communities – it is only on this individual level that we can negotiate issues such as need, culture, experiences and outcomes (Bowman 2004).

Conclusion

People who are vulnerable in society, who lack social power, tend to have lower levels of social trust and in Australian society this includes people who are unemployed, in poor health, elderly, young or are recent immigrants. The pivotal role of public adult education and training can be seen in recent attempts to measure social capital and in the strong relationship between measures of educational attainment and civic efficacy, civic identity, levels of trust and political knowledge and activity (Putman 2004; Winter 2000).

The role of adult, community and public education as a philosophy and practice leads to adult education sites being prominent in future public interaction. Sites such as neighbourhood-based, adult community education, public libraries, University of the Third Age, community learning circles and other forums can be 'places where people can practise the habits of social trust' (Latham 2000: 216). Adult, community and public education is one area of public policy where research has been limited to individual transformation and achievement. Measuring levels of social trust, social cohesion and inclusiveness as indicators of the development of social capital is the current challenge for researchers and governments in all areas of public policy.

The development of new public policy in adult, community and public education needs to emerge from conversations between political actors engaging in a dialogue with individuals, groups and communities about their values and needs. Conversations between political actors, policy-makers and researchers must be about genuine partnerships and participation in order for these social indicators to come to the fore and be explored.

This means acknowledging and exploring how national, regional and localised social and cultural structures and processes contribute to a discourse on identity, history and sustainability via the exploration of local power relations and processes of exclusion and marginalisation. 'The subversive logic of social capital demands public policy responses that are place and people specific and deeply grounded in local needs and circumstances' (Winter 2000: 291).

The challenge is to evaluate and redesign Australia's adult, community and public education policies and systems so that they facilitate a divergence in style and approach and a high level of local judgement and flexibility – not just as rhetoric, but as a reality that can be measured in terms of the development of social and economic resources that connect people and create all manner of capital formation in localised places. This redesign can commence with further research about adult education and training as sites of social, civic, community **and** educational activities and begin to measure the factors and processes of adult education that impact on and link individuals, groups, communities and regions within the context of a twenty first century, culturally diverse, Australian society.

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Challenges in understanding and assisting mature-age students who participate in alternative entry programs

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Mature-age students are a significant group within the Australian sub-degree and undergraduate commencing cohort. Nevertheless, little is known about mature-age student backgrounds or factors that affect their participation at university. This paper draws on a case study that examined the nature and outcomes of Australian alternative entry programs for mature-age students. Specifically, the paper explores the demographic characteristics of mature-age students who participate in these programs. Australian research indicates that mature-age student circumstances influence their university aspirations and awareness of academic study. An understanding of mature-age student characteristics assists program organisers in designing effective alternative entry courses for unmatriculated, return-to-study and equity group mature learners. It is through a shared knowledge of mature learner

circumstances and appropriate pedagogy that alternative entry program personnel can monitor and advance student participation at university.

Introduction

> Australia's universities have a greater mix of students than in many countries. In comparison to other countries, a smaller proportion of higher education students commence directly from school. There is also a greater proportion of mature-aged students, more students studying part-time and more students via distance education programmes (Nelson 2002: 5).

Mature-age students (21 years and over) constitute a notable group within Australia's higher education sector. Since the 1950s, mature-age ('mature') students have represented a significant group of the commencing undergraduate cohort. In 2002, for instance, mature students comprised 38 per cent of the undergraduate intake (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science & Training 2002). Mature students help to diversify the social and age mix within the undergraduate population. Higher education also represents a means for mature learners to advance their life opportunities and outcomes. For these reasons, it is vital that mature students are encouraged to participate in academic study (Abbott-Chapman, Braithwaite & Godfrey 2004; Baldwin 1991; National Board of Employment, Education & Training/Higher Education Council [NBEET/HEC] 1996; Ramsay 2004; Rosenman 1996).

Some mature students lack admission criteria to higher education (for example, final year of school results, further education Certificate IV). In these circumstances, students' education backgrounds can prohibit them from attending university (Abbott-Chapman *et al.* 2004; Anderson & Vervoorn 1983; Cullity 2005; Dawkins 1987,

1988; Karmel 1975; NBEET/HEC 1996; Ramsay 2004). To re-dress this concern, 13 of the nation's 44 universities conduct alternative entry programs (AEPs) for mature students. Typically, students are required to complete two or more AEP subjects (for example, Earth Science, Introduction to Philosophy). Alternative entry programs provide mature learners with admission criteria to university and introduce students to academic culture, including the practices and expectations of study. Without an alternative entry route to university, undergraduate study is not possible for some adults. The immediate past Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, stated:

> There must be equality of opportunity in higher education to allow individuals to fulfil their potential, regardless of their personal circumstances and backgrounds.
>
> There should be no systemic barriers to participation. There should be provision for the varying needs of students from different backgrounds. Special intervention measures may be needed to encourage participation from groups that are under-represented in certain areas, or to sustain their success, including 'second chance' [unmatriculated, return to study and/or older students] opportunities and dedicated support (Nelson 2002: 2).

Background to the paper

The paper illustrates how mature students' decisions to attend an AEP are influenced by a complex mix of adult circumstances. The snapshot of mature learners highlights the personal, social, attitudinal, educational, cultural, vocational and financial circumstances that can affect their beliefs about academic study. This paper is taken from a case study inquiry that examined the nature and outcomes of alternative entry programs for mature-age students. The project explored, in part, Australian research that investigated AEPs for mature students. The literature shows the relevance of: (i) investigating mature learner characteristics; (ii) understanding

how mature student circumstances affect their higher education opportunities and outcomes; and (iii) considering the backgrounds and needs of unmatriculated, return-to-study and equity group mature learners.

The case study did not explore AEPs for Indigenous or non-English speaking background (NESB) students. The decision to narrow the research focus was based on the awareness that AEPs for Indigenous and NESB students are conducted for 'all age' rather than mature learners. Therefore, this overview of mature learner circumstances is constrained by the research boundaries (that is, AEPs for mature-age students), the limited amount of AEP research available, and the dated nature of some of this work. Nevertheless, the paper provides an insight into issues that affect mature learner involvement in alternative entry courses.

Mature learners illustrate a wide social mix of students

Mature students who participate in an AEP represent a broad spectrum of Australian society. Some of them have lived in middle or high income households, attended independent schools and completed Year 12. Typically, these students have undertaken paid employment or attended to home duties and, therefore, delayed university study (Osman 1981). Their final year of school qualification, however, is no longer admissible for entry to higher education. Possibly a closer portrayal of AEP mature students comprises adults who come from a low socio-economic status background, left school prior to completing Year 12, are first-in-the-family to study, and are either in paid employment or recipients of social security benefits (see Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; Penglase 1993).

How many mature students participate in a program?

It is difficult to determine the number of mature students who participate in and complete an alternative entry program. Annually,

Australian universities submit to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) data that show commencing student numbers and admission routes to university. Student entrance routes are recorded in DEST Data Element No. 327: 'Basis for Admission to Current Course.' The DEST 'alternative admission' sub-categories relevant to this inquiry are:

- Mature-Age Special Entry, for example, Special Tertiary Admission Test [STAT] (Ramsay, Tranter, Sumner & Barrett 1996)
- Special Entry Provision, for example, specific tests for equity group students
- Other Basis applicants whose academic credentials cannot be matched to university admission system processes or Tertiary Admissions Centre requirements (Ramsay *et al*. 1996)
- Exam/Assessment held by, or conducted on behalf of, the admitting university

An awareness of AEP student numbers is blurred as some programs can be assigned to more than one DEST 'Basis for Admission to Current Course' sub-category (DEST, personal communication March 13 2002; Ramsay *et al*. 1996). Due to this overlap of sub-categories, Ramsay *et al*. have concerns about the "reliability of basis for admission data" in reporting student entry routes (1996: 28).

The lack of data regarding AEP mature student participation is further complicated as few universities publish information showing the number of mature students who enrol in, or complete, an alternative entry course. In addition, DEST student data rarely illustrate the combined elements of 'age' and 'basis of admission'. Nonetheless, aggregated DEST data sets (see Table 1 following) indicate the number of mature students (21 years plus) with alternative admission credentials.

Table 1: Mature students admitted to university via an alternative admissions route (taken from DEST data sets since 1998 – exact years unknown)

DEST, Basis for Admission to Current Course alternative entry sub-categories	Alternative admission mature students (21 years+) by age and number					Total of alternative admission mature students	Alternative admission mature students, as % of total of new undergraduates (n = 367 989)
	21–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+		
Mature-Age Special Entry	4 404	2 506	1 216	307	47	8 480	2.30%
Special Entry Provision	2 276	1 227	569	156	29	4 257	1.16%
Exam/ Assessment	6 228	3 149	1 591	412	50	11 430	3.11%
Other Basis	15 442	5 733	2 393	670	105	24 343	6.61%
TOTAL	28 350	12 615	5 769	1545	231	48 510	13.18%

Adapted from unpublished aggregated DEST data sets compiled by Ian R Dobson, Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, Victoria

Table 1 suggests that Other Basis admission procedures are the most likely alternative entry route completed by mature students. Other Basis strategies include alternative entry and enabling programs (that is, non-award preparation for study, for instance, Mathematics of Nursing Student). Significantly, all age clusters of mature learners show a preference for this type of admission strategy. The 24 343 mature students accepted to university via an Other Basis procedure constitute 50.18 per cent of all mature students with alternative entry qualifications. As shown in Table 1, the Other Basis category of students represents 6.61 per cent of the undergraduate commencing student intake. These data are consistent with 1993 and 1994 student admission figures that show, respectively, 9.7 per cent and 7.0 per cent of 'all age' undergraduate commencers were admitted by way of an Other Basis admission procedure (DEET, as cited in Dobson, Sharma & Haydon 1996). The data shown in Table 1 suggest the significance of AEPs in assisting mature students to participate at university. The information, nevertheless, should be interpreted cautiously as the sub-category Other Basis includes enabling as well as alternative entry programs.

Circumstances and factors that influence mature learner participation

Age

Alternative entry program research indicates that there are two main age groupings of mature students: 20–30 and 30–40 year olds (Collins & Penglase 1991; Cullity 2005; Isaacs 1982; McNamee & Maxwell 1993; Moses 1978; Osman 1981; Smith 1987b; Stehlik, Pablo & Lansangan 1993; Stephenson & Munn 1989). Most of these studies show that 20–30 year olds are more likely than other age groups to participate in an alternative entry course. Specifically, 21 to 29 year olds make up the largest number, over 50 per cent, of mature students admitted to university via an alternative entrance route. A deeper analysis (see Table 1) shows that 21 to 25 year olds represent over one-third of all alternative entry students. These data suggest that 21 to 25 year olds were early school leavers or unmatriculated school completers. This assumption is made on the basis that their Year 12 results would be accepted, time wise, for admission purposes. The decline of student numbers as age increases highlights the significance of AEPs for young and middle-aged adults.

Gender

A greater number of women than men enrol in AEPs for mature learners (Barrett 1986; Beasley 1985; Broughton & Merley 2003; Collins & Penglase 1991; Cullity 2005; Isaacs 1982; McNamee & Maxwell 1993; Osman 1981; Penglase 1993; Ramsay 2004; Ramsay *et al*. 1996; Smith 1987b; Stehlik *et al*. 1993; Stephenson & Munn 1989). Research suggests that social and vocational matters affect the age at which males and females commence study. In particular, women who are early school leavers (Barrett, Beauchamp & Powell 1979) or whose families discouraged girls from attending university (Osman 1981; Isaacs 1982) are keen to enrol in alternative entry courses. These students regard alternative entry and university as ways to "'catch-up' on their education" (Barrett *et al*. 1979: 3). One suggested reason for the high number of women AEP participants is that male early school leavers return to study sooner than unmatriculated females (King, as cited in Ramsay 2004). Ramsay also considers the high AEP participation rate of women occurs as males show a preference to enrol in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses and they, then, use these credentials as an alternative access route to university.

The notion of gender differences within higher education participation rates was explored by Birrell, Calderon, Dobson and Smith (2000). Similar to Ramsay (2004), Birrell *et al*. observed that young males, especially males from "blue-collar backgrounds", are more likely to enrol in a further education course than in undergraduate study (2000: 56). Birrell *et al*. suggest that men's education choices are influenced by "cultural factors", particularly the values held by "working-class communities" regarding the "appropriate career aspirations of boys" (2000: 56).

Ethnicity

Generally, Australian resident English-speaking background learners who come from a non-Indigenous upbringing participate in AEPs for mature students. Indigenous and local NESB students also enrol in these programs. Commonly, however, universities with high catchments of Indigenous and NESB students conduct a dedicated program for these learners. For example, Charles Darwin and James Cook universities conduct AEPs for Indigenous students, and La Trobe and Curtin universities hold programs for NESB students. Some universities also conduct AEPs for international NESB students.

Social background, and issues that complicate an understanding of student circumstances

Face-to-face interviews with AEP staff indicate a change within the social backgrounds of students who enrol in these programs (Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; Cullity 2005). Staff suggested that the student demographic has changed from a high intake of middle-income women with families to a broader social, gender and age mix of students. It appears that current AEPs are more likely to include learners in their early twenties, students who have failed Year 12 exams, employees who want to upgrade their vocational credentials as well as middle income women who want to study for personal growth reasons. Staff, from two separate AEPs, also suggest the numbers of males, long-term unemployed and people on social security benefits have increased (Cullity 2005). A staff member stated:

> They are a younger, fragile, less skilled, less confident student … The traditional upper-middle-class mum has changed to a broader demographic: people with mental illness, more people with issues (Cullity 2005: 182).

There are limited data to show the number or percentage of equity group students who participate in an alternative admission program. Information about student background or level of disadvantage is often assessed from anecdotal information regarding learner education, employment histories, place of residence, household income or social security documents (see Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004). Alternative entry studies locate a reader within the social and educational circumstances experienced by students and use this information to illustrate learner background. Alternative entry

program research suggests that students with a low socio-economic status or rural/regional background are more likely than other equity groups to participate in a program (Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; Bond 1996; Broughton & Merley 2003; Cheong 2000; Cullity 2005; Fulmer & Jenkins 1992; McNamee & Maxwell 1993; Munns, Nanlohy & Thomas 2000; Murphy, Cobbin & Barlow 1992; Penglase 1993).

Significantly, socially and educationally disadvantaged mature learners remain some of the most under-represented students in the Australian higher education community (Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; NBEET/HEC 1996; Ramsay 2004). The use of AEP selection practices (Gale & McNamee 1996) and increases to the student Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) (Ramsay) are matters that can adversely affect the number of equity group mature students who attend university. Ramsay argues that research should explore why equity group and under-represented mature student numbers have not improved.

The notion of 'learner privacy' complicates the collation of student demographic data. Some AEP staff are concerned about protecting student confidentiality (Penglase 1993; Smith 1987a, 1987b). Program staff who hold this belief argue against documenting student backgrounds or following-up on program non-completers. Smith, for instance, indicates that student withdrawal from an AEP is simply a "matter of fact that we must accept" (1987a: 23). The author reveals tension about requesting information from alternative admission students:

> No personal information is demanded of students at any time except their names, addresses, phone numbers and ages. Their occupations, family and financial circumstances and prior education are considered to be their own affair and quite irrelevant to our purpose (Smith 1987b: 8).

Contrary to Smith (1987b), Bond (1996) and Cobbin and Barwood (1993) contend that it is through a pooled knowledge of student backgrounds and program findings that AEP providers can consider issues that affect student engagement in higher education.

Education and family background

Education experiences. Mature students who participate in an AEP represent learners with different education backgrounds but a desire to participate in higher education. Program research shows that a little over one-half of the mature students who attended an AEP left school prior to completing secondary education (Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; Beasley, 1985; Collins & Penglase 1991; Greagg 1981; Isaacs 1982; Osman 1981; Ramsay *et al*. 1996). Even so, between 30 and 60 per cent of the students who were early school leavers have sub-matriculation credentials; for example, a trade certificate or diploma studies (Beasley 1985; Collins & Penglase 1991; Isaac 1982s; Osman 1981; Ramsay *et al*. 1996). These data suggest the relevance of lifelong learning to student personal and/or vocational well-being.

The significant number of early school leavers who participate in further education or trade apprenticeships indicates that these students left school for reasons other than a disinterest in learning. In particular, some AEP studies allude to social issues (namely, the nature of the local community, employment opportunities and family values) as matters that influence students' decision to leave school and undertake sub-degree studies (Beasley 1985; Collins & Penglase 1991; Cullity 2005; Osman 1981).

The socio-demographic nature of a community and the vocational opportunities it offers can affect the level of post-compulsory school education achieved by community members (Cheong 2000). Specifically, Collins and Penglase (1991) and Smith (1987b) found a high participation rate of 20 to 30 year olds in the Open Foundation Course conducted at the University of Newcastle. The city of Newcastle has one of the highest rates of non-Year 12 completers in Australia. Cheong suggests the low rate of Year 12 completers is

one of the main reasons why young adults participate in the Open Foundation Course.

Collins and Penglase (1991) also show that 80 per cent of Open Foundation Course students have enrolled in further education or completed a trade-based certificate. The number of Open Foundation Course students with sub-matriculation credentials is larger than the figures shown in other research (for example, Isaacs 1982; Osman 1981). The high rate of continuing education completed by Open Foundation Course students may be a result of the (then) industrial nature of the city of Newcastle, a city that once required a large semi-skilled and skilled workforce.

Family values. The education background and values of family members can also influence a person's decision to complete Year 12 and study at university (Abbott-Chapman *et al*. 2004; Andrews 1999; Birrell *et al*. 2000; Munns *et al*. 2000; Penglase 1993; West & Boon 1980). Familial attitude to learning is instrumental in determining people's post-compulsory education choices and/or experiences (Birrell *et al*. 2000; James 2002). The effect of parental education and family ideals on student learning reveals how cultural factors can influence a person's higher education goals.

The low aspirations of family members (for example, 'uni is not for girls', 'study has no relevance to your life') discouraged some AEP mature students from attending university at an earlier age. This type of attitude from family creates a situation where women, in particular, can develop low self-esteem and perceive "themselves to have little status in the community and little control over the circumstances of their lives" (Penglase 1993: 45; Munns *et al*. 2000). The poor self-concept developed and held by these people is a mixture of "social and cultural reasons", for example, "gender, class and ethnicity" (Munns *et al*. *Home:* para. 1). Munns *et al*. conclude: "Beliefs and expectations of family members regularly played significant roles in the students' leaving of school" (2000 *Home:* para. 1).

Abbott-Chapman *et al*. (2004) examined the demographic characteristics and academic performance of AEP mature learners with a low socio-economic and rural background. Survey results showed that over 66 per cent of respondents were first-in-the-family to participate at university. Moreover, many of them had attended government schools, a measure of education disadvantage for low socio-economic status students (James 2002; Western, McMillan & Durrington 1998). Abbott-Chapman *et al*. claim that the social and educational backgrounds of the mature students perpetuated a climate where "higher education may be seen to be irrelevant" to people living and working in a rural area (2004: 25).

