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Bringing Skills Back In: A Space for Literacy in a Social Realist Curriculum

Lizzie Grace

Abstract

Skills have a significant role in contemporary education discourse, but there has been little engagement with the concept of skills from a social realist viewpoint. Skills are represented in social realist literature in a narrow, instrumentalist sense. This precludes the possibility for more a complex construction of skills to contribute to social realist notions of a powerful and equitable curriculum. In this paper, literacy is used as an example of a skill which is not easily explained by social realist depictions of skills, but which shares important characteristics with the social realist concept of powerful knowledge. I argue that the best way to describe literacy from a social realist perspective is as a “powerful skill”, and that such skills, alongside “powerful knowledge,” are an important part of a curriculum that contributes to social justice.

Key words

Social realism, powerful knowledge, literacy, skills, curriculum

Introduction

Compared to knowledge, skills have a relatively secure position in contemporary curriculum discourse. They are, of course, central to the growing Twenty-First Century Skills movement (Trilling, 2009), as well as dominating competency-based vocational education curricula (Wheelahan, 2015). *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) provides substantially more information about what students ought to be able to *do* than about what they ought to *know*, and this is also reflected in the content of national assessment requirements at both primary and secondary level (Ministry of Education, 2010; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, n.d.). Skills are also prominent in global education discourse, particularly with reference to preparation for work. Two of the seven indicators for the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (the main goal concerning education) explicitly mention skills (Indicators 4.3 and 4.7), while a third refers to literacy and numeracy; together, these are all of the indicators that address what students should learn, rather than who should have access to education (United Nations, 2016).

While social realism tends to position itself in opposition to these trends, a comprehensive social realist approach to skills has not yet been offered. The primary object of concern for social realist writers is *knowledge*, especially questions about what

makes certain knowledge valuable and the role of knowledge in the curriculum. Social realists argue that the primary purpose of schooling is to provide equitable access to powerful knowledge, and that the lack of access to this knowledge is the most significant form of educational inequality (Rata & Barrett, 2014). “Powerful knowledge,” a term first used by Wheelahan (2007) and expanded upon by Michael Young (2010a, 2010b) refers to knowledge that is considered especially valuable due to certain characteristics, including generalisability, being distinct from everyday experience, and being created and evaluated through the procedures of the academic disciplines. The social realist view is that contemporary education is trending away from the provision of powerful knowledge, in favour of instrumentalist, skills-based curricula targeted at preparation for work instead of at intellectual development, and “culturally responsive” curricula that trap students in their own experiences.

An early articulation of this argument can be found in Young’s (2008) book, *Bringing Knowledge Back In*. Young offers social realism as an alternative to the relativism of the New Sociology of Education, and argues that questions about knowledge and what should be taught in schools need to be central to education policy and research. Equitable access to knowledge is seen by social realists to be the foundation of a socially just education system. It is argued that education can empower students from disadvantaged social groups by providing access to powerful conceptual knowledge, rather than by accepting students’ social or everyday knowledge as a substitute for academic knowledge. While social realism has foundations in the work of early 20th century theorists such as Durkheim, Vygotsky, and Bernstein, it is a relatively new contributor to educational debate and, as such, has been subject to strong critique, with many questioning whether social realism’s central concepts, including powerful knowledge, are coherent and useful concepts for exploring educational issues (Catling & Martin, 2011; White, 2012; Yates & Millar, 2016). In this paper, I argue that there is a need to “bring skills back in” to social realist arguments about curriculum. A social realist approach to skills, which draws on the perspective’s ideas about knowledge, offers an alternative to the instrumentalist and procedural approaches to skills that currently dominate education policy and discourse, and further develops the explanatory power of social realism as an educational theory.

While there is much discussion in social realist literature about knowledge and what makes it valuable, there is little parallel discussion of the role of skills in the curriculum. Skills in social realist writing tend to be characterised in three ways: as context-bound procedural knowledge; an attempt to engage students in thought without content; or as symptomatic of an increasingly instrumental approach to education. These characterisations suggest that skills should not be treated as an important part of a curriculum informed by social realist principles. In this paper, I argue that the way social realism conceptualises skills is too narrow and simplistic, and acts as an obstacle to an understanding of the potential value of skills in a curriculum that has equity as a principal aim. Social realist literature regarding skills is explored, and three prominent ways of envisioning skills in social realism are examined. Literacy is used as an example of a skill that is not adequately described by these approaches. I argue for a more nuanced approach to skills that includes the notion of “powerful skills,” which share the characteristics used by social realists to identify powerful knowledge. Literacy is

presented as an example of a powerful skill, and the ways in which it embodies the attributes of powerful knowledge are explored.

“Skills” in social realism

This section will explore three ways skills are represented by social realist writers. I argue that none of these approaches offers an adequate description of the full range of skills that could be taught in schools, because they discount the role of complex intellectual skills. Literacy is used as an example of such a skill, and the ways each approach outlined below fail to explain literacy as a skill will be discussed.

Skills appear in the substantial social realist literature on vocational education as “procedural knowledge” as opposed to “theoretical knowledge” (Wheelahan, 2015, p. 753). Theoretical or powerful knowledge is integrated with other knowledge, and can be generalised and used to think beyond the task at hand. In contrast, procedural knowledge consists of specific knowledge of how to complete a particular task. Wheelahan argues that vocational education in Anglophone countries, where competency-based training is dominant, emphasises procedural knowledge and does not provide access to powerful theoretical knowledge. Vocational courses tend to teach students how to perform the tasks associated with the occupation they are preparing for, without teaching the underlying concepts that explain why the task is done in this way and which would allow students to participate in debates within the profession. As a greater proportion of working-class students participate in vocational courses rather than in academic courses, this tendency leads to differential access to powerful knowledge along class lines.

This is, arguably, a simplistic view of the teaching of skills in vocational education, but it also has very little to say about intellectual skills such as literacy. Literacy development does not entail learning a set of procedures for performing particular tasks; rather, it requires the student to develop the capacity to use a complex system of symbols for a variety of interrelated purposes. The focus in social realist literature on procedural skills in comparison to complex knowledge allows social realist writers to argue that knowledge is more valuable than skills. However, a better parallel for procedural skills may be rote-learned knowledge, which social realists are generally quick to reject (Beck, 2012). Rather than an argument for knowledge over skills, then, this is an argument for complexity and generalisability over the simplistic and the context-bound.

Gamble’s (2014) research on craft knowledge has some interesting implications for this point. Her work suggests an approach to vocational education that would provide students with the generalisable and theoretical knowledge underpinning their chosen occupation. Students in the apprenticeship-model trade school in Gamble’s study are expected to gain a tacit understanding of the theoretical principles that explain why tasks (such as building a table) are done in a certain way. What is important, however, is not that the student is able to articulate these general, abstract principles—indeed, Gamble claims that the teacher in this scenario is also unable to do this—but rather that they are able to demonstrate their knowledge through the successful completion of the task. Likewise, successful literacy learning is evidenced by what the student is able to do with language, rather than their ability to explain how language works. The desired outcome

of both literacy teaching and Gamble's craft pedagogy is what the student is able to do—their skills—rather than the explicit knowledge they possess. What is interesting here is that, while Gamble writes from a social realist perspective, the pedagogy described here is constructivist. Students in the carpentry workshop construct their own knowledge of carpentry through their attempts at constructing tables and other objects, and they learn particular skills only as they become useful. Skills are always practised in the context of a project, never in isolation, and students are expected to derive the conceptual knowledge underlying the procedures they follow through working these procedures out for themselves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the literacy teaching approach that most closely resembles Gamble's craft pedagogy is the writers' workshop, where students work on individual writing projects with the support of the teacher, and learn specific techniques and approaches only as they become relevant to the student's own writing (Atwell, 2015; Welsh, 2013). Both are constructivist pedagogies—usually dismissed by social realist writers—which minimise explicit instruction and are guided by children's interests.

Gamble's work also has implications for another prominent approach to skills in social realism, which positions them as activities one performs on, or with, knowledge. Rata makes this point in relation to the focus on skills rather than knowledge in NCEA:

In the absence of specific detail about content in subjects such as English and History, the student is left “thinking”, “understanding”, “examining”, “exploring”, and all the other verbs that denote doing something with knowledge but without referring to the actual knowledge that is the raw material for the action. (2012, p. 131)

Rata's argument is that students need to learn the content and concepts of a discipline before they can practise the activities that the discipline performs with its knowledge. While acknowledging that such skills are valuable, it is argued that these skills are performed and practised through the acquisition and communication of knowledge, rather than through teaching that is directed at skill development. Similarly, it is often argued that literacy, particularly advanced disciplinary literacy, must be learned in the context of using literacy skills for a purpose, including the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). While this approach does not claim that skills are unimportant, the explicit teaching of skills is pushed into the background of the curriculum. It is assumed that literacy and other skills will develop automatically as they are practised in the context of acquiring knowledge. While some students undoubtedly continue to develop their literacy skills through exposure to increasingly complex texts in the course of their study of other subjects, others, particularly those who enter secondary school with less developed literacy skills, tend not to progress without further literacy instruction, and struggle to learn course content as a result (Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Kim et al., 2016; Marchand-Martella, Martella, Modderman, Petersen, & Pan, 2013; Wendt, 2013). While social realism argues that a focus on skills risks diminishing access to knowledge, a focus on knowledge also risks impeding skill development.

Social realist writers also claim that the increasing focus on skills in contemporary

curricula is a sign of an increasingly instrumentalist view of education, where the purpose of education is preparation for work in the “Global Knowledge Economy,” rather than intellectual development. There is plenty of evidence that this approach to skills is dominant in current educational discourse. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s *Global Skills Outlook 2017* report (OECD, 2017) identifies which skills countries should focus on developing through education based on which skills are in demand in global value chains, and would therefore enable countries to engage with global markets and technologically advanced industries. Sustainable Development Target 4.4 targets the development of “skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship,” (United Nations, 2016) and the indicator for that target focuses on information communications technology (ICT) skills in particular. On a global scale, then, skills are an important part of an approach that values education primarily in relation to its contribution to a country’s economy, rather than for its contributions to democracy, social cohesion, or intellectual development. In much social realist writing, “skills” are synonymous with this instrumentalist approach to education, and are therefore readily dismissed, because the purposes of education from an instrumentalist point of view are very different to the purposes of education according to social realism.

Young (2010a) argues that educational decision-makers ought to resist pressure to take responsibility for addressing social and economic issues. Instead, he posits intellectual development as the primary aim of education, and argues that this is concept-based rather than skill-based. This argument is based, in part, on the simplistic notions of skills as procedural knowledge discussed above. In contrast, Rata (2012) argues that the development of literacy is the development of the ability to think conceptually rather than concretely, and therefore is equivalent to the development of intelligence. This points to the potential for a more complex notion of skills to have a place—perhaps a central one—in social realist conceptions of a curriculum aimed at intellectual development.

Powerful knowledge, powerful literacy

This paper uses the term “powerful literacy” to indicate an alignment between literacy and the social realist concept of “powerful knowledge.” However, the term is also used in critical pedagogy, an approach that is often considered antithetical to social realism (Rata, 2012). Both paradigms are concerned with how education can be a source of power for disadvantaged students, and with education’s role in reducing social inequalities. According to critical pedagogy, this ought to be done by teaching students to examine and critique their social conditions and the ways that power is enacted in their lives. Critical pedagogy has close ties with literacy, given its origins with Paulo Freire’s adult literacy work (Freire, 2000). In his work with working class adults in Brazil, Freire taught basic literacy in conjunction with discussions about his students’ social conditions, using a dialogical approach which drew substantially on students’ everyday knowledge. Freire’s notion of “reading the word” and “reading the world” (Freire, 1985, p. 18) is central to critical pedagogy and expresses how its advocates conceptualise the power of literacy.

Arguments for the power of literacy and its importance in a curriculum with social justice objectives are familiar from the critical pedagogy perspective (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Finn, 1999; Freire, 2000). In this section, I hope to show that an emphasis on literacy, and other powerful intellectual skills, is also consistent with the social realist model of education for social justice. Central to this discussion is the concept of powerful knowledge (Young, 2010a, p. 11). The way that powerful knowledge is defined is closely linked to the contrasting phrase, “knowledge of the powerful” (Young, 2010a, p. 11). This concept is aligned with the constructivist view of knowledge developed by the New Sociology of Education, and reflects the position that certain knowledge is powerful because it is the knowledge held by people in power; the power rests with the knower, rather than with the knowledge. From this perspective, working-class students have poor educational outcomes because schooling privileges the knowledge of the upper and middle classes. If schooling and society recognised the knowledge of the working classes as valuable, then these educational inequalities would be substantially reduced. From this perspective, there is nothing about the knowledge itself which makes it more or less powerful.

Powerful knowledge, on the other hand, is the phrase used in social realism to refer to knowledge that is intrinsically powerful, and therefore beneficial to all students. Providing access to this knowledge is considered by social realists to be essential for a just and equitable education system, and inequitable educational outcomes are argued to be the result of failing to provide this knowledge to all students. Powerful knowledge refers to knowledge that possesses a particular set of characteristics, which Young and others argue make that knowledge the ideal basis for the curriculum (Rata, 2012; Young, 2010a). In this section, I describe these characteristics and explain how they are embodied in literacy. Because these characteristics can be identified in literacy, it follows that literacy ought to be considered an important curriculum component from a social realist perspective.

Separation from experience

A key characteristic of powerful knowledge identified by Young (2010a) is differentiation from experience. This distinction is drawn from Durkheim’s notions of the “sacred” and “profane” (Durkheim, 1926). Durkheim initially used these ideas to separate religious and everyday ways of thinking, but argued that the distinction is fundamental to all societies, even as society becomes increasingly secularised. This distinction, between everyday, practical knowledge (the profane) and abstract, symbolic, and later scientific knowledge (the sacred), is a fundamental idea for social realism. While students can gain everyday or social knowledge through experience, Young (2010a) argues that schools are responsible for providing access to knowledge that is not available through experience. Such knowledge is powerful precisely because it gives students the ability to think about the world beyond what they have experienced themselves, and so they have the ability to imagine themselves and society in ways other than as they currently are. Literacy shares this characteristic because school literacies are different from the literacies found in the home. Exposure to literate practices in the home varies widely between students, and tends to be linked to socioeconomic status (Finn, 1999; Waldfogel, 2012).

However, all students are asked to produce and interact with different types of texts in ways that are different from the ways texts are used at home and at work. This is particularly the case as students develop discipline-specific literacies in secondary school and beyond. Disciplinary literacies require students to recognise how language is used differently in different disciplines, including differentiating between the precise, technical meanings of words that may also have everyday, social meanings—such as “prime” in mathematics or “parent” in chemistry (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). While constructivist theories emphasise the need to bring everyday literacies, along with everyday knowledge, into the classroom (Kist & Ryan, 2009; New London Group, 1996), social realist writers argue that the role of schools is to provide knowledge, and literacies, which are not found in everyday life. Rata (2012) argues against the influence of constructivism on literacy education, which has led to an increasing emphasis on everyday literacy practices, rather than inducting students into academic and disciplinary literacies. While some literacy practices are found in students’ everyday experience, then, school literacy has the potential to take students far beyond these experiences.

Links with academic disciplines

Young (2010b) also argues that powerful knowledge is derived from the knowledge produced by experts in the academic disciplines, albeit recontextualised for schooling. It is argued that these disciplines form the social basis upon which knowledge is constructed, tested and evaluated, and therefore the basis upon which the objectivity of knowledge can be assured. This facet of powerful knowledge is perhaps the one with the strongest links to research on adolescent literacy, which includes a significant body of literature about disciplinary literacy (see, for example, May & Wright, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wendt, 2013). Each discipline has specific ways of thinking and creating knowledge, and these are reflected in the different ways each discipline uses language. Developing competence in a discipline’s literacy practices is therefore necessary for the acquisition of the powerful knowledge created by that discipline. Many authors on disciplinary literacy emphasise that these literacy practices must be learned in the context of the acquisition of content knowledge, and content area teachers also tend to be more open to their role as literacy teachers when literacy practice is embedded in content learning (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

While the relationship between literacy and the disciplines is clear, this approach does raise some concerns. The implicit argument about literacy development in much social realist literature is that, while literacy is undoubtedly important, it will develop naturally as the student reads, writes, and performs other literacy tasks in the process of acquiring powerful knowledge (Rata, 2012). However, this raises a set of issues which echo social realism’s concerns about constructivist pedagogies, where students learn knowledge only as it becomes applicable to their projects and interests, rather than acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated concepts that make up a discipline (Ormond, 2014; Rata, 2012). When students are expected to learn one thing through the process of learning or doing something else, that learning is inevitably fragmented, because it is determined by the needs of the task, rather than by what needs

to be learned. This applies to the acquisition of science knowledge through participation in an environmental conservation project, but it applies equally to the development of literacy skills through reading a textbook or writing an essay. In both cases, only the knowledge or skills required by the activity will be developed, and it is highly likely that this will result in significant gaps in the students' learning. It is therefore essential that literacy and other skills be treated as important educational outcomes in their own right, not merely as desirable side-effects of knowledge acquisition.

Generalisability

A third important feature of powerful knowledge is that it is generalisable, rather than context-bound. This idea has already been considered in terms of procedural knowledge as a primary social realist conceptualisation of skills. Everyday knowledge tends to be confined to the contexts in which it is learned, or to the society in which it is produced. Objective, theoretical, conceptual knowledge developed in the academic disciplines, however, includes generalisable concepts which apply in multiple contexts (Young, 2010a). Significantly, this also means that the concepts can be used to generalise beyond one's own experience. Literacy embodies this characteristic of powerful knowledge because it is a form of symbolic thinking. Language is a system of symbols which allows for infinite varieties of ideas to be expressed (Halliday, 1994), and so is an essential tool for thinking of things in ways other than as they are, or thinking beyond one's personal experience. Rata (2012) argues that the development of literacy is the development of the capacity for symbolic and conceptual thought. This ability to think in terms of symbols and concepts, rather than only in terms of the concrete, is necessary to enable one to generalise beyond the concrete instances of a concept.

Powerful knowledge, powerful skills

If literacy has many of the characteristics of powerful knowledge, does that mean that literacy should be considered as a form of knowledge rather than as a skill? This is a tempting approach, as it allows for literacy to be included within a social realist curriculum model without disrupting the centrality of knowledge in that model. It is also almost true by definition; if powerful knowledge is defined by the characteristics discussed earlier, then literacy must be powerful knowledge. However, literacy is primarily taught, assessed, and valued as something that students *do*, rather than something they *know*. An individual is considered literate based on what they are able to do, rather than the knowledge they possess.

One way to circumvent this issue is to reduce literacy to knowledge about language. From this perspective, students become literate by acquiring knowledge, first of letters, then of simple words and sentences, through to more complex understandings of grammar, spelling, vocabulary, structure, and genre. Literacy is therefore the possession of this knowledge about language. While the explicit teaching of grammar and other aspects of knowledge about language this perspective would imply is currently unpopular in New Zealand education, and in global education trends (Locke, 2010), the same is true of many recommendations that arise from social realist work in education. Christie and Macken-Horarik (2007) have argued that such explicit knowledge about

language should be the centre of the English curriculum. Within English as an academic discipline, of course, explicit knowledge about language is required in order to analyse texts, which is a primary way of producing knowledge within the discipline. However, several recent meta-analyses have found that explicit grammar instruction has little effect, or even a negative effect, on student writing quality (Andrews et al., 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Wyse, 2001). While the dearth of high-quality empirical research in this area means that these findings are not conclusive, it is nonetheless worth noting that, once again, it is what students are able to do with their knowledge about language, rather than their possession of that knowledge, that is considered valuable. This is in contrast to, for instance, scientific knowledge, where what a student knows is far more highly valued. This is not to say that knowledge about language is not valuable; however, it does not constitute literacy. Therefore, it makes the most sense to treat literacy as a skill rather than as knowledge.

So far, I have explained how social realist writers represent skills and their role in the curriculum, and explained how social realism characterises the powerful knowledge that forms the centre of a social realist curriculum. I have argued that literacy is more comfortably situated within the definition of powerful knowledge than within the social realist interpretation of skills. On this basis, I argue that the way social realist writers represent skills is too narrow to encompass the full range of skills that could be taught in school, and that intellectual skills such as literacy are especially neglected. The best way to describe literacy's place within social realism is as a "powerful skill" that is powerful in the same ways certain types of knowledge are powerful. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in depth what other skills might be considered powerful in this sense. It is possible that literacy may be unparalleled as a skill that provides students with the ability to move beyond their experience, think about the world in new ways, and have power within their social world. However, there is the potential for other skills to be treated similarly. It may, for instance, be more productive to consider certain parts of mathematics and science curricula in terms of skills to be learned rather than knowledge to be acquired. If this is the case, both the acquisition of powerful knowledge and the development of powerful skills ought to be treated as central elements of paramount importance in the curriculum.

