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From the Editor's desk

Dr Trace Ollis

In this April edition of the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), we have a diverse range of articles representing adult learning in higher education, adult education and its capacity to prevent poverty, and an article on older adult learning. The first three articles are focused on adult education in the space of higher education - in universities, in enabling education programs and adult learning that occurs as people complete their doctorate. The fourth article in this edition, highlights some of the tensions and contradictions around the concept of a guaranteed minimum income enacted in the European Union as a measure to eradicate poverty. The paper focuses on the implications for adult education. Our final paper uncovers the need to understand ageing as a process of lifelong learning.

Johanna Nieuwoudt's research examines psychological distress among students in enabling education programs in a university. She notes university can be a transformative experience for students, but it can also be very stressful. She claims there is a dearth of research investigating students' psychological distress in enabling education programs. The data in the paper reveals that enabling students experience a great deal of psychological distress, and at a much higher rate than the general population; this can put them at risk of severe mental health issues. Also notable is that high psychological distress is associated with poor

academic performance. This appears in contradiction to the purposes of what enabling programs are seeking to achieve.

The next article focuses on an enabling program in a university in Tasmania. ***Lyn Jarvis*** examines the experiences of students in an enabling program as they progressed through their first semester of study. She draws on the lens of 'risk' to consider the issues and challenges they faced in their studies. Drawing on qualitative data the findings reveal that a complex relationship between risk and opportunity were found. The paper claims the enabling program emerged as a safe space where risk could be unpacked and managed as students were given the opportunity to try university. The research highlights the considerable existing strengths that students of enabling programs bring to their studies.

The paper by ***Robert Templeton*** outlines the experiences of mature-age postgraduate students whilst studying for a doctorate. Mature-age postgraduate students are defined as those who are late to higher education or may have returned to postgraduate study after working for some time in industry. There are many motivations for mature-age students to return to postgrad study such as vocational reasons, higher status, cultural, social, financial, or symbolic. The author outlines how the experiences of studying a doctorate, completed or not, impact the professional and personal capabilities of the student. The findings noted some of the benefits to doctoral students included improvement in their own self-development such as self-esteem, belief, and self-confidence.

Juan Ramón Rodríguez-Fernández and ***Spyros Themelis's*** paper examines the policy position of Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) a mechanism used primarily in the European Union to fight poverty and achieve social inclusion. Within the GMI education and vocational training play a major role. The authors argue the Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a better measure to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion. They claim that alone UBI cannot challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism in its various manifestations which impact on education, poverty and social inclusion agendas. However, they assert the UBI can provide an alternative conceptualisation of social inclusion based on the creation of adult education for critical and participatory citizenship.

The final paper by ***Małgorzata Malec-Rawiński*** examines ageing as a process of identity formation, and that it should be considered a project of lifelong learning. The paper draws on in-depth interviews with older Polish migrants living in Sweden. She claims that ageing is a natural part of the life cycle, that it is socially and culturally constructed, but that everyone experiences this process differently. The processes of ageing are viewed as a learning process, constantly evolving and reconstructed based on the lived experiences of the elderly and situated in the context of their social, educational and cultural contexts.

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Psychological distress among students in enabling education: An exploratory study

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Studying at university can be a transformative experience; however, it can also be a stressful experience for many students. Research has shown that university students experience rates of psychological distress at higher rates than the general population. However, studies investigating the mental health of students enrolled in enabling programs are largely lacking. This study investigated the prevalence and severity of psychological distress among students enrolled in an enabling program at a regional university in Australia. The data provides evidence of high levels of psychological distress in enabling students, with the majority of students (95%) experiencing above normal levels of psychological distress. Significant inverse relationships were found between age and depression, and age and anxiety. No significant relationship was found between age and stress, gender, and psychological distress, nor between study mode and psychological distress. These findings suggest that enabling students are a high-risk population for mental health problems. The results highlight the need for further research on the psychological well-being of enabling students, to improve students' mental wellbeing and

prevent the development of mental illness. High psychological distress is associated with reduced academic performance, but it can also lead to a lower quality of life and increased morbidity and mortality.

Keywords: mental health, psychological distress, enabling education, university students, academic success, wellbeing

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Introduction

The university study experience can be a transformative one, providing students with access to skills and knowledge that can change their lives and give them access to a wide range of employment options. Many students enter university via an enabling program (James & Walters, 2020). University enabling programs are pre-award programs that enable students to gain admission to undergraduate programs while preparing students for the rigours of higher education (Roche & Syme, 2018). Enabling programs in Australia are similar to access programs in the United Kingdom, developmental education in the United States, and bridging or foundation programs in other countries such as New Zealand (Roche & Syme, 2018). Enabling programs have become an increasingly popular pathway to higher education in Australia. In 2014, 11,588 equivalent full-time students were enrolled in enabling programs across 19 Australian enabling programs (Pitman et al., 2016).

Enabling programs help students to transition to university, but students enrolled in enabling programs may be particularly vulnerable to experience psychological distress (James & Walters, 2020). Students enrolled in enabling programs are typically highly diverse and from multiple equity groups (Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011). For example, students are typically from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, may have financial constraints, may be juggling multiple responsibilities as single parents or carers of elderly parents, may lack family support, and may have physical health issues (Taylor, van Eyk, & Syme, 2018) and mental health difficulties (Crawford et al., 2016). Research found that financial problems increase the risk of psychological distress in younger university students (Cvetkovski, Reavley, & Jorm, 2012). This has important implications for socio-economically disadvantaged students (Cvetkovski et al., 2012) that

are often enrolled in enabling programs. However, research is lacking investigating the psychological wellbeing of students enrolled in enabling programs. This current research investigates psychological distress among students enrolled in an enabling program at a regional university in Australia. The program is 12 weeks in duration and consists of four subjects. The program is offered three sessions a year and can be studied online or on campus. The three compulsory subjects equip students with communication, study, and numeracy skills. The fourth subject is an elective, and students can choose between an arts-based or science-based subject. Successful completion of the program provides a distinct pathway into tertiary study at this university.

While the attainment of a tertiary education can enrich students' lives by improving their career prospects and increasing their self-esteem (McCall, Western, & Petrakis, 2020), studying at university can be a stressful experience for many students (Geng & Midford, 2015; Larcombe et al., 2016; Pitt, Oprescu, Tapia, & Gray, 2018; Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Research indicates that university students experience rates of psychological distress (Leahy et al., 2010; Sharp & Theiler, 2018; Stallman, 2010; van Agteren, Woodyatt, Iasiello, Rayner, & Kyrios, 2019) and depression (Goldney, Eckert, Hawthorne, & Taylor, 2010; Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2013) at comparable rates or higher than individuals in the general community. Mental disorders are associated with lower quality of life and increased morbidity and mortality (Rehm & Shield, 2019). In 2010, 83.9% of the students in a sample from two large Australian universities experienced elevated levels