Employment and financial arrangements

The mature learners who participate in an AEP show a variety of employment backgrounds. Employed adults, retrenched people, long-term unemployed, self-funded students and social security recipients undertake these courses (Cullity 2005). In some instances, the students fund their own learning (Barrett 1986; Collins & Penglase 1991; Penglase 1993) or some of them are supported by their partners/spouses (Collins & Penglase 1993; Penglase 1991). On the other hand, Bond (1996) and Stephenson and Munn (1989) state that approximately 60 per cent of AEP participants were unemployed prior to them attending a course. Likewise, Osman (1981) shows that some of the AEP students received government pensions. The different employment and financial circumstances experienced by mature students reveal the diverse social mix of adults who participate in an alternative entry program.

Academic interests

Demographic circumstances that can influence mature learner undergraduate choices include age, gender and secondary school studies. Historically, AEP mature learners show a higher enrolment rate in arts and humanities degrees than they do in commerce or science (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke 1999; Barrett & Powell 1980;

Barrett 1986; Cullity 2005; Osman 1981; Stehlik *et al*. 1993; West & Boon 1980). In addition, a greater number of women than men enrol in arts or humanities studies (Cullity 2005; Isaacs 1982; Moses 1978; Geogh, as cited in Osman 1981). Conversely, a higher number of male AEP completers than female students undertake a law, commerce or science degree (McNamee & Maxwell 1993; Osman 1981). These findings suggest that gender is a relevant indicator of AEP mature learner faculty enrolment patterns. A point worth considering is whether these results reflect current equity research findings (see James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause & McInnis 2004). James *et al*. (2004) illustrate, for instance, significant increases in the number of women who participate in a science degree.

Issues that may affect mature student choice of undergraduate field of education include: (i) changes in community attitudes regarding the intrinsic value of higher education; (ii) the abolition of student fees in the mid-1970s; and (iii) the low number of mature students with a science background. Specifically, Moses (1978) found that a higher number of unmatriculated women than men participated in a Faculty of Arts alternative entry program. The author conducted the research at a time in Australia when there was an increased demand for university places from mature students. This was especially the case for women who wanted to 'catch-up' on lost education opportunities and a growing community interest in continuing and lifelong learning (Barrett *et al*. 1979; Collins & Penglase 1991; Isaacs 1982; Watkins 1979; West & Boon 1980; West & Eaton 1980). In addition, the 1970s Labor Government abolished university course fees. The removal of course fees is sometimes attributed to an increase in the number of mature students enrolling in higher education during this period (DEET 1993).

Also, AEP mature student secondary education can influence their undergraduate choices. Students who studied social science and arts subjects at school are limited in their opportunities to undertake

science or mathematics degrees (Barrett & Powell 1980). To re-dress this educational disadvantage, especially for equity group students, universities now conduct science and mathematics alternative entry and enabling programs. Science oriented AEPs provide students with the necessary knowledge to participate in their preferred degree. For instance, Griffith University's Access Program is designed, in part, to increase the number of women who participate in science and technology-based degrees (Bond 1996). Similarly, the Open Foundation Course implemented science and mathematics units to address, as Penglase suggests, "the science bogey" that can prevent prospective students from enrolling in science or mathematics courses (1993: 47).

Pedagogic issues to ponder when creating a fit between academic culture and mature learner needs

Alternative entry program research discusses some of the personal, social, educational, vocational and employment circumstances that can influence mature student higher education opportunities and outcomes. Mature learners who participate in AEPs are not a uniform or static group of learners. In some instances mature students can experience similar circumstances to each other. These similarities do not suggest there is a typical group of mature learners as their social and education outcomes can differ. This paper indicates the need to consider mature students as individuals with separate social, education, personal and vocational experiences. To suggest otherwise is to ignore unmatriculated, return-to-study and equity group mature learner characteristics that can separately or collectively affect student decisions to participate at university.

A point worth noting, however, is the suggested changes to the student demographic. Of importance are the illustrated increases in the number of young adults, men, unemployed persons and social security recipients who undertake alternative admission courses.

Since the 1980s, policy-makers and academics have stressed the importance of implementing pedagogy that improves the higher education opportunities and outcomes of equity group and first-in-the-family-to-study learners (see Barton & Hamilton 1998; Biggs 2003; Clarke, Postle and Skuja 1997; Dawkins 1987, 1988; Giroux 2000; Karmel 1987; Lo Bianco 2004; NBEET/HEC 1996; Street 1996; Taylor & Burgess 1997; The New London Group 1996; Ramsay 1994; Webb 1999). The authors separately highlight the relevance of teaching and learning practices that promote a fit between academic culture and the higher education needs of these students.

A concern for some educationalists is that academic culture can inhibit rather than encourage students to participate in study. The standard use of academic practices and expectations suggests an assumption by lecturers that students have knowledge of these conventions (Street 1996). Instead of a shared awareness of academic discourse, there is a "gap between faculty expectations and student interpretations of what is expected in student writing" (Street 1996: 103). The use of academic discourse without a common understanding by the student community creates a scenario of power by lecturers over learners (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Biggs 2003; Lea 1998; Lo Bianco 2004; Stephens 1985; Street 1996; Taylor & Burgess 1997; The New London Group 1996). Academic discourse can limit, that is, student access to knowledge and practice. Gee, in citing the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, argues: "literacy only empowers people when it renders them active questioners of the social reality around them" (1990: 41).

In light of the above concerns, how should academics and AEP lecturers revise their pedagogy to create a fit between academic culture and mature learner needs? Biggs (2003: 2) contends that there is "no single, all purpose best method of teaching." Biggs (2003) and Entwistle (1993) suggest that teaching is a personal matter for individual educators, and that teachers should consider

collectively the resources available to them, learner requirements and backgrounds, and educator strengths and weaknesses. Biggs (2003: 5) states: *"Good teaching is getting most students to use the higher cognitive level processes that the more academic students use spontaneously"* [author's emphasis]. Metacognitive practices require students to, for instance, question, comprehend, analyse, interpret, theorise, reflect and apply knowledge at a deep learning level (Biggs 1991, 2003; Entwistle 1993; Gibbs 1992; Mann 2001; Ramsden, Beswick & Bowden 1986). Deep learning occurs, that is, when students reveal a desire "to engage the task appropriately and meaningfully" and where students implement "appropriate cognitive activities for handling it" (Biggs 1991: 16).

To encourage students to develop deep learning practices, Ramsden *et al*. (1986) contend that university lecturers and skills advisers need to embed academic procedures within knowledge. With this aim in mind, the academy and AEP educators have used such pedagogic approaches as problem-based learning (Taylor & Burgess 1997), social learning practices and ideals (Archer *et al*. 1999; Clarke 2000; Cullity 2005; Stephenson & Munn 1989) and andragogic principles, especially self-directed learning (Carbone 2000; Cullity 2005; Milligan 1995; Wuest 1991). In addition, Entwistle (1993: 79) describes seven 'teacher functions' that support deep learning; Biggs (2003) provides an overview of 'good teaching practice'; Simpson (2000) offers practical strategies to aid open and distance learning student progress; and Cantwell (2004) emphasises the importance of aiding student affective and cognitive growth.

The aim of increasing unmatriculated, return to study, equity group student engagement at university is not a straightforward matter of selecting pedagogic theories and practices. The demographic changes that have occurred during the 1990s and 2000s within the sub-degree and undergraduate population have required the academy to rethink their pedagogic practices. Perhaps the final comment regarding

appropriate teaching and learning should be left with Biggs (2003: 9–10):

> Improving teaching under these conditions [increased social mix of students] is not a matter of simply learning a swag of teaching competencies. Teaching is personal, and the context in which each teacher works is different. What is effective for this teacher, for the subject, at this level, for those students, may not apply to other teachers, working under their own conditions. Individuals have to work out their own solutions. This requires *reflection* [author's emphasis], a theory of teaching to reflect with, a context of experiences as the object of the reflection. This process may be structured in action research, in which possible solutions are carefully monitored to gauge their success.

Progressive educationalists argue that it is the lack of explicitness from academic staff about academic literacy that, in part, confuses commencing students. Progressive educators stress the relevance of establishing a learning environment that realises and values cultural and social "differences" (The New London Group 1996: 69). In a changed and changing social world, it is incumbent on educators, first, to recognise, plan for and implement pedagogic practice that appreciates difference within a learning community, and, second, to join with learners to become "active participants in social change" (The New London Group 1996: 64). To achieve this aim, educators need to work towards improved student access to and active engagement in learning (The New London Group 1996; Taylor & Burgess 1997). The New London Group indicates that the "real deficits" experienced by learners, and ones that require attention, are a "lack of access to social power, wealth and symbols of recognition" (1996: 72). The argument presented by The New London Group contends: "The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities" (1996: 72).

Challenges arising from this paper

First, knowledge of mature learner backgrounds aids AEP organisers in creating, delivering and monitoring an effective course. The lack of AEP published work, however, limits educator awareness of mature learner circumstances. As argued within this paper, an increased and shared understanding of mature learner characteristics would benefit the planning, design and outcomes of future alternative admission courses. In particular, program design is enhanced by knowledge of AEP students: demographic backgrounds, participation and completion rates, undergraduate enrolment patterns, and their reasons for withdrawing from courses.

Second, the limited awareness of mature student characteristics and their participation and completion rates is worrying. A more current and reliable understanding of student outcomes would provide knowledge about the effectiveness of these programs. The AEP community and government agencies should consider how best to examine programs and report findings. Towards this end, AEP educators require institutional support. In addition, government personnel should consider the ambiguous nature of DEST course (for example, 'non-award', 'enabling') and admission sub-categories (see Table 1). The overlap of these sub-categories creates difficulties when researching and/or documenting AEP outcomes.

Third, mature student demographic details consistently show that more women that men enrol in alternative admission courses. Ramsay (2004) suggests that this happening is due to the greater number of men than women who undertake vocational education, and that men use this qualification to progress to university. King (cited in Ramsay 2004) indicates that male early school-leavers return to study sooner than women early school-leavers. While there is merit in these arguments, AEP organisers should examine whether, for instance, program timetabling, content or study demands discourage males from attending an alternative entry course. If AEPs

are to increase the social mix of mature undergraduates, plainly these programs need to explore ways to improve male student participation and completion rates.

Fourth, research indicates that women prefer to participate in arts as opposed to mathematics or science degrees. Nevertheless, some AEP educators show concern about improving mature learner opportunities for the study of science and mathematics courses (Barrett & Powell 1980; Bond 1996; Penglase 1993). An issue, and one that is alluded to in AEP research, is the notion that women may genuinely prefer to study arts and social science degrees (see Isaacs 1982; Moses 1978). More recently, however, James *et al*. (2004) illustrate the increased participation rate of women in science-based programs. Clearly, AEP research should further explore this issue.

Finally, the reasons why mature students withdraw from an AEP remain blurred. The suggested high attrition rate of program non-completers indicates that, either, the programs fail to meet mature learner needs or that mature students decide against studying at university. Perhaps some mature students are intimidated by the academic and financial demands of university? These ideas are speculative and can only lead to guesses about why some mature students leave a program. Research which explores mature student non-completion would aid AEP organisers in assisting 'at risk of withdrawing' learners. This understanding would enhance the effectiveness of an AEP in meeting mature learner requirements.

Final thoughts regarding the importance of understanding mature learner circumstances

Mature students represent a valued and socially dynamic group within the Australian higher education community. A comprehensive understanding of mature learner characteristics aids AEP organisers in designing and implementing strategies that benefit these students. Demographic changes to the AEP student intake indicate the significance of providing students with a supportive and working understanding of academic culture. Organising a fit between academic culture and mature learner requirements is fundamental in increasing mature learner higher education participation and success rates. It is also necessary that AEP personnel share with their colleagues about course practices that encourage or inhibit mature student learning. It is through a pooled knowledge of mature learner circumstances and the pedagogic practices used within AEPs that program organisers and the academy can achieve these worthwhile goals.

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An evaluation of a formal professional examination in adult continuing education

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This study provides a framework for the evaluation of assessments that may be used in adult continuing education. It provides an example of the analysis of an examination for 33 solicitors seeking specialist accreditation. Resampling was used to generate a group of 1000 results, and responses were analysed using a Rasch model. Results indicated a select and capable group of candidates for whom many items in the assessment were redundant. A five-step general model for evaluating formal assessments in adult education is outlined.

Introduction

Quite appropriately, adult education is not viewed as a field in which formal educational assessments are dominant let alone as a quantitative area of research (see English, 2005; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998). Nevertheless, there are pockets of continuing adult education and training which involve formal, high stakes assessments and that are often overlooked as components of this diverse field. One such area in Australia is the specialist accreditation of solicitors that recognises their expertise in specific areas, such as: advocacy, business law, commercial litigation, criminal law, employment law, family law, immigration law, local government and planning law, mediation, personal injury, property law, taxation or wills and estates.

The specialist accreditation of solicitors is a nationwide endeavour but one undertaken independently at the state level by the various law societies. For instance, the Specialist Accreditation Scheme in New South Wales was established in 1992 and today there are around 1400 accredited specialists. In 2005 around 122 applicants sat for the different specialist accreditations. Accreditation involves a three-phase assessment, including preparation of a mock file for a complex matter, an exam and an oral assessment in the form of either a peer interview or simulated client interview (Gonczi, Hager & Palmer, 1994).

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the performance of one cohort on this professional assessment. Typically, however, only a small number of practitioners seek specialist accreditation and these are by definition already a distinct group. Thus the evaluation of this formal assessment is hindered at the outset by a limited and select data set. Notwithstanding this limitation, the paper will also demonstrate to adult educators how resampling can be used to overcome the problem of small sample size and it will also apply the method of Rasch scaling to assist in the evaluation of this formal assessment. This is the first application of these methods in this field and a detailed description will be provided for the reader. Some aspects of this report may appear quantitative but the reader is assured that a statistical background is not essential. Where possible, straightforward

descriptions will be used and the interested reader will be referred to other sources. The results will have implications wherever formal assessments are used in adult education and training contexts.

The Rasch measurement approach described in this paper deals with the development of any assessment. It is consistent with the philosophy of having a clear definition of the construct being assessed (see for example Wilson, 2006) and recognises that valid inferences from the results constitute the essential quality of a sound assessment. Rasch analysis is ideally suited for contexts where there is a need for qualitative accuracy in describing a person's performance on a set of tasks. The emphasis is not on the total score but moving towards results that are descriptive and meaningful, conceptually coherent and structured. Having constructed an instrument (that is, developed a method) that is appropriate for the context, the next step in a sound assessment process is – as Wiggins (1998) quite rightly noted – the appropriate educative use of an assessment (*cf*. Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2002).

The specific focus of this paper is to evaluate the Personal Injury Law exam of the Specialist Accreditation Board of the Law Society of New South Wales. It is one component of a large continuing education program and this particular adult professional examination happens to be the most popular field for accreditation. It covers the fields of workers' compensation for injury, motor vehicle accident compensation and general liability for injury.

Description of the examination

The Personal Injury Law examination is a three-hour written paper (20 minutes reading time) in two parts: Part A comprises two essay questions worth 20 marks each and Part B comprises 20 short questions worth 3 marks each. This is a closed book examination and the identity of the candidates is not revealed.

The examination is constructed by assessment panels who are expert in the particular area of law. These subject-matter panels also design the mock file and conduct the peer interviews. As in many other professional fields, there is no formal training in educational assessment but there is considerable practical expertise in the content area. In-service courses for assessors have emphasised an approach (Gonczi, Hager & Palmer, 1994) in which different sources of evidence contribute to a judgement about professional competence. The professional knowledge within a specialty has always been considered a key component of this model and is assessed by a formal examination. In this respect, it serves as a useful prototype for other formal assessments in adult continuing education.

A typical Part A question deals with hypothetical cases about which the candidate is asked to give preliminary advice. This involves a consultation by two new clients and the candidate is asked to give some brief preliminary advice about each case. For each case the candidate is required to explain (with reasons): the relevant parties to any possible action and the causes of action which should be considered; the issues which are most likely to be contentious; the defences, if any, which may be raised; the statutes, if any, which may be relevant; the court or tribunal which is most likely to be appropriate; and what steps or enquiries might be made immediately and before filing a claim on the client's behalf.

Part B of the examination consists of 20 questions selected from a pool of questions previously forwarded to the candidates. Answers are intended to be brief and should include references to relevant statutory provisions where applicable. Two sample questions are: "Is it possible for a court to make a 100% reduction of damages in respect of a plaintiff's contributory negligence?" and "In a claim under the *Compensation to Relatives Act 1897*, what is the effect of contributory negligence on the part of: (a) the deceased relative; and (b) the claimant?" A description of the results for all 33 candidates from the

2005 Personal Injury Law examination is provided in the following section.

Analysis of the results of candidates

Typically, the assessment panel obtains the results by adding together marks for the various components and sets a pass mark of 50%, as is common practice in most secondary and tertiary sectors in Australia. In 2005, the final scores ranged from 56 to 85 out of a possible 100, with a mean score of 71. By all accounts, this was deemed a competent group as everyone passed (see Figure 1 for a distribution of the overall results).

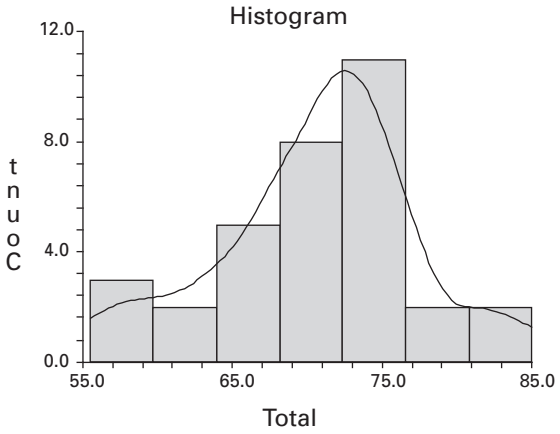


Figure 1: Distribution of scores on the Personal Injury Law examination

Rasch measurement

Analysis of raw scores, however, is not an adequate approach to educational assessment. Scores hide as much as they reveal. For example, the average score on an assessment reflects the competence of the group but the competence of the group is dependent on the difficulty of the assessment. Therefore, both difficulty and competence

are intertwined. Secondly, scores are not real units of learning or competence in the sense that seconds, metres, kilograms and litres have real world equivalents. Thirdly, they lack the fundamental aspect of additivity (Michell, 1994, 1997). For instance, it is certainly the case that scores can be added arithmetically but in reality they do not represent equal units. At best, scores only give us a vague sense of the extent of performance and are mainly useful for describing those with extremely high or low scores. We have known for many years that the units of ability represented by these numbers are not equal and this has practical implications. In this case it would require more ability to move from the extremes of 84 to 85 or 56 to 57 on this examination than it would take to move from 70–71, which is around the average. Finally and as a corollary, scores usually reveal little about the competence of the person in terms of the specific tasks that he/she is capable of undertaking correctly.