Skills and knowledge in a social realist curriculum

This argument raises the question of what a curriculum that recognises the importance of powerful skills as well as powerful knowledge would look like in practice. To the extent that powerful skills could replace powerful knowledge in the curriculum, this would have profound implications for the choice of content students ought to learn. A key argument in social realism is that the specific content students ought to learn should be set by the curriculum, rather than being determined by individual schools' or teachers' decisions based on teachers' own knowledge, assessment requirements, and students' interests (Rata, 2012; Young, 2010a). Because this content is identified as what students need to acquire as a result of schooling, content selection decisions must be made on the basis of what knowledge is best for all students to have, rather than on a pedagogical basis that considers what students will be interested in. In cases where skill

development is the primary curriculum objective, however, there is considerably more room for variation in content. At the extreme, where only skill development is expected, content selection becomes a pedagogical decision about what will engage the student and provide the greatest opportunities for skill development. Provided there is content of interest available that provides those skill development opportunities, selecting content that students will want to engage with is clearly advisable. Given the shared objectives of the social realist and critical pedagogy approaches, increased flexibility relative to content would also allow for the incorporation of content advocated for by proponents of critical pedagogy, such as content that is directly related to important contemporary social issues.

This approach is consistent with many assessments in New Zealand's national secondary school qualification, NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement). The English and History assessment standards, for instance, ask students to demonstrate their ability to write an essay and their understanding of important disciplinary concepts (such as theme, character, and setting in English, or continuity and change in History), but do not dictate which content students should learn in the process of developing these skills and their knowledge of the concepts. As Ormond (2014) argues regarding History, however, this approach can easily lead to the emptying of content from the curriculum, as neither the content nor the quantity of content made available to History students is standardised. It is therefore possible for students to demonstrate the skills and conceptual understandings required by the assessment without acquiring a comprehensive body of knowledge. Developing powerful skills without compromising access to powerful knowledge, then, is a significant challenge.

Earlier in this paper I argued that one potential approach to this challenge, allowing literacy and other powerful skills to develop automatically through the acquisition of powerful knowledge, is inadequate if one recognises the importance of developing such skills. Research on academic literacy suggests that even students who earn the qualifications required to pursue further study sometimes do not have sufficient opportunities to learn the literacy skills needed to succeed at tertiary level (Emerson, Kilpin, & Feekery, 2014; Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016). This research shows that while these qualifications appear to require advanced literacy skills, teachers—under significant pressure to ensure their students meet University Entrance requirements—sometimes address their students' lack of these skills by providing other ways for them to pass assessments, such as providing the necessary knowledge through less sophisticated texts. This is more likely to occur in schools and classes with high proportions of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. A significant element of the social realist argument is that decisions about important learning should not be made on a local level, because this leads to differential access to powerful knowledge—and powerful skills—that is likely to lead to students being fixed in their own experiences (Rata, 2012; Young, 2010a). What is required, then, is a curriculum which allows dedicated opportunities for the methodical development of both powerful knowledge and powerful skills. Ensuring that neither knowledge nor skills are neglected in this curriculum is an extremely complex, ongoing task.

Conclusion

This paper proposed a social realist approach to “powerful literacy,” and argued that literacy’s compatibility with the characteristics of “powerful knowledge” indicates the need for social realism to incorporate a more nuanced understanding of skills and their role in an empowering curriculum. Important social realist literature relating to skills has been examined, and I have argued that the ways skills are represented in this literature is overly simplistic. Three key characteristics of powerful knowledge—differentiation from experience, connection to academic disciplines, and generalisability—have been considered in relation to literacy. Literacy shares these important characteristics with the type of knowledge which social realist writers argue ought to be at the centre of the curriculum. This suggests that skills such as literacy are powerful in the same way that certain types of knowledge are powerful, and that an equitable, empowering curriculum ought to include these powerful skills alongside powerful knowledge. This argument raises questions about what *other* skills might be considered powerful, and what a curriculum that aims to provide equitable access to both powerful skills and powerful knowledge would look like. It also poses a social realist challenge to the technical and instrumentalist approaches to skills that currently dominate education policy globally. Bringing skills back in to social realist ideas about curriculum will contribute to a more complete picture of a curriculum that provides all students with the intellectual resources they need to participate and thrive in democratic society.

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Curriculum and Identity in the Pacific

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Abstract

This article examines the inclusion of the term “identity” as a central idea in the national curricula of three Pacific nations: New Zealand, The Republic of Nauru, and The Cook Islands. Curriculum statements and policy documents from each nation are analysed using the conceptual tools of knowledge differentiation and culturalism in order to understand what is meant by identity in these curricula. The appearance of the term in national curricula has been relatively swift and unproblematised. However, this article claims it has had a two-fold, deleterious effect. First, a focus on developing dispositions related to identity has the potential to displace subject knowledge. Secondly, the view of “identity as ethnicity” supports the shift to culturally responsive pedagogy and practice in the education systems of these countries. The emphasis on social or cultural identity may restrict students to their experiences and limit access to academic knowledge.

Keywords: identity, knowledge, curriculum, Pacific education

Introduction

This article outlines a study that examines the inclusion of student identity affirmation in the national curricula of three Pacific nations with educational, political, and economic ties—New Zealand, The Republic of Nauru, and The Cook Islands—and considers the implications of this inclusion for students’ access to knowledge. The study problematised the requirement that students are “positive in their own identity” (Ministry of Education, NZ, 2007, p. 8) in order to explain and critique the changes to curriculum and the implications of the shift from a focus on academic subjects to a culturally responsive approach. In spite of their strong educational ties, each nation shows varying interpretations of the inclusion and commitment to student identity in their curricula and educational policies.

The New Zealand Curriculum

Of the three nations, New Zealand is the largest in population and landmass, and has the strongest and most stable economy. It also has considerable influence on the curricula of Pacific Island nations such as The Cook Islands and the Republic of Nauru as both an aid donor and provider of educational curriculum consultants in the Pacific region.

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education NZ, 2007) directs “that students’ identities . . . are recognised and affirmed” (p. 9). While there is no further

explanation of the meaning of the term or how teachers might recognise or affirm their students' identities, the terms identity or identities appear 17 times in what is a concise curriculum document. The majority of references pertain to a student's personal identity and address curriculum aspirations that students' identities are recognised, considered, affirmed, strengthened, and understood. Further references relate to affirming and recognising a New Zealand national identity, understanding language as an expression of identity, and knowing about identity. Two single specific references are made to strengthening Maori students' identities, and the notion of multiple identities is acknowledged (see Figure 1). The significance of these references can be appreciated when compared with the usage of other terms that might be considered important in a national curriculum. The terms "citizen" or "citizenship", for example, appear nine times, while the word "learner" features 16 times. There can be little doubt that the notion of identity holds a place of some significance in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Figure 1: References to Identity in the New Zealand Curriculum (2007)

<i>Vision</i>	Positive in their own identity. (p. 8)
<i>Principles</i>	The curriculum is non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory; it ensures that students' identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed. (p. 9)
<i>Key Competencies</i>	Opportunities to develop the competencies occur in social contexts. People adopt and adapt practices that they see used and valued by those closest to them, and they make these practices part of their own identity and expertise. (p. 12)
<i>English</i>	The study of New Zealand and world literature contributes to students' developing sense of identity, their awareness of New Zealand's bicultural heritage, and their understanding of the world. (p. 18)
<i>Health Education</i>	Students build resilience through strengthening their personal identity and sense of self-worth through managing change and loss, and through engaging in processes for responsible decision-making. (p. 23)
<i>Learning Languages</i>	As [students] move between, and respond to, different languages and different cultural practices, they are challenged to consider their own identities and assumptions. (p. 24)
<i>Learning in Years 1-6</i>	The transition from early childhood education to school is supported when the school: fosters a child's relationships with teachers and other children and affirms their identity. (p. 41)
<i>Principles</i>	These principles put students at the centre of teaching and learning, asserting that they should experience a curriculum that engages and challenges them, is forward-looking and inclusive, and affirms New Zealand's unique identity. (p. 9)

<i>Official Languages</i>	Te reo Maori is indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a taonga recognised under the Treaty of Waitangi, a primary source of our nation’s self-knowledge and identity, and an official language. By understanding and using te reo Maori, New Zealanders become more aware of the role played by the indigenous language and culture in defining and asserting our point of difference in the wider world. (p. 14)
	By learning te reo Maori, students are able to: . . . strengthen Aotearoa New Zealand’s identity in the world. (p. 14)
<i>English:</i>	Translation of the whakatauki: Ko te reo te tuakiri, Ko te reo toku ahurei, Ko te reo te ora. Language is my identity, Language is my uniqueness, Language is life. (p. 18)
<i>Learning Languages</i>	Translation of a whakatauki: Ko tou reo, ko toku reo, te tuakiri tangata. Tihei uriuri, tihei nakonako. Your voice and my voice are expressions of identity. May our descendants live on and our hopes be fulfilled. (p. 24)
	Languages and cultures play a key role in developing our personal, group, national, and human identities. (p. 24)
<i>Social Sciences</i>	Conceptual strand: Identity, Culture, and Organisation—Students learn about society and communities and how they function. They also learn about the diverse cultures and identities of people within those communities and about the effects of these on the participation of groups and individuals. As they explore how others see themselves, students clarify their own identities in relation to their particular heritages and contexts. (p. 30)
<i>Official Languages</i>	By learning te reo and becoming increasingly familiar with tikanga, Maori students strengthen their identities, while non-Maori journey towards shared cultural understandings. (p. 14)
<i>Dance</i>	[Students] explore and use dance elements, vocabularies, processes, and technologies to express personal, group, and cultural identities, to convey and interpret artistic ideas, and to strengthen social interaction. (p. 20)

The inclusion of identity in New Zealand’s curriculum can be viewed as a response to the claim that has been substantiated in educational reports, namely, that students from marginalised ethnic minorities, especially Maori¹ and Pasifika² students, are overrepresented in negative educational statistics (Alton Lee, 2003). These students are classified as “priority learners” by the Ministry of Education in their attempt to recognise and address systemic underachievement. One of the principal solutions for addressing underachievement was to focus on affirming marginalised students’ identities. The Pasifika Education Plan 2009-2012, for example, sets out the government’s strategy for addressing underachievement and improving educational outcome. In order to do so, it specifically connects Pasifika students’ achievement with their cultural identity:

*Success in education requires harnessing Pasifika diversity within an enabling education system that works for young people, their families and communities. This requires the education system, leadership, and **curricula to start with the Pasifika learner at the centre, drawing on strong cultures, identities and languages** [emphasis added].*

(Ministry of Education NZ, 2009, p. 7)

Pasifika Success is characterized by demanding, vibrant, dynamic, successful Pasifika learners, secure and confident in their identities [emphasis added], languages and cultures, navigating through all curriculum areas such as the arts, sciences, technology, social sciences and mathematics. (Ministry of Education NZ, 2013, p. 3)

In New Zealand education, the task of ensuring that Pasifika students are secure and confident in their identities is viewed as a principal role of the school as well as the community and family. The most recent Educational Review Office (ERO) report emphasises the importance of “Cultural Diversity”. It is one of eight principles in the *New Zealand Curriculum* that provide a foundation for schools’ decision making. This principle calls for schools and teachers to affirm students’ different cultural identities, and incorporate their cultural contexts into teaching and learning programmes. The ERO reported the schools that enacted cultural diversity showed the following characteristics and recommended that schools should incorporate these practices:

- teachers were aware of students’ different cultural identities;
- students’ cultural contexts were incorporated into teaching and learning programmes and into the classroom environment;
- teachers provided practical opportunities for all students to be proud and share their languages and cultures through cultural groups, special events, and school festivals that celebrated cultural difference;
- all students experienced learning contexts from multiple cultures;
- there were clear expectations in schools’ charters for celebration of diversity, stating the right of all children to feel culturally safe;
- boards that had developed such charters sought representation from all the cultures of their school community, and staff were representative of many cultures. (ERO, 2012)

The understanding of identity in these documents clearly means cultural and ethnic identity. Teaching and learning programmes have been developed to respond to the identity affirmation requirement. Students may participate in “cultural groups, special events and school festivals” such as *kapa haka*³ or *Polyfest*⁴. *Polyfest* is an annual festival that began in the 1970s as a way for students to demonstrate “pride in their cultural identity and heritage and bring schools and the different cultures between them together” (ASB Polyfest, n.d., para. 1). It is an example of how an extra-curricular activity is now included in the school curriculum. It is sufficiently embedded as valid school knowledge that the national assessment system—the National Certificate for

Educational Achievement (NCEA)—awards credits for participation and achievement in this cultural activity.

The assessment often involves students being filmed performing in a group. They are assessed on factors including dance choreography, movement, technique, and coordination. Students can achieve credits in year 11, 12, and 13 in achievement and unit standards chosen by the teacher. For example, year 12 students can gain credits under the achievement standard Dance 2.4: Perform in a theatre dance work. Many schools use a level 2 standard: Perform an ethnic or social dance to communicate understanding of the style and a level 3 standard: Perform a group dance. However the repertoire standards—2.5 and 3.5 were specifically written for this type of performance and give the students more appropriate credit value for the amount of work involved in being part of a festival performance. (Ministry of Education, NZ, n.d., para. 3)

The issue is not that the knowledge and activity itself is not a *real* school subject. Music and dance, along with other creative subjects have a justified place in an academic curriculum in that these subjects are informed by theoretical knowledge. McPhail (2014) describes this as “legitimation; [where] student interests and varied . . . skills can be utilised in assessments, broadening what knowledge can be seen and heard as legitimate” (p. 4). The problematic issue is that the purpose of studying music and dance for these students is to affirm their ethnic identities by developing cultural knowledge that is restricted to a specific social group identified in terms of its ethnicity or racial origins.

The inclusion of the cultural and social knowledge in these types of activities has the effect of replacing or “dislodging” (Wood & Sheehan, 2012, p. 17) school subject knowledge from the disciplines in the curriculum. New Zealand writers have noticed the changing face of knowledge in the past decade and explained it in terms of a shift from epistemic to experiential or social knowledge. Ormond (2011), for example, expresses a concern about a subtle and “surreptitious” shift away from knowledge in secondary school history (p. 1). McPhail (2013) considers similar concerns in the secondary school music curriculum as he describes the tensions that teachers face as they attempt to balance the theory of music education with student engagement. He claims that teachers’ inclination to support students’ participation in music through performance has meant, “there is a risk that students may be denied access to important conceptual knowledge” (p. 52). The same argument is made here with respect to the inclusion of identity in New Zealand’s curriculum. The desire to address concerns about educational achievement, to use culturally relevant pedagogical practices, and to support and sustain student self-efficacy through the affirmation of identity may have the effect of trapping students in their social and cultural identities and limiting access to the universal knowledge that is developed in academic disciplines and altered for teaching in schools in the form of subjects such as maths, science, music and so on.

The Cook Islands Curriculum

The Cook Islands is a group of 15 islands with a total land area of 240 square kilometres spread across 800,000 square kilometres of ocean. The island population numbers 10,900, which is considerably less than the 58,000 Cook Islanders living in New Zealand. Given these statistics, the fact that Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens, and the relationship of free association between the two countries, it is not surprising to find comparable characteristics in each country's curricula. One of those characteristics is an increased emphasis on identity.

The term, identity, appears in both The Cook Islands Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, Cook Islands, 2002) and also in Social Sciences Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Cook Islands, 2006). It not only appears more frequently than in the New Zealand document but greater detail is given about the reason for its inclusion, what knowledge should be developed, and how it should be understood. Nine references to identity are included in The Cook Islands Curriculum Framework. The first reference explains that the purpose of the curriculum is to "develop students with a strong Cook Islands identity" (2006, p. 2) and further elaborates:

The school curriculum will acknowledge and value the special place that is the Cook Islands and will give students the opportunity to learn about Cook Islands culture and language. It will ensure that Cook Islands cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, histories and events are recognised and respected. (2006, p. 5)

Further references are made to the place of language, specifically Cook Islands Maori⁵ as being vital for maintaining identity; The Arts as a means to express identity; a focus on establishing identity in early childhood education is explained, and having a positive identity is listed as an essential skill that students should develop.

The Social Sciences learning area is identified as the principal place in the curriculum where students will develop and learn about a Cook Islands identity as it stresses the importance of students learning primarily about Cook Islands culture and society before exploring that of other societies. The Social Sciences Curriculum unequivocally states: "As many of the world's cultures undergo dramatic change, schools have an obligation to ensure that the young have knowledge of their heritage, beliefs and lifestyle which identifies them as Cook Islanders" (Ministry of Education, Cook Islands, 2006, p. 7). The national social sciences curriculum, therefore, only stipulates knowledge from the Cook Islands context. Where another context is included, it is referred to in general terms as "overseas" as in the achievement objective at Level 4 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: References to Identity in the Cook Islands Social Sciences Curriculum

Introduction (p. 5)	In the past, the people of the individual Cook Islands lived their lives largely in isolation from each other, but now there is a recognisable and flourishing national identity.
	Building a sense of identity, socially and culturally from an early age helps to provide a feeling of security and community.
Rotainga – Unity (p. 6)	The uniting of people in a common understanding of who they are and why they are unique is the first step to creating and maintaining a national identity. (p. 6)
	The stars represent the equal union of the fifteen islands of the Cook Islands nation reflecting the curriculum’s emphasis on developing students’ concept of identity.
	The rounded bowl shape of kumete symbolises the Cook Islands society, the focus of the curriculum, and its hard wood reflects the solid cultural identity of the country.
Social Organisation and Identity–Aim (p. 12)	Students will know why people establish their identity by belonging to a variety of groups.
	They will understand that people’s behaviour and participation in the group is determined by traditions, values, beliefs, rules and laws and that from these people establish their identity at various levels within society.
Achievement Objectives	Students will endeavour to: Level 1: Identify and describe their own identity and that of others. Level 2: Describe how communities in the Cook Islands and overseas reflect their cultural identity. Level 4: Compare ways in which people retain and pass on their cultural and national identity in the Cook Islands and overseas. Level 5: Explain how and why people maintain their identity, individually, culturally and nationally.
Exemplar at Level 4 (p. 22)	Basic: The student can use a chart to show the similarities between the ways people retain their cultural and national identity in the Cook Islands and Japan e.g., Cultural clubs, farming methods, medicines, sports, language, flags. Advanced: Students can investigate and compare the similarities between the Cook Islands and 3 other societies’ ways of retaining and passing on their cultural and national identity e.g. Stories, plays, film, music, art, political systems, laws, dances, songs, crafts, ceremonies.

Exemplar at Level 5 (p. 23)	<p>Basic: The student can demonstrate they understand the concept of identity and their right to an identity at different levels of society. They can identify the way these identities are maintained/protected by the individual and groups. e.g., personal profiles, stories, case studies of human rights issues (child labour, racism, war).</p> <p>Advanced: The student can explain the importance of identity for the individual and society both nationally and culturally and how the threat to identity can be perceived in various ways (e.g., economic – globalisation; social – racism; and political – genocide) and how societies work at different levels to maintain the sense of identity by combating these threats by laws, organisations, alliances/treaties and wars.</p>
Glossary (p. 26)	Identity – the way a person or a group perceives themselves in relation to other people and groups.

The basis for emphasising a Cook Islands identity is made explicit in the curriculum. It has its foundations in the concern that national identity should be protected from the impact of globalisation whether it be from incoming influences or outgoing migration.

The benefit of a more global understanding is significant for Cook Islands students as most are destined to travel and live in other countries and their own country is a significant tourist destination where people of many cultures come together. As the prospect of globalisation of culture and economy increases, awareness becomes the greatest means of protection for Cook Islands cultural independence.