The Rasch methodology provides a way of overcoming these obstacles. It was developed by the Danish mathematician Georg Rasch (1960) principally in relation to reading attainment tests. Rasch methods are now widely used in large-scale educational assessments such as the *Program for International Student Achievement* (PISA) or the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMMS).

Rasch used the method of conditional probability to overcome the problem of the interdependence of ability and difficulty in assessments. In doing this, he also provided us with a measurement unit (the logarithm of a probability) that could be added. Thus, he satisfied the fundamental criterion of assessment with the additivity of units (see Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2002; Bond & Fox, 2001).

Rasch also measured ability (that is, competence) and difficulty on the same scale and in the same units, meaning that for the first time both ability and difficulty could be compared. Using Rasch measurement it is now possible to determine in advance whether someone is likely to

have the competence to undertake a task. Finally, Rasch also provided mathematical models against which each item, task or question in an assessment could be compared, that is, we can determine the fit of the task to the model.

The Rasch model is essentially very simple and logical (Baker, 2001; Wright & Stone, 1979). It states that the probability of answering a question correctly is a function of the difficulty of the task and the competence of the person (see Appendix 1 for a mathematical expression of the model). When the competence of the person is greater than the difficulty of the task, then there is a higher probability (not absolute certainty because we are human after all) of answering it correctly. When the competence of the person is less than that of the task's difficulty, then there is an increased likelihood of failing on the task. While this verbal description is straightforward, the underlying mathematics is more complex.

Typically, Rasch measurement takes a very large sample that has undertaken an assessment and describes the performance of the group on each of the tasks in the assessment process. Note again that the emphasis is not on the total score but on the response to each item, question or task (Baker, 2001). This is why it is also called item response theory and this model of responding can be tested. It is also possible to see whether each person responded in a way that was consistent with the model. Of course, our small sample of 33 experienced solicitors provides a major constraint in applying Rasch methods, but it is really quite typical of adult learning where we usually have small cohorts.

One way around this is to use the technique of resampling to create a larger sample with smaller standard errors. This is achieved by continuously sampling with replacement from the original sample (Agho & Athanasou, 2005). In this case I took small samples from the group of 33 and continued until a total sample of 1000 was achieved. While this might seem like some sort of statistical

conjuring, it actually produces a sample which is much more likely to be representative of the original population (see Effron, 1979). The technique is also called "bootstrapping" because one literally lifts oneself up by his/her bootstraps. The process normally ceases when the statistic of interest stabilises its value and the calculated errors of measurement are reduced to a desired level.

Resampling is now a commonplace technique for replicating the original population. Essentially any small group that we have in adult education is from a larger potential population. If we continuously take thousands of small samples from our group, then we can come closer to replicating the larger potential population (see Simon 1999 for further details). With this brief introduction to both Rasch and bootstrapping/resampling, it is now time to turn our attention to applying these to this formal continuing education assessment.

Sampling with replacement

The results for all tasks were first recoded on a common scale from 0 to 5 for each question in Part A and also in Part B. (The essay questions, Part A: questions 1 and 2, that were marked out of 20 have been recoded as: 0=9; 1=10; 2=11–13; 3=14–16; 4=17–18; 5=19–20. The Part B questions that were marked out of 3 have been recoded as: 0=0; 1=.5; 2=1; 3=1.5; 4=2; 5=2.5–3.0.) The maximum total score on the test was now 110. Then a resampling of 1000 with replacement was undertaken to increase the size of the sample in order to eliminate the problems of a small initial sample size and to reduce any errors of estimation.

Final scores now ranged from 56 to 85 (all figures rounded to nearest whole number) out of a possible total of 110 with a mean score of 83 (95% confidence level of 83 to 82; standard deviation = 5). Generally, one could have reasonable confidence in a score of 82 as the average for this group out of a maximum 110. Looking at the distribution of responses in Figure 2, it implies that the group was of a high

standard. As one might expect, the results using resampling were now more evenly distributed around the average score than with the original sample of 33 (compare the shapes of Figures 1 and 2).

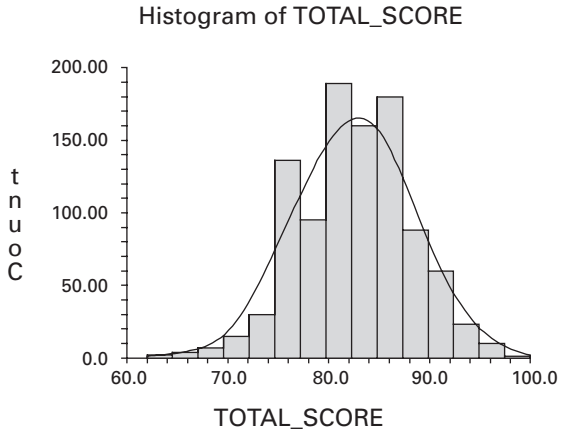


Figure 2: Plot of N=1000 for the total score

A Rasch item analysis

A Rasch analysis now takes the recoded scores and analyses them in terms of the contribution of the ability/competence of each person to their performance on each item or question. (The Rasch analysis was undertaken using both the QUEST (Adams & Khoo, 1994) and the RUMM (Andrich, Sheridan & Luo, 2004) programs.) To repeat the main point, the model that is being tested is that those with the highest competence should perform better on each question than those with lower ability. If this does not hold, then the item or task is not assessing what it is intended to determine.

For the reader who is concerned how the person's competence is determined, then in the absence of any other criterion, we are forced to use a person's total score on the exam as the initial estimate of ability. It is then possible to examine whether each item or question

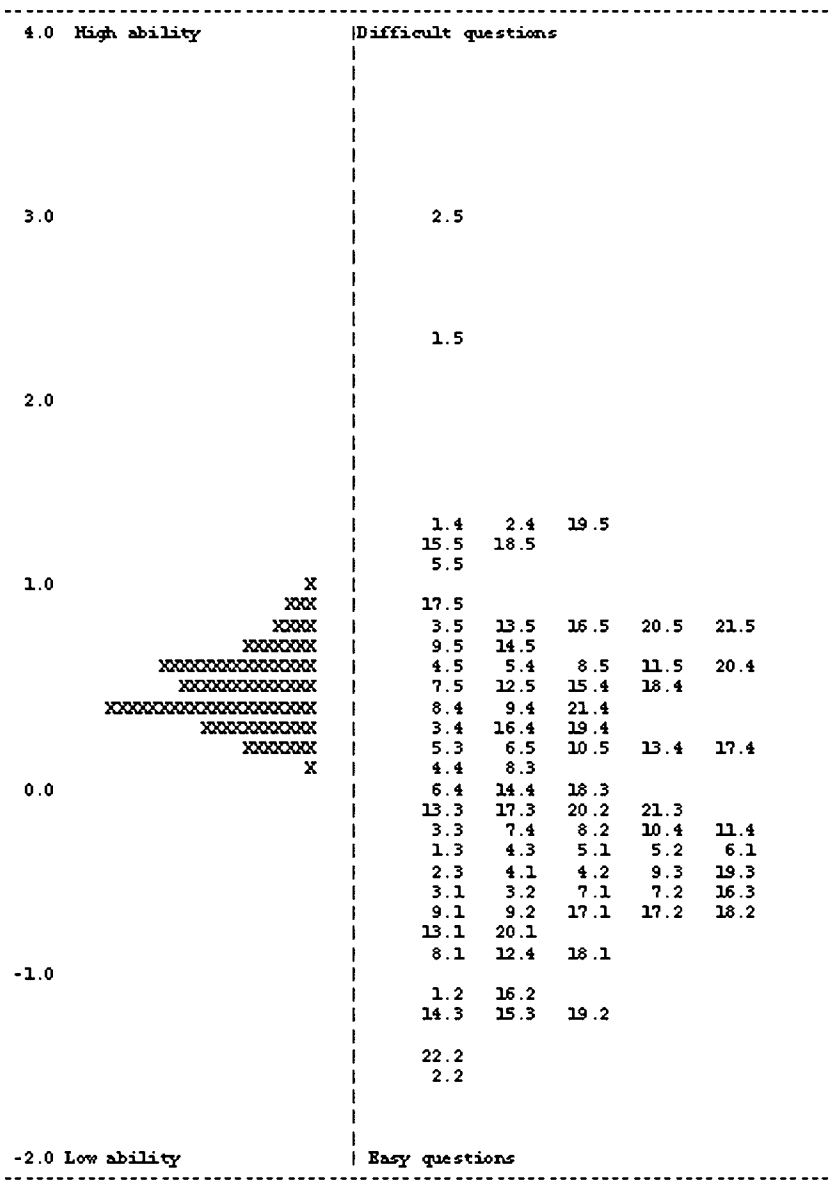
fits this model using a range of measures derived from a Rasch analysis. Further details are explained below.

Item-ability map

The results of this assessment are summarised in the item-ability chart below (Figure 3). On the far left-hand side are the scores on this assessment which range from 4.0 (hard questions requiring high ability to answer them correctly) to -2.0 (easy questions requiring low ability to answer them correctly). The average on this Rasch scale is set at 0.0 but it can be transformed easily to any desired level (for example, 50 out of 100). In the language of Rasch measurement, these units are called logits (or log odds of probability). Typically they vary from +3.0 (items which are difficult or people with high competence) to -3.0 (items which are easy or people with low competence).

The series of Xs on the right-hand side is a distribution of the ability/competence of the candidates – it is like a chart that has been rotated 90 degrees. A general inspection reveals that competence on this assessment was fairly normally distributed with a slight tendency for a more average (0.0) than high average level of performance (>1.0). This is consistent with the selected nature of the group of candidates.

On the right-hand side and on the same scale as ability are located all the questions. These are expressed as a decimal. The first part of the decimal is the question number and the second part is the rating on that question. So 2.5 represents a rating of 5 on question 2. Closer inspection of this diagram shows that many items were well below the ability level of the group while some other questions were well above the ability level of the group. For instance, although hardly anyone failed the Part A (Question 1 and Question 2), it was difficult for them to obtain a rating of 4 or 5 on these questions. Questions below 0.0 failed to discriminate in terms of the dimension being assessed, namely, knowledge of personal injury law.



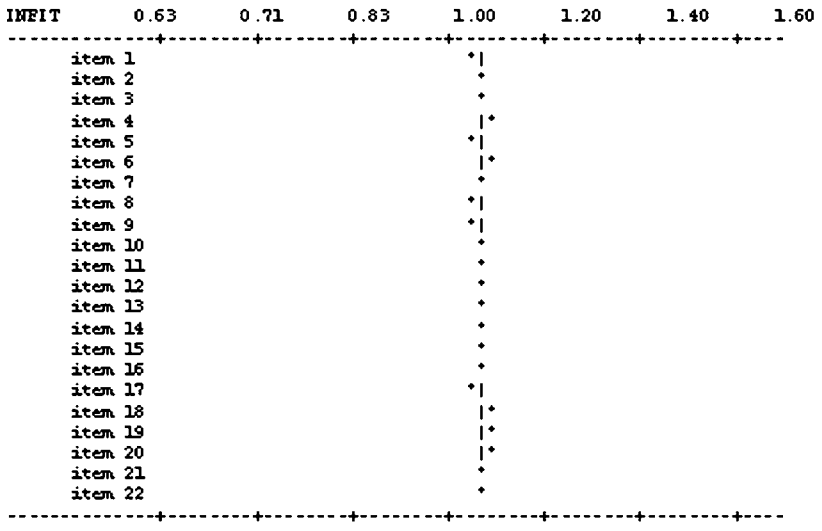
Each X represents 12 candidates

Figure 3: Item-ability map (N=1000)

On most tasks it was possible to score 3 or 4 out of 5 and still be well below the average level of competence of this select group (items 1–4, 6–7, 9–19, 21). Inspection of these items indicated that possibly a layperson with a nodding acquaintance of personal injury law, such as an insurance claims manager, let alone someone assumed to have a specialist knowledge of personal injury law, might even be able to respond with a partially correct answer to some questions (for example, 'What is meant by the term "vicissitudes of life"? How does the court take into account the vicissitudes of life when assessing damages for future economic loss?'). It is likely that these questions are redundant for this group. Of course, this may not be a problem if each item or question is intended to work towards a specific level of competence and to use this exam in the spirit of criterion-referenced assessment. By the same token, it is hardly necessary to ask questions that are well below the ability of the group as they do not add greatly to the level of knowledge about a person's competence. A numerical index of the reliability of this assessment called separability can also be determined and this was considered moderate at around 0.69 and it would be improved by better selection of items. The next section goes beyond the overall assessment and considers the nature of each item.

Fit of the assessment to the Rasch model

Most of the items fitted the constraints of the Rasch model. That is, as the ability of the group increased, so did the probability of answering the question correctly. This is calculated using a statistic, INFIT(see Figure 4) and the infit measures were well within the accepted criteria of 0.7 to 1.3 (Adams & Khoo, 1994, p. 26).



Infit statistics should lie within 0.7 to 1.3 to show that they conform to the Rasch model

Figure 4: Item-fit statistics (N=1000)

One of the benefits of item-response theory and the Rasch model is that it allows the evaluation of the response to each item through an item characteristic curve. This is an S-shaped curve that shows the expected score associated with a given level of ability or competence. One would expect an increased probability of answering a question correctly as the ability or competence of the person increases. The actual curve can be compared against the theoretically expected curve based on the equation in Appendix 1 to see to what extent it fits or departs from the model. Thus, the essence of Rasch measurement is that it proposes a model and really many other models could also be proposed and tested, but by and large the Rasch model is efficient in explaining most of the results from an assessment (Wright & Stone, 1979).

Figure 5 shows two of the item characteristic curves – one for an item that does not fit the model well (Item 1) and the other for an item that fits the model just marginally better (Item 9). Item 1 was the Part A case consultation concerning "…Belinda, the widow of George, who died following complications from elective knee surgery" and item 9 was the question, "Briefly explain which provisions of the Civil Liability Act 2002 have particular relevance to a claim by a surfer against a surf club which involves injury suffered by the surfer while swimming between the flags at the beach patrolled on the day by the club?". Only two out of the 22 items are dealt with here due to limitations of space.

In Figure 5, the black dots represent the average performance of 10 ordered sub-groups within the sample of 1000. One is looking for a monotonically increasing score as the competence of the group increases. The line models the performance on the item, question or task and will vary from item to item. The higher the chi-square value that is shown above the chart, then the better will be the fit of the group's performance to the Rasch model. Neither of these items is an especially good fit to the Rasch model although Item 9 is marginally better than Part A Question 1. (The full set of 22 item characteristic curves is available freely from the author upon request, together with all the datasets and the QUEST and Rumm outputs.)

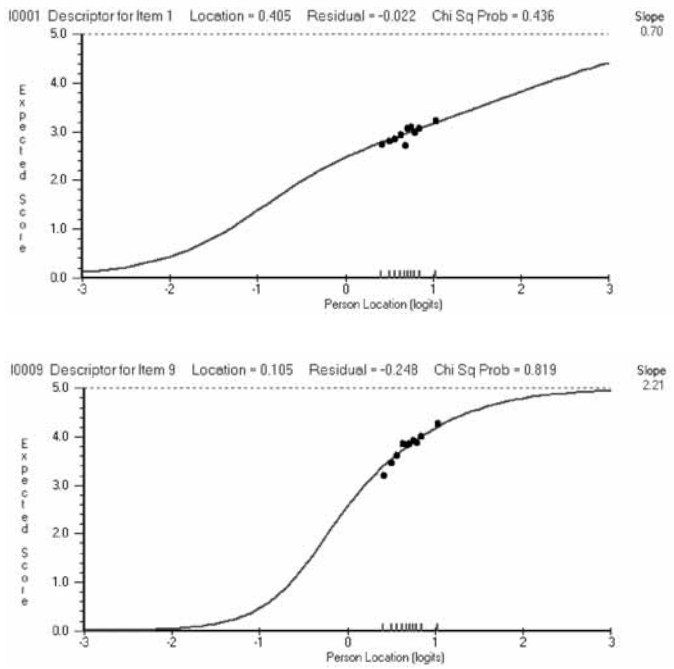


Figure 5: Item-characteristic curves for item 1 and item 9

The next chart that assists in the analysis of each item is the category probability curve. (The full set of category probability curves is also available from the author upon request.) The category probability curves may appear complex at first glance but they show five curves for the scores 0 to 5 for each item. The curve for each score shows the probability of answering correctly at each ability level. As expected, item 9 is clearly the better of the two items. If one follows the line for a score of 0, then there is a very high probability of scoring 0 with an ability of -3 logits, but by the time one reaches 1 logit, there is no probability of scoring 0. For a score of 5, there is almost no probability of scoring 5 up to -0.5 logits; it then increases rapidly until, with 3 logits of ability, it is almost certain one will score 5. Each of the scores can be traced and the respective probability of obtaining

that score read from the left-hand side and the ability level can be read from the bottom axis. By way of contrast, item 1 presents a less clear pattern.

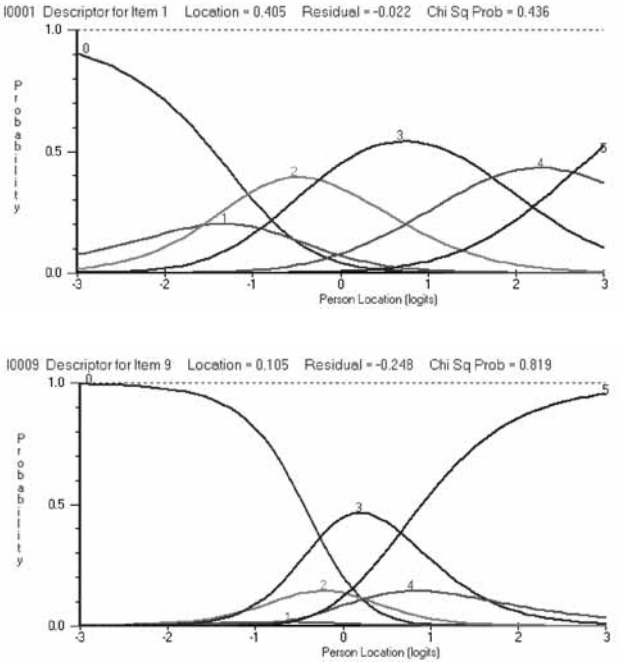


Figure 6: Category probability curves for item 1 and item 9

Concluding comments

The Rasch model is ideally suited to the analysis of competence on individual tasks rather than merely being a way of scoring assessments. In one sense, it provided an x-ray of the performance of this group of 33 adults on each task and it is much more consistent with a diagnostic adult education focus than previous ways of dealing with the results of assessments through scores or subjective judgements. These comments would also apply to questionnaires, surveys and attitude scales (see, for example, Athanasou, 2001).

The evidence that was obtained from this analysis now allows one to undertake an overhaul of the assessment in order to meet the needs of all stakeholders. For example, it was pointed out earlier that some items and tasks (items 1–4, 6–7, 9–19, 21) were not as useful as they were imagined to be at the outset. The content might have been relevant to the specialty but they did not provide information about competence. Consequently, one advantage of the application of Rasch measurement is in constructing or re-designing an assessment to ensure that every item and task in an assessment is a component of the construct or competence being assessed. Assessment panels have now been informed about the fact that the overall assessment was far too easy, that some items were redundant, and that other items were not providing helpful information about the level of knowledge of the candidate. Another advantage of the Rasch analysis is that the performance of each person can be examined or evaluated qualitatively. This has not been dealt with in this paper, but it involves examining the extent to which each person's pattern of results fits the Rasch model. It allows for a descriptive and interpretative view of what is happening with each individual (for example, tiredness, guessing, inconsistent patterns, gaps in their knowledge or problems with the structure of their competence).

There are some limitations of the Rasch model. The major restriction is that the assessment tasks for some reason or other may not fit the Rasch model which assumes that responses are a function of the specific characteristic of a person and the level of the task. The Rasch model is quite flexible and applicable across many circumstances, but it is conceivable that the observations may not fit and some other model should be developed. Another limitation is that some performances may be difficult to describe in terms of being right or wrong or along some scale. There are partial credit and rating scale Rasch analyses that can be used, but again it is conceivable that in some circumstances it will be difficult to describe or order performance. A further limitation is that the original conception

of the construct being assessed may not be coherent or structured. In some instances, it will be difficult to operationally define the construct, thereby making it impossible to assess. However, the overriding advantage of the Rasch approach is that it proposes a general model to account for responses and then sets out to test that model. That is both good science and good assessment practice.

In addition to providing an example of how a formal assessment might be analysed, one other objective of this paper has been to provide readers with a pragmatic framework for dealing with assessments in adult education, continuing education and training contexts. Without the resampling procedure, it would have taken some 30 years to amass a Personal Injury Law group equivalent in size to our bootstrapped sample of 1000. In the case of other specialties with only a handful of candidates, the evaluation of professional examinations has relied upon subjective judgements. The Rasch model provides a diagnostic and criterion-referenced focus rather than implicit and subjective norm-referenced approaches to analysing results within most educational settings (see Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2002).

Consistent with the approach outlined in this paper is a proposed framework for evaluating professional examinations in adult education. This is set out in Figure 7. It involves administering an assessment to a small group (N<250); coding the responses onto a common scale; resampling with replacement to produce a bootstrapped sample of size of 1000 or even better up to 10000; applying a Rasch analysis to each item to determine its strengths and weakness as well as its adherence to the model; and finally, applying a Rasch analysis to determine whether each individual's performance conforms with an expected pattern. The last stage has not been dealt with in this paper but it is available as a standard output from many of the Rasch analysis programs.

It is recognised that the application of resampling and the Rasch model may not have immediate application for most readers since they are not involved in formal assessments, but the potential application for surveys and questionnaires in adult education must not be overlooked. The same framework that was outlined in Figure 7 still applies. There may be a view that such approaches are suited to educational measurement contexts and hardly applicable to adult learning. In my opinion, this would represent a narrow view of measurement and a very limited perspective on the diverse field of adult education. Probably, the practices of educational assessment and educational measurement are much more conceptual and qualitative than appear at first glance (see Wilson, 2006).

Finally, Rasch approaches are consistent with assessment for learning. In recent years, there has been a distinct change in the ways in which educational assessment has been viewed. Previously, the summative aspects of assessment dominated educational discourses, but lately the emphasis has altered towards formative assessment as a component of curriculum and instruction. For instance, Wiggins (1998) described a view of assessment in which the aim "....is primarily to *educate* and *improve* student performance, not merely to *audit* it" (p. 7; italics are from the original quotation). Although the audit aspect has been emphasised in this paper, it is also recognised that certification *per se* does not exclude an approach to assessment that is both educative and informative. Without the necessary technical accuracy, however, neither the certification nor the educative objectives of an assessment will be achieved.

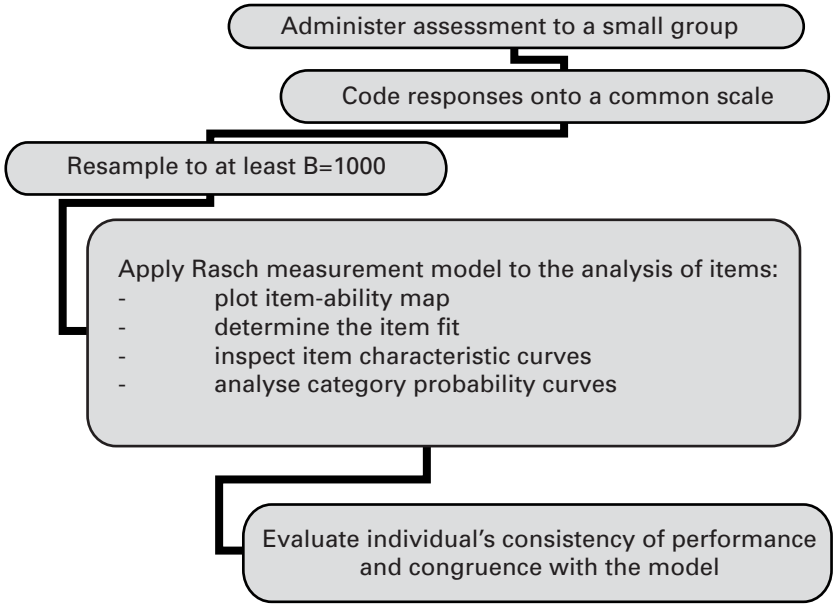


Figure 7: A framework for the evaluation of formal assessments

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APPENDIX 1: The Rasch one parameter logistic model

The one-parameter model (also called the Rasch model) assumes that item difficulty is the only characteristic affecting candidate performance. The item characteristic curve for the one parameter logistic model is given by:

$$P_i(£) = \frac{e^{(£ - b_i)}}{1 + e^{(£ - b_i)}}$$

$P_i(£)$ is the probability that a randomly chosen examinee with ability $£$ answers item *i* correctly (an s-shaped curve with values between 0 and 1 over the ability scale).

b_i is the item difficulty parameter. It is the point on the ability scale where the probability of a correct response is 0.5. This varies typically from –3 to +3 when values are transformed so that the average is 0.

e is the transcendental number (2.1718).

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Moving towards a model of professional identity formation in midwifery through conversations and positioning theory

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The disciplines of nursing and midwifery both uphold a powerful oral tradition that can impact upon student learning. Students enrolled in a Graduate Diploma of Midwifery are supervised and assessed by midwives during their placements in midwifery practice settings by a program of 'preceptorship' support and where conversations are innate. Positioning theory, developed by Harré and others, is a metaphorical concept in which an individual 'positions' herself/himself within entities of encompassing people, institutions and societies where conversations are conducted either privately or publicly. As construction sites of professional learning, conversations are underpinned by reflective practices. In unravelling conversations, positioning may be applied as an analytical tool by educators to interpret the emerging meanings and themes in their discussions with students, reflective journals by students and in meetings with preceptors/midwives.

Introduction

In Victoria, Australia, there are various pathways to obtaining the additional qualification of 'midwife' in the Division 1 register of the Nurses Board of Victoria, the regulating authority. They include a Graduate Diploma (pre-masters), or Master's degree, or undergraduate program of Bachelor of Midwifery, or a combined course program of Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Midwifery. The focus of this paper is on students enrolled in a Graduate Diploma of Midwifery. Course entry criteria include that all enrolled students must be registered nurses with at least twelve months' postgraduate experience as a nurse.

Throughout the Graduate Diploma of Midwifery, students are required to undertake placements in midwifery practice settings. Support of students is undertaken in a program known as 'preceptorship'. Experienced midwives provide supervision and assessment of students on their practice placements, and are identified as a 'preceptor/midwife' in this paper.

During these placements, midwives and students work closely together and engage in conversations related to the delivery of care. In midwifery practice settings, students position themselves and others to meet their learning agenda pertaining to course requirements as well as those of the regulating authority, the Nurses Board of Victoria. For students to meet these requirements, they rely upon support from their preceptor/midwife. Embedded in this support are conversations, related to the delivery of care, conducted

in practice settings between the preceptor/midwife and their student. It is claimed that the working relationship between students and their preceptor/midwife contributes to each student's professional learning and their identity formation as a midwifery practitioner (Phillips, Fawns & Hayes 2002).

When working together in the delivery of care, the relationship between the student and the preceptor/midwife is usually dynamic and emotionally intense. This is often related to the care of women, during pregnancy, labour, birth and the time immediately following birth. It is observed by educators that conversations conducted between students and their respective preceptor/midwife provides immense support of students as well as having an influence on their professional learning. Students are encouraged to think about midwifery practices and record their learning experiences in their practice journal as a private method of reflective practice. As a public form of reflective practice, students engage in conversations with their preceptor/midwife, other midwives and other health care providers related to care. Implicit in these conversations is the positioning that students assume in positioning themselves or others to meet their learning needs.

Positioning theory has a place in midwifery education as it facilitates the understanding of meanings and themes that emerge from the important moment-to-moment interactions that occur in practice settings. Conversations have been and continue to be fundamental for students' induction into professional practice and an influence on their professional identity formation as midwives (Phillips 2002). The impact of professional conversations between midwives and students should, therefore, be sanctioned by educators as an essential component of learning (Phillips, Fawns & Hayes 2002). Educators have opportunities to analyse and interpret themes and meanings of the interactions related to midwifery practices in students' reflective practice journals, discussions with students or in meetings with preceptor/midwives.

Ongoing literature searches have been undertaken using sources such as CINAHL, ERIC, Infotrac, Medline and PsycINFO. Key words applied for this search included 'midwifery education', 'midwifery curriculum', 'reflective practice', 'student supervision', 'conversations' and 'positioning theory'.

Positioning theory explained

Positioning theory emerged from the work of Hollway (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999a), who examined positions and gender differentiation, with underpinning theories from social constructionist psychology including Wittgenstein and Vygotsky (Howie & Peters 1996; Gillett & Harré 1994; Davies & Harré 1990). A 'position' is a metaphorical concept in which an individual positions himself/herself according to three social entities encompassing 'people', 'institutions' and 'societies'. It is within each of these entities that discursive practices are conducted either privately or publicly. The notion of position in an institution or society has a more fluid connotation in regard to participation in conversations (van Langenhove & Harré 1999a; Tan & Moghaddam 1995; Gillett & Harré 1994; Davies & Harré 1990). The word 'position', therefore, takes on a specific meaning in regard to standpoints, either on a personal level or as a group representative. Davies and Harré (1999:37) explained that positioning "is the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another". The concept of position is manifested by a certain set of rights, duties and obligations as a speaker whereby each episode of everyday life can be seen as the development of a storyline (Gillett & Harré 1994; van Langenhove & Harré 1994). van Langenhove and Harré (1999a) described positioning theory as a tool applied to the analysis of everyday conversations.

The relationship of positioning theory and midwifery education is presented in consideration of the possible range of human behaviours. Students, therefore, work in a close relationship with their preceptor/midwife and are consequently exposed to sociological and psychological contexts, and positioning within practice settings.

Sociological and psychological contexts, and positioning

The sociological and psychological background of midwifery occurs in various practice settings. These settings include, for example, team and/or caseload midwifery and where midwives provide care of women during pregnancy, labour, birth and the time after birth. Students observe and participate in professional practice under the supervision and guidance of their preceptor/midwife whose practice is governed by regulations.

Midwives are accountable and responsible for the delivery of care. They are required to practise within the framework of professional practice according to the requirements of the Nurses Board of Victoria, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council competencies and guidelines of the professional organisation, and the Australian College of Midwives Incorporated. In addition, midwives are expected to practise within the policies and procedures of the employing organisation.

The literature emphasised the importance of local moral orders or obligations that are implicit within social structures and interactions through conversations (Harré & van Langenhove 1999a; van Langenhove & Harré 1999b; Davies & Harré 1999; Moghaddam 1999; Gillett & Harré 1994). Harré and van Langenhove (1999a) described how two basic principles underpin social constructionism with positioning. The first principle refers to what individuals intentionally do, publicly and privately, and the second to what individuals are to themselves and others as a result of interpersonal interactions developed over a lifetime. Davies and Harré (1999:33) referred to the

"immanentist stance" that makes acknowledgement of conversations conducted within social rules, whereas van Langenhove and Bertolink (1999) emphasised that individuals are responsible for the construction of their social reality.

Social constructionism, as argued by van Langenhove and Bertolink (1999), is crucial for social phenomena to be considered and generated in and through conversations and conversation-like activities. As such, discursive processes are considered to be the place where many, if not most, psycho-social constructions are jointly created (Harré & van Langenhove 1999a). Positioning theory focuses on understanding how psychological phenomena are produced in discourse. The constant flow of everyday life is conducted through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of the social world of midwifery practice settings. A 'social world' is also understood to consist of a network of interactions framed within some relatively stable repertoire of rules and meanings.

The notion that the social world is a social construction was developed during the 1970s (Gillett & Harré 1994; van Langenhove & Bertolink 1999). It is within discursive practices that the social world is formed and, according to van Langenhove and Harré (1999a:15), it is "within conversations [that] social acts and societal icons are generated and reproduced". This means that social actions can be recognised or 'determined' by others, whereas some actions may not be understood (indeterminate). A student can, for example, position her/his preceptor/midwife to ask about the care of a woman during childbirth. In response to the student, the preceptor/midwife can draw upon her/his autobiography as an experienced practitioner.

Autobiographical accounts, produced in either public (speech-acts) or private (thoughts), enhance persona development upon which the cooperation of others in discursive practices is critical with many possible outcomes, either positive or negative (Gillett & Harré 1994). Sabat and Harré (1999:93) explained that personas "serve to

create the public impression of a type, a persona or character, from a local repertoire", demonstrating that personas are typically joint productions. Recognition of a persona may impose profound effects on society or individuals, whereby the persona and related behaviour is open to scrutiny and has the potential to attract appropriate or inappropriate responses or actions by participants. It has been observed that, when students have a comfortable relationship with their preceptor/midwife, they position themselves and their preceptor/midwife in conversations to assist them in their learning needs. If students are intimidated by their preceptor/midwife, they report that they position themselves to maintain minimal contact and conversations with their preceptor/midwife. Harré and van Langenhove (1999a) emphasised that positioning is reliant upon the moral and personal attributes of participants to provide guidelines or rules for discursive practices. Within this context, Harré and van Langenhove (1999a) promoted positioning theory as an analytical tool to facilitate the many and varied institutional discursive processes. Institutional processes within midwifery practice settings encompass societal and cultural influences that impact on the personal identity of midwifery practitioners, as well as for students.

Personal identity

Personal identity is connected with personal agency and is related to the assumed responsibility for actions taken at that particular moment in time (Harré & van Langenhove 1999a; Harré & van Langenhove 1999b). For most midwives in their function as preceptors, personal identity is related to many multifaceted factors such as culture and time. These factors are, however, subjected to change within the parameters of personal and social attributes of discourse in which there are many contradictions and paradoxes.

It has been indicated by students that the personal identity of their preceptor/midwife, does influence them. Students have, for example,

reported that they have observed excellent practices by midwives that they would like to follow and, on the other hand, seen practices that they do not wish to emulate. In either of these instances, the personal identity of the preceptor/midwife has made an influence on the student's professional identity formation as a midwife.

Personal identity, according to Gillett and Harré (1994), Harré and van Langenhove (1999a) and Sabat and Harré (1999), is to be located in a position and moral order that may be recognised. This may be exemplified when a student assumes accountability for an action to demonstrate their 'agency' in midwifery practice, when for example, assisting a new mother in the care of her newborn infant.

An agent is one who exercises a social identity. Archer (1995) pointed out that each person is an 'agent' prior to becoming an 'actor' because the properties of an agent are acquired. These properties include collective memberships such as gender groups, indigenous, middle or working class groups, which are systems of social stratification and most apt for the practice and social world of midwifery practice. This entity of agency, as described by Archer (1995), is an efficient mediating mechanism for the elaboration of self-identity. Harré and van Langenhove (1999a:7) observed:

> There are kinds of identity which we attribute to people, and that we refer to by the use of the word 'self'. There is the self of personal identity, which is experienced as the continuity of one's point of view in the world of objects in space and time. This is usually coupled with one's sense of personal agency, in that one takes oneself as acting from that very same point.

Personal identity is demonstrated in first person indexical applications such as 'I', 'me', 'myself', 'my' or 'mine' (Harré & van Langenhove 1999a). Through the application of these personal pronouns, an individual can demonstrate responsibility for their own actions (agency), a sense of personal identity and commitment.

An example of a student assuming responsibility is presented in the following:

> The woman was a multigravida (more than one child born) who had a daughter, two and half years of age, [born] in Bali before migrating to Australia. Her husband and daughter were present at the labour and delivery [birth] … I had the opportunity to build a rapport with the woman and her family and establish their cultural beliefs and traditions related to the birth and their birth plan.

In another example, a student explained her experience and acknowledged the support obtained from her preceptor/midwife and how they worked together in the following.

> I think as a student you can't have seen absolutely everything you are going to come across in delivery suite [birthing area]. So I mean, you probably have done it all in theory and read through it on occasions out of textbooks. And until you actually see it physically, you can't be sort of a beginner so to speak. But once you actually come across it and so many people up there [delivery suite] are quite happy to actually be with you. I'd say, "I haven't seen this [an experience] before", and they would say, 'Ah, that's fine. Come on, we'll do it together".

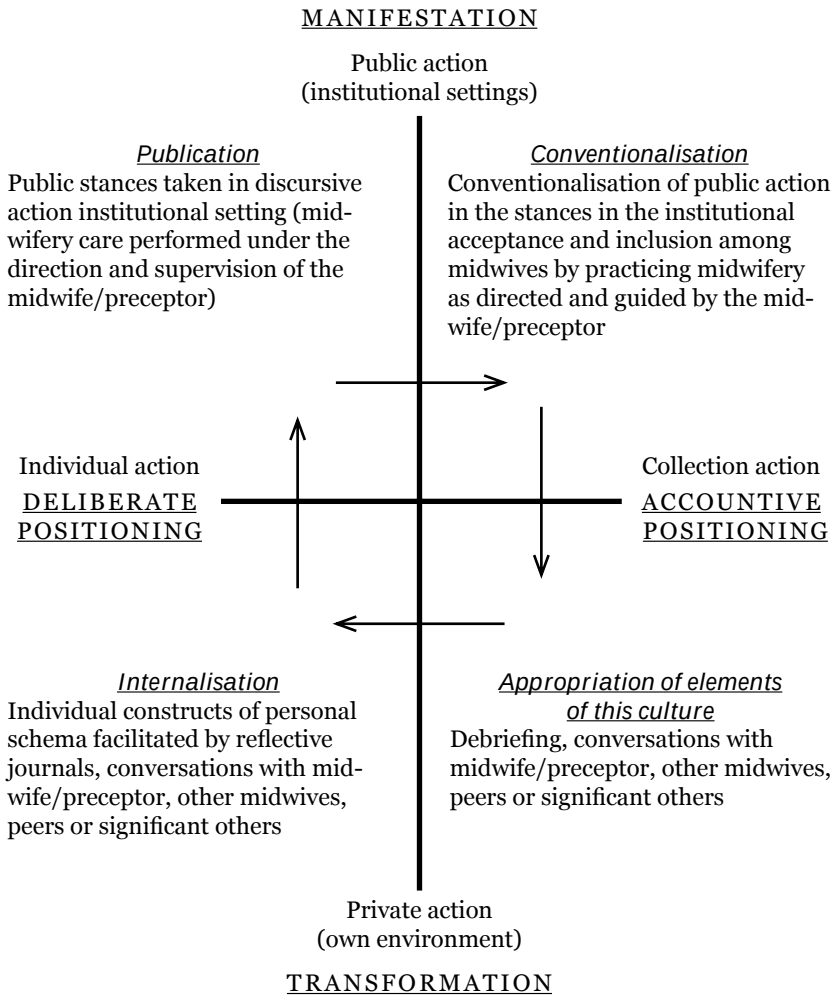
The use of the pronoun 'you' is another frequently used expression that may be applied when an individual applies another persona within a particular context, for reasons that are only known to themselves (Harré & van Langenhove 1999a). Within a culture of 'caring' in midwifery practice, the use of personas such as 'I', 'we' and 'you' demonstrate attitudes and relationships between students, preceptor/midwives, other midwives, childbearing women and their families. The application of the pronoun 'they' is used in everyday conversations. For students, they apply this pronoun to demonstrate to their preceptor/midwife their responsibility and accountability in the delivery of safe practices in midwifery practice settings.