(Ministry of Education, Cook Islands, 2006, p. 5)

Education is considered to be the last bastion for the preservation of Cook Islands identity. This role for education has its roots in 1970s educational policy which promoted the inclusion of cultural studies in the formal curriculum. Schools were encouraged to participate in “activities such as an annual schools’ cultural festival and a *Kia Orana* day each week when schools are encouraged to orient that day’s programs towards islands culture, including dress, dancing, and *umukai* (local cooking in a ground oven)” (Kennedy, 2016, p. 285). However, if schooling is to prepare Cook Islands students for their future, then schools must address the inevitable problem that faces many Pacific Island nations—preparing students for living in both a traditional society in their home islands, as well as in a contemporary society such as New Zealand. Concern for the declining island-based Cook Islands population and the diminishing use of Cook Islands Maori (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010) are reflected in the emphasis on maintaining and sustaining a cultural identity. While other settings beyond The Cook Islands are included in the curriculum, they are not the focus. Balancing the focus on Cook Islands culture, language, and knowledge with discipline-based school subject knowledge will continue to be an issue if students are to move and find success in the professions that will contribute to a stable and successful economic, political, and democratic nation.

The Nauruan Syllabus

The Republic of Nauru is a small island nation in the Central Pacific with a population of around 10,000 people and a landmass of 21 square kilometres. Once described as being one of the world's richest nations, Nauru is now one of the poorest and receives the majority of its revenue from international aid. Like many Pacific Islands nations reliant upon international aid to fund its education system, the aid is dependent upon the adoption of a curriculum based on the "global blueprint" (Coxon, 2002, p. 9) evident in the other two curricula discussed in this study.

The term, identity, features as a conceptual strand in the Nauru Social Sciences syllabus. It is included in the achievement objectives, indicators of knowledge, and in examples of skills to be developed as well as possible learning experiences. In the 19 references to identity in a document of 35 pages, personal identity is mentioned most frequently, in fact, almost twice as many times as are national identity, cultural and collective identity (see Figure 3). In comparison with the *New Zealand Curriculum*, the Nauru syllabus provides more detail about how teachers might enact the ideas about identity in the syllabus, but offers little rationale about why it is included as a concept. Unlike the Cook Islands curriculum, there is not a predominant concern with the preservation of a national, cultural identity.

Reports written in preparation for the Nauru Social Sciences syllabus reveal concerns about identity and education beyond the global blueprint. The *Education For All* (EFA) report, written primarily by Nauru Education Department officials following a series of reviews held in public forums, provides a unique insight into the condition of the national education system as it moves towards the nation's goals for education in the 21st century: "to prepare its citizens to cope with the changing economic and social conditions of the country" (UNESCO, 1999, p. 4). The report describes education as failing to produce Nauruans competent to deal with this vision of the future. It regarded the curriculum as culturally inappropriate and claimed that "a lack of continuity [and] relevance" (1999, p. 37) contributed to the academic failure and a loss of identity for Nauruan students. Significant numbers of Nauruans were reported to be illiterate in English and also to have a poor command of Nauruan. Furthermore, the report declared, "Nauru does not have a learning culture. This way of life has not yet been developed in the society" (1999, p. 39) Yet, despite the implication that "a learning culture" refers to academic knowledge, the report acknowledged the need for education to preserve Nauruan culture, language, tradition, and identity. Ironically, then, schooling in Nauru is seen as both the reason for a loss of identity and the solution for preserving a cultural identity.

Figure 3: References to Identity in the Nauru Social Sciences Syllabus

Conceptual Strand	Cultural Heritage and <i>Identity</i>
Key concept in ECE strand: Social Living	<i>Aña ijegen (identity)</i> is the formation of a confident self, based on knowledge and positive experiences in the home, community and school.
Nauru Studies	Students have opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of Nauru through studying; the development over time of Nauru's <i>identity</i> and ways in which this identity is expressed.
Knowledge Indicator at Level 1	Students will understand that culture contributes to personal <i>identity</i> .
Skills at Level 1	Students will be able to select things, and explain reasons for selection, that show something particular about their own and other people's <i>identities</i> .
Guidelines for Student-centred learning experiences at Level 1	Experiences that involve giving examples of factors that contribute to their <i>identity</i> (e.g., age, language, family, community, traditions, gender, where they live, stories of the past); describing and demonstrating ways of demonstrating respect for their own and others' <i>identities</i> (e.g., standing still during the national anthem, participating willingly in cultural celebrations, including others in their activities).
Knowledge indicator at Level 2	Students will understand that cultural practices reflect tradition (rites of passage, observances, protocols) that are often reflected in personal and group <i>identity</i>
Guidelines for Student-centred learning experiences at Level 2	Learning experiences that involve describing how practices, traditions and stories can indicate and/or influence an individual's or group's <i>identity</i> .
Learning Outcome at Level 3	Students will gain knowledge, skills and understanding of ways in which personal, cultural and national <i>identity</i> are developed and maintained.
Knowledge Indicators at Level 3	Students will understand that cultural practices influence <i>identity</i> , that <i>identity</i> can be personal, group and cultural (e.g., an individual creates a sense of self, sees themselves as part of a group and/or as a member of a particular cultural group); how particular factors and practices influence personal, group and cultural <i>identity</i> ; how the development of a Nauruan <i>identity</i> is influenced through images and stories of historic events and of people overcoming and/or facing difficulties; how Nauruan <i>identity</i> is presented using iconic stories, events, people and symbols.
Guidelines for Student-centred learning experiences at Level 3	Learning experiences that involve analysing influences that contribute to their personal <i>identities</i> , including perceptions about being Nauruan.
Knowledge at Level 5	Students will understand that cultures exert influence on people's <i>identities</i> , their practices and behaviours.

Ethnic revivalism and identity in education

The purpose of this discussion is two-fold: to describe how identity has come to be understood; and to consider the effect the inclusion of identity has had in New Zealand, The Cook Islands, and Nauru. The explanation is located in the rise of the global phenomenon of ethnic revivalism (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975) in the late twentieth century. The commitment of the three Pacific nations to identity recognition and affirmation in their curriculum has occurred with significant effects on two key areas of schooling: pedagogy and curriculum. Pedagogy in schools is now characterised by a focus on ethnic identity. There are also implications for the curriculum with a shift from a focus on academic to social knowledge in response to the deep forces of the changes to societal cultural reproduction.

The inclusion of identity in the curriculum of New Zealand, The Cook Islands, and Nauru has been treated differently by each of these nations, although each nation understands identity in terms of ethnic categories. In the case of New Zealand, the focus on identity is justified as a means to address the underachievement of priority learners; in The Cook Islands, the survival of a Cook Islands identity is a central concern; and in Nauru this focus is required to satisfy the prerequisites of aid donors as well as maintaining a Nauruan identity. In spite of these different justifications, the centrality of identity recognition is common to all three curricula. But how is identity conceptualised given the range of intentions? The type of identity that features most frequently is a cultural or ethnic identity. The descriptors “ethnic” and “cultural” appear to be used interchangeably with the same meaning. In this article, I use the term “ethnic identity” and take it to mean belonging to a group that is understood as sharing particular values, types of social relations and practices. Rata (2017) describes two forms of ethnic identity. One refers to an individual’s self-recognition and affiliation with an ethnic group, as is the case in New Zealand and Nauru. The second form, which refers to ethnic categorisation, that is political recognition and affirmation of an ethnically defined group, helps to explain the shift to a recognition and affirmation of ethnic identity in all three nations but, in particular, characterises the situation in The Cook Islands.

The shift to considering identity in ethnic terms was first identified in Glazer and Moynihan’s (1975) edited volume, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. These anthropologists draw attention to the fact that the term featured rarely in literature until the 1960s. They describe its appearance in popular usage through dictionaries of the 1960s and note two types of identity. One is an *objective* condition, which refers to belonging to an ethnic group, and the second refers to a *subjective* disposition that is associated with a sense of pride. It is no coincidence, they claim, that the term came into popular usage at a time when nations were experiencing conflict over social distinctiveness such as during the civil rights movement in the USA, religious conflict in Northern Ireland, or the Tamil Liberation movement in Sri Lanka; or when there was recognition of the depressed status of minority and indigenous groups in places like Canada; or during a time of linguistic differences such as those in Belgium. Linguistic, religious, national, and cultural conflicts were not new but they came together in the 1960s and 1970s as the result of processes associated with fundamental changes to global capitalism (Friedman, 1994).

The emergence of “ethnicity” as a new social category, Glazer and Moynihan (1975) suggest, could be explained by three related reasons. The first is the rise of ethno-nationalism and the intensity of ethnic conflict during this period, such as that noted earlier. Ethnic identity provided an effective strategy for making “legitimate claims on the resources of the modern state” related to concerns about the equality of groups within the nation state (p. 11). Secondly, ethnicity expanded to include both a personal affiliation related to heritage and a socio-political group where rights and interests were defined and pursued by the group. Finally, ethnicity became a more relevant and important affiliation and categorisation than social class because it linked political and economic interests with emotional (affective) ties to a group. In essence, the emergence of this new social category of “ethnic identity” was based on “tendencies by people in many countries and in many circumstances to insist on the significance of their group distinctiveness and identity and on new rights that derive from this group character” (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975, p. 3).

Similarly, the revival of a personal ethnic identity and the rise of the group categorisation was explained by Friedman (2006) as a consequence of the declining modern nation-state and the ascendancy of supranational institutions. As this happened, individuals lost faith in the nation-state as the major provider of their personal identity and retracted into the roots of their cultural identities, which had been subsumed under the nation-state. It signalled a “return to identifying with historical and cultural social groups . . . in a period of fundamental change” (Rata, 2017). It is possible to trace the 21st century idea of cultural recognition and affirmation in the curriculum documents of New Zealand, The Cook Islands, and Nauru to the ethnic revivalism of the preceding three decades. The following sections will discuss the effect ethnic and cultural recognition and affirmation has had on education in these nations.

At the same time that ethnic identity was emerging as a newly formed social categorisation, educators were attempting to find explanations and solutions for the educational problems caused by cultural deprivation and poverty. Scholars such as Bloom, Davis, and Hess (1965) explained the learning problems of minority children as being the result of a deficiency in their home backgrounds. Drawing on research that linked children’s intelligence scores with their home environment, they described the school as the site where this deficiency could be corrected. *Compensatory education*, if offered at school, would compensate for the low academic achievement of those with the lowest cultural and economic capital. “The schools will have to provide unequal education; they will have to devote attention to the needs of deprived children in order to compensate for lackings in their background” (Silverman, 1965, p. 490). Compensatory education focussed, at least in part, on the children of ethnic minorities, who were not succeeding in schools. This approach was soundly rejected by growing numbers of writers in the emergent New Sociology of Education, who considered the explanation or solution, rather than the children, as deficient because of its “blaming the victim” approach (Ryan, 1976). What they did not reject, however, was the relevance of cultural background. For these politicised sociologists of education, the starting place for learning was the students’ social and cultural knowledge (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Like the compensatory model, learners were viewed as capable, but rather than

compensate for their social and cultural heritage, that heritage was given a central place in their learning. The growing influence of cultural relativism was supported by the equally influential shift to constructivism. This approach, with its progressivist roots, placed the child at the centre of learning as the “constructor” of knowledge. It was seen as a solution to the deficiencies of “transmission” pedagogies.

In subsequent decades, multicultural scholars such as Au (1993), Ladson-Billings (1994), Delpit (1995), and Nieto (1992) went on to theorise and generate teaching applications based on acknowledging and further developing the home–school link. Rather than identifying a deficit of low cultural capital for ethnic minority students, they theorised that a discontinuity existed between school culture and the home culture of ethnic minorities. This discontinuity was considered an important factor where students displayed low academic achievement. A pedagogy that was more closely aligned and responsive to home culture was seen as a solution to the problem of academic achievement. This new pedagogy, in which teachers validated and affirmed students’ cultural identity and ways of learning, was variously termed “culturally responsive teaching (CRT)” (Gay, 2000) or “culturally relevant teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It involved pedagogies that addressed student achievement but also “help[ed] to accept and affirm cultural identity” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 496). To multicultural educators, an emphasis on cultural or ethnic identity was important to distinguish the culturally based pedagogical approach from that of deficit and compensatory solutions.

Although The Cook Islands is not a multicultural society in the same way as the United States of America where culturally responsive pedagogy began, The Cook Islands curriculum, concerned with the maintenance of an ethno-national identity, rejected the disconnection between home and school. It devotes a whole page of the curriculum to an explanation of the need for a home–school relationship. The curriculum advocates a “shared responsibility of the school and the home in the education of students and the positive impact that such relationships and partnerships can have on parents, teachers and students” (Ministry of Education, Cook Islands, 2002, p. 33).

New Zealand, the most ethnically diverse of the three Pacific nations under discussion, has embraced CRT. It is evident in the curriculum, which acknowledges “learning is inseparable from its social and cultural context” (Ministry of Education NZ, 2007, p. 34) and in educational initiatives designed to interrupt the pattern of poor engagement and underachievement of learners from ethnic minorities. *Te Kotahitanga*, for example, is a project that seeks to improve the educational achievement of New Zealand’s indigenous Maori students in mainstream secondary schools. It draws on the principles of CRT to assist teachers to become more effective in their practice with Maori students as they develop a “culturally appropriate and responsive context for learning in their classrooms” (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003, p. 4). Writers of a report to the Ministry of Education (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007) claim that the implementation of this pedagogy of cultural relations has led to statistically significant improvement in the Mathematics and Literacy scores in standardised tests. There is considerable debate, however, concerning the ways in which these claims are substantiated (Nash, 2001; Openshaw, 2007; Rata, 2012).

Culturally responsive pedagogies are more clearly reflected in the language and

explanations for in the types of approaches that are favoured in the New Zealand education system. These pedagogies support the idea of a home–school connection and, in turn, this means that the child’s experience tends to be promoted above academic knowledge. This widespread shift to children’s experiential knowledge has led to increasing debate in the literature about the academic knowledge–experiential knowledge issue. At the centre of the debate is the question asked by Young (2010): What should be taught at school? Should it be knowledge from the academic disciplines, which is contextualised as school subject knowledge, or should it be from the child’s experience? Furthermore, does the recognition and affirmation of identity contribute to or diminish greater social equality? In the case of The Cook Islands, the inclusion of identity as content in the curriculum is pervasive but there are limited opportunities for students to access knowledge beyond their local context. Nauru’s experience is more complex. There is limited official or unofficial documentation available so it is difficult to assess the effects of the shift to identity. Identity is hinted at in what documents do exist, however, it is mainly found in reports written by the nation’s political leaders for global organisations such as UNESCO. In New Zealand, the inclusion has led to a widespread acceptance that the affirmation and recognition of identity is actually part of curricular knowledge itself. Despite the intention to raise the academic achievement of priority learners, there is the potential for restricting access to academic knowledge by limiting their learning to that which only has social and cultural relevance.

Notes

- 1 Maori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand.
- 2 Pasifika is a collective term used in New Zealand to describe migrants from Pacific Island nations who have settled New Zealand. It is generally not used in Pacific Island nations.
- 3 Maori performing arts.
- 4 A performing arts festival for New Zealand Secondary School students to express themselves through traditional culturally based forms of Maori and Pacific Island dance.
- 5 The two official languages of the Cook Islands are English and Cook Islands Maori.

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Wellbeing and Resilience among Teacher Education Students in Nauru

Terence Sullivan, Penelope Serow and Neil Taylor

Abstract

The researchers wanted to understand how 22 Nauruan teacher education students responded to changing circumstances and whether or not they did anything specific to maintain their sense of resilience. The population of the Republic of Nauru is a small remote Pacific Island community of extended families, with the prioritisation of traditional family and community obligations. Most of the students access the Internet only when visiting their technology-equipped study centre, which is an allocated classroom in the secondary school. Even then technological infrastructure outages limit effective delivery. To ease these obstacles, teacher education is flexibly delivered, facilitated by two, face-to-face, support lecturers. Researchers noted that the students sensed wellbeing and resilience when their course and study habits were compatibly aligned with their family and community commitments and the students' technological, geographical and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Resilience and wellbeing; positive education; Pacific cultural and social protection mechanisms; teacher education; flexible delivery, Nauru

Over time, people's environmental, social, personal and educational circumstances form their individual character strengths and more specifically affect their desire to learn, their will to sustain that learning and their coping mechanisms that form their sense of resilience (Ratuva, 2011). This study reports on the students' reflections regarding these circumstances, as expressed by 22 Nauruan pre-service and in-service teachers, who were based on their Pacific island nation of Nauru and who were completing an online degree in teaching from an Australian university. Being in their final year of study, these students had already demonstrated a working level of academic resilience. In documenting these phenomena, the researchers aimed to examine their own professional practice with the overall purpose of enhancing student success through harmonising the diverse cultural, educational and contextual differences and the competing needs and aims of all parties.

Geographical, historical, cultural and educational context

The Republic of Nauru is a small, remote island nation located in Micronesia in the Central Pacific. Its current population of 10,000 is slowly increasing but, twice in the last century, this population dropped below 1,500 at which level its sustainable growth was

placed in jeopardy. This had occurred in the early 20th century as a result of introduced disease and toward the middle of the 20th century as a result of occupation during war in the Pacific. Extensive mining of the island's phosphate deposits in the late 1960s and into the 1980s coupled with its very low population, enabled the Republic of Nauru to have one of the world's highest per-capita incomes (Ratuva, 2011). The sovereign nation of Nauru gained independence in 1964 and became a permanent member of the United Nations in December 1999. These events remain a source of pride and celebration in the Republic of Nauru. In recent times, mining has slowly dwindled and the previous over-reliance on this single source of income has resulted in the Nauruan economy equally shrinking, requiring the Government of the Republic Nauru to rely on other international income measures involving trade and aid agreements.

Despite most families personally experiencing cycles of extreme trauma and euphoria throughout the turbulent 20th century, most individuals in the community have maintained their inherent values and symbolisms, which have kept them connected to their origins and traditional culture. Ratuva (2011) characterised the population of the Republic of Nauru as consisting of a small community of extended families with very strong traditional family and community-oriented obligations. In a further study, Ratuva (2014) examined kinship, reciprocity, communal obligation and communal labour as examples of social protection mechanisms in Fiji, Samoa, Kiribati and Vanuatu—all of which are strongly adhered to in the Republic of Nauru. Ratuva (2014, p. 42) points out that these indigenous, resilience-enhancing social constructs are an integral component of local social organisation, culture and identity and very much an inseparable part of people's daily lives, implying that they must be included in the design of any global import, such as the teacher education project in this study, into a local community.

The Nauru School System comprises five infant schools, one lower primary school, one upper primary school, one lower secondary school and one upper secondary school. There is also one government managed and funded Catholic college catering for students from Pre-school to Year 8, after which students move to the two government secondary schools to complete their education. The system ranges from Prep to Year 12 with a population of 3,327 students, 1,728 girls and 1,599 boys, as of the last census in 2013. A combination of low qualifications and a general shortage of teachers has resulted in the employment of teachers mainly from Fiji and Kiribati, leaving few local role models as teachers for the Nauruan children. The Department of Education of the Republic of Nauru has had to deal with continuing problems over school attendance and teacher motivation and commitment (Collingwood, 2014).

To improve the quality of its education system, the Government of the Republic of Nauru legislated policy that all teachers must be registered with at least a recognised Diploma qualification and decided to increase the proportion of qualified Nauruan teachers as quality Nauruan educational role models for the country's children. The high cost of providing professional development services and the need to access an offshore teacher education institution led to a partnership with the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for funding and direction. To achieve these goals, the Nauru Department of Education decided to partner with the

University of New England, facilitated by the Australian Government Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs, to deliver Pacific-focused flexible teacher education in Nauru emanating from the university's Australian campus (Serow et al., 2016).

From the initial request through to delineating the project's purpose and aims; design, establishment and implementation, to subsequent revisions and renewal of contracts, the Department of Education of the Republic of Nauru has held the authority of agreement. This meta-design in ownership gave voice to the local, cultural-based indigenous perceptions of the nature of Pacific teacher education to which the Department of Education of the Republic of Nauru aspired.

Through the Nauru Teacher Education Project (NTEP) team, the Department of Education of the Republic of Nauru aimed to provide an internationally recognised, quality teacher qualification that met the requirements of the Nauru Education Act (Government of the Republic of Nauru, 2011); to provide culturally responsive and appropriate teacher education tailored specifically to the Nauruan context; to enable NTEP students to access quality education while remaining in the context of their community for the duration of their studies; and build local mentoring capacity from within the Nauruan education community.

The NTEP team consisted of: one Nauruan governor (Secretary of Education, Nauru); two UNE governors; two face-to-face support lecturers; two Australian campus-based support lecturers; and one project manager. Face-to-face lecturers played a crucial role in delivering content and helping students adapt to the rigorous demands and structure of studying at an Australian university. Face-to-face and Australian support lecturers worked with Australian course and unit coordinators to contextualise the unit content and align it with the Nauruan educational syllabuses. As well as the design of content and delivery of teacher education, the physical presence and learning environment was very much locally owned. There was no physical signage or office for the NTEP. Its learning environment was simply an allocated classroom in the senior secondary school and access to the schools for professional experience sessions.

Academic resilience from a positive education perspective

As this report focused on the academic resilience of the teacher education students in Nauru and ways in which the NTEP team adapted its course to support its students' sense of academic resilience, a brief summary of the positive education and Pacific social protection mechanisms, culture and ways of knowing literature seemed pertinent. Pigeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar, and Lo (2014) found the quality of transition of students entering higher education depended on a combination of: their pre-existing levels of psychological distress or wellbeing; their perceived social support; their sense of campus connectedness; and their daily personal, social and academic life circumstances. Pigeon et al. (2014) concluded that, depending on the students' states of mind, they subjectively experienced changing life experiences as either detrimental or supportive of their study intentions.

Martin and Marsh (2009) researched "academic resilience" among at-risk cultural groups, defined as those challenged with ongoing learning difficulties and those caught in chronic debilitating circumstances. They found that, if left without support, these

students usually developed chronic academic failure and/or psychological distress affecting their personal, social and academic livelihood.

Positive psychological characteristics of flourishing and academic resilience

Seligman (2011) studied some general life indicators of “flourishing”; a state of being which he considered was determined by the quality of: (a) relationships present; (b) emotions present; (c) engagement in a particular task; (d) meaning found in the task; and (e) accomplishment in the particular context. Pigeon et al. (2014) summarised the specific indicators of having a sense of academic resilience and so feeling wellbeing and flourishing in a learning environment. These indicators were: (a) feeling supported in the learning environment; (b) belonging to a community of learners; and (c) feeling an optimistic engagement in the learning activity and its delivery.

Further, developing and sustaining this sense of academic resilience depended on mindful application of a person’s capacity to be resilient using one’s personal virtues and signature character strengths (McGovern, 2011), which enabled that person to have a sense of flourishing in the learning context (Dweck, 2006; Flock, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013) and so increase that person’s sense of a state of wellbeing. This is particularly so if a person is optimistic and has a high energy level to overcome obstacles to achieving goals (Huppert, 2009; Martin & Marsh, 2009).

A positive educational pathway to flourishing and resilience

A continuing mindfulness of one’s signature virtues and character strengths (and consciously applying them in times of academic struggle) can lead to an increase in the achievement of academic goals (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Martin & Marsh, 2009; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Achievement experiences, in turn, promote a sense of resiliency and a feeling of academic flourishing. Huppert (2009) also demonstrated that positively focusing on one’s inner strengths and goal achievement brought about a sense of wellbeing and flourishing, resulting in improved cognitive functioning and health and social relationships, all of which increased a student’s capacity for academic resilience.

In relation to creating resilience enhancing learning environments in educational organisational structures, several researchers (Bushe, 2013; McGovern, 2011; Oades, Robinson, Green, & Spence, 2011) emphasised that maintaining a mindfulness of inner strengths and creating empowering organisational structures and processes that focus on nurturing environments, might be an effective way for individuals and communities to reinforce their belief in their sense of resilience. It is more personally self-powering, ultimately creative and satisfying to focus on positive self-development rather than become fixated on the alleviation of perceived hindrances to one’s intentions. The success of this transforming process of actively encouraging a sense of wellbeing, and thus resilience, was also documented by Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011) in their positive psychology courses with undergraduate students.

Uncertainties when defining wellbeing, flourishing and academic resilience

The multi-disciplinary meta-study by Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) found most Western research, reviewed from a wide range of philosophical, psychological and educational backgrounds, over the past 40 years, could only objectively propose the notion of a person's resilience and maintaining that resilience as attempting to remain in a state of equilibrium, in which that person sensed wellbeing or flourishing (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). When identifying instances of academic resilience and its related states of wellbeing and flourishing, there is still much academic debate.

Rather than focus on the objective characteristics of the state of wellbeing and resilience, Pacific educators such as Ratuva (2014), Teaiwa (2011) and Wesley-Smith (2016) offer a holistic, Pacific-based view that focuses on communal relationships, consideration of family and kinship obligations and reciprocity as social support mechanisms in personally turbulent times, which sustain resiliency in people. Teaiwa (2011, p. 214) connects this same sense of community when speaking of what she understands as appropriate pedagogies that support learner-centredness amongst teachers and students, thus developing learning communities that nurture their members without marginalising and so sustain a sense of resilience.

Research purpose

By situating the resilience and wellbeing indicators found in the positive education literature within the more holistic cultural and social relationship perspectives and practices that constitute cultural and social protection mechanisms found in Pacific education literature, the authors of this report hoped to further understand the Nauruan students' sense of wellbeing and resilience, their contextual factors and coping mechanisms, in order to better deliver a more supportive and sustainable teacher education in the Republic of Nauru.

Research questions

Three research questions guided this research:

1. What contextual factors influenced the students' sense of academic resilience?
2. How do students respond to their changing circumstance?
3. How do NTEP students sustain their life and academic coping mechanisms?

Research method

Interviewees were invited to participate obligation-free, giving informed, written and signed consent. The University Ethics Committee granted ethical approval under NTEP Approval Number: HE14-030. Interviews were conducted with students towards the end of their Associate Degree in Teaching (Pacific Focus) in order to ensure data were collected from students who had already demonstrated effective levels of academic resilience. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the students' responses, the questions leading their self-reflections were crafted from the supporting positive education and Pacific anthropological and education literature (Dweck, 2006; Flock et al., 2013; Huppert, 2009; Martin & Marsh, 2009; McGovern, 2011; Pigliascio & Lipp,

2011; Pigeon et al., 2014; Ratuva, 2014; Seligman, 2011; Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith, 2016).

Self-reflection was encouraged and responses sought on the ways the students understood their level of comfort with types of learning support offered to them; the quality of their relationships with their fellow students and support lecturers; their sense of meaning and compatibility with the topics under study and their delivery; their feelings of distress or wellbeing in relation to their accomplishments in previous and current learning experiences; their level of mindfulness of specific personal virtues and signature character strengths that enabled them to achieve and feel self-empowered through their achievements. The researchers compiled responses and attempted to draw meaning from across the group in relation to the chosen supporting literature and the students' personal, social and educational contexts. Finally, the researchers gave some remedial thought to emergent implications for the students' wellbeing, their context, and their teacher education course.

These views are in alignment with Wesley-Smith (2016) who considers that studies of Pacific people should incorporate empowerment through indigenous voices and perspectives that reflect ownership of their context. Even so, when taking an interpretive approach to capture the reflections of the students regarding their sense of resilience situated within their perception of their context, there always remains the danger of unwittingly affecting the participants and their context in unintended ways (Pigliascio & Lipp, 2011).

Participants

The interviewed group of 22 comprised 13 out of a possible 14 mature age, in-service teachers employed by the Nauru Government Department of Education, plus nine out of a possible 10 pre-service students, some enrolled directly after completion of secondary schooling and others being of a more mature age. The two students not interviewed were unavailable due to illness. All students were studying in English, which was their second language.

The students were from diverse social and economic circumstances and were predominantly female except for three pre-service males. All except five had children of their own. All were completing the same qualification to meet recently introduced Nauru teacher registration requirements. Prior to the interviews, the NTEP had been running for 18 months and the interviewed students were the remaining students of an original cohort of 21 in-service and 18 pre-service, from which seven in-service and eight pre-service teachers had already withdrawn. Those students who had withdrawn from teacher education could not be interviewed due to the ethical agreement not to intrude on their personal lives.

Contextual factors influencing the students' sense of academic resilience

Approaching the completion of their two-year Associate Degree and anticipating articulation to the final two years of their Bachelor Degree, the 22 interviewed students had created well-used pathways to connect with academic support; including

course content and delivery adaptations designed to improve study and family time-management; student–lecturer and student–student support; and information technology usage. As an example:

I thought it would be hard. I thought we'll be left alone and ... but through the assistance online from other ... even from other students and from you guys back in Australia I think that's what makes it easier because I get to have a lot of assistance and help from outside.

The same student elaborated:

Direct interaction [with visiting lecturers] to show us what we are not sure about ... We really need to have someone that really knows what we are struggling with ... They [face to face support lecturers] have a timetable. This period we're going to do this unit and so you're not having this unit today. Maybe you have it tomorrow. It helps us ... If it were only online you wouldn't have that. You'd just have to work it out yourself.

Again:

My in-service teachers ... they are the ones that have more experience and they are the ones motivating us and encouraging us to continue on because I must say that there was a time that we are really feeling that we cannot handle it anymore or we cannot continue on.

Communal relationships and reciprocity

Similarly, an in-service student pointed out, “[The face-to-face support lecturers] are very, [very] much supportive and if we want to learn more, we’ll go online and they [on-campus support lecturers] are always there for us.”

Many of the students commented that they felt emotionally connected with others in their group (indeed, some were actually members of the same extended family) and their support lecturers. Comments such as, “we really support each other”, “we are like families” and “we’re a team” demonstrate these emotional as well as personal, social and academic bonds. Another student commented, “I find it very effective that I have colleagues, other colleagues that are older than me and more experienced than me. I always ask them for help or anything from them.” Students also emotionally connected with their support lecturers: “I feel like they’re [lecturers] always there for me.”

Appropriateness of content and delivery

The students thought that the NTEP contained local and global pedagogical knowledge and skills, and used curriculum tools and resources from the Nauru Department of Education. The students also thought that the Nauruan syllabuses were similar to the Australian Curriculum with some syllabus documents at the senior secondary level being used with agreement from Education Queensland in Australia. As an example, a primary NTEP student explained her satisfaction with the relevance of applying the course content in the classroom: “I think a lot of it [content] has been very useful. I’m

putting into practice what I've been learning. Especially during this two week practicum [professional experience period]." However some of the early childhood education students found the Nauru Early Years Curriculum Guidelines difficult to reconcile with their course child-centred pedagogical activities because of the differences between Pacific and Australian child-rearing practices in families, communities and schools. "It's really different than what we are learning. It's [teaching in Nauruan schools] more like teacher-centred learning than child-centred."

Apart from ongoing technology infrastructure problems, all NTEP students expressed how satisfied they were with the convenience of studying through flexible delivery: "Well, I'm very happy doing flexible learning. I'm here with my family and I'm doing that learning here in Nauru—not going away."

How students respond to changing circumstances

All NTEP students reported a sense of wellbeing in relation to their previous schooling experiences as per the following example:

I enjoyed my childhood. I had many friends. Most of my schooling ... I went overseas in the primary. In Year 5 and 6 I came back to Nauru. I was in Fiji before. And I still have friends in Fiji but when I came back here, I just knew everybody because it's a small island. So I really enjoyed my childhood education. I was one of the top students as well.

Another student reported a powerful virtue or strength in being able to reconceptualise negative memories by finding positive attributes in a particular life event. When reflecting upon her own childhood school days, she was able to appreciate positive friendships and success in order to reinforce her sense of academic resilience to overcome bullying:

With other students bullying me, I just thought they were temporary for me so I kept attending school. Sometimes I thought to myself, "I'm tired of going to school because of this bullying," but I just kept going. When I was in primary, I hardly failed any subjects. I think that's because I had a lot of friends also.

Using personal virtues and signature character strengths

All students expressed in their own words, their use of the character strengths such as: rational prioritising; optimistically re-defining stress-filled situations; perseverance; and visualisation, in order to overcome learning obstacles. A typical student comment exemplifying all four strategies was:

I picture the end or what date [that] the last assignment is supposed to be in—for example, on the 26th of that month. Oh, I'll try and get mine in before then. So I get a longer holiday.

A further example of applying the strength of dogged persistence shows in another student's repetitive emphasising of her current academic goal:

Well I'm very determined to finish this programme. I've been on and off in this programme and I'm very determined to finish this programme. I'm willing to take up any challenge just as long as I finish this programme.

All students were future thinking and all were optimistically visualising completion of assignments to graduate or continue with further study. A typical student said, “I think they said they can offer the Bachelors after the Associate. I think maybe I can complete that and get a good score.”

Considerations of family and kinship obligations

When asked, “What personality strengths, values and attitudes help you achieve in this NTEP?” one student echoed the spirit of the whole group in demonstrating her emotional attachment to her family. This was characterised by a deep-seated valuing of and strengths in perseverance and optimism toward overcoming her struggle to finally achieving as an example for her children and out of gratitude for her husband:

Well, like what's making me keep on going? My children at home. I want to show them like how to be resilient in everything, like they have seen my stress and I'm like trying to manage things and then, but I just want to show them, like being a role model, like not to give up on things that are good and important to our lives, and to keep on going even if there's struggling, but continue and even like ... Yes, and I would like to give thanks to my husband because sometimes, every time I feel like giving up, he's always there like encouraging me and telling me not to give up. That's what makes me keep on going. I just want them to see me. Like, I just can't wait for the graduation day. I want them to see me there, so they can like, maybe perhaps be somebody like me to become resilient all the time, in what—everything they do, not to give up quickly. Like I know they have seen me going crazy with my work and stuff, but I still keep on going, continuing on until [I] reach the very end.

How NTEP students sustain their life and academic coping mechanisms

Students' motivations to succeed were often driven by generational influences urging them to overcome daily adversities:

I think sometimes. Not really most of the time but not really about myself. Plus it's not really thinking. It's people telling me, it's my father telling me. You have to do this for the kids. You have to do this. You can't quit. Stop saying that. Stop saying it's hard.

The students' motivations were also driven by future thinking about their social and educational contexts and the opportunities therein. This in itself was a powerful inner strength bringing meaning to their personal and professional vision because they saw themselves as key players in a uniquely Nauruan educational change role: “Here in Nauru, there is a lack of teachers, local teachers. So what motivates me is to be one of the locals who is able to work for their country.”

Being mindful of inner strengths

Overwhelming events had occurred among the original 39 students in the course as this latter study, having only 24 students remaining in the course, attests. However, in such circumstances, the remaining 22 students who were available for interviewing for this study, found such setbacks to be only temporary due to their personal self-reflection and awareness of their inner strengths, which they felt they could bring to bear on each situation as it arose.

For example, “I really think hard about not ... being stressed, and I just go find help and sit down and really put my mind to it. I always try to find the next step.”

On the occasions where competing contextual pressures overwhelmed students, unless they could deploy a practised strategy to overcome such obstacles, they could become at-risk and face ongoing learning difficulties and eventual loss of self-efficacy and self-esteem. One student explained her practised strategy, which was staying mindful of her key inner strength:

Usually my best saying would be like everything happens for a reason, so I can't control everything. So, whatever happens that's a lesson to me that I try to overcome and move on, that's what I usually tell myself. I guess if I don't get that experience I wouldn't understand the other side of the equation, so whatever happens that makes me a stronger person and just move forward with it.

Interpretation of students' responses

The students rationalised their desire to complete their NTEP by professing their personal virtues: “love of children”, “love of education” and “willingness to be role models for family and community.” Their sense of Pacific community relationships, consideration of family and kinship obligations and reciprocity, encouraged them to want to complete their studies in order to be Nauruan role models for Nauruan children and so support the future of their nation.

Their personal and wider communal virtues also supported an optimistic belief that most circumstances have positive aspects either emerging or still yet to emerge, as implied in the ideas of Huppert (2009), Martin and Marsh (2009), McGovern (2011), Pigeon et al. (2014), Teaiwa (2011) and Wesley-Smith (2016). One student spoke of this optimism while relating her experience of when she was working late with other students in the university centre to meet an assignment deadline. She emphasised the enjoyment of camaraderie and collaborative learning and concealed the experience of late night deprivation from her family.

Gable and Haidt (2005), McGovern (2011), Oades et al. (2011), Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar (2011), Seligman et al. (2009) and Seligman (2011) argue that students who are mindful of their fluctuating levels of academic resilience and regularly enact a range of inner virtues, beliefs and personality strengths are demonstrating effective learning behaviours that, in turn, produce a sense of self-power and flourishing which is supported through their communal relationships and reciprocity with each other (Ratuvu, 2014; Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith; 2016). The students themselves referred to

perseverance, rationalising why they were studying, and visualising sheer study effort, as strategies to make the best of what exists and to achieve similar academic goals. This was exemplified in comments such as, “I try harder; I have to keep pushing; and I break things into step-like planning.”

Even though the students in this study were the remaining successful NTEP students of their initial cohort, they still struggled in their persistence, as one student pointed out, “most the time I feel worried.” This focus on difficulties tended to lower their sense of self-efficacy because it required them to use more energy in successfully maintaining their self-determination and sense of resilience. An extensive literature review by Oades et al. (2011) suggested that students need to be aware of, and appreciate, past and present supportive structures and relationships in order to feel connected to their personal, social and academic lives. It is the awareness and appreciation of support that generates a sense of wellbeing and flourishing and so a sense of being resilient (Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith, 2016).

The students expressed their desire to be role models for their families through their study and explained their appreciation of the support from their families. Whenever possible, they managed their continuing sense of wellbeing by attending to their family obligations first and their study second. Wesley-Smith (2016) noted this cultural family and community prioritisation. Sullivan et al. (2015) also noted this prioritisation in an earlier study of the same group of students and pointed out how it led to a need to liaise between family and the University on behalf of the student, especially in areas such as time management, meeting family obligations and understanding University organisational processes.

Limitations when studying the interpretations of others

There are data collection and analysis limitations resulting from the subjectivity of students’ interpretations of themselves and their circumstances. Also, there are limitations related to the interpretations of the researchers concerning their analysis of the students’ reflections due to their preconceived interpretations and possibly, research methods. The literature debate as to what constitutes academic resilience and its outcomes of sustained wellbeing and flourishing and ways of knowing (Dodge et al., 2012; Ratuva, 2014; Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith, 2016) constrain any generalisation of analysis, interpretations and implications being derived from the data. Pigliasco and Lipp (2011, p. 402) also point out that researchers cannot avoid culturally transforming their subjects’ and their own interpretations of reality.

Emergent issues and implications

An earlier study (Sullivan et al., 2015) suggested that NTEP support lecturers needed to promote academic resilience, wellbeing and flourishing by initiating supportive relationships, promoting shared learning communities amongst the students and adapting the online content to the flexible learning context. In this later study, the students reported favour with these adaptations.

Many of the students’ reflections alluded to the students’ prioritisation of family,

extended family and community involvement, which is in alignment with Ratuva's (2011) understanding of Nauruan traditional family and community obligations and their prioritisation of family and place. The students' gained a sense of resilience, wellbeing and flourishing (Sullivan et al., 2015) from their family and community support. Presumably then, there was an overflow from family and community of wellbeing and flourishing that built a sense of resilience related to their professional studies and work.

Oades et al. (2011) suggested that through: (a) embedding supportive structures and relationships between students and including their lecturers; (b) ensuring content is meaningful and relevant; and (c) promoting authentic learning communities, course coordinators can facilitate the development of student academic resilience, wellbeing and flourishing. Considering the overflow of resilience from family and community wellbeing and flourishing, a fourth strategy in this context would be to refine the practice of time management to maintain the equilibrium between study and family and community commitments (Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith, 2016). Adaptations such as Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar's (2011) idea of regular reflective practices (being mindful of changing circumstances) inducing feelings of wellbeing toward previous and current learning experiences, would further enhance the students' personal virtues and signature character strengths to overcome learning obstacles and so maintain a sense of equilibrium in their lives.

Even though these students could be viewed as academically successful as they approached the end of their course, they still struggled with their sense of doubt and personal and professional insecurities. In terms of Bushe's (2013) appreciative inquiry theory, it is possibly better for students to consider their successes (though often extremely difficult to practise) rather than becoming fixated on an environment that they perceive as problematic. This more positive outlook appears to be associated with feelings of self-power and focused on their supportive resources such as family and each other as well as their lectures (Teaiwa, 2011; Wesley-Smith, 2016).

Finally, delivering and sustaining the teacher education project must be stringently evaluated and reevaluated to safeguard the students and their social and wider cultural context. This is a two-way cultural transformation process as elaborated by Pigliascio and Lipp (2011) and remains the underlying rationale for this ongoing research.