It is emphasised by van Langenhove and Harré (1999a) that there is a need for individuals to have both a personal and professional identity in order to be perceived as complete.

Personal and professional identity formation

Figure 1 provides a schematic cycle of the personal and professional identity formation of students related to their professional learning as a midwife. It begins with the label of 'manifestation' applied to the 'public' and 'private' domains of reflective practice (van Langenhove & Harré 1994). Principal elements within such private interactions include, for example, confidential and individual, such as private thoughts. Public reflection is embedded within professional conversations with peers (singly or within a group), whereas conversations occurring with midwives, including those midwives who function as a preceptor/midwife, are placed within the 'collective'. These underpinning principles have drawn upon Vygotskian theories (Hanfmann & Vakar 1962), whereby public (external) and private (internal) language may impact upon actions that individuals may take following discussion with others (public) or thinking (private) through a problem, which may result in a 'transformation' of understanding.

Figure 1: The social psychological spaces for professional identity formation as a midwife



Adapted from van Langenhove, L. & Harré, R. (1994), 'Cultural stereotypes and positioning theory', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 24(4), p. 365.

Harré (1983:45) observed that "in the private-public dimension, language is understood as a common instrument of representation". Individuals as agents interpret and respond to the world in a subjective and social manner that is appropriate for them. Harré (1983:42) also argued that "an individual's linguistic capacities and knowledge of conventions ensures the presence of the many through the persistence of collective conventions and interpretations of what can be thought and planned".

Positioning may be applied when an individual deliberately engages in positioning himself/herself or others to achieve a course of action; for example, by using a practice opportunity to enhance learning in midwifery settings. Accountive positioning of oneself pertains to, for example, a student reporting care to a midwife (van Langenhove & Harré 1999b). The cycle shown should not be assumed to operate in one direction only. There can be movement in either direction for public and private actions, and deliberative and accountive positioning. These actions should be considered as a dynamic cycle of learning that is appropriated and adapted from experiences in practice settings. As an outcome of this cycle, students can construct their knowledge from their experiences either privately (thoughts) or publicly (conversations) to influence their professional learning and identity formation supported through reflective practice. This is in particular reference to a model of professional development by Benner.

Benner's model and reflective practice

Benner's five phenomenological stages of reflective practice give the best foundation in practice settings (Benner 1984; Benner, Tanner & Chesla 1996). In an exceptionally creative and widely influential process, Benner categorised the professional practice of nurses according to a skill acquisition model comprising five stages developed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Benner 1984). The five stages

include novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert levels based upon the narratives of newly qualified and expert nurses which captured their clinical and ethical judgements (Benner 1984). These experiences and comprehensions of nurses were related to their practice knowledge and development of their professionalism. Intrinsic to Benner's work is the facilitation of experiential learning by public and private reflective practices in practice environments where conversations were fundamental. The Benner model continues to be a point of reference in contemporary professional practice for midwives in terms of the preceptor support required for students. Students are allocated a preceptor/midwife who is considered by peers to be 'competent' or above in accordance with Benner's model.

The support by each preceptor/midwife usually is designed to encourage professional conversations around identified student learning needs. These conversations allow students to externalise thinking skills and to develop logical and well thought-out points of view (Yost, Sentner & Forlenza-Bailey 2000). Within this context, the preceptor/midwife can play a key role in the process of guided reflection on practice. Johns and McCormack (1998:64) found that "reflection-on-experience provides the supervisor with rich feedback on practitioner performance and effectiveness, although this information depends on the extent of the practitioner's disclosure". It is acknowledged that reflective practice is imperative for student learning. Together, reflective practice and positioning can provide a translation of students' actions in midwifery practice settings.

Reflexive positioning

Davies and Harré (1999) referred to reflexive positioning as the process by which some students position themselves privately (thoughts) or through internal discourse. This is intended to promote both intentional and unintentional positioning leading to the production of storylines. It also influences an individual's

local moral capacity and personal attributes to influence speech acts (Harré & van Langenhove 1999b; Tan & Moghaddam 1995). According to Moghaddam (1999), reflexive positioning is a pragmatic process because there are various mechanisms to produce one's autobiography. Likewise, it is conceded that there can be many diverse situations in midwifery practice that lead to the types of positioning that students engage in.

Several types of positioning have been identified by van Langenhove and Harré (1999a: 20–23) who explained 'modes of positioning theory', summarised in the following:

- first order positioning (refers to the way an individual locates herself or himself and others)
- second order positioning (occurs when the first order positioning is questioned and has to be negotiated), must be intentional
- Third order positioning (occurs when accountive positioning occurs outside the initial discussion), must be intentional
- Performative and accountive positioning (refers to one's own or others' conflation)
- Moral and personal positioning (positioning with regard to the moral orders in which they perform social actions)
- Self and other positioning (positioning constitutes the initiator and others in certain ways, and is also a resource through which all persons involved can negotiate new positions)
- Tacit and intentional positioning includes three typical kinds of positioning talk: (a) the positioning assumed by individuals, how they position others and are positioned by others; (b) discursive practices in which the first kind of positioning becomes a topic or target; and (c) discursive practices in which the positioning-talk has as a topic first or second order positioning.

Students usually apply these types of positioning in their conversations with midwives to influence their professional learning and shape their identity formation as a midwife.

Discussion

The notion of professional conversations, related to midwifery practice settings, also encompass factors such as power, technology, physical environment and institutional bureaucracy. These factors are normally considered by midwives to be part of the 'routine' within institutional practices of maternity services, usually within the large organisational structures of health services. Structures include institutional behaviour and dynamics that influence the structure of students' psychology through rules, policies and procedures such as those in midwifery practice settings, and predispose their professional identity formation.

Institutional practices, societal rhetoric and discursive positioning also facilitate a dynamic social structuration through language, rules and signs that all contribute to a reproduction of culture that is often unpredictable and fraught with inexplicable interpretations. Ratner (2000), a cultural psychologist, stated that all individuals subjugate their conscious or unconscious individuality to the group or work unit and act as cultural agents through their expressions of significant opinions and viewpoints. It is through conversations, however, that potent words and powerful sentences serve to either change or maintain a social world (Harré 1976). Midwifery practice is a social world in which cultural practices are changed and maintained in conversational relationships. They are acknowledged, by both midwives and students alike, to be both powerful and influential in their professional learning.

Positioning is, therefore, a tool for analysing the dynamics of conversations from emerging themes, patterns of social acts and storylines (Harré 2005). It can be employed to identify any student learning issues related to practice placements so that additional support can be provided. The application of positioning is to achieve positive outcomes for students related to their professional development and the attainment of the additional qualification

of 'midwife'. Professional conversations are the construction sites for students' professional identity formation based on their induction into midwifery and learning experiences. The preceptor/midwife must have information and an understanding of the course curriculum and its requirements so that there is effective conversational support required for the supervision and guidance of students in practice settings.

Conclusion

The professional identity formation of a midwife begins to grow and develop due to the everyday conversations conducted between students and their preceptors/midwives in practice settings. It is important that preceptors/midwives fully engage in these conversations with students as their professional identity formation is dependent upon the dynamic interrelationships and moment-to-moment interactions of these conversations. Students elect to position and re-position themselves or others in conversations to enhance and fully exploit their experiential learning. In this context, positioning theory serves as an effective tool for analysing social episodes that typically embody midwifery practice and education.

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Educational policies and problems of implementation in Nigeria

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The poor performance of the education sector in Nigeria has become very worrisome. What is the problem? Is the educational policy faulty or is it the implementation that is faulty? What are the implications for national development? These are the issues explored in this paper, based on a literature review approach. The findings blame the distortions in the educational system on the ineffective implementation engendered primarily by lack of political will, lack of continuity of programs, and corruption. The situation has hindered national development and, until urgent action is taken to review Nigeria's educational system, its national aspirations will continue to be compromised. The paper recommends the discontinuation of the National Policy on Education fashioned after the American system and the adoption of the model practised by Asian countries such as Japan, China and India which takes the culture of the people into consideration. In addition, the

provision of qualitative education should be made compulsory and entrenched into the Constitution in order to encourage result-oriented implementation. Sustained political will and eradication of corruption are necessary for effective policy implementation.

Introduction

In education as in other fields of human endeavour, every official action of an organisation must have a backing or a basis. It is this purpose that a policy serves. A policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made, but it does not make the decision. It usually provides a general guide that facilitates decision-making. Educational policies provide the direction for educational activities.

The formulation of an educational policy sets the stage for implementation which, according to Ukeje (1986), is perhaps the most important aspect of planning. Planning is usually an action which succeeds policy formulation but precedes implementation. Unfortunately, educational policies and goal attainment have been irreconcilable due to implementation constraints. Perhaps this accounts for the observation made by Governor Oyakhilome of Rivers State in an address sent to the Convention of the Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning in 1986. He expressed concern about the problem of policy implementation thus:

> We know it is difficult to realize planned objectives one hundred percent. But our experience in planning education in this country shows a disturbing gap between planned objectives and attained results ... As professionals in the field of education, it may be pertinent to identify whether those critical gaps are results of faulty planning or faulty implementation (Oyakhilome 1986:2).

Policy implementation in education is a conspicuous national problem that has taken centre stage in Nigeria. This paper examines the problem in some detail and explores its implications for the development of Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Over the years, the gap between educational policies and goal attainment due to inadequate implementation of these policies has become of great concern to many observers. The paper is interested in identifying the implementation constraints and to explore the implications of poor educational policy implementation for national development. Following a clarification of the causes and effects of the problem of poor policy implementation, the paper will advance remedial measures.

Research questions

In course of this examination, the following questions will be addressed.

- Are educational achievements in line with educational policies in Nigeria?
- What factors or constraints have made the implementation of educational policies difficult?
- What are the implications of poor implementation of educational policies for national development?
- What strategies can be adopted to ensure better policy implementation?

Policy as a concept

A policy serves the purpose of ensuring that every official action of an organisation must have a basis or a backing. Terry (1977: 1989) considers that “a policy is an overall guide that gives the general limits and direction in which administrative action will take place”. According to him, “a policy defines the area in which decisions are to be made but it does not give the decision”.

A policy brings about a meaningful relationship between business objectives and organisational functions as it discourages deviations from planned courses of action. A policy ensures consistency of action because an organisation is governed by approved principles. A policy does not have to be rigid, as there should be room for adjustment if necessary after its formulation.

Perhaps this is why Hoy and Miskel (1978:215) believe that "policies are not only formulated but also programmed, communicated, monitored and evaluated"? The non-rigid nature of policies is confirmed by Lindblom (1959:86) when he describes policy-making as a "process of successive approximation to some desired objectives in which what is desired itself continues to change under reconsideration". In fact, a good policy is one that can be reviewed as the need may arise. Lindblom believes that a wise policy maker cannot expect all their policies to achieve a one-hundred percent success. Regardless of how good a policy may be, its implementation may introduce some element of imperfection.

The concept of educational policy

Educational policies are initiatives mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system (Okoroma 2000:190). According to Osokoya (1987:2):

> Education is a distinctive way in which the society inducts its young ones into full membership. So every modern society needs some educational policies to guide it in the process of such initiation.

In the view of Awokoya (1981), educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life of a people. He believes that the objective of any policy is to satisfy individual needs, community pressures and the degree of complexity and sophistication to which socialised personnel must be educated and trained to meet these demands. The following considerations, according to Awokoya (1981), are necessary to guide the formulation of adequate educational policy.

- It should be formulated and adopted through a political process which acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interests and desires among its participants
- It should portray some elements of guidance for properly directed and coordinated action towards the attainment of the desired goals
- It should contain information on the broad objectives that should be reached
- It should be a binding guide on the actions of those implementing it
- It should be enforceable and enforced by the society which formulates it.

Kerr (1976) believes that, for a policy to qualify as an educational policy, it must be distinct from other policies. In his view, educational policies are distinguishable from other policies by the fact that policies on education are part and parcel of educational institutions. However, it is important to note that not all policies formulated in educational institutions can qualify as educational po1icies. Generally, policies must be rational and purposeful to enable them to stand the test of time.

Problems associated with policy implementation

The gap that often exists between policy formulation and implementation provokes inquiry to identify factors that constrain the effective implementation of educational policies. The problem of policy implementation is traceable to the planning stage which comes immediately after policy formulation. Okeke *et al.* (1985) and Ukeje (1986) have stated clearly that good planning will ensure effective implementation. Good planning that can facilitate effective implementation ought to consider such factors as the planning environment, social environment, political environment, and financial and statistical problems. It is in recognition of this observation that Aghenta (1984: 239) noted:

> For education to achieve all ends, it has to be carefully planned. The plan must take into consideration ... the needs

of the society; the political, socio-cultural, economic, military, scientific, and technological realities of the environment are very important to its survival.

Adesina (1977) notes that planned implementation is constrained by the following factors:

- over-estimation of available resources – this is a situation where estimated resources are greater than actual available resources to implement a program
- under-estimation of the costs of implementing a plan – this happens when cost-estimates do not make adequate provisions for inflation and actual implementation costs become unmanageable
- over-reliance upon external assistance – plans that substantially rely upon assistance from foreign sources for their implementation run into hitches when such aid fails to come, and
- inaccurate statistical data – planning education requires accurate and up-to-date data. Plans that do not adequately provide for this usually have implementation problems.

Furthermore, Van Horn and Van Meter (1977) have also advanced three general explanations for unsuccessful implementation of programs, namely:

- the communication process – effective implementation requires that implementers know what they are expected to do; as messages pass through any communication network, distortions are likely to occur which can produce contrary directives, ambiguities, inconsistencies and incompatible requirements;
- the capability problem – ability to implement policies may be hindered by such factors as incompetent staff, insufficient information, political support, inadequate financial resources and impossible time constraints, and
- dispositional conflicts – implementation of a policy may fail because those charged with the responsibility of implementation refuse to carry out their own assignments.

National Policy on Education

Prior to 1977 Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain at independence. The inability of this policy to satisfy the national aspirations of the country rendered it unpopular. In 1969 a National Curriculum Conference was organised which reviewed the inherited curriculum and identified new national goals for Nigeria's education. A National Seminar was organised by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973 under the Chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebo. This gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977 (Akangbou 1985; Bello 1986; Okoroma 2000).

The National Policy on Education is anchored on Nigeria's philosophy on education as enunciated through the nation's objectives. Nigeria has five main national objectives as provided by the Second National Development Plan and accepted as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education. They are the building of:

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 1998).

Implementation of the primary and secondary aspects of the National Policy on Education

An analysis of the implementation efforts of the primary and secondary aspects of Nigeria's education policy will give an insight into the relationship between policies and goal attainment through implementation.

Universal Basic Education (U.B.E.)

The implementation of universal basic education in Nigeria started in 1976 under the name Universal Primary Education (U.P.E.).

The acronym U.B.E. became operational in 1999 when President Olusegun Obasanjo, dissatisfied with the result of the U.P.E., renamed and relaunched the program. However, four years later it has been established that the U.B.E. and U.P.E. are identical twins and that what was relaunched was old wine in an old bottle. The implementation problems that lead to the abandonment of the U.P.E. have also saddled the U.B.E. and are about to cripple the program.

As early as 1977, just barely one year after the U.P.E. was implemented, the following picture, according to Taiwo (1980:174), emerged:

- the figure of 2.3 million children expected in primary education rose to 3 million (an increase of 700,000 additional children who had not been budgeted for), and
- instead of the N500 million earmarked initially for the project, the Federal Government had actually spent a little over N1 billion on primary education while the scheme was just one year old.

Taiwo saw this situation as a short-sightedness in planning on the part of the Federal Government. This trend continued until the program was jettisoned in 1999. Adesina (1977) was *ab initio* apprehensive about the success of the scheme unless adequate resources were made available for its effective implementation. This fear was continued within the first year of the scheme. Onabamiro (1974) and Nwankwo (1974) have given 'recipes' for the successful implementation of the U.P.E. They included:

- accurate statistics of children of school age
- adequate number of school buildings
- adequate number of qualified teachers
- sufficient financial provisions, and
- adequate publicity to create awareness about the scheme.

Despite being equipped with these implementation recipes, the Federal Government acted inconsistently and everything required for the effective implementation of this aspect of the national education policy was in short supply. The scheme, therefore, did not fully achieve its goals.

Then the U.B.E. came into existence in September 1999. So far, available records have not shown any departure from the U.P.E. trend. The situation appears even worse due to the entrenched corruption in Nigerian society today. A recent study conducted by Okoroma (2003) to assess the effective implementation of the U.B.E. program revealed significant inadequacy in the implementation efforts. Among the constraints that impede effective implementation are:

- inadequate qualified teachers
- insufficiency of funds
- inadequate teaching and learning facilities
- poor motivation of teachers, and
- lack of guidance and counselling services.

These problems are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the U.P.E. This indicates that the relaunching of the U.P.E. with the new nomenclature of U.B.E. did not result from any lesson that was learned from the failure of the U.P.E. The quality of education at the primary level today is worse than the pre-1976 era.

Implementation of the secondary education policy

The implementation of the 3-3 aspect of the national education policy has equally been very contentious. Some states of the Federation started implementing the policy in 1982 while others followed gradually. Almost 22 years later, there are cries of a poor standard of secondary education in Nigeria. The policy which was initiated to guarantee functional education after the American model has become even worse than the British system that was adjudged non-developmental. Studies, seminars, conferences and individuals have confirmed that the goals of the secondary education policy have not been achieved due to ineffective implementation.

A study by Okoroma (2001:95) on the evaluation of the 3-3 aspect of the National Policy on Education in Rivers State revealed that effective implementation of the policy has been hindered by the following factors:

- inadequate teaching staff
- lack of adequate workshops
- inadequate laboratories and libraries
- insufficient funds, and
- non-availability of guidance and counselling services.

These factors are similar to those that presently handicap the implementation of the U.B.E. scheme. The same factors constrain the effective implementation of policies in other forms of education including tertiary education.

Nigerian factors that militate against the implementation of educational polices

Efforts have been made to develop education in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Various policies in the interest of education have been formulated, some of which have been presented in this paper. Unfortunately, these efforts have not produced the desired effect. The state of education in Nigeria is still deplorable. It is so bad that some resourceful Nigerians prefer to send their children to Europe, America and even small African countries such as Ghana that has only two universities as against over sixty universities in Nigeria that lack adequate learning facilities.

Apart from the general problems of policy implementation common to most countries, especially those of the third world, some factors have been identified as peculiar to Nigeria and inhibiting her educational growth. It is no longer news that Nigeria is the giant of Africa in terms of resourcefulness as a major oil and gas producer. Ironically, most Nigerians live below the poverty line of one dollar per day. The following reasons, among others, account for this deplorable situation.

Lack of political will

Ordinarily, Nigerian leaders would want the country to stand out best in every thing, including education. However, political will has been lacking. Perhaps this is as a result of instability of governments or lack of continuity. Between 1960 and 2005, the country has had several governments led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (late), General Aguiyi Ironsi (late), General (Dr.) Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Mohammed (late), General Olusegun Obansanjo (as Military Head of State), Alhaji Shehu Shagari, General Mohammadu Buhari, General Ibrahim Babangida, Chief Earnest Shonekon, General Sani Abacha (late), General Abdusalam Abubakar and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (Current President). In 45 years, Nigeria has had twelve heads of state out of which only three were democratically elected. Others came through military groups. This shows that most Nigerian leaders have never had time to draw-up plans of action before they drafted themselves or were drafted into leadership and therefore have been ill-prepared for any development efforts whether in education or other spheres. Most of their actions were not patriotic but for personal aggrandizement. Even Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (the Current President) had no program of action before he was drafted to become president in 1999. Chief Obasanjo was jailed for life by the late General Sani Abacha on treasonable charges. The demise of General Abacha installed General Abdusalam Abubakar who released Obasanjo from jail, granted him presidential pardon and supported him to become president. So, Chief Obasanjo really had no political programs for education or anything else. His dismal performance, especially in the area of education, may not really be surprising. The points canvassed here are supported by Hodges (2001:26) when he noted:

> In the final analysis, Nigeria's development failures have sprung from the lack of success in achieving an effective model of governance. At the head of this problem has been the instability generated by the rivalry for control of the huge resources accruing to the State from the oil industry, and the use of political power to milk the state for personal gain rather than promote economic and social development.

So, educational polices were formulated by various governments but political instability stalled or discouraged the political will to implement such policies. As new governments came in quick succession and with relative uncertainty, continuity in polices could not be guaranteed. Every political player was in a hurry to help himself before he was displaced by another group. This has affected educational policy implementation in Nigeria.

Corruption

If anything has contributed greatly to the stagnation of corporate development of Nigeria, it is this virus called 'corruption'. It is found in all aspects of human endeavour in Nigeria. Its prominence in Nigeria has earned our nation a place of negative prominence in the world. Adesina (2004:16) noted:

> The 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index, released by Transparency International (TI), the watchdog on global corruption, ranks Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world. In 2003, the organization ranked Nigeria second, a one-step improvement from the previous position as the most corrupt country in the world.

Although President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria was uncomfortable and disputed the rating, many Nigerians agreed that it was correct. This is because corruption pervades all segments of Nigeria's national life. Despite enormous oil and gas wealth at the disposal of the country, basic things of life such as food, shelter, portable water, electricity, good roads and education have become luxuries to the citizens. However, people at the various levels of governments and their agents wallow in enormous financial and material wealth.

Corruption has contributed to stagnate the development of education in Nigeria. Some good educational policies have been put in place. An example is the National Policy on Education already discussed. The designers of the policy, from all intents and purposes, were quite visionary. The objectives of most policies in Nigeria are often

derailed at the implementation stage due to a number of reasons: (1) the budgets for the implementation of the policies are often passed by lawmakers with strings attached to them; (2) even when the budgets are passed, the executive arm of government is often reluctant to release the funds to facilitate implementation, and (3) the inadequate funds often released to the operators of the education system (primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions) are not honestly and fully utilised to promote the cause of education. Many corruptly divert much of the available education resources to serve personal interests. Aghenta (1984) supports these observations with the following assertion:

> The money available is never carefully used. The money the government votes for running the schools … does not get to the schools and the little that gets there is normally wasted by those whose responsibility it is to manage the schools.

Since the re-establishment of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the state of education has further deteriorated. The UNESCO standard for education for all nations of the world is 26% of the national budget. During the era of dictatorship (military government) in Nigeria, education received as much as 13%. But the present democratic government in Nigeria has fallen short of this. For example, in 2001, it allocated 8% to education. In 2004, the Federal Government's provision for education was a dismal 5.6% of the budget.

The issue of corruption in education became more prominent in 2005 when President Olusegun Obasanjo made a broadcast to the nation alleging that some members of the National Assembly demanded and collected N55 million from Professor Fabian Osuji (the former Minster of Education). The Senate President and five other senators were involved in the deal. According to President Obasanjo the purpose of the bribe was to enable the National Assembly to approve an enhanced budget for the Ministry of Education (Obasanjo 2005:11). All the facts available show that the refusal to accede to such a bribery demand meant doom for the education sector for the

year. It is rather unfortunate that senators who are senior citizens expectedly demanded an inducement before they would approve that Nigerian children should go to school. Adighije (2005:5) confirmed that bribes to the National Assembly is a normal practice and that every Minister does it. Osuji (2005:1), who was involved in the corruption scandal, admitted having given N55 million to the Senate Committee on Education but said it was a public relations gift and not a bribe. According to him, other Ministers do the same to have their budgets passed in line with their proposals. This implied that such practice must have been going on over the past six years of democracy in Nigeria to the detriment of educational development. No doubt these unfortunate and corrupt practices affect implementation as they occur at the various stages of program execution. Ejiogu (2005:11) concurs:

> The cankerworms of corruption and gross mismanagement of resources have been blamed for the deplorable state of the country's educational system. As a result of these two factors, the sector has consistently witnessed scarcity of resources, to the extent that less then 20 percent of eligible children of secondary school age get enrolled into schools. At the tertiary level, only 0.3 percent of Nigerian youths who are due for enrolment at that level get the opportunity to go into higher institutions.

Implications for national development

Education is an instrument for excellence. It librates people from poverty and ignorance. Ukeje (1966:155) believes that "education is for life and for living. It is an investment in people which pays untold dividends to the society. When that investment is not made or is made inadequately, the society suffers a loss". Presumably it is in recognition of this importance of education that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided at Section 18 as follows:

(1) Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

(2) Government shall promote science and technology.
(3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide:
  (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education
  (b) free secondary education
  (c) free university education, and
  (d) free adult literacy programs (FRN, 1999:18).

It is in pursuance of this constitutional provision that the National Policy on Education was developed and accepted. Nigeria's educational philosophy is also anchored on this constitutional mandate.

The importance of education to national development is no longer in doubt. The issue that agitates the mind is the effect of poor implementation of educational policies on the development of Nigeria. It was Ake (1988:2) who said that "education is the process of becoming the best we can be". With the numerous crises in the educational system engendered by poor policy implementation, it is doubtful whether its recipients are really becoming the best as expected. If not, what is the fate of Nigeria?

The euphoria with which Nigerians welcomed the National Policy on Education has died down and been replaced with despondency due to non-performance. The National Educational Research Council Report of the Baguada Seminar of September 1980 captured this euphoria as expressed in that seminar thus:

> The introduction of the new system of education is deemed crucial to the implementation of the philosophy of "developmentalism". It is hoped that when fully operational, it will help transform the society and launch the nation along the developmental trajectory that will lead us to a state of parity with the advanced world (Baguada Report 1980:7).

In the same state of mind, Ukeje (1986:8) noted that "the 6-3-3-4 system is more than a structure. It is a new process, a new orientation

and a new activity, which hopefully will lead to new individuals and a new and bright future". The ineffective implementation of the various programs canvassed by the National Policy on Education has relegated these hopes and optimism to back-stage. Nigeria is caught between one 'evil' (the rejected British educational system which is still unofficially practised) and one 'saint' (the accepted American educational system which we can neither officially nor unofficially practise). Consequently, the conservatism of the British educational system which helped us to maintain our traditional values and a healthy society has been lost. On the other hand, the American system with its potential for technological development and growth has failed to make any difference in our society because we have not learned anything.

In the present circumstance, the dream of Nigeria to move to a state of parity with the advanced world appears to be a mirage. Ukeje (1986) was full of hope that the new system would lead to new individuals and a new and bright future. Eighteen years later, the system has not produced new individuals and the future appears more hopeless than in 1982 when the policy commenced.

If Nigeria continues to hide under the umbrella of the National Policy on Education conscious of the implementation problems, our national aspirations will suffer greater impediments. Our national development will only rely on miracles, if any. The British system of education was found inadequate for Nigeria's developmental purposes. It is also true that the American system has failed in Nigeria because of our sociological circumstances. We need not continue to deceive ourselves with a national educational policy that has been found unworkable else in the future there will be no policy to lay hold on.

Recommendations

There is an urgent need for a workable educational policy for Nigeria. It is for this reason that the following recommendations are advanced.

- The present national educational policy should be disbanded on account of its non-workability.
- An indigenous system of education fashioned after the models operated by Asian countries should be adopted. Ideas that are alien to the cultures of Nigeria should be avoided because they are bound to fail.
- Education should be removed from the sphere of politics. It should be made purely a constitutional matter, but not as provided by the 1999 constitution which allows escape routes for political leaders. When the constitution states that "Government shall as and when practicable provide free education at different levels", the right to education has been denied the citizens and political leaders may be non-committal as the provision of education becomes a discretionary matter.
- The entrenchment of education as a non-negotiable right of every citizen in the constitution would help check corruption in that sector. Corruption is largely responsible for the failure of the National Policy on Education and other policies in Nigeria.
- Mismanagement of educational resources at any level should be made a serious offence attracting a minimum of five years' imprisonment. This should be included in the next constitution of Nigeria. It is believed that in the presence of corruption no new system of education can succeed.
- Nigerian governments and leaders should develop the necessary political will for education to grow.
- Every effort should be made to eradicate corruption from all spheres of Nigeria's various programs so that available resources can be utilised for public interest.

Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, we can conclude that the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria are constrained by the following factors.

- Most educational policies are well focused but the planning is often defective, making implementation difficult.
- Resources available for the implementation of a given educational policy are often over-estimated and thereby elicit unrealistic expectations that fail to materialise.
- Since educational policies are usually translated into plans before implementation, studies have shown that the costs of implementing such plans have often been under-estimated. Most educational policies have become stalled at the planning stage.
- Reliable data have not been a popular feature in planning education in Nigeria. This situation has not facilitated the effective implementation of educational plans.
- The implementation of educational policies is also often hindered by the interplay of politics, which may sometimes relegate reality to obscurity.
- Qualified teachers are not in sufficient numbers in the entire educational system in Nigeria. Studies have already confirmed this to be true of the U.B.E. Scheme, as well as the secondary education program. The tertiary level of education, where hundreds of students receive lectures hanging out of windows and doors and taught by one lecturer, is also confirmation.
- Facilities such as classrooms, offices, laboratories, workshops, libraries, power, water *et cetera* are basic requirements in every school system. These have been found to be grossly inadequate in most Nigerian educational institutions. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has confirmed this in its numerous publications.
- Insufficiency of funds for implementing educational policies in Nigeria is a problem that has recurred in almost every implementation study that has been carried out. The importance of funds for carrying out any activity need not be over-emphasised.
- Government lacks the political will for effective implementation.
- Corruption at all levels hinders the implementation of educational policies and programs.

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Implementation of cooperative learning in the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education at Kuwait University

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The purpose of this study is to review the success of implementation of cooperative learning in various courses delivered at the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education at Kuwait University. According to recent research in the field of social cognition, learning situations which make use of the social context often achieve superior results over individualistic experiences. Interviews with 200 university teachers conducted for the last two years showed their experience and opinions about the effects of cooperative learning in their classrooms on the achievement of content knowledge, retention and students' attitudes toward it. The results of this study revealed that about 75% of the teachers believed that cooperative learning had been successfully implemented. The present analysis offers a series of positive findings and recommendations to improve further the educational standard of the Centre in Kuwait University.

Introduction

Cooperative learning is an adopted instructional strategy which promotes student learning and academic achievement across the curriculum. It has been used successfully to promote learning achievement in cooperative writing, problem-solving in technological studies and comprehension in reading. It promotes socialisation and positive interaction making students consistently more cooperative and helpful.

Several specific cooperative learning experiences were introduced into one of two sections of a language learning course. For the five topics in which these techniques were utilised, student comprehension was compared with that of students in the second section of the same course which did not apply this methodology. Higher scores were earned by the students who utilised cooperative techniques when studying all five of the topics. Both practically and statistically higher results were obtained in three of the five topics by those who were exposed to cooperative methods.

The present study therefore aims to determine whether the relationship between cooperative learning orientation and achievement remained in new methodology courses in which groups were to fulfil main course requirements. Recent educational research has been conducted regardless of some facts, such as: the overwhelming majority of graduate students in colleges of education are required to enrol in at least one research methodology course as a necessary component of their degree programs; the majority of students find these courses the most difficult in their programs of study; and recently, there has been an increase in the number of research methodology instructors who use cooperative learning techniques in their classes (Onwuegbuzie & DaRos 1999).

Improving learning is a consistent goal in teaching professionals. Research suggests that learning styles play an important role in new

methodology classes. Thus, graduate students who prefer to learn in cooperative learning groups in most cases perform better than do their peers in more individualistic orientations (Onwuegbuzie 2001).

The educational technology is a process shifting from instruction to learning and construction. Cooperative learning is among these process technologies. Several times the Ministry of Education has vowed to introduce an innovative program that would raise the educational standard in the State of Kuwait. Efforts have been concentrated in three main directions:

- improving classroom management style of learning in small, nuclear groups
- working towards obtaining a better social and physical environment
- introducing new, and upgrading previous, educational facilities in classrooms.

So far, this study has been the first to evaluate the results and effectiveness of cooperative learning in the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education.

Research literature on cooperative learning

Johnson and Johnson (2005; 2001; 2000; 1994; 1989) and Slavin (2001; 1995; 1988; 1980) have extensively published and reviewed the literature on cooperative learning. Blosser (1992: 6) comments on their contributions, also quoting Brandt (1987), saying that:

> They identify a variety of outcomes of cooperative learning. Achievement increases for all ability levels (high, medium, low); higher-level thinking processes can result; a deeper level of understanding is possible; critical thinking is promoted; more positive peer relationships result; students exhibit better social skills and provide more social support for their peers; and a higher level of self-esteem can result (Brandt, 1987: 17).

She also points out that teachers can teach their students how to be part of a productive group and manage conflict, and teachers themselves can learn those social skills and use them with their colleagues.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) define the basic elements of cooperative learning as: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group stills, and group processing. Individual accountability is the key to insuring that all group members are in fact strengthened in learning cooperatively. It stems from highly structured, cooperative learning activities which ensure that every student participates equitably and meets the learning objectives. Johnson and Johnson point out that the following learning outcomes can be promoted by cooperative learning:

- increased retention
- more frequent higher-level reasoning, deeper-level understanding and critical thinking
- greater achievement motivation and intrinsic motivation to learn
- greater ability to view situations from other perspectives
- more positive, accepting and supportive relationships with peers regardless of ethnic, sex, class or handicap differences
- greater social support
- more positive attitudes toward professors
- more positive attitudes toward subject areas, learning and college
- greater psychological health, adjustment and well-being
- more positive self-esteem based on basic self-acceptance
- greater social competencies.

In their study, Johnson and Johnson (2000) integrate cooperative learning with competitive and individualistic learning by providing guidelines for managing critical issues, assessing competencies and involvement, and resolving conflicts. They clearly defined each type of learning, pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of each, and

analysed the conditions under which each should be used. Their book is helpful for pre-service and in-service teachers who are interested in cooperative learning methods.

Likewise, Johnson and Johnson (2005) point out the use of cooperative learning to promote a culturally plural society within school. They discuss the following topics: the nature of each type of interdependence and the values implicit in each, the types of cooperative learning, the basic elements for effective cooperation, research on the use of cooperative learning and its positive influence on diversity, and the implications of research on cooperation for diversity. They (2005: 16) indicated that:

> Cooperative learning promotes greater efforts to achieve, more positive relationships, and greater psychological health than do competitive and individualistic learning. These outcomes indicate that when cooperative learning is used the majority of the school day, diversity among students can be a potential source of creativity and productivity.

Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998; 1991) also point out the use of active learning strategies through cooperation in the classroom. They (1991) show how college faculty can facilitate students in actively creating their knowledge rather than passively listening to the professor's. Their monograph is about "structuring learning situations cooperatively at the college level so that students work together to achieve shared goals".

The concept of cooperative learning is also introduced by Slavin (2001; 1995; 1988; 1980), who offers a practical, down-to-earth approach to cooperative learning and provides practice methods for groups. He (1988: 9) developed a method called Students Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) which involves competition among groups. In this method, students are grouped heterogeneously by ability, gender, race and ethnicity. They learn materials in teams and take quizzes as individuals. Individual scores contribute to a group score. Slavin considers this method appropriate for a variety of subjects.

Onwuegbuzie (2001) tried to determine whether the relationship between peer orientation and achievement remained in research methodology courses in which cooperative learning groups were formed to undertake major course requirements. He found that graduate students who preferred to learn in cooperative learning groups tend to obtain lower levels of performance in research methodology courses in which all assignments are undertaken and graded individually than their counterparts who have more individualistic orientations. He also found that peer orientation explains as much as 27.4% of the variance in achievement among graduate students.

In another study, Jacobs, Power and Loh (2002) provide ideas and resources that can be used by teachers who want to improve their classroom and promote community building. They demonstrate how classroom teachers can use cooperative learning techniques for lesson planning and class management. The studies in their book are based on experience and in-depth research.

In a cooperative learning classroom, students are placed in small groups and work together under the teacher's guidance to attain group goals that cannot be obtained by working alone or competitively. In such a classroom environment, students discuss, help each other learn and encourage personal achievements in other members in the group. Thus, the way in which lessons are organised can influence students' interactions with others, knowledge, and attitudes (Carson 1990, Johnson & Johnson 1989). Cooperative learning has the advantage of using this method in different subjects and levels, starting from elementary school to university.

However, this kind of pedagogical approach requires very experienced and well-trained teachers who know how and when to assign learning objectives to students and how to monitor each learner within each small group.