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Postgraduate management education in Hong Kong

John Croucher

Abstract

The Macquarie Graduate School of Management (MGSM) is Australia's No. 1 ranked management school and in the top four in Asia. For over twenty years it has offered post-graduate management degrees to Hong Kong based students in which the teaching is undertaken by MGSM faculty. The aim of the programme is to engage, enable and equip students to succeed in both an academic and broader life. The purpose of this research is to gain new knowledge into the operation and effectiveness of the programme that provides the tools and skills required to make the students better managers. Part of this process involved two surveys, the first comprising 132 randomly selected students from the postgraduate management programmes to provide a snapshot of their profile and views on various aspects of them. The second was a separate study of over 1000 student teaching evaluations that provided feedback on the quality of lecturing in the programme across all core subjects. Overall the students were reasonably satisfied with the learning environment although several areas for improvement and further research were identified. Important aspects of lecturing skills were also identified with key attributes that relate to being judged a good communicator outlined.

Keywords

MBA, management education, student evaluations, Hong Kong, learning and teaching

Introduction

Macquarie Graduate School of Management (MGSM), located at Macquarie University in Sydney, is Australia's No. 1 Management School along with being ranked in the top 50 in the world in the world (Financial Times, 2017).¹ It offers degrees in both Australia (Postgraduate Certificate, Post Graduate Diploma, Master of Management, MBA and PhD) and in Hong Kong (all but the Master of Management) (MGSM in Hong Kong, 2017).² The flagship degree is the MBA that consists of 10 core (compulsory) subjects with a further six elective subjects. In Hong Kong all teaching is done by means of block classes, consisting of a total of 40 hours of face-to-face tuition in which Sydney-based academics fly to Hong Kong and lecture for twenty hours on each of two successive weekends. Exams are administered at a later date.

1 Financial Times, Business Education, 2017 <http://rankings.ft.com/businessschoolrankings/global-mba-ranking-2017?mhq5j=e2>

2 MGSM in Hong Kong <https://www.mgsm.edu.au/about-us/locations/mgsm-in-hong-kong>

The programme in Hong Kong is designed to create a learning environment that is professional and of high quality, creating the ability to think critically, act ethically, communicate effectively and work together in teams productively. MGSM offers five broadly based specialisations:

1. People and Organisations
2. Marketing
3. Strategy
4. Operations, Supply Chain, Innovation, Statistics
5. Accounting, Banking, Finance, Economics

The Hong Kong based partner is the Hong Kong Management Association (HKMA) (The Hong Kong Management Association, 2017),³ although the degrees awarded at the graduation ceremonies, held in Hong Kong, are Macquarie University degrees. Classes are conducted in the district of Wan Chai located on Hong Kong island and classrooms occupy three floors of the Pico Tower, which is situated in the heart of what is known as the 'red light and bar district' (Wan Chai Visitor's Guide, 2017).⁴

Learning and teaching quality very seriously by MGSM and it is important that the same case studies used in Australia are not simply transported, but rather these and other examples are placed in a local context. MGSM pedagogy involves critical processes that see lecturers take on a facilitative role in guiding students to design their own solutions to complex, real world problems using appropriate models and frameworks. Of course different approaches to learning and teaching are evident, with some lecturers relying heavily on exploring case studies while others find student group work the best approach as team work is re-enforced. In some instances experiential learning is the main focus, especially those subjects that involve 'study tours' in which the class travels to overseas countries to observe, analyse and discuss how processes are handled in a variety of organisations.

The traditional face-to-face lecture has been the cornerstone of MGSM presentations in Hong Kong, although the use of online techniques and blended learning are currently being considered. One study (Bambacas, 2011) supported the MGSM current practice, concluding that, while surveyed business students in Asia gave a high ranking to face-to-face delivery, an independent web-based learning environment was their lowest preference.

Students at MGSM are expected to be present at least 80% of all lectures and attendance is taken in every class, this never having been an issue. Exceptions can be made for those who have personal issues or necessary business trips during the course. This requirement remains, despite the audience being mid- to high-level managers and they have never questioned this requirement. There is still a degree of wariness in the business community as to whether an online MBA is of sufficient quality, although there are many such programmes now in evidence and may be attractive because they are

3 Hong Kong Management Association.2017 http://www.hkma.org.hk/program/program_next.asp?prog_no=MMBA&prog_cat=M&ver_type=E

4 Wan Chai Visitors Guide, <http://gohongkong.about.com/od/whattoseehk/a/Visitors-Guide-To-Wan-Chai.htm>

often cheaper and do not require regular attendance at lectures.⁵ Nevertheless, online MBA offerings continue to challenge this pedagogy.

However, problems with falling attendances have arisen elsewhere with many institutions (Morris, 2005), with this being partly due to the so-called ‘technological revolution’, with a meta-analysis study by Freeman et al. (2014) finding that students in STEM courses not only find lectures boring, but ineffective. Unfortunately, many also do not see much value in interacting with fellow students in person. In contrast, those doing an MBA, for example, are keen to network, as surveys show that some 50% to 60% of MBA graduates have found a job by networking.⁶ An MIT study (Clay and Breslow, 2006) suggested means by which students could be made to attend lectures, including regular quizzes, taking attendance and providing exam hints at random times, although these were often labelled as ‘cheap and mean’. No MGSM student has expressed this view, however, and apart from the attendance requirement there are no tricks to make them attend.

Many lecturers have developed a reliance on *Microsoft PowerPoint*; although there are certainly critics of this approach (Cowan, 2015). Other research (Loneragan, 2011) outlines how *PowerPoint* presentations can go terribly wrong despite the best intentions of the lecturer. It is interesting to note that many of the highest rated lecturers at MGSM rarely use *PowerPoint* in the classroom, including one who was awarded the prestigious title of Australian University Teacher of the Year.⁷

Teaching evaluations

Each offering of all subjects at MGSM is subject to a compulsory anonymous student evaluation survey, usually handed out in the final lecture. The effectiveness of such evaluations has been examined in a study (Ozcan, 2013) who found that students with higher GPAs tend to evaluate lecturers more favourably and those at developing universities evaluated teachers higher than those at established institutions. In another study (Palmer, 2012), examples were found of institutional responses to these student evaluations have proven to be ineffective as they have not led to real and sustainable improvements in teaching quality. Moreover, it has also been suggested (Rienties, 2014) that many academics are very sceptical in particular about evaluations that are completed online. In a remarkable study (Westfall et al., 2015) it was found that if students find their teachers attractive, they are more likely to pay attention, be more motivated and rate their ability more highly.

Despite these shortcomings, MGSM views their student evaluations as a valuable tool in their continuous improvement process. One of their goals is to provide entrepreneurial and enquiry-based pedagogies for critical thinking and collaboration to design solutions to real-world problems. While the response rate found by some, such as Rienties (2013), was 60%, at MGSM it is essentially 100% as they distributed and collected in person. The reason for this strategy is it is thought that the majority of

5 Friedman, Jordan, What Employers Think of Your Online MBA Degree US News 2016 <https://www.usnews.com/education/online-education/articles/2016-05-09/what-employers-think-of-your-online-mba-degree>

6 Access MBA, <http://www.accessmba.com/?id=2679>

7 See <http://www.mq.edu.au/newsroom/2013/11/20/professor-john-croucher-named-university-teacher-of-the-year/>

students who would take the time to answer an online evaluation might be mainly those with a gripe, therefore negatively skewing the results.

At MGSM serious consideration is given to all student evaluations and they are certainly used by lecturers to improve their teaching and develop the topics covered. Data were collected from over 1000 MGSM management students in Hong Kong covering over forty different offerings of core MBA subjects. They were handed out in lectures and filled in anonymously. This covered a four-year period with one of the key questions being how the students rated various aspects of the teaching of the lecturer in the subject.

These survey forms consist of fifteen Likert scale questions (examples shown in Table 1) and three open-ended questions including comments on what they liked or didn't like about the subject and what improvements they could suggest. Responses to the questions were rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = lowest, 5 = highest). These survey forms are sealed in an envelope by a student in the lecture and the student signs across the seal. They are then returned to Sydney for analysis with the responses seen only by the lecturer (after they have submitted their grade sheet) and the Dean.

Table 1: A sample of questions on the student evaluation form

Wording of question
Overall I would rate the teaching of the lecturer in this subject as (excellent → very poor)
This lecturer exhibited a good knowledge of the subject matter
This lecturer stimulated interest in the subject
This lecturer was able to explain concepts clearly
This lecturer stimulated intellectual curiosity
This lecturer had enthusiasm for the subject
This lecturer was well prepared for each session
This lecturer structured subject content in ways that assisted learning
There were good class dynamics and opportunities to interact with lecturer and students
I was encouraged to ask questions if I did not understand the material covered in class
The lecturer showed how to apply concepts, theories and constructs a typical problems and issues in management
Session times were used effectively
The assessment accurately assessed my knowledge and understanding of the subject matter
Feedback on my assessment was timely and useful
The lecturer made an effort to address different student capabilities
I acquired useful skills or knowledge that I expect to be able to use now or in the future

The overall mean score for the quality of the lecturer across all subjects was 4.14, with a median of 4.06, out of a possible 5. The quantitative based subjects were at, or near, the top of the list while those involving mainly essay writing were further down. Classes are conducted in English and students must have reached a minimum level of English proficiency level. The top three ranked subjects with the highest mean lecturer ratings, all numbers based, are shown in Table 2. It is interesting to note that these are the only three quantitative subjects and the lecturers involved were considered among the best among their colleagues, including the one who won the Prime Minister's Award.⁸

Table 2: Highest mean scores (out of 5) for lecturer rating

Subject	Score
Accounting for Management	4.86
Financial Management	4.76
Information and Decision Analysis (statistics)	4.66

MGSM is aware of the importance of gauging the responses of the audience to what their lecturers are presenting. In this sense they can determine what the Hong Kong students feel the teaching faculty do well; and what they not do so well. In the period covered there were no poor performers, although three aspects in each category stood out. Aspects that MGSM lecturers are best at (with the mean score in parentheses) include:

Having enthusiasm for their subject (4.59)

Having a good knowledge of their subject matter (4.57)

Aspects in which MGSM lecturers least excel include:

Making an effort to address different student capabilities (3.83)

Providing timely and useful feedback on assessment (3.85)

Accurately assessing the knowledge and understanding of the subject matter (3.88)

One might therefore conclude that the highly regarded teachers are enthusiastic and know what they are talking about, but these alone turned out not to be enough to guarantee an individual good lecturer rating. The low rating for providing feedback on the submitted work is no doubt partly due to the lecturer having to transport assignments, class tests and group projects back to Sydney where they are marked and then sent back to Hong Kong. There are various methods of assessment used, depending on the lecturer, with techniques including open and closed book final examinations, multiple choice tests, short answer and essays type exams, individual assignments, group projects and online quizzes.

⁸ This group includes the one who won the Prime Minister's Award. See Hare, J. Teachers in class of their own awarded The Australian, 20 November 2013, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/teachers-in-class-of-their-own-awarded/news-story/66a17ce8995be051f7e1c07bead8b06f>

A study of 113 MBA students in Hong Kong (Thompson, 2002) found that Chinese students considered the most important characteristics of lecturers were the ability to stimulate thinking, curiosity, and discussion; enthusiasm; open-mindedness; business, international, and teaching experience; English skills and systematic structure; and feedback. These were not dissimilar to the findings by MGSM. It was also suggested that Chinese students are receptive to Western-style teaching, valuing the class atmosphere, and also rating the lecturer's business experience more highly than academic credentials.

Correlations between teacher ratings

Apart from identifying factors at which lecturers excel or otherwise, it was important to determine whether these aspects were really of great significance to management students when rating a lecturer. To consider this aspect, the five top and bottom questions that correlated with the five-point scale (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent) *Lecturer rating* question were found.

There were three questions that had a correlation coefficient of over 0.900 with rating the lecturer, all having a p -value < 0.01 . These were (in order):

I would rate this subject as very good ($r = 0.943$)

The teacher presented the subject matter clearly ($r = 0.939$)

The teacher stimulated intellectual curiosity ($r = 0.934$)

Three questions that had a correlation coefficient of less than 0.600 with rating the lecturer. The first was not significant ($p > 0.05$). These were (in order):

Relatively the workload of this unit was heavy (0.132)

Feedback on my assessment was timely and useful (0.477)

Good class dynamics and interaction (0.578)

Curiously, apart from the question relating to workload, all questions in the survey had a significant correlation (to varying degrees) with the lecturer rating. That is, students did not blame the lecturer if they considered the workload for the subject too heavy or light, although it is precisely the lecturer who is responsible. From the survey, it was found that that stimulating interest and the ability to clearly explain material and concepts were the most crucial to be considered a good lecturer in Hong Kong.

At the other end of the scale, it is interesting to note that *appropriate assessment* and *timely, useful feedback* and *good class dynamics* correlate less highly with rating a teacher. These were also two of the three questions that students thought that lecturers were worst at, indicating that although lecturers do not perform well in these areas, students do not seem to mind all that much.

What is important to management students?

A separate, smaller survey comprising a random sample of 63 males and 69 females was taken, not with the aim of assessing the lecturer but of uncovering personal characteristics, how the students viewed themselves, their fellow students, the programme, their reasons for choosing MGSM and their overall satisfaction with the programme.

To this end, a 15-question anonymous survey was administered to these students over a three-year period 2014-16 and analysed using the statistics package *Minitab*. A selection of the summary data is shown in Table 3. Just over half (53%) of all tertiary students in Hong Kong are female, an increase from 46% in 1995-96 (Yau, 2014), the current figure being consistent with that of MGSM, although of the 20,000 MBA students in Australia fewer than one-third are female (Frino, 2014). The overall mean age in the MGSM programme is almost the same for both men and women, being 36.0 years for men and 36.2 years for women, these being about three years older than in the Sydney programme. Almost all of the students are in full-time employment and are expected to have at least some management experience unless they have an outstanding undergraduate academic record or some other equivalent qualification.

Table 3: Summary data for the 132 surveyed students

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Number	63	69
Mean age (years)	36.0	36.2
Mean weight (kg)	75.9	53.7
Mean height (cm)	174.5	160.8
Mean years management experience	8.4	6.1
Mean ability as a manager (/10)	6.7	6.4
Mean maths ability (/10)	6.7	6.4
Mean essay writing ability (/10)	6.4	7.8
Mean satisfaction with programme (/10)	7.4	7.2
% who chose MGSM partly because it has no GMAT	42.9	35.9

The results shed an interesting light on the feelings of Hong Kong students, who are often shy and retiring in lectures and very reluctant to answer or ask questions on the lecture material in front of their classmates. To broaden the survey, respondents were asked their age, height and weight, questions that could be considered quite sensitive. Intriguingly, among the females, eight refused to state their age, seven their weight and four their height. In contrast, all males responded to each of these three questions.

One of the pre-requisites for entry is that the candidates should have at least two years management experience (among other things) but it turned out that 11 females (16%) and 6 males (9%) revealed that they had never managed anyone with this group gaining admission through an outstanding academic undergraduate record. Of those 115 that had been a manager, 94 (82%) already rated their ability as a manager as 7 out of 10 or higher, with only one, a male, describing himself as a perfect 10 out of 10. Presumably the vast majority of students have a significant degree of belief in their management skills even before they complete their programme.

Reasons for selecting MGSM

Respondents were asked whether it was important for MGSM to have formal accreditation, something that MGSM is very keen on. The result was that only a dismal 44% thought it was important, although MGSM currently has AACSB accreditation, one of only ten out of 40 business schools at universities in Australia to do so.⁹

An examination of why Hong Kong students selected MGSM over their competitors revealed that, when asked to name their top three reasons, *Reputation* came in first, with 65%, closely followed by *Flexibility* (64%), not requiring a GMAT (39%), *Convenience* (36%) and *Word of Mouth* (27%). The fact that MGSM does not require a GMAT was quite popular, although many years ago it did require all applicants to sit for the GMAT but abandoned the practice when the results it produced bore no relationship to consequent performance. It turned out to be a wise decision, as the high quality of the students did not diminish and there were simply more applications. A comparison of completion rates between women and men (Montgomery et al, 2007) found that female registrants of the GMAT were about 30% less likely than males to complete their MBA.

A point of contention in the Hong Kong teaching facilities is the lack of a proper lecture theatre and no breakout rooms for small group teaching. When asked to rate their experience, the students rated the facilities with a mean score of 7.1 out of 10, which make them only barely satisfactory. Disturbingly perhaps, not one person rated them 10 out of 10 while 10% rated them as 5 or lower.

Grading

There are five grades available to be earned in the subjects at MGSM: namely, HD (High Distinction), D (Distinction), CR (Credit), P (Pass) and F (Fail). To gain an insight on how the students' grade expectations, the largely quantitative methods subject was selected, as the grading might be considered to be the least subjective, and respondents were asked, after completing all the coursework and lectures, what grade they expected to receive. Not one student expected to fail (although six ultimately did so). The remaining percentages of actual and expected grades are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Actual and expected percentage student grades in the quantitative methods subject

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Expected grade (%)</i>	<i>Actual grade (%)</i>
High Distinction	2.7	8.2
Distinction	38.9	27.0
Credit	41.6	41.4
Pass	16.8	18.9
Fail	0	4.5
Total	100	100

⁹ AACSB. See http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/accredited-members/global-listing?F_Country=Australia

Overall it seems that students overestimated their ability for the very top grade (High Distinction), but did somewhat worse than anticipated at the Distinction level. Apart from the failures, on balance they were quite accurate in assessing their own talents. As the survey was anonymous, it is not known whether these expected grades actually lined up. For example, whether the 41.6% who felt they would get a Credit grade were for the most part the same 41.4% who actually did so, but the proportions were almost identical.

Academic ability

There were two questions that asked students to rate their own academic ability on a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest) and then to rate their perception of fellow students using a similar scale. There was no overall difference between the two, with the mean self-rating being 7.2 and the mean rating of others being 7.0. A closer examination revealed that 42 (32%) rated themselves below other students, 45 (34%) the same and 45 (34%) as above, so it was a fairly even split. Only one student rated themselves as 3 points or lower below their fellow classmates while 9 (7%) saw themselves as 3 or more points higher. In one extreme case a 37-year-old male rated himself as 8/10, while judging others as 2/10. He also gave his overall satisfaction rating with the programme as 2/10, the lowest in the sample and he expected to receive a Distinction in the subject. It is not known if he did so.

Correlations between student attributes

In the survey of 132 students on their attributes, there was a non-significant negative correlation ($p = 0.207$) between self-rating of mathematics and essay writing ability. Of those students who rated the facilities as 6 out of 10 or lower, 79% were female. In fact, a χ^2 test was significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the women were far unhappier than the men when it came to their surroundings. This was borne out by a significant correlation ($p = 0.024$) between *Gender* and *Satisfaction with facilities*. One of the reasons to be explored for this displeasure is whether the location of the teaching facility, in the middle of a red light and bar district of Hong Kong, is a factor. If so, it certainly doesn't bother the males with 85% being very satisfied with it.

Not unexpected is the positive correlation between self-assessed *Maths ability* and *Age* ($p = 0.037$), in which younger students were more confident of their numerical skills than older ones. A quarter of those surveyed were aged 45 or over with nobody aged under 27 and so for some it had been twenty years or more since leaving high school. There is, however, no correlation between *Age* and the self-assessed *Ability as a manager* ($p > 0.05$). However, of those students with no management experience at all, 91% were below the median age of the group. For those who were aged 39 or greater, 97% rated their management ability as 7 out of 10 or greater.

Another correlation of interest was that between students who claimed that the high reputation of MGSM was a major factor in choosing it and whether they thought that MGSM should have accreditation ($p = 0.038$). This was also borne out by a chi-square statistic testing the independence of the two variables ($p = 0.041$). This suggests that if they already feel that MGSM has a high reputation then accreditation is not necessary.

The questions that had the highest correlation with teacher rating were *Applying the concepts to management* ($r = 0.91$) and *Presenting the subject matter clearly* ($r = 0.95$), both with $p < 0.01$. The only non-significant correlation was with *the appropriateness of the workload* ($p > 0.05$).

Some of the gender differences in responses have already been explored, but there are others that are worthy of consideration. For example, *all* of those who rated themselves as 5 or lower out of 10 as a manager were female. There were no gender differences between the grade they expected, mathematics ability (men generally regarded themselves superior to women in this respect but this wasn't significant), whether they enrolled at MGSM because of no GMAT, word of mouth, flexibility, price, reputation or convenience. In the MGSM survey, when it came to grades, nearly 80% of those who saw themselves as gaining only a bare pass were women.

There was a significant positive correlation between the heights of males and their self-assessment of their management ability ($p = 0.005$), this being in line with the idea that tall people fare much better and are more confident in their ability in the workplace (Tyrrell et al., 2016, Croucher, 2006). However, this confidence was not evident in this study among females ($p = 0.174$). There was a significant positive correlation between the age of females and their self-assessment of their management ability ($p = 0.001$), but this was not evident among males ($p = 0.743$). Highly significant positive correlations are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Highly significant positive correlation coefficients ($p < 0.01$)

<i>First variable</i>	<i>Second variable</i>
Self-rating of ability as a student	Grade expected in the subject
Self-rating of ability as a student	Self-rating of mathematics ability
Self-rating of ability as a student	Self-rating of essay writing ability
Self-rating of ability as a student	Satisfaction with programme
Rating of the ability of other students	Rating of the facilities
Satisfaction with the management programme	Rating of the facilities
Rating of the ability of other students	Satisfaction with the management programme
Self-rating of mathematics ability	Rating the ability of other students

Remarks

The aim of MGSM's postgraduate management programmes in Hong Kong is to harness the experience and mindsets of a wide, diverse group of peers and associated stakeholders in the country. Where required, communication, cultural and academic skills are promoted to enable effective integration into social and academic context in Hong Kong where students use work/life experiences to critique management theory.

Student evaluation surveys have shown themselves to be an effective method of assisting faculty to identify any problem in learning and teaching (Crossley, 2015)

and for the Dean to use in the performance management of academics who provide a balance of the educational and practical aspects of their courses.

It is important that these surveys do not develop into ‘popularity contests’ where teachers are afraid to chastise students for poor behaviour or try something new in their class for fear that it will result in lower ratings. So far, with a mature audience, there is no real evidence of this. The survey instrument and questions asked are constantly under review. It would be useful to have an idea of whether a prospective student is likely to be satisfied or not based on information that could be gained from an interview prior to admission.

Specific areas that need to be addressed were identified in these surveys. One is the location of the classes, currently in Wan Chai, that is now under consideration, along with the facilities provided. It was also surprising that having no GMAT was a significant driver in the selection of MGSM as against other management schools, and there are no plans to introduce it in Hong Kong. It was also interesting that nearly 80% of those who felt that would gain only a bare pass in the quantitative methods subset were women, despite the fact that women and men do equally well in it.

Having accreditation did not seem as important to the students as might be thought, although MGSM considers it essential for a quality business school and will actively attempt to keep it. It was also found that those lecturers rated the highest overall scored the best on presenting their subject matter in a clear manner and demonstrating how it could be applied to management. Their ratings did not seem particularly affected by not providing useful feedback, a task sometimes difficult as there is a necessary delay in getting marked work from Sydney back to Hong Kong. It was also found that a heavy workload in a subject did not detract from how a lecturer was rated, probably because it was felt that they were only the messenger and not responsible for it.

Further research could include how the results for MGSM compare with other leading business schools that offer postgraduate management programs in Hong Kong. This would involve similar surveys taken from those institutions and similarities and differences highlighted. Another interesting study would be to survey the students at, say, five years after their degree and determine whether they hold the same view of the programme. They may well feel differently about how they viewed, in hindsight, all aspects of their experience.

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Transnational education and domestic higher education in Asian-Pacific host countries

Nigel Healey

Abstract

Higher education globally faces a serious productivity challenge, with universities tending to pass on higher costs to students and government through higher fees, rather than systematically reengineering the way they educate students to drive efficiency gains. The productivity challenge is particularly acute for the Asia-Pacific, where economic growth and large university-age populations are increasing the demand for higher education. Unless the productivity challenge can be overcome, the region faces a stark choice between raising tertiary participation rates and maintaining academic quality. This paper reviews the phenomenon of transnational education, the educational equivalent of the globalization of business, and asks whether allowing foreign universities to set up local operations provides a way of enhancing the quality and accelerating productivity growth in the domestic higher education systems of host countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Key Words

Higher education, transnational education, Asian-Pacific host countries

Introduction

The productivity challenge facing the Asia-Pacific region is considerable. The demand for higher education will grow strongly over the next decade. Table 1 shows the population sizes of the 20-24 year-old cohorts for eight selected countries in the Asia-Pacific. Although this regional cohort is forecast to decline by 7.0% between 2015 and 2025, with the biggest fall in China as a result of the 'one-child policy' (20.8%), in these eight countries alone there were 290.7m young people of university age in 2015.

The final column shows the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which measures total tertiary enrolments as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving. For the OECD countries, the GER in 2012 was 70.7%. As GERs in the Asia-Pacific rise towards OECD levels, the need for university seats will grow dramatically. For example, raising the GER to a modest 50% for these eight countries alone would require 71m more university seats in the region. The British Council has estimated that enrolments will rise by 50m in the Asia-Pacific by 2025 (British Council 2012).

Unlike manufacturing, higher education has been plagued by stagnant productivity growth, with tuition costs spiraling as a result. A special report on higher education

in the United States by *The Economist* concluded that ‘The average cost of college per student has risen by three times the rate of inflation since 1983. The cost of tuition alone has soared from 23% of median annual earnings in 2001 to 38% in 2010. Such increases plainly cannot continue’ (*The Economist* 2012, p.57).

Table 1: 20 to 24-year-old Population Cohort

	2011	2015	2025F	GER (2012)
China	119.3m	104.8m	83.0m	26.7%
India	115.5m	119.3m	121.7m	24.8%
Pakistan	18.1m	19.1m	18.9m	9.5%
Indonesia	21.4m	21.3m	21.6m	31.5%
Malaysia	2.5m	2.6m	3.0m	36.0% (2011)
Philippines	9.0m	9.5m	11.0m	28.2% (2009)
Thailand	5.2m	5.2m	4.8m	51.2% (2013)
Vietnam	9.0m	8.9m	6.6m	24.5%

Sources: United Nations Population Division: World Population Prospects 2017

(<https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>)

UNESCO Institute of Statistics: Education (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx>)

Table 2 shows that for the ‘top ten’ universities in Asia according to the *QS University Rankings: Asia 2016*, undergraduate tuition fees have risen as high as US\$26,000. Salidi (2016) reported that average tuition costs in Singapore had risen by an average of 38% between 2007 and 2016, noting that ‘the cost of a law degree at NUS [National University of Singapore], meanwhile, rocketed from S\$6,100 in 2009 to S\$12,400, a 103 percent hike’.

In contrast, in Vietnam, which has a population of 92.7m of whom nearly one-quarter (23.2%) are under the age of 15 years, representing a major pipeline of future growth in the demand for higher education, *per capita* gross domestic product is US\$2,050 (World Bank, 2016). Unless universities in the Asia-Pacific can significantly increase their productivity, high-quality education will be beyond the reach of most citizens.

Productivity is closely associated with – but different from – quality. Productivity measures the efficiency with which universities transform inputs (labor, capital, land) into outputs (trained graduates, high-impact research papers) and is properly a major concern for governments that seek the best return on their investment in their domestic higher education systems.

Table 2: Undergraduate business international tuition fees (per annum), 2017/18

QS WUR Rank 2016		US\$
1	National University of Singapore (NUS)	\$23,137
2	The University of Hong Kong	\$18,716
3	Nanyang Technological University (NTU)	\$26,030
4	The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)	\$17,947
5	Tsinghua University	\$3,818
6	Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST)	\$6,060
7	City University of Hong Kong	\$15,383
8	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	\$18,588
9	Peking University	\$3,818
10	Seoul National University	\$4,625

Source: QS University Rankings Asia 2016, universities' websites

The relationship between productivity and quality is that to measure the former, it is necessary to define the output of universities so that this output per input can be measured. In turn, this means defining output in terms of the minimum quality acceptable, otherwise universities could increase output by simply reducing quality (Summary and Weber 2012). For example, if output were simply defined as the number of students graduating, universities could increase output by reducing the passing grade. If output is defined as the number of graduates who get a well-paid job within six months, this distorting incentive is reduced.

The second dominant feature of contemporary higher education has been the globalization of universities, with institutions reaching out to new student markets in foreign countries by setting up local provision, either directly in the form of an 'international branch campus' (IBC) or by working in partnership with a local organization to franchise their degrees (Huang 2007, Altbach et al 2009, Knight 2012).

The growth of cross-border or transnational education begs the question of whether the growing presence of foreign providers accelerates the development of higher education in the host country, by improving quality and productivity in the domestic higher education sector. For example, if the foreign providers integrate into the domestic sector, hiring and training local faculty in advanced educational pedagogies like 'flipped classroom' and problem-based learning, transnational education may grow the pool of talented educators and administrators, which benefits the domestic institutions. Competition between foreign providers and local universities may encourage the latter to be more innovative and efficient. There may also be a 'demonstration effect', as foreign providers showcase educational technologies like virtual learning environments and social learning commons which their local counterparts can adopt.

The extent to which transnational education positively impacts the development of the local higher education system depends on a range of factors, including its scale and the policy motivations and regulatory regime of the host government (McNamara and Knight 2014). If the foreign providers entering the market are targeting potential students who cannot afford to enter (or are barred from entering) the domestic universities, then the transnational education may largely be in the form of cheap, low quality courses.

In the 1990s, for example, much of the growth in transnational education in south-east Asia involved UK and Australian universities partnering with small private colleges to offer 'cheap and cheerful' business degrees, often part-time to working students (Altbach 2004). The domestic universities remained aloof from these developments, as the new foreign competitors recruited local students who were too academically weak or too economically disadvantaged to gain places in the domestic system. On the other hand, some countries, notably Qatar, have actively targeted the world's leading universities (including Cornell, Texas A&M and Carnegie Mellon) to set up campuses in the wealthy city state, believing that their presence would drive up standards and efficiency throughout their higher education system.

Some critics have questioned the benefits of transnational education for host countries, citing the short-term, commercial objectives of the foreign universities involved which tend to minimize technology transfer and militate against long-term capacity building (Stella 2006). Others argue that transnational education can amount to 'educational imperialism' (Pyvis 2011, p.733) and that the importation of English-language, Western curricula may be unsuited to the cultural and societal needs of local students (Liston 1998, Yang 2000, Rhee and Sagaria 2004). Egege and Kutieleh (2008) warn against a 'one world culture that has the potential to undermine local differences' (p.68), while in a powerful attack on the role of western education, Tikly (2004) has argued that educating students in developing countries 'into a western way of thinking based on western forms of knowledge, [is] part of a process that scholars... have described as a "colonisation of the mind"' (p.188).

These are powerful critiques and resonate closely with the core thesis of this paper, which is that the positive impact of transnational education on the quality and productivity of the domestic higher education sector depends upon the nature of the transnational education provision and the motivation of both the foreign providers and the host government. The structure of the paper is as follows. It first outlines the meaning and forms of transnational education. It then considers the potential of transnational education to meet demand in the Asia-Pacific and explores the scope for host countries to use transnational education to accelerate the development of their domestic higher education sectors, so driving up the quality and efficiency of their local institutions.

What is transnational education?

Transnational education is defined as 'any teaching or learning activity in which *the students are in a different country to that in which the institution providing the education is based*' (Global Alliance for Transnational Education 1997, p.1, italics added). Put another way, transnational education includes 'all types of higher education study programs, sets of study courses, or educational services (including those of distance

education) in which the *learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based*⁷ (Council of Europe 2002, italics added).

At the heart of both these definitions is the fundamental ‘principle of transnationality’, namely that the student is in a different country from the university awarding the qualification. Transnational education is thus essentially about the means by which the educational service is provided by the university in country A to students in country B. Universities can deliver education across borders in a number of ways – for example, by online delivery, partnering with foreign colleges to deliver programs on their behalf or setting up their own off-shore campuses to provide the teaching directly.

The scope for the growth of transnational education

The phenomenon of transnational education is generally seen as the most advanced stage of the internationalization of universities. Universities start to internationalize their teaching activities by recruiting foreign students to their home campuses. This is sometimes termed ‘export education’, as it is the educational equivalent of exporting services like tourism (where the foreign tourist has to visit the exporting country to consume the service). For universities in the most advanced export education countries like the UK and Australia, roughly one in five university students are foreign (OECD 2016).

There are, however, limits to the growth of traditional export education. Universities face capacity constraints. International students tend to be concentrated in subjects like business and engineering that offer graduates the best prospects of a successful career. International student numbers cannot be expanded beyond a certain point without distorting the shape and academic character of a university. Some universities have unwittingly allowed this point to be passed and, in so doing, have alienated both the international students who feel cheated by not getting the Australian or UK educational experience they were promised, as well as the domestic students who resent being a minority in the student body (Guillen and Jia 2011, Rafferty 2013).

There are notable exemptions, where world-class universities have sought to attract the most talented students, regardless of nationality. London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is one of the leading social science institutions in the world. In 2015/16, only 51.8% of its undergraduates and 19.5% of its postgraduates were from the UK (HESA). LSE is, however, a small, specialist research-intensive institution with only 10,400 students, which is seeking to build a global brand. It is very different from the large UK and Australian teaching-intensive institutions, where international enrolments are the financial life blood of the university and most postgraduate business programs are almost exclusively international students.

Perhaps more fundamentally, there is a limit to the number of students who are willing and able (financially and culturally) to study in a foreign country. Tellingly, while the total number of students in tertiary education has grown rapidly over the last 35 years, the percentage that study outside their own country (ie, who are ‘internationally-mobile’) has remained fairly constant at around 2% (see Table 3).

Table 3: Global and Internationally Mobile Tertiary Enrolments

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Internationally mobile students (m)	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.7	2.1	2.9	3.7	4.6
Global tertiary enrolments (m)	51.2	60.3	68.7	81.7	99.9	139	181.4	212.7
Internationally mobile as % total	2.2%	1.8%	1.9%	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%	2.0%	2.2%

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics: Education (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx>)

Transnational education allows universities to increase their international enrolments by offering their qualifications in third countries, competing for the 98% of the market for higher education that is not internationally mobile. Moreover, by establishing themselves in markets where the local higher education sector is too underdeveloped to satisfy demand, universities may actually increase global participation in higher education (Vincent-Lancrin 2007, p.76). Maastricht University has expanded its graduate business programs into African countries with the deliberate intention of widening global access rather than increasing and diversifying revenue, although this initiative is atypical and has depended on strong financial support from the Netherlands government.

Types of transnational education

The principle of transnationality begs the question of how the university in country A can provide the educational service to students in country B. The simplest way is to classify transnational education in terms of the institutional and contractual infrastructure that the university uses to deliver education.

This approach is derived from international business theory. The Uppsala 'stages approach' to internationalization argues that companies internationalize incrementally, by first exporting their goods, then moving to licensing production to a partner in a third country (where the financial risk is primarily borne by the partner) and finally investing directly in their own production and distribution facilities (Johansson and Vahlne 1977, 1990). The underlying principle is that each stage is riskier than the one before, so that companies only move from exporting to licensing, and from licensing to foreign direct investment, as they acquire more knowledge about the third market and gain greater confidence.

There are countless examples from the corporate world of the way that companies penetrate new markets in a staged way. Coca Cola, for example, is sold in every country except Cuba and North Korea, but has never moved beyond licensing. Coca Cola manufactures syrup in the United States, which is shipped to franchisees who make and bottle (or can) the final product for distribution in their own countries. Honda, on the other hand, uses different penetration strategies in different markets, exporting directly

to small markets like New Zealand, licensing the production of outdated models to foreign manufacturers in developing countries like China and India where there is huge demand for cheap transport, and setting up production facilities (foreign direct investment) in developed countries like the US, where customer demand is for more specialized vehicles.

In transnational higher education, there are parallel stages of internationalization, but different terms are generally used to describe each stage. The equivalent of exporting education to students who remain in their own countries is usually called 'distance learning', licensing is variously known as twinning or franchising and validation and foreign direct investment usually takes the form of setting up an IBC (see Healey 2008) for more details. A recent study by the British Council and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) noted 'TNE terminology chaos. Over 40 different terms are being used to describe international programme and provider mobility [IPPM]. Furthermore, the same terms are used to denote very different modes of IPPM while different terms are being used to describe the same mode of IPPM' (Knight and McNamara 2017). The next sub-sections consider each stage of internationalization in turn using the most common definitions of transnational education.

Distance learning

In higher education, the traditional equivalent of exporting has been for students to travel to the home campus to study. However, distance learning provides an alternative way of exporting education directly to students in their own countries. Students located in another country can access online program materials, either independently or as part of an online, tutor-supported program (Quality Assurance Agency 2010).

Universities have engaged in distance learning education for many years. The University of London pioneered correspondence courses in the 19th century (Harte 1986). The UK's Open University used the medium of national television to broaden the reach of distance learning in the 1960s. The internet and the spread of smart phones have dramatically reduced the costs of providing distance-learning, allowing universities to reach increasing numbers of students around the world without leaving their home campus. The recent emergence of 'Massive Open Online Courses' (MOOCs) and the huge global enrolments in popular courses have illustrated the enormous potential market for distance learning (Hoy 2014).

Franchising and Validation

The higher education equivalent of licensing production to a foreign partner is franchising or validation. Franchising involves entering a partnership with a foreign provider, under which the partner is licensed to promote and teach the home/exporting university's degree in its own country, with no curricular input from the host institution (British Council 2013). The precise terms of franchise agreements vary widely, but generally the partner is responsible for providing the physical infrastructure (the teaching buildings, library, computing facilities), employing the academic and administrative staff who teach the degree, marketing and recruiting students and teaching and assessing the students. Importantly, students enroll with the local delivery partners (Drew *et al.* 2008).

The university provides the intellectual property (ie, the curricular content, learning outcomes) and oversees the quality of the teaching and assessment (British Council 2013). The partner bears most of the financial risk and normally pays the university a royalty fee per student, although financial arrangements also vary widely.

Validation is a closely related form of licensing. In most respects, the relationship between the university and foreign provider is the same as in a franchise. The main difference is that the curriculum (including the degree title) is developed by the partner and validated by the university (British Council 2013). If the proposed curriculum is deemed appropriate in terms of quality and meets the awarding university's degree standards, the university licenses the partner to market its own qualification as an award of the university. Validation allows the curriculum to be more closely attuned to the context of the market in which it is being delivered. In some cases, the curriculum may be delivered in the local language, which makes the qualifications accessible to a much wider pool of students.

While US and Australian universities engage in franchising, validation appears to be a uniquely UK practice. In the US, for example, regional accrediting bodies require franchised degrees to be identical to those taught on the home campus. One possible explanation for the difference may be that, until relatively recently, degree awarding powers in the UK were restricted to a relatively small number of institutions. Before 1992, only universities established by Royal Charter could award degrees. Many small colleges relied on local universities to validate their degrees. The polytechnics had their degrees validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). The use of validation inside UK borders was thus widespread (Silver 1990). When the polytechnics gained university status and degree awarding powers in 1992, they already had the organizational infrastructure and experience to begin validating degrees themselves – both in local colleges and, increasingly over time, offshore.

Joint programs are a variant of franchising and validation. Although multiple definitions of the 'joint program' exist, the QAA (2010) defines it as a program which allows offshore students to complete the university's entire degree at a partner institution or to begin the program in the partner institution and transfer to complete the degree at the awarding university.

The program being delivered at the partner institution could, in principle, be either a franchise or a validation. For example, in the 1990s many UK universities offered their degrees through private Malaysian colleges on a '2+1' basis, where the first two years were studied in Malaysia and the final year was completed by students coming to the UK. The Malaysia-based part of the program was typically a franchise, to ensure a seamless transition to the UK for students as they moved onto the final year of the same degree.

As these colleges developed, they gained local degree-awarding powers, but some continued to need the academic credibility they had enjoyed by granting the degrees of UK universities. One solution was to design and award their own degrees, which were validated by the UK university, so that the students could graduate with two awards. This form of joint program is becoming increasingly popular in Malaysia as many private colleges are being upgraded to university colleges.

In other countries, the early years of the degree may be franchised to the foreign partner, while the final year of the degree is taught at the foreign partner's campus by faculty from the awarding university on a 'fly-in fly-out' mode of delivery, which usually involves intensive block teaching (Smith, 2014). This variant combines franchising and distance-learning. As with the other forms, joint programs are not a separate stage of internationalization, but rather a mix of the more distinct stages like franchising and validation.