Furthermore, the cooperative learning approach makes subjects more interesting and promotes effective learning. Also, it improves intergroup relations, self-esteem, attitude toward class and the advantage of working in a team (Johnson & Johnson 1989; Slavin 2001). As the result of some studies, university students demonstrate greater academic achievement over a long term through the use of cooperative learning than through other traditional teaching methods. The major advantage of cooperative learning is that it refers to small group instruction that comprises five elements: clear, positive interdependence among students; group self-evaluation; interpersonal behaviours that promote each member's learning; individual accountability; and frequent use of small-group social skills.

Cooperative learning is one of the most favoured and successful practices in education. Its basic principle is 'students work together to accomplish shared learning goals'. It results in positive effects on students' achievement and retention of information (Johnson & Johnson, 1990; Slavin, 1991; Cavalier, Klein & Cavalier, 1995). On the one hand, a number of studies have shown considerable increase in learning skills' development and confidence resulting from properly implemented active and cooperative methods. On the other hand, Foote (1997) found that, in a Kansas Community College study of cooperative sociology and psychology courses, there were no significant differences between grades of 50 students in cooperative courses and those of 100 students in traditional classes.

Putnam (2001) concluded that in 232 studies comparing cooperative learning with other methods, 40% showed no significant differences between cooperative learning and other methods, 50% showed a significant difference in favour of cooperative learning and 10% in favour of individualised instruction.

Many other research studies have been conducted on cooperative learning, its techniques and use. Among these studies are: Aronson

(2000), Aronson & Patnoe(1997), Aronson *et al*. (1997; 1978), Cohen (1994), Cohen & Laton (1997), Deveon (2004), Goodsell *et al*. (1992), Lie (2005), Purdom & Kromrey (1995), Sharon (1980) and Wallace (1995). Totten and Sills (1990) briefly identify and describe ten publications they consider to be seminal works that offer readers a comprehensive discussion of cooperative learning.

Methodology

According to Harvard Education Research the methodology of cooperative learning focuses on four major models. The models differ in how much structure is provided, what kinds of rewards are offered, methods of holding students individually accountable, and the use of group competition.

Student Team Learning (STL) was developed at John Hopkins University and is the focus of a large number of studies. Its emphasis is on team goals and success. Students are rewarded on improving their own performances, and team scores are important motivators. This method includes four separate programs (John Hopkins University Research Center, 2000)

Learning Together (LT) is a method developed by David Johnson and Roger Johnson at the Research Center of University of Minnesota. Students work in four- or five-member, heterogeneous groups on a group assignment sheet. A single product is submitted, and the group receives rewards together. Thus, the emphasis falls on team-building activities and regular discussions within groups (University of Minnesota Research Center 2000).

In an attempt to address educational dilemmas, Elliot Aronson and colleagues developed and implemented the jigsaw classroom technique at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Students are assigned to six-member teams to work on segmented academic material. Each team member reads an assigned section, and then

members from different teams who have studied the same sections meet in "expert groups" to discuss their sections. Then students return to their own teams and take turns teaching their teammates about their section. Jigsaw ∏ is a modification designed at John Hopkins University in which all students read a common narrative but individuals meet and become 'expert' on assigned topics. This method was primarily used in social studies where learning from text is important.

When properly carried out, the jigsaw classroom technique can transform competitive classrooms in which many students are struggling into cooperative classrooms in which the same students show dramatic academic and social improvements. As a result, students begin to form cross-ethnic friendships and discard ethnic and cultural stereotypes. In addition, jigsaw classrooms decrease absenteeism and improve education in a multi-cultural world. Studies have consistently revealed enhanced academic performance, elimination of prejudice and improved social relations (Aronson *et al*. 1977; Perkins & Saris 2001).

Shortly after Aronson and colleagues began to document the power of the jigsaw classroom, Robert Slavin, Elizabeth Cohen and others began to document the power of other kinds of cooperative learning programs (Cohen & Lotan 1997; Hurley *et al*. 2001). Thus this technique appears to be gaining in popularity.

In view of the above theoretical and practical research, the following study was carried out. All 2002 instructors at the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education at Kuwait University were interviewed to express their findings and knowledge about the implementation of cooperative learning in their sections. The interview focused on four main issues:

- How do instructors perceive the idea of cooperative learning and its advantages?
- Do instructors apply the method of cooperative learning in their classrooms, and with what tools?
- How was cooperative learning tuition method introduced to the instructors?
- Was the implementation of cooperative learning in Kuwait University successful, and if not, why?

The validity of the study results has been acknowledged by two faculty members and three experienced lecturers from Kuwait University.

Findings

The results of the interviews with the 200 instructors are summarised below.

First issue

Instructors' perceptions of what is cooperative learning were: 47% defined it as placing students into groups; 35% described it as delivered to groups of three to five students who develop interpersonal skills; and 18% found that it encouraged reasoning, responsibility and creativity. The instructors stated that cooperative learning exhibits the following advantages (Table 1).

Table 1: Instructors' perceptions of the advantages of the cooperative learning teaching strategy

Percent	Number of teachers	Advantages of cooperative learning teaching strategy
80	160	Stimulating students' team work and collaboration
71	142	Inciting students' interest
65	130	Encouraging constructive competition among students
65	130	Enabling implementation of discipline and self-control
63	126	Encouraging critical reasoning
55	110	Promoting students' independence
53	106	Tapping creativity
48	96	Incorporating shy students in the team
47	94	Intensifying socialising
46	92	Positive interdependence among students
45	90	Activating group discussions
44	88	Promoting individual accountability
40	80	Advancing interpersonal behaviour
35	70	Highlighting self-evaluation

Of the total number of instructors, 14 refrained from citing any advantages. Instead, they suggested several *disadvantages* of cooperative learning as follows:

- it needs some changes in the classroom environment
- it requires specific technical skills and knowledge (in some specialised courses)

- sometimes it distracts the student's attention from focusing on the core subject
- often instructors rely on the most active students to lead

Generally, when asked about the differences between cooperative learning and traditional tuition, most of the instructors opted in favour of cooperative learning highlighting the following – that it:

- stimulates student independence and self-reliability reducing direct instruction
- encourages use of 'high-tech' facilities
- unravels and promotes leadership skills
- encourages greater creativity in problem-solving
- uplifts personal satisfaction in achievers and involves more students in the team
- breaks the ice more easily between the students and the teacher
- is more demanding for the teacher in terms of effort, knowledge and experience

The following are the requirements the instructors need to fulfil in order to implement the methodology of cooperative learning (see Table 2).

Table 2: Instructors' views on the skills and knowledge required for the implementation of cooperative learning

Percent	Number of teachers	Skills and knowledge required for the implementation of cooperative learning
91	182	Creativity in designing worksheets, learning aids and presenting information
90	180	State of the art knowledge of the subject-matter
89	178	Excellent orchestrating and guiding skills
86	172	Promoting socialising through discourses and exchange of ideas
82	164	Ability to manage 'fair play' relationships among students, encouraging more effort and rewarding achievers
78	156	Patience and ability to listen and judge correctly
71	142	Ability to maintain discipline and encourage student participation
59	118	Understanding cooperative learning and its proper implementation

Second issue

The extent of implementation of cooperative learning in the instructors' classrooms was given as: 160 instructors (80%) had constantly implemented it throughout the academic year, and 15 instructors (30%) had implemented it for one or two semesters. Twenty one instructors (10%) were not implementing it in their classroom work.

In designing the class activities in cooperative learning, teachers applied different work styles. The first approach was to organise students into small groups and then deliver instruction conventionally to the whole class; the second was to give instruction to the whole class first and then place the students into groups so they could consolidate the knowledge with joint efforts together; and the third approach was to group the students at the beginning, appoint a leader in each group, and have each group fulfil tasks assigned by the instructor. Thus, the students cooperated to find information, while the teacher's role became a supervisor.

Third issue

This issue examines the ways in which teachers were introduced to the method of cooperative learning. Here are some instructors' opinions on the knowledge, skills and sources necessary to implement successfully cooperative learning. From the interviews, the majority of teachers pointed out that they relied on their personal experience within the course of cooperative learning throughout the academic year. The educational authorities did little or nothing in this respect, with the result that teachers in many subjects practise cooperative learning with limited training. Seventy percent suggested that more teacher training and upgrading workshops should be organised in cooperative learning methodology. Highly experienced local and visiting foreign teachers should deliver lectures and exchange experience with regard to updated information and teaching methods. Competent, practice-oriented, model lessons should be presented in variety of subjects so that different instructors, each in their own field, could gain ready access to the newest trends in world educational practice.

Fourth issue

The fourth issue related to the degree of success of the implementation of cooperative learning. The majority of instructors (75%) said that cooperative learning was successfully implemented in the academic courses run in the Center for Community Service and Continuing Education at Kuwait University. Almost one-quarter claimed that it had limited success, while 16 instructors said that it was a failure. The factors that were seen to contribute to its successful implementation are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Factors contributing to the success of cooperative learning implementation

Percent	Number of teachers	Factors contributing to successful implementation
100	200	Regular size classes
100	200	Experienced and knowledgeable instructors
80	160	Specially adapted courses/curricula to suit cooperative learning
75	150	High-tech classroom facilities and adequate environment
74	148	Students' positive attitude and motivation toward cooperative learning

Assessment, evaluation and reporting student learning

Cooperative learning groups present important opportunities and benefits for instruction, assessment, evaluation and reporting. Through cooperative learning groups, instructors can promote students' levels of critical thinking and reasoning. Also, it promotes self and peer assessment alongside teachers' judgements.

There are two levels of assessment – individual and group. In cooperative learning, assessment and evaluation practices constitute an integrated whole by implementing procedures before, during and after instruction. In this way, first, the student has the possibility to learn from these assessment experiences, and second, there is almost no possibility of teacher bias affecting the assessment procedure.

Discussion and suggestions

The views of 200 university instructors involved in this research were examined to determine their understanding about cooperative learning as a methodology, and how and to what extent they had achieved success in its implementation in the classroom.

The findings reveal that these instructors have understood the advantages of cooperative learning and the positive effects from its implementation in comparison with traditional teaching practice. Indeed, the ability to work with others within a group and to develop interpersonal skills may be justification for using cooperative learning strategies.

Yet, the literature suggests there is a need for additional research in cooperative learning strategies to be conducted in some subject areas. Studies in which cooperative learning strategies are used for a semester or for a whole academic year should be conducted to determine if students' achievements are increased with additional experience in using cooperative learning. Future research should also focus on comparisons between different models of cooperative learning, as well as comparisons with other approaches.

This research supports the view that cooperative learning experiences promote positive attitudes toward the instructional experience, and provide opportunities for students to develop skills in group interactions and in working with others that are needed in today's world.

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RESEARCH REPORT

Universities are funny places!

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Universities are funny places. They have a strong sense of hierarchy and rank. They have an amazing disparity in salary levels and status between staff, are class conscious, and are run by a large bureaucracy that oils and keeps the machinery going. They operate as educational institutions and yet also are entrepreneurial, marketing themselves in a competitive search for students and research resources. Most are in the public education sector but a few are private; they are closely scrutinised by governments and have to perform and make account of themselves to government authorities yet offer little accountability to the lower echelons of their workforce by the managerialist-inspired

elite upper ranks; and have had to come to grips with enormous social, political and cultural change to the world, nation and local contexts.

There are many academic tribes and territories within the university community (Becher 1989). Some academic disciplines are more conservative than others (Lawless 2004), and they straddle professional education as well as broad education.

I have worked in all three of South Australia's universities, and both of its medical schools in a career in the university and not-for-profit community sector. I have worked in the conservative disciplines such as management studies and medicine, and also in the more progressive ones such as Aboriginal studies. I have worked in student unions, in the central administration units and in the academic disciplines of the Australian higher education sector. I am currently working in an academic school of commerce investigating the pharmaceutical industry while also studying as a postgraduate. What has been my most common experience as a researcher, educator, student and administrator in this sector since 1975? It has been the diversity of it all, and the driving need to understand this strange beast and to celebrate it strengths and delights and bemoan its weaknesses and horrors. Relationships between staff and students can be delightful, exhilarating and inspiring, rich with solidarity and hope, but also can turn into horror stories of misunderstanding, snobbery, bullying, whitewashed racism and nuanced sexism.

As a workforce, it has some unique qualities. There are unique opportunities for the university workforce to have thinking valued, to be allowed to spend time on thinking and conversation, to consider and reflect together in conversation and to work and co-author together, while also working in difficult and demanding jobs and careers. Having worked outside of the university sector, I am aware how rarely employers value and encourage critical thinking and discussion, or abstract and conceptual exploration of ideas.

University workforces do this and sometimes they do it well. Another thing they sometimes do is enter into solidarity with marginalised communities and address issues of social justice and the urgent need for social change that transforms society for the better. Having worked in several of the fractious disciplines and tribal territories of academia, I have realised that progressive people ready to act – not just talk and think – for social justice are everywhere in the university sector. A conservative academic discipline such as medicine can be home to people deeply concerned for racial and gender justice and for transformation of inequity – and everywhere in this complex, contradictory and diverse workforce are people who want to think, talk but most importantly act together for social justice and against inequity. They look at students as learners not customers, and as people with whom to work in solidarity rather than products on a conveyer belt.

Could it be that, in this strange beast known as the university, it is possible to educate, not just train, and possible to seek wisdom and build compassion and solidarity within a community, to build an experience that working in the academy is more than just a day job which pays the bills?

Universities are just as diverse, contradictory and complex as any social institution or social phenomena. Hang about – for a researcher that means they are themselves a potential research question, doesn't it! My goodness, it even poses a question for a doctoral study.

I am currently designing a research project which will investigate the university as a community engaging in activism for social justice. Are universities really a place able, and with the capacity, to do more than just replicate and reproduce the inequities of a hierarchical, capitalist, competitive and adversarial society? Do they replicate the norms of social inequity – can they also be places which dissent, resist inequity and seek hope for, and even successfully create, social justice? Is it possible to see each other, staff and students, as a community, as

"agents of change rather than as mere objects of economic necessity" (Hillcole Group 1997). Is radical wisdom possible in the university setting?

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RESEARCH REPORT

What is the moral imperative of workplace learning: Unlocking the DaVinci code of human resource development?

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In the course of my doctoral study, I am exploring the strategic linkages between learning activities in the modern workplace and the long-term success they bring to organisations. For many years, this challenge has been the Holy Grail of human resource development practitioners, who invest heavily on training and professional development projects each year but readily admit to their inadequacies when it comes to evaluating the full benefits. In the UK

alone, estimates for 2008 indicate that this expenditure will reach over 23 billion pounds sterling (Mann 2006:13).

Although the problem appears straightforward, the answer has proven to be more elusive. HR managers perpetually strive to quantify how workplace training contributes to the organisation's profitability or competitive advantage by monitoring how an individual changes their behaviour and adds value. After all, survival and growth are reported to be the two most compelling reasons driving change in today's enterprises (Boxall & Purcell 2003), so when training is found to contribute to the bottom line, it is guaranteed to attract the attention of senior managers, who are often more skeptical (Clarke 2005:9). This dilemma has been a key issue for HR professionals for decades, but new evidence is suggesting that the real measure of strategic success may be found in evaluating how *employee learning* can help organisations secure something much more sustainable and macro-economic than mere profit. I am referring to a concept that goes beyond the commercially convenient activities of corporate social responsibility towards a renewed notion of national identity that is deeply embedded in the ontological security of every individual employee (Field 2004); in other words, satisfying mutual concerns over long-term personal safety and knowing what can or should be done to make a meaningful contribution to society – and be recognised for it. During a recent interview about strategy and professional development within a major Australasian energy company, one senior executive said:

> Many people only think about the company, but this organisation is different – we think about the country and what will be there for our kids in the longer term. The key question for our employees is – what can they do for New Zealand?

This highly successful organisation is currently engaging with its employees on the basis of a *moral imperative* and is doing so by deliberately aligning every aspect of its strategy to one over-riding

vision that it focused eighty years into the future. Furthermore, all employees are included in the planning process through an intricate and interwoven system of communications that recognises the value of people's capabilities. In an industry beset with talent shortages, this process enables the employees to share both explicit and tacit knowledge in a way which adds value, not just to the employer but also to broader communities and their families. For individual staff, the combination of a compelling long-term vision and inclusive approach to learning may be adding new dimensions to the psychological contract such as citizenship, spiritual fulfilment and a sense of meaning – putting daily mundane chores into context and adding personal identity to the work.

Interestingly, commentators on post modernism have reported on the extent to which the forces of globalisation, particularly large multi-national organisations, have impacted on historical, societal and national boundaries (Usher, Bryant & Johnson 1997; Monbiot 2004). Critics reject these developments as damaging, with values deeply embedded in relativism and they argue for a renewed sense of unity towards patriotism and national identity (Monbiot 2004). In parallel, *complexity theorists* believe that detailed long-term strategic planning has become a futile activity in today's globalised economy (Rosenhead 2006). Here is one organisation that appears to have embraced some of these ideas by simplifying its strategy towards one unifying goal – and in doing so, may have inadvertently cracked the DaVinci code of human resource development.

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BOOK REVIEW

Creative writing: education, culture and community

Rebecca O'Rourke
Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2005
ISBN: 1-86201-161-3; 263 pages

In the introduction to *Creative writing: Education, culture and community*, UK writer, journalist and adult educator Rebecca O'Rourke states that her book is 'a testament to the influential role played by university departments of continuing education both in developing creative writing as an academic discipline and facilitating its contribution to social and cultural change' (p. viii). Against this background, O'Rourke's significant and timely contribution maps adult education in creative writing in the UK by focusing on an important question: whether the British cultural and educational policy of recent decades has resulted in an inclusive and democratic approach to literature and writing in that nation. Underlying this question is the understanding that such policy has shifted from encouraging the relatively passive consumption of literature

(developing readers) to the more active production of literature (developing writers), although writers are also, of course, usually active readers.

The twin focus on policy and education makes this a work of great interest to all involved in the provision of creative writing education – and certainly not just those with a special interest in adult education. O'Rourke indeed foregrounds education, in general, writing that, in the UK:

> [c]reative writing … could be understood as a means of training for writers but also as the uses of writing which were not primarily literary. Both tendencies put education, with its capacity to transform individuals and social groups, at the heart of the cultural experience and this educational inflection became a defining feature of contemporary British creative writing (p. 3).

O'Rourke argues that current cultural policy (which privileges educational values and processes) is 'problematic for those who advocate cultural action as a catalyst for radical social change' (p. 4), especially as the discourse of economic rationalism within cultural policy is, itself, affected by its turn towards education. This scaffolding means that O'Rourke's book contributes to several spheres of study: adult education, creative writing, creative arts education and cultural policy – fields which, as this book so vividly illustrates, intersect in many, quite complex ways.

Creative writing: Education, culture and community is certainly not an uncritical study, locating many tensions, ambivalences and frustrations for those involved in what could be termed the 'creative writing enterprise'. O'Rourke looks, in particular, at the relationship between writing tutors or workshop facilitators and their participants, and investigates at length what she describes as the 'tension between personal development, artistic considerations and commercial or marketised imperatives' (p. 6). Her musings on who are the best teachers of writing (writers or professional educators), how they should be trained and accredited, and whether this task should be

conceptualised as teaching or facilitating, contributes to the long-standing discussions on these issues, although these questions themselves are currently mutating as many writers are obtaining professional and/or postgraduate qualifications in writing and/or education.