International branch campuses

IBCs represent the final stage of internationalization, with the university establishing a satellite campus in a third country (British Council 2013). Currently the US has the most IBCs, followed by the UK and Australia (Salt and Wood 2014). Financially, an IBC is much riskier than franchising or validation. There are a number of examples of IBCs which failed to break even and were closed at a financial loss to the university. These examples include UNSW Asia in Singapore (closed in 2007), George Mason University in the United Arab Emirates (closed in 2009) and the University of East London in Cyprus (closed in 2013). In an earlier era, several US universities opened IBCs in Japan in the 1980s, which subsequently foundered in the protracted recession of the 1990s (Umakoshi 1997).

However, when they are successful, IBCs enable universities to project themselves as 'global universities'. The University of Nottingham and Monash University have both used their IBCs around the world to position themselves as global brands (Sidhu 2009). These universities present themselves as global universities, with campuses in multiple countries, rather than as a university with its 'headquarters' in, say, Nottingham and small, dependent IBCs in developing countries. Systems and academic procedures are operated on a pan-university basis, to reinforce the model of a single university, with globally distributed campuses.

What is being transferred to the host country in transnational education?

In distance-learning, the students study for the qualification in their own country, but the university retains complete control over the curriculum, teaching, assessment and certification (ie, the issuing of the testamur or certificate). To all intents and purposes, the student could be in any country and, apart from the upskilling of students completing the distance-learning degree, there is no wider benefit to the host country.

Table 4: The transfer of higher education to the host country by type

	Distance Learning	International Branch Campus	Franchise	Validation
Curriculum	X	X	X	✓
Teaching	X	✓	✓	✓
Assessment	X	X	✓	✓
Certification	X	X	X	X

In the case of a branch campus, the home university retains control of the curriculum, assessment and certification, but typically employs local academic and administrative staff to teach the students, even though it may second a small number of its permanent staff to provide leadership and mentorship. In this case, the IBC is making a contribution to the host country over and above the students it graduates, by providing valuable professional development for local staff and training them in new methods of pedagogy and the use of educational technology.

In a franchise, the home university normally retains control of the curriculum and certification, but allows the franchise partner to teach and assess the degrees using local staff, providing only a moderating role to ensure academic quality. This further enhances the capacity and capability of local academic and administrative staff, who have the autonomy to deliver and assess the curriculum, but with the support and oversight of the home university.

Finally, validation allows a local partner to develop the curriculum and teach and assess the degree, with the home university using its quality assurance procedures to control the quality of the degree offered and certify it as its own. Although validation is often regarded as the riskiest form of transnational education for the home university, it arguably provides the greatest potential benefit to the host country in terms of building local capacity.

Transnational education and productivity growth in host countries

The globalization of business, which has broadly followed the stages approach of exporting, franchising and direct foreign investment, has played the dominant role in accelerating the economic development of host countries. Although the extent to which the benefits of economic growth have 'trickled down' to the poorest sections of society are strongly contested by the anti-globalization movement (eg, Wade 2003, Tickle 2004), there is no question that the rapid productivity growth experienced in countries like China over the last 25 years has been driven by the transfer of capital, management and technology from the West to the industries of the host countries. With higher education globalizing along a similar path, will transnational education provide the same boost to productivity growth in the higher education systems of the host countries?

It turns out that the answer to this question depends significantly on the policy motives of the host governments in allowing or inviting foreign universities to establish a presence in their country. There are essentially three broad motivations:

- Demand absorbing.
- Export oriented.
- Demonstration effect.

Demand absorbing

Higher education is a 'superior good', in the sense that the demand for higher education grows faster than gross domestic product (GDP); for example, a 1% increase in GDP may raise the demand for higher education by 1.5%. On the other hand, it takes time to increase the supply of university places if quality is to be maintained. Campuses need to be built, academic and administrative staff trained, policies and procedures developed

and management systems installed. In countries enjoying rapid economic growth, the demand for higher education tends to outstrip the growth in the supply of places, either forcing the unplaced students to look abroad for opportunities or creating a vacuum which could be filled by transnational education.

Governments in, for example, Hong Kong SAR, Greece, Uzbekistan and, until recently Malaysia, have used transnational education as a way of supplementing domestic higher education and increasing the supply of places to local students, sometimes in a deliberate effort to reduce the foreign exchange drain of students going abroad to study. In the case of the United Arab Emirates, there is a large expatriate population that cannot access the (free) domestic higher education system. This is reserved for Emirati nationals, forcing the children of expatriate workers to either go abroad to study or join one of the many transnational education ventures in the country (Wilkins 2011).

Export oriented

Higher education is a major export sector, with countries like Australia and the UK heavily dependent on export education. Some government have used transnational education to create 'education hubs' which are intended to attract foreign students from across the surrounding geographic region (Verbik and Merkley 2006, Knight 2011). The benefits of an export-oriented approach to transnational education go beyond earning foreign exchange. Transnational education projects 'soft power', with students returning to their home countries as advocates of the country that provided their education. In a world where many countries have ageing populations, attracting students to study in an export hub is also an important way of wooing skilled migrants to counter the 'demographic timebomb' (Liu-Farrer 2009).

Singapore's 'Global Schoolhouse' is one of the best-known education hubs projects, although, as argued in the case study below, Singapore has actually combined a small export-oriented project with elite foreign providers like Yale with a large transnational sector aimed at local students. Countries like Botswana and Mauritius, with underdeveloped domestic higher education systems and low populations, have used transnational education to build up their position as an educational destination for the surrounding region.

Demonstration effect

A third policy motive is to use transnational education to provide a demonstration effect for the domestic higher education; in other words, to use high quality foreign universities to provide an example of best practice to local institutions and to encourage the transfer of forms of education technology, including curriculum design, pedagogy, quality assurance, the use of English as a medium of instruction and systems of academic governance. There is some evidence that the Chinese government is using transnational education to strengthen its domestic higher education system, by requiring foreign universities to work in close partnership with Chinese universities and co-sharing the design and teaching of the curriculum.

Benefits of transnational education for productivity of host higher education sector

As discussed above, transnational education could potentially accelerate productivity growth and enhance quality in the domestic higher education through a variety of channels, for example by expanding the pool of qualified and experienced faculty and administrators, transferring education technology in the form of academic quality processes and regulations, strengthening the local higher education institutions that work with foreign universities and connecting the local higher education sector to the wider global higher education market (Middlehurst et al 2009, McNamara and Knight 2014).

As the sections above have outlined, the potential benefits of transnational education for domestic productivity growth depend on the type of transnational provision (eg, IBC versus validation) and the motivation of the host government. To illustrate these differences, consider the following three country case studies.

Case study: Malaysia

Until the 1990s, large numbers of Malaysian students went abroad for higher education. This was mainly because the domestic higher education system was underdeveloped, but it was exacerbated by a racial quota system (in place until 2002) which restricted the availability of domestic places to Malaysians of Chinese descent, and by the generous MARA Overseas Scholarships for Bumiputera students (Guan 2005).

Many local entrepreneurs saw the commercial opportunities in filling the gap between domestic demand and supply and, in partnership with mainly UK and Australian universities, set up franchise and validated operations, often on a so-called '1+2' or '2+1' basis. The Malaysian students studied the first one or two years of the degree in-country and then transferred to the overseas university to complete their studies. After the 1997 'Asian financial crisis', when the value of the Malaysian ringgit collapsed, many of these partnerships were transformed into '3+0' partnerships, with the entire program completed in Malaysia, to prevent this lucrative market collapsing (Hill et al 2014).

The Malaysian government recognized both the opportunity (if properly regulated) and risk (if uncontrolled) of this rapid growth of transnational education (Wilkinson and Yussof 2005, Tham and Kam 2008). In 2007, the new Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) established the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) and began to closely regulate transnational operations to ensure that they evolved within a strict quality framework. This framework has allowed many private colleges offering franchised and validated foreign degrees to be upgraded to private university colleges (with degree-awarding powers) and ultimately to full university status. Sunway University and Taylors University are two of the best known of these success stories. In recent years, the Malaysian government has set out its ambition to establish the country as an education hub, completing a remarkable transformation for its transnational providers from capacity absorbing to export-orientation (Siew 2013, Selvaratnam 2016).

Case study: Singapore

Despite the Global Schoolhouse project targeting elite universities to set up export-

oriented operations in Singapore, the country has for at least two decades allowed large numbers of private colleges to offer franchised a validated degree from Australian and UK universities (Sidhu et al 2011). As investment in public universities, including the launch of new universities like Singapore Management University, and polytechnics has driven up the quality of the domestic higher education system, the government became concerned that many of the transnational programs being offered by the private sector were of low quality (Lim 2010).

In 2009, the Singapore government launched the Council of Private Education which was charged with evaluating and regulating the quality of private transnational operations. In the last seven years, approximately two-thirds of the 2,000 or so transnational programs which existed in 2009 have now closed (Lo 2014). In contrast to Malaysia, where transnational education set the country on a path to a much stronger higher education system, it is arguable that in Singapore, quality improvements have been driven by the domestic institutions and the private transnational education has been of lower quality, with relatively few wider benefits for the country (Altbach 2004, Lim 2004, Garrett 2015).

Case study: China

China has witnessed an extraordinary expansion in its public tertiary sector since 2000, with a three-fold increase in total enrolments (Brandenburg and Zhu 2007). This dramatic expansion in the number of domestic places has been coupled with a decline in the 18-22 year old population, which began falling in 2011 as a result of the ‘one child’ policy (Wang 2005). Tertiary participation rates have risen rapidly to reach 30%, but there has been considerable policy concern about the quality of much of the new provision, as ‘the rapid expansion of the system has made it difficult to sustain quality inputs such as the number of qualified faculty and staff, curriculum development and program upgrading, laboratory facilities, and library books’ (Min, quoted by Bai 2006, p.141). Poor graduate employment rates have emerged as a key policy issue (Wang et al 2012, Li et al 2014, Soo 2015). From 2007, the Chinese government was forced to reverse the shift from public to private funding of universities to allow an expansion in postgraduate places to absorb the growing pool of unemployed graduates and develop a range of alternative new routes into employment for graduates (Chan 2015).

Given the scale of China’s domestic higher education system, transnational education is so small it has no appreciable impact in either absorbing demand or generating export revenue. However, the Chinese government is using Sino-foreign transnational joint ventures, which require local education partners, as a means of transferring technology from foreign providers to their local counterparts (Ennew and Fujia 2009). This is a new, but interesting development in the way that transnational education can influence quality and productivity growth in the domestic higher education sector through a demonstration effect (Sharma 2014, Mok and Han 2016).

The value to host country of transnational education

Based on the analysis of the three host countries above, it follows that the extent of the positive impact of transnational education on the quality and productivity of the

domestic higher education sector depends on the nature of the transnational education itself and the motivations of the host government. The case studies suggest that when the transnational education provides a demand-absorbing role (ie, it is targeted at local students), it can have a positive impact on domestic sector. However, gaining these benefits requires that the host country has a strong quality assurance framework in place (as in Malaysia) to avoid the risk that profit-seeking private entrepreneurs with short time horizons dominate the market (as in Singapore pre-2009).

These benefits are likely to be systematically lower if the transnational education has an export-orientation, because the host government has a less direct interest in ensuring the quality of the transnational provision – and so integrating the transnational education providers into its domestic sector. Finally, IBCs can have a powerful demonstration effect if they are used systematically by higher education policymakers, but this effect is likely to be dissipated if the transnational education has a strong local component, as with a franchise or validation. Table 5 summarizes these conclusions.

Table 5: The value of transnational education by type / role

	Distance learning	International branch campus	Franchise	Validation
Demand absorbing	Low	Medium	High	High
Export oriented	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Demonstration effect	Low	High	Medium	Medium

Conclusions

Higher education globally faces a serious productivity challenge, with universities tending to pass on higher costs to students and government through higher fees, rather than systematically reengineering the way they educate to drive efficiency gains. This is particularly true in the world's leading universities, where despite the enormous advances in digital technology, universities still teach in the same lecture–tutorial, face-to-face format they have used for decades.

The productivity challenge is particularly acute for the Asia-Pacific, where economic growth and large university-age populations are increasing the demand for higher education. Unless the productivity challenge can be overcome, the region faces a stark choice between higher tertiary participation rates and lower academic quality.

This article has reviewed the phenomenon of transnational education, the educational equivalent of the globalization of business, and asked whether allowing foreign universities to set up provides a way of accelerating productivity growth and enhancing academic quality in host countries. The answer appears to be that, under the right circumstances, transnational education can play a positive role, for example, in Malaysia and Singapore where foreign providers have absorbed excess demand and China where IBCs have had a strong demonstration effect, but it requires that the host

government has a clear objective for transnational education and that it can control not just the quality, but also its integration into the wider domestic higher education landscape.

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Rethinking what it means to be a progressive teacher: Key ideas from social realism

Graham McPhail

Abstract

This paper outlines a recent development in thinking about educational futures from within the sociology of education. This development, which has its roots in the philosophy of critical realism, and the sociology of Durkheim and Bernstein, has very practical implications for educational policy and practice expressed through a broad sociological project termed *social realism*. Social realism has been adopted by scholars and teachers who are seeking a resolution to the tension in the on-going and tired debates between traditional and progressive traditions in education. Moreover, the approach has as its underlying aim a social justice agenda centred on students' rights of access to knowledge. Social realism provides a powerful argument for enabling the move beyond entrenched positions of established 'traditions' to look afresh at a 'mixed' philosophical and pedagogic approach for education. Moreover, these ideas provide a means to think about and link the process of education philosophically, politically, and at the practical level of the classroom.

Key words

Social realism, progressivism, sociology of education, knowledge, traditional education

Introduction

For a century or more debates about the central purpose of education have tended to oscillate between two long-standing, apparently contradictory views¹. In one view, often termed *knowledge* or *subject centred* it is argued that education's purpose is to build students' intellectual capacity through exposure to certain kinds knowledge; "the best that has been thought and said" (Arnold, 1869/1960, p. 6). In this argument knowledge 'comes first', in both an ontological and epistemological sense. Knowledge exists prior to, and separate from learners and their understanding of it. This approach is often conflated with authoritarian approaches to content and pedagogy. Education is a matter of power and control achieved through strong classification and maintenance of boundaries expressed through a pedagogy rote learning; a 'one size fits all' unchanging curriculum. In the second view, often termed *student-centred* or *progressive*, the concern is more with process than content, and the child's personal social and learning needs come first. Knowledge is secondary, and acts as the conduit for realising an innate potential in the student, and for constructing understanding and meaning-making. More

recently proponents of this view often suggest that education is not about learning ‘things’ but about ‘learning how to learn’. The teacher becomes a facilitator and co-constructs knowledge with the student.

The apparent dichotomy between ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ views was clear to Dewey (1938) when he noted that humans tend to think in terms of extreme opposites: ‘the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without (p. 17)’. By ‘development from within’, Dewey is referring to the idea of ‘drawing out’ the child’s innate abilities. In this sense he is drawing on child-centred ideas inherited from Rousseau and Hegel that remain deeply embedded in thinking about education today (Hirsch, 2015). By ‘formation from without’ Dewey is alluding to the more traditional idea of education as the acquisition of the collective knowledge and capabilities required to function in, and contribute to, a democratic society. The editor of Dewey’s 1938 publication *Experience and Education* summarises the positions well and offers a pragmatic appraisal of their respective merits:

Where the traditional school relied on subjects or the cultural heritage for its content, the “new” school has exalted the learner’s impulse and interest neither of these sets of values is sufficient unto itself. Both are essential ... the traditional curriculum undoubtedly entailed rigid regimentation and a discipline that ignored the capacities and interests of child nature. Today, however, the reaction to this type of schooling often fosters the other extreme – incoherent curriculum, excessive individualism, and a spontaneity which is a deception of freedom. Dr Dewey insists that neither the old nor the new education is adequate (Hall-Quest, 1938, p. 9-10).

While these central divisions have pervaded educational discourse for some time, and continue to do so, the ideas need not be mutually exclusive (Alexander, 2008).

Three key concepts from the social realist literature can assist us with breaking down the dichotomised landscape. The first, *knowledge differentiation*, concerns the distinction between context-dependent and context-independent knowledge and provides a place for discussions to begin concerning the relative merits of certain sorts of knowledge for educational purposes. The second idea is the theoretical *distinction between curriculum content and pedagogy*. This allows us to theorise more clearly the interrelationship between what we teach and how we teach it and in particular to acknowledge the interrelationship between epistemic knowledge structure and pedagogy. The third concept, ‘*powerful knowledge*’, draws our attention to what it is about some sorts of knowledge that enables those who have access to it to change the way they think about the world and their place in it. This epistemic knowledge enables the development of thinking beyond the present and particular; it empowers those who have access to it. The argument of social realists is that the primary means for realising education’s key purposes, such as intellectual development, critical thinking, adaptability, creativity, and readiness for citizenship, is through access for all students to a curriculum founded on ‘powerful knowledge’. This the starting point for the curriculum; “curriculum theory must begin not from the learner but from the learner’s

entitlement to knowledge” (Young, 2013, p. 101). Access to this knowledge is then realised through a pedagogy of engagement (Young & Muller, 2010). There is a ‘mix’ of both ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ ideas drawing on many of the philosophical ideas of critical realism (Moore, 2007; 2013a; Wheelahan, 2010), the sociological insights of Durkheim (1998) and Bernstein (2000), and pedagogical insights of Morais and Neves (2001, 2011). I touch on these aspects briefly as appropriate in the paper.

My intention in the remainder of this paper is to elaborate on thinking about educational futures from within the social realist project. Rather than being a clearly defined *ism*, or a homogenous school of thinking, social realism is a ‘coalition of minds’ centred on some key ideas (Maton & Moore, 2010). This approach has as its underlying aim a social justice agenda for education centred on students’ rights of access to powerful knowledge. Its key concepts have been adopted and utilised by many scholars and teachers world-wide who are seeking a resolution to the tension in the on-going and tired debates between traditional and progressive traditions in education (Young & Lambert, 2014). Social realism provides a powerful argument for enabling the move beyond entrenched positions of established ‘traditions’ to look afresh at a ‘mixed’ pedagogic approach for education (McPhail, 2013). Moreover, these ideas provide a means to think about and link the process of education philosophically, politically, and at the practical level of the classroom (Barrett & Rata, 2014; Maton & Moore, 2010; Maton, 2013; Moore, 2007a&b; 2009; 2013a; Muller, 2000; Rata, 2012; Wheelahan, 2010; Young & Muller, 2010; 2013; Young, 2008a).

A theoretical device

To try and bring order to a complex topic, filled with ‘isms’, I will employ the concept of *recontextualisation* (Bernstein, 2000). This concept will act as a *theoretical device* to assist with the explanations the paper aims to make. Recontextualisation is the broad concept Bernstein uses to describe the process whereby various ideas, which he terms recontextualising principles, vie for ideological influence within a field. Bernstein (2000) suggests the recontextualisation process ‘selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 33). For example, within education ideas are recontextualised from psychology, sociology, linguistics, philosophy etc. into the region of education. Bernstein theorises that recontextualisation occurs in two fields; one is at the level of the state and its agents (the official recontextualising field or ORF) and the other is at the level of pedagogic transmission and acquisition (the pedagogic recontextualising field or PRF). This second field includes teachers in schools and other educational institutions. Within the official recontextualising field, the Official Pedagogic Discourse (OPD) of the state produces dominant principles that generate guidelines about school organisation and management, curricula, and evaluation. The most important point to note is that the discourses appropriated in a given educational setting at a particular time are the result of the dynamic interplay between the ‘dominant ideology in the official recontextualising field (ORF)’ and ‘*the relative autonomy of the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF)*’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 53, italics added).

The concept of recontextualisation can work at various levels, from considering

the influences on a teacher's motivations and values in enacting various pedagogical approaches (e.g. direct instruction or group work) through to political ideas influencing educational policy. At the policy level for example, the recontextualising principle of neo-liberalism has become dominant in educational policy world-wide (Lilledahl, 2015; Robertson, 2012). In New Zealand education, this principle has been realised through the reification of marketisation and relevance, both of which have affected educational structures and processes such as qualifications, assessment, and curriculum content (Adams, Openshaw & Hamer, 2005; Hipkins, Johnston, & Sheehan, 2016).

In the next section of the paper I return to social realism and elaborate the key three ideas mentioned above – knowledge differentiation, the curriculum - pedagogy distinction, and powerful knowledge. I conclude by drawing briefly on Rata's recent work that explores the link between access to powerful knowledge and the future of democracy.

Knowledge and the New Sociology of Education

Young and Muller (2010) depict the world of conservative education as one where the classification of knowledge is unquestioned. Education comprises an “induction into the dominant knowledge traditions that keep them dominant” (p. 17). In this view of education, culturally significant canons of knowledge are given transcendental status. Knowledge can be seen as a form of symbolic control in that those in power have control over how knowledge is recontextualised and made available, or not made available to others. This is ‘the knowledge of the powerful’ scenario.

The critique of school knowledge as ‘knowledge of the powerful’ began in the 1970s and was centred on the problematising of knowledge through what came to be known as critical curriculum studies in the USA and the New Sociology of Education (NSOE) in the UK. This approach was new in that ‘it marked a shift from the macro-structural concerns of sociology of education ... to a focus on the relationship between school knowledge, educational processes and the classroom’ (Moore, 2009, p. 95). Sociologists began to look at schools as agencies of cultural reproduction and purveyors of a hidden curriculum. The curriculum began to be understood in terms of power, politics, and ideology (Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Young, 1971). Moreover, the NSOE provided ‘a set of critical tools . . . including the concepts of stratification, reification, commodification, alienation and relativism’ (Philpott, 2010, p. 82). The ‘deconstruction’ of the curriculum in the 1970s through the application of these concepts revealed ‘an alienated relationship between pupils and school knowledge’ (Philpot, 2010, p. 83). One of the key outcomes of this analysis was to question the taken for granted differentiation between school and non-school knowledge to ease the theorised alienation experienced at school by so many students. The central aim was to make schooling more inclusive and democratic. A key issue for educational research has remained that of “unmasking the social power underpinning the standpoint, culture, form of life etc., to reveal ‘knowledge’ as the disguised interests of dominant social groups” (Maton, 2014, p. 6). What the NSOE has not been able to do is to offer a theory of knowledge to guide a reconstruction of the curriculum post-deconstruction (Young, 2008b).

The discourses of the NSOE have had far-reaching effects through the utilisation of

ideas such as constructivism, culturalism, and relativism as recontextualising principles (Young, 2008a; Moore, 2009; Rata, 2012). For example, during the 1970s the argument was made and largely accepted that because knowledge was socially constructed it was also arbitrary and its boundaries and content could be remade. The social change sought for society as whole would be found by weakening the classification of school knowledge to include other, equally valid ‘ways of knowing’ – an epistemological relativism; ‘the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people ‘know’ as ‘reality’ in their everyday lives ... commonsense knowledge rather than ‘ideas’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1996, p. 27). However, with hindsight Young (2008a) observes the mistake made in the 1970s and 1980s “was to imagine that demonstrating the power relations underlying existing curriculum could be the basis for creating one that was more democratic. It has not happened...” (p. 9). The significance of the epistemic dimensions of knowledge itself, its internal characteristics and structure, were neglected. The sociology of education “became preoccupied with education as a ‘relay’ for other things (class, gender, ethnicity) and lost sight of education itself” (Moore, 2013b, p. 32). Maton (2014) argues that this has resulted in ‘knowledge-blindness’, which is the result of a ‘subjectivist doxa’ that “reduces knowledge to knowing and a deep-seated tendency towards constructivist relativism” (p. 3).

Knowledge Differentiation

A way out of the relativist dilemma is to see knowledge as differentiated into two types, but without recourse to conservative ideology that gives some knowledge transcendental status. Knowledge differentiation is a concept derived from Durkheim, Vygotsky, and Bernstein that sees disciplinary and every day knowledge as irreducibly differentiated (see Moore, 2007a; 2009; Muller, 2006; 2009; Rata, 2012; Wheelahan, 2010; Young and Muller, 2012; 2013; Young, 2008b; 2010a; 2010b). Young (2008a; 2008b; 2010a) has clarified this idea of differentiation by arguing that there is a vital distinction to be made between context-dependent and context-independent knowledge modes. Context-independent knowledge (also known variously as theoretical, conceptual, disciplinary) “is not tied to particular cases and therefore provides a basis for generalizations and making claims to universality” (Young, 2008b, p. 15). This is the powerful knowledge that I will discuss in greater detail below. On the other hand, context-dependent knowledge “provides no reliable basis for moving beyond particulars” (2008b, p. 15). It lacks the integration of concepts characteristic of deeper systems of meaning.

This is not to argue that social knowledge is not important. Clearly without it we could not function in society. Within education however, Vygotsky (Karpov, 2003) and others (e.g. McLean & Abbas, 2009) note the importance of social knowledge, not as a source of curricular content but as a bridge for making connections between every day and disciplinary knowledge. Hoadley (2011) too notes that pedagogically everyday knowledge has an important function as a ‘portal to the esoteric’ but the significance and usefulness of everyday knowledge “varies with subjects and their relation to everyday/workplace practices. In the more specialized subjects, such as mathematics and science for example, the dominance of everyday knowledge has the potential to obscure, confuse or dilute conceptual specification” (p. 155).

If knowledge differentiation is accepted as a potential curricula recontextualising principle, then there will be necessary limits on what type of knowledge is likely to be given preference in the curriculum. For example, in the South African context Hoadley (2011) notes substantial shifts from the ‘ambiguous constructivism’ of the late 1990s, towards knowledge differentiation in the revised 2009 curriculum; “Notions of knowledge differentiation emerged strongly, undergirded by the key conceptual critique of Curriculum 2005 around disciplinary probity and conceptual coherence” (Hoadley, 2011, p. 151). The shift towards knowledge differentiation, away from dedifferentiation was aimed at providing greater visibility to curriculum content and coherence for teachers and students (Hoadley, 2011; Muller, 2006). It was also the result of influence of certain voices within the ORF becoming part of the OPD. A significant implication is the need to evaluate the intrinsic potential of knowledge forms, their epistemic structure, rather than seeing them as merely different standpoints (Lilliedahl, 2015). Context-independent or objective knowledge must be verified by rigorous disciplinary procedures, especially peer review to ensure knowledge is soundly justified and not someone’s preferences based on opinion or belief (Moore, 2010)

The Curriculum-Pedagogy Distinction

In Young and Muller’s (2010) second educational ‘future’ (practices of the present) various forms of constructivism act as recontextualising principles affecting both pedagogy and content ‘in progressive opposition’ to traditional or conservative ideas (p. 18). These discourses in education look increasingly to the dissolution of traditional knowledge boundaries, for example through subject integration (Ministry of Education, 2009) and an emphasis on key competencies rather than disciplinary knowledge (Hipkins, Bolstad, Boyd, & McDowell, 2014; Amadio, Operti & Tedesco, 2014). Through the under-specification of knowledge content and the creation of a learner-centred approach to content and pedagogy (OECD, 2012; Cheng, 2014), ‘the present’ essentially shifts education’s focus towards the knower and an equivalence of everyday and disciplinary knowledge (dedifferentiation). A number of studies, key amongst them by McEneaney & Meyer (2000) and Baker and Le Tendre (2005), note world-wide trends in curricula towards dedifferentiation; subject specific knowledge content is reduced with a new emphasis on learning to learn and the broad socialisation of students as future citizens and life-long learners. The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) is an example of this trend with minimal conceptual or content guidance as was the initial reformed curriculum in South Africa alluded to by Hoadley above.

Biesta (2012) has coined the term ‘learnification’, to capture aspects of these trends, in particular the change in language associated with education, away from knowledge and teaching towards the learner and learning. He argues that this discourse has become so pervasive that the what of learning has become next to invisible and the teacher has started to vanish with it (Biesta, 2012). Biesta argues that the problem with this new discourse is that distorts education’s dimensions; ‘the point of education is never that children or students learn, but they learn something, that they learn this for particular purposes, and that they learn this from someone’ (p. 36, italics in original).

This shift in language is a manifestation of the influence of constructivism – a key

recontextualising principle for education which has brought with it an over-emphasis on pedagogy. Confusion occurs where recontextualising principles such as constructivism are not well understood, for example, the differences between psychological constructivism (theories about learning) and social constructivism (concerned with epistemology – the creation and validation of knowledge), yet both are picked up and encouraged within both recontextualising fields (McPhail, 2016). For example, current discourses, predicated on a desire to create more just approaches to education, advocate a ‘constructivist’ stance by bringing students’ pre-existing social and cultural knowledge into the curriculum; “a critical-constructivist pedagogy does not rank forms of knowledge, but rather promotes a pluralistic epistemological democracy” (Desautels et al., 1998, p. 259). The greatest problem for education occurs where an individualised form of psychological constructivism is accepted as a means to knowledge production: where a student’s individual construction of the world is deemed to be how the world is (see for example O’Connor & Greenslade, 2012). In this situation epistemology is confused with ontology in that “social construction is extended from knowledge to reality” (Maton, 2014, p. 6). The South African Department of Education clarifies this potential confusion clearly by reminding us that “although all learners do engage in the construction of knowledge in terms of coming to understand certain concepts, skills and content, it has generally been accepted that these aspects inhere within the subject and not in the minds of learners...” (South African Department of Education, 2009, p. 24, as cited in Hoadley, 2011, p. 153).

We can see the influence of knowledge dedifferentiation in policy discourses that argue for a central place in the curriculum for students’ social and cultural knowledge; through localised content and the push towards curriculum integration (Ministry of Education, 2007; Siteine, 2016). While this is likely a sensible and motivating pedagogical manoeuvre as outlined above, it can become a problem where the discourse confuses pedagogy with knowledge itself:

the curriculum needs to be seen as having a purpose of its own: the intellectual development of students. It should not be treated as a means for motivating students or for solving social problems The curriculum should exclude the everyday knowledge of students, whereas that knowledge is a resource for the pedagogic work of teachers. Students do not come to school to learn what they already know’ (Young & Lambert, pp. 96-97).

Powerful Knowledge

Social realists argue that the ‘knowledge as power’ argument articulated since the 1970s fails to take account of two very significant truths concerning knowledge: (i) that all societies differentiate between types of knowledge – specialised and every day and (ii) there is an emancipatory and ‘empowering’ capacity in the former. Durkheim (1998) labelled the two knowledge forms sacred and profane, Vygotsky (1986) ‘scientific’ and ‘spontaneous’, Bernstein (2000) vertical and horizontal discourse. Disciplinary knowledge is produced in a different way and in a different context from everyday knowledge and most significantly it has a generative structure derived from the logic

and principled relations of concepts called the episteme; a structured system of meaning (Rata, 2016). The generative capacity of an episteme allows concepts, ideas, or theories to generate yet more knowledge; a universalising capacity. This universalising capacity enables disciplinary knowledge to transcend the context of its conception so it can be used in other times and in other places (Rata, 2017). Powerful knowledge is knowledge that demands the development of abstract thought that in turn provides access to the site of the ‘unthinkable’ and ‘yet to be thought’. Such thinking has the potential to challenge the social distribution of power (Bernstein, 2000). In this optimistic view education is seen as a potential site of interruption rather than reproduction (Moore, 2013b).

Recently Young has coined the phrase ‘powerful knowledge’ in an attempt to highlight the potential importance of context-independent knowledge and to distinguish it from the negative delineations with which it is often coupled when described as ‘knowledge of the powerful’:

To explore the differentiation of knowledge in the curriculum, we need another concept that I want to refer to as powerful knowledge ... powerful knowledge refers to what knowledge can do or what intellectual power it gives those who have access to it. Powerful knowledge provides more reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world and acquiring it can provide learners with a language for engaging in political, moral, and other kinds of debate (Young, 2008b, p. 14, italics in original).

Moreover, Young argues (2009) that access to this knowledge in a systemised and engaging pedagogical form (through considered selection, sequence, pacing, and evaluation) is generally not available in the home and therefore it is a matter of social justice that schools should provide this epistemological access for all students. The school itself is central to this argument as it remains society’s only institution where the ‘interruption’ capacity of education, at least theoretically, can be provided for every student; “One can, after all learn anywhere, but the gift of teaching is only ‘available’ in a very small number of places and the school is definitely one of them” (Biesta, 2012, p. 41).

What might the adoption of powerful knowledge as a recontextualising principle mean for policy and practice? Firstly it would see a recalibration of policy directives away from ‘learnification’ towards teacher subject expertise at all levels of schooling, supported by the development of pedagogical content knowledge, in much the way the Finnish education system expects and requires of its teachers (Sahlberg, 2015). In New Zealand we would also need to see a renewed focus on the specification of key disciplinary concepts and indicative content which is mindful of conceptual progression (Rata, 2016) much as has occurred in the South African experience alluded to earlier in the paper. However it is necessary to include the caveat here that the move towards emphasising knowledge should not be seen as a reactionary, neo-conservative project. In practice it would see teachers focussing on the interrelationship between the epistemic structures of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogy to create student engagement. The term “engaging” is designed to highlight the purpose of the pedagogy as linking (or

engaging) the student with academic knowledge. Often in current discourse, pedagogy appears to be a carrier of an empty space. As Biesta (2009) notes “learning is basically a process term. It denotes processes and activities but is open – if not empty – with regard to content and direction” (p. 39). In practice a recalibration of the recontextualising discourses towards knowledge would allow teachers to clarify the significance of content in teaching and begin to distinguish it from the moral agendas with which knowledge itself has become entangled.

Philosophically social realism allows for a productive move beyond the simplistic reductionism of the traditional versus progressive dichotomies. Often, the best that can be done to improve outcomes for marginalised students is to ensure access to powerful knowledge rather than a curriculum founded on the ideas of progressivism in which the key danger is an over emphasis on pedagogy at the expense of what is taught. The work of Morais and Neves of the ESSA (Sociological Studies of the Classroom) group in Portugal (Morais, 2002; Morais & Neves, 2001, 2011) provides a sustained and significant body of work that provides exemplars of a mixed pedagogic approach (McPhail, 2013). Related to student engagement and learning in the primary school science context, they state that “we have come to a model that conceptualises a school pedagogic practice that [has] the potential to lead children to success at school, narrowing the gap between children from differentiated backgrounds” (2011, p. 191). Their mixed pedagogic practice utilises two approaches usually associated with traditional approaches to education and three associated with progressive approaches in relation to the five fundamental dimensions of pedagogy identified by Bernstein (2003/1990): selection, sequence, pacing, evaluation, teacher/student model. For selection and sequence there is explicit teacher control (but student choice within parameters). In relation to pacing however, students need to be given more control; the time to assimilate and develop the knowledge and evaluative criteria for the task in hand. But “time without explicit criteria may be useless” (Morais, 2002, p. 560). This leads to the importance of explicit teacher control over the evaluative criteria. This is similar to Hattie’s model of feedback (2011) which requires the teacher to explicitly guide the student towards their next learning steps. Morais & Neves (2001) suggest that explicit guidance in relation to evaluative criteria is the most crucial aspect of successful pedagogic practice. Underpinning and supporting these aspects the teacher/student mode of interaction is ‘progressive’ in that it involves developing a personalized attitude to students and a learning environment where all students feel confident to “question, discuss, and share ideas, thus strengthening the impact of the evaluative criteria (Morais, 2002, p. 561). In this model the teacher must have deep content knowledge; to know about selection, sequence, pacing, and evaluation (feedback).

While the social realist argument is that powerful knowledge, while socially constructed, can be separated from issues of power, this does not mean that we need not be vigilant about this aspect. The challenge is make a distinction between moral agendas and matters of epistemology so that we do not unintentionally disadvantage students, particularly those from already less-advantaged backgrounds (McPhail, 2016). Social realists, along with critical realists, also argue that knowledge is emergent and fallible nevertheless it is possible to make judgements about what knowledge is

likely to be most powerful for educational purposes in a given context (Carter & New, 2004; Moore, 2013a; McPhail & Lourie, 2017; Sayer, 2000). While developing student autonomy and independence through pedagogical progressivism we need to keep an eye on the epistemological ball so that autonomy and independence is firmly grounded in knowledge.

Conclusion

Educational reform in New Zealand has been pervasive since the 1980s. New Zealand was perhaps the first nation in the western world to implement neo-liberal economic policies in complete and far reaching ways and this has affected educational structures, assessment, and content. However, while neoliberalism is dominant in the New Zealand political sphere, a long history of progressivism in education (Mutch, 2013) ensures that teachers respond to market-derived rhetoric and policy in varied ways. This is part of the autonomy of the PRF alluded to earlier in the paper. New Zealand's education system is also officially bicultural, and this commitment, along with a new drive for evidence-based teaching has resulted in an idiosyncratic contradictory mix of educational discourses. On the one hand, student-centred, and on the other, objectives driven with expected pre-determined outcomes. The growing need for cultural competent teachers responsive to the needs of all students, particularly Māori (indigenous New Zealanders) and for education generally to be more inclusive, provide the stimulus for a needed move away from practices of 'the past', however, this has resulted in the over-socialised, pedagogy driven policy and practice (Young & Muller; 2010; Biesta, 2009; 2012; 2014). That this phenomenon is not unique to New Zealand is exemplified in a recent call on line to 'put subjects at the heart of the curriculum, stop reducing education to 'skills' and 'learning objectives', get rid of the obsession with pedagogy, and trust teachers to teach' (Hayes, 2017). Biesta (2012) has noted 'it is remarkable, if not shocking, that how much policy – but increasingly research and practice – has adopted the empty language of learning to speak about education' (p.38) (see for example OECD, 2012).

It has been noted in this paper that within this context of change we have created a knowledge 'blind spot' (Maton, 214) and the 'disappearance of the teacher' (Biesta, 2012) and I have argued that social realism provides a means to resolve the relativist impasse. Nevertheless we need to ensure that the recalibration towards subjects and knowledge is a progressive one, not a neoconservative turn towards the restrictive practices of the past. Of course there are many contested ideas concerning education's key purpose - transmitting society's heritage (classic humanism), the use of disciplines to developing individuals' capacities and thus a more equal society (liberal humanism), meeting individuals' needs and aspirations so as to support their personal growth (progressivism), a curriculum aimed at creating a skilled workforce (instrumentalism), or education to change society (critical). Biesta (2012) suggests it is highly unlikely that education can work in relation to a single aim but the key purpose argued for here is the growth of intellectual and creative capacity through access to powerful knowledge (Barrett & Rata, 2015).

The link between powerful knowledge and democracy has been important in the work of many scholars, most notably Dewey, but Rata's recent work highlights the link

between knowledge and democracy and is instructive here (Rata, 2014, 2017). She argues that “a symbiotic relationship between individual citizens and disciplinary knowledge is required for democracy” (2014, p. 80); “thinking in the abstract objective ways demanded by disciplinary study enables students to conceptualise what society is and what it might be like” (p. 86). Education then has a primary political function wherever there are concerns for the empowerment for all students: ‘it is in this disciplinary knowledge that one learns the political tools of doubt, challenge, and criticism as well as symbolic representations of the modern self-creating society’ (Rata, 2014, p. 81). Without the development of these critical capacities in its citizens the very foundations of nation-state democracies are at risk. In this argument, rather than serving a global market place, education reasserts a liberal humanist tradition.

Social realism provides a powerful set of concepts for enabling the move beyond entrenched positions of established ‘traditions’ to look afresh at emancipatory philosophical and pedagogic approaches for education. To be progressive, to be student-centred and critical, firstly requires us to be ‘knowledge-focussed’; to be clear about what it is we want our students to learn. In this paper I am attempting to reclaim the label ‘progressive’ for an approach to teaching that is not limited by either/or positions that we often hear expressed in ‘bi-polar slogans’ that offer us a stark choice between ‘child centred’ or ‘subject-centred’, ‘traditional or progressive’, ‘teaching facts’ or ‘learning how to learn’. This is the result of an over simplistic view that one approach is ‘right’ for all occasions in all contexts. My assertion is that we need to be as ‘progressive’ as we can as pedagogues; to be imaginative and creative in the ways we engage students with the challenges of learning about *things*. In terms of curriculum content, we need to be more ‘traditional’ in the sense that students need to come into to contact with established bodies of knowledge that are quite different from everyday knowledge. The argument for forms of engaging pedagogy and the way in which knowledge is seen as emergent rather than always clearly defined, separates this ‘social realist’ view from that of more conservative traditions. This social realist view is progressive in that it aims to see students actively engaged in learning while providing them with access to the realms of disciplinary thought which develop the critical faculties required for democratic citizenship in 21st century, pluralist societies.

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Endnotes

- 1 This is a simplification for rhetorical purposes, and I acknowledge a more complex reality where at least three further positions can be identified, each with a long history drawing on various aspects and dimensions of the two extremes identified here. For example vocational or utilitarian, liberal, and more recently, objectives-driven.

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