In terms of my own disciplinary interests (as a tertiary educator in the field of creative writing), I found Chapter 3, 'The rise of creative writing in education', fascinating and useful, in its critical and historical account of the rise of creative writing as an educational, academic and scholarly activity. In this, O'Rourke sets out to challenge, as she writes, 'the tendency to locate creative writing's origins exclusively within higher education' (p. 36). While her overall argument is persuasive, I do not agree with this assertion or the related statement, that:

> [t]here is also a danger that creative writing in higher education will monopolise both the knowledge production and pedagogy of creative writing, assuming that in both instances higher education practitioners are more sophisticated than those working in schools or adult education (p. 140).

On the contrary, in my experience in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, creative writing programs and teachers in the higher education sector work closely with high school teachers and programs which 'feed into' their courses, while many currently involved in the tertiary sector of creative writing as teachers, researchers and students have experience as students and/or educators in the adult education sector. I believe that there is therefore much more movement and synergistic connectivity between these areas than these statements suggest. Perhaps what O'Rourke's point foregrounds, however, is that much more formal and informal discussion, collaboration and strategic planning needs to occur between these too often seemingly discrete sectors of the discipline.

A particularly interesting section of this work (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) is devoted to a detailed ethnographic study of what O'Rourke terms 'social writing', the genesis of which is traced to a shift in cultural

policy from understanding writing as an individual, solitary and singular activity to one which is social and socialised. This social writing forms part of what O'Rourke discusses at length in Chapters 4 and 5 as 'local cultures of writing', and then from the point of view of writing course participants (Chapter 6) and tutors (Chapter 7). The extensive and revealing (anonymous) quotations from interviews with these participants, tutors and other educators and policy-makers in these and other chapters make for compelling reading. Another feature of the book here, and overall, is its deconstruction of many of the seemingly natural oppositions that often frame creative arts discourse – metropolitan/regional, formal/informal education and instruction, amateur/professional, student/teacher and artistic/commercial – and, instead, shows how these categories often intersect and affect each other.

Although creative writing in its various institutional settings continues to be the target of what are now decades-old snipes, this detailed and sophisticated study is yet further proof that the discipline of creative writing has come of age. It also stands testament to the maturity of the scholarship of teaching as field of research. As a significant contribution to these research areas, this text provides a rich resource for scholars, with an excellent bibliography regarding the history of development of creative writing in the UK, especially in the broader context of adult education and cultural policy. It also has a thoughtfully compiled index, a feature sometimes lacking in otherwise interesting texts. O'Rourke's overall conceptualisation is both innovative and insightful, and I predict many researchers will embrace this approach and methodology to study other creative arts practices and pedagogies in this productive manner.

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BOOK REVIEW

A coffee, a chat and a gentle transformation: a manual for trainers/facilitators in non-formal learning

Cheryl Lewis-Fitzgerald
Melbourne: Australian Institute of Education and Training, 2005
ISBN: 1-920858-43-1; RRP: $50

This manual was funded under an ALA (Adult Learning Australia) – ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) Innovation Research Grant in 2005. It is based on research which the author, Cheryl Lewis-Fitzgerald, undertook for her Master of Education.

This spiral-bound set of instructions has been developed for qualified trainers and assessors who are involved in non-formal learning associated with "community capacity building in action ... [which] contributes to our social capital" (p.49). The accompanying CD ROM contains additional material and is described as having further relevance for people who are not formally qualified to Certificate IV level.

The manual is not a text which explores the philosophical concerns associated with education and training to encourage people to enter the workforce in order to support socially constructed economic goals. In the opening sections, Lewis-Fitzgerald explains that her methodological premise is one of the "486 heutagogy", that is, the study of self-determined learning – learning that is learner-centred and is therefore relevant in the non-formal learning environment, as distinct from pedagogy as "the science of teaching" (p.24) where the teacher is in control and decides what is to be learned. The heutagogical approach – claimed to be firmly based in learning principles – is explained relatively briefly and therefore my description of it risks minimising any central intricacies, but in short, heutagogy appears to be closely linked to experience-based learning (Kolb 1984; Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993). Lewis-Fitzgerald emphasises what she describes as the importance of utilising non-formal (mentoring, coaching, shadowing, learning on the job) learning and "informal" (that is, serendipitous) learning for people who have been marginalised and/or socially disadvantaged and who hence have become disengaged from learning.

I found slightly puzzling discrepancies between the table which delineates the differences between formal, non-formal and informal learning – their purpose, timing, content, delivery and control – and the content of the preceding pages, and the examples of non-formal learning environments which include "workplace learning/training" (p. 29). However, within the context of the philosophical parameters of this manual, these were understandable. Non-traditional learners are described in a series of lists and templates, with left-hand column "barriers to learning" tabled into sections, and right-hand column "solutions to overcome the barriers". These obstructions include language and literacy, cultural background, physical impairment and the ubiquitous "learning styles". The inherently paternalistic notion of being socially deficient in having "personality traits" of a poor self-image, being a loner or being insecure about abilities, which could

be countered with counselling to "overcome poor motivation, using a buddy system and encouraging group participation" (p.55), concerned me. This section seemed both simplistic in its approach to the complex area of personality and problematic in its notion that some "personalty traits" are troublesome and not socially desirable. There was nothing about cross-cultural training in Aboriginal contexts, anti-colonial and/or anti-racist, ethno-specific activities. There was a similar omission in little advice about educators undertaking their own personal cultural review. Heron (1989, 1993) has stressed the key notions that facilitators examine their role and be aware of the ethical dilemma of being a part of the socially manipulative processes that can be embodied in the power relations between the facilitator-teacher-trainer and the audience-student. Yet there are no such directions in this manual beyond instructions for the trainer/facilitator to "be neutral", to be "self aware and know their own strengths, weaknesses, 'hooks', biases and values" (p. 77). I suspect from experience that this limited advice would do little to illuminate anyone who had not previously encountered challenges to their social constructs and socially constructed perspectives. It would have been useful here to have provided examples of differing perceptions by proposing varied interpretations of stories read through different cultural lenses or methodological perspectives.

I also found the concept of someone being a trainer (as delineated in the title) sat uneasily with the assertion that this manual has an underlying methodological perspective grounded in heutagogy; the concept of someone as a "trainer" would seem to embody the knowledge-owner instructing the knowledge-lacking. Facilitator certainly seems a more appropriate expression in relation to heutogogy, although the terms are used interchangeably or as one word until Chapter 5, where the deliverer is then referred to as a facilitator. However, the chapter title itself, '*Delivering* non-formal learning', seems to be a reiteration of the underlying tension between what the philosophy of the manual is asserted to be and what it

actually is: a prescriptive set of basic group work skills that can be of assistance to those inexperienced in working with groups of people who are being reskilled in the process of learning in order for them to continue their lifelong learning ("lifelong learning = survival skills", p. 10).

Despite my unease with the lack of any acknowledgment (or even awareness?) of the ethical dilemmas which underscore many adult education philosophies, I was keen to read the chapters associated with effective learning. Having observed facilitators in multiple learning situations 'presenting' by taking a position at the front of room and imparting their wisdom over periods of two to three hours before a group of disengaged youth and adults, I had expected that anything designated as a "manual" would include a prescriptive section or discussion or even some micro-strategies about how to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Would a person new to facilitating learning be able to enter a room and be able to facilitate student-centred learning in a group of disengaged people by utilising this manual? Chapter 5 does include long lists of bullet points of key facilitation skills and problems that can occur in learning. It would also be useful to include information about principles of social learning and socio-cultural learning and to include examples of the kinds of exercises that can be utilised by students to seek actively their own solutions, rather than have that wisdom and knowledge imparted passively by a teacher-facilitator.

Chapter 6 was written by a different author and has a different voice. It details the methods for accreditation through assessment including RCC (recognition of current competency) / RPL (recognition of prior learning). This learning is mapped against assessment and accreditation processes in the National Training Framework, a point at which the philosophy embodied by the coffee and chat and gentle transformation seems a bit swamped by the emphasis on assessment and accreditation. Chapter 7 is written by "trainers and other staff"

and includes some useful information about how trainers/facilitators can assist themselves while working in potentially stressful contexts.

This manual is a somewhat repetitive compilation of familiar concepts which are readily available; it includes descriptive information such as the stages of group development (detailed, unreferenced); it would have been useful to follow this with information about how to assist groups to work through these stages in order to become a functioning group. There are sections which detail active listening skills and basic communication strategies (again, unreferenced) and many prescriptive pages about coaching and mentoring.

While I found the exclusion of any discussion about or even acknowledgment of those central dilemmas in education to which I have alluded, this manual does achieve what it means to do. The author states that its function is to assist people who are already qualified trainers and assessors who are facilitating other people in the process of learning to learn, or re-learning how to learn. It is a manual, a set of instructions or directions, and would be useful for anyone entering the field; the reference list provides useful links to additional sources of information. I am unsure whether I can justify a price of $50 for a spiral-bound edition which contains familiar material and an odd inclusion of some clip art in one chapter only, but the CD ROM increased the overall value in terms of the amount of material available to utilise in the learning environments in which this is centred. It is also a pity that the "research into learning" in Chapter 2 of the CD ROM is not in the actual manual, as it adds overall rigour. One minor point too, given that this is a manual and as such the spiral binding is very useful, I would have liked the addition of chapter dividers, colour-coded and tab-ended to enable quick and easy referencing to various sections.

I still have a sense of unease about anything – well intended though it may be – which ignores its white, well-educated and employed, middle class centeredness. I also found the combination of logos of

the sponsoring organisations, varied type styles that vaguely resemble handwriting and a hand-drawing of two cups of coffee on the cover, did little to arrest me. But this manual does provide some useful information and guidelines, and ties some interesting notions about transformative learning and lifelong learning to the government focus of making people work ready.

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BOOK REVIEW

Mind and context in adult second language acquisition: methods, theory, and practice

Cristina Sanz (ed.)
Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005
ISBN: 1-58901-070-1; A$81

Contributors: Rebekha Abbuhl, Rebecca Adams, Harriet Wood Bowden, Melissa Bowles, Heidi Byrnes, Rusan Chen, Akiko Fujii, Ronald P. Leow, Alison Mackey, Kara Morgan-Short, Cristina Sanz, Catherine A. Stafford, Michael T. Ullman, Bill van Patten

The editor, Cristina Sanz, is an associate professor (Spanish linguistics) at Georgetown University, USA, which conducts cross-disciplinary research on cognitive SLA (second language acquisition). In 2001, Cristina ran a course on Instructed SLA that inspired this volume. Most contributors were involved in that course, either as

lecturers or students. The book details their current research in a unique, inter-departmental collaboration including neuroscience, language and linguistics.

The book is intended for researchers and teaching practitioners of adult SLA, but will also be of interest to program directors and SLA courses. It is very readable and packed with intense thought. The ten chapters are divided into four parts: theory and methodology, internal factors, external factors, and pedagogical implications. Each chapter is prefaced with key words and an introduction and finishes with a summary. Most add exercises (quite a few including data analysis), a guided critique on a recommended reading, notes, suggestions for further reading and a comprehensive reference section (as recent as 2005).

Each chapter is placed in historical context. The authors then present their work and primary research question and conclude with future directions. Current gaps and debates in that subject area are clearly identified. However, one main complaint is that given the book is about adult SLA, many examples, activities and readings relate to research on children and in school classrooms.

Chapter 1: Adult SLA: The interaction between external and internal factors. This chapter introduces the topic of adult SLA, describing its history, directions, research and questions. It places the book's over-riding interest in the cognitive processes of adult L2 learners and states the goal of adult SLA research as explaining *what* is learned and *how* it is learned. The tension between various schools of thought is introduced, preparing the reader for the scholarly arguments in the ensuing chapters. The reader is warned that SLA is 'a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by looking at only one aspect of it' (p. 10).

Chapter 2: Research methodology: Quantitative approaches. Written by a statistician, this chapter gives an excellent grounding

in statistical procedures with examples provided in SLA contexts. It explains the logic of hypothesis testing and gives advice on choosing an appropriate statistical test.

Chapter 3: Research methodology: Qualitative research. This chapter argues for more qualitative research in SLA, particularly over the longer term, and discusses the options, considerations and concerns. It's also a good orientation to SLA terminology.

Chapter 4: Individual differences: Age, sex, working memory, and prior knowledge. Some enlightening findings are presented in this chapter, particularly the argument against the critical period hypothesis (encouraging for older learners) and the ramifications of sex differences (due to fluctuating levels of estrogen) on the processing of vocabulary and grammar.

Chapter 5: A cognitive neuroscience perspective on second language acquisition: The declarative/procedural model. New ground is described here by a professor of neuroscience, who makes connections between declarative and procedural memory and lexical and grammatical acquisition, with implications for age and sex factors (with suggestions of pharmacological manipulation!). The good news is that he claims adult learners can achieve L1-like proficiency.

Chapter 6: Attention and awareness in SLA. This chapter reports on recent theories that human attention, contrary to popular belief, is of unlimited capacity, although the control of that attention is problematic. It discusses ways of measuring learner awareness, and using attention and awareness to facilitate learner development.

Chapter 7: Input and interaction. This chapter, despite emerging criticisms of a communicative method that privileges speaking and time-consuming/value-poor activities, argues for more communicative and task-based learning work in class, in support of the interaction hypothesis, which 'suggests that second language

development is facilitated when learners interact with other speakers' (p. 207). The author calls for an emphasis on learner-learner speaking tasks in order to promote interactional negotiations but this a simplistic view of real-time, both within and without the classroom. Chapter 10 argues for a more intellectual approach better suited to mature learners.

Chapter 8: Explicitness in pedagogical interventions: Input, practice and feedback. This chapter presents, to a scholarly depth, the means for teachers to facilitate L2 development, particularly by giving explicit information about the mechanics of the language, by emphasising practice and by giving appropriate feedback.

Chapter 9: Processing instruction. The volume turns to pedagogical implications and now examines how teachers can intervene in learning, by drawing learners' attention to incorrect processing strategies and training them in correct practices.

Chapter 10: Content-based foreign language instruction [CBI]. This chapter is a gem, criticising CBI and SLA research in America and expressing some anger at the resultant 'intellectual displacement'. It also drives home the message of planning curricula for long-term L2 acquisition with the advanced, worldly learner in view. The focus of most research has been on the lower proficiency levels, which has implications when learners reach the advanced levels. The author argues for a rigorous re-interpretation of CBI to better prepare adult learners to participate in an intelligent and intellectual society, through a genre-based literacy.

Overall, the book is densely packed with thought, weaving a complex, intricate web of issues to engage the reader. A main challenge for the relatively young field of SLA research is accessing the mind of the adult learner and then providing specific guidelines for teachers to convert research into practice. This volume makes some attempt to address this, but although some contributors consider the learners'

and teachers' perspectives, others continue to make assumptions from researchers' perspectives. Nevertheless, everyone involved in SLA will be greatly appreciative of this concerted effort to advance knowledge in the field of adult SLA.

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BOOK REVIEW

Enhancing income generation though adult education: a comparative study

Richard G. Bagnall (ed.)
Brisbane: Australian Academic Press, 2003
ISBN: 1-875378-43-X, 176 pages (pbk), A$32

This study of the impact of policy on the role of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Vocational Education and Training (VET) stems from a policy survey and review undertaken by the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE). National as well as local government policy has been reviewed, as well as ongoing management practice functioning as policy. It was conceived in 1998 and case studies were undertaken by regional experts in Fiji, India, the Philippines and Thailand between 1999 and 2000.

As Bagnall points out in the introductory chapter (itself a revision of the issues paper that informed the drafting of each case study), there is a growing global movement away from the perception of 'training' as intellectually inferior to education, and an increase in demand for education that yields an immediate and perceivable vocational outcome. The trend is pronounced in Australia, as witnessed in Bagnall's case study, but is also prevalent in developing nations in which vocational skilling is in demand, as urbanisation decreases traditional reliance on agriculture.

The role of Adult and Community Education (ACE) or Non-Formal Education (NFE) in VET is a worthy object of study, as these forms of provision have considerable overlap with VET – indeed, several writers note that NFE looks increasingly like mainstream VET provision (notably Veramu's paper on Fiji). In many cases, the boundary between the two areas is very indistinct and ACE / NFE autonomy has become eroded, particularly where government grant funding for ACE / NFE provision is dependant on their adherence and compliance to models with a highly vocational focus.

There are two important and contrasting outcomes of this trend. Firstly, the social justice interests that are normally prevalent within ACE / NFE settings have become marginalised – in a programmatic sense – as the demand for measurable vocational outcomes has begun to predominate. The contrasting development is the 'direct and explicit involvement of non-formal educational providers in the provision of formal VET courses', or in courses with recognisable vocational outcomes (p.143). So, while the trend towards vocational education is affecting (and marginalising) aspects of the ACE / NFE sector, the presence of so many ACE / NFE ideas and traditions within vocational educational provision is also shown to be capable of having a very positive impact on the nature of VET.

What emerges from the case studies is the ability of ACE / NFE to infuse VET provision with humanistic attitudes and values that enhance the learner as an individual and a citizen as well as increasing their earning capacity. The most positive aspect of this

is where the provision of critical thinking skills – not normally emphasised with traditional vocational education provision – allow learners to develop entrepreneurship and develop new forms of livelihood.

Further, ACE / NFE provision in most of the countries under study is better capable of delivering services to marginalised groups like rural women, the disabled or Indigenous groups, than government-run VET agencies (this emerges strongly in the Philippines study). ACE / NFE has traditionally also been a major 'second chance' mechanism for those who have either failed in formal education or need re-skilling, or for those whose skills are being forgotten due to lack of use (as is often the case with literary training to adult learners). Finally, ACE / NFE provision, particularly where it is entirely NGO-run and not dependant on government funding, can be far more rapid in reacting to changes in technology or global workplace pressures than formal VET provision that is often subject to the ponderous pace of government regulation.

Unfortunately, the picture developed within the case studies is one where the considerable potential of ACE / NFE is often being thwarted by governmental fixation on vocational competencies as the only valuable and measurable outcome of educational provision, ignoring both the social justice aspects of provision to marginalised groups, and the potential benefits of entrepreneurial activity created by the development of critical thinking. A major lesson, according to Bagnall's final synthesis, is that ACE / NFE is vital for a strong, vibrant and diverse culture of VET provision, one which is responsive to the needs of different cultural groups as well as to the changes in global and local employment markets.

As it is a policy review rather than a view of best practice, one is left curious about the precise nature of many of the ACE / NFE courses discussed, and whether their content could readily be transferred into other contexts. One area of research that is of particular importance

to both NFE and VET is ways to provide VET that manage to instil values associated with sustainability and social justice, while not losing sight of the economic and vocational imperative. Another important and related area, highlighted by Bagnall, is the need for an understanding of how different sectors of education might cooperate in vocational education. One hopes that the availability of this volume might go some way to stimulating further research in these areas, as well as informing policy as VET reform in Australia and its region continues.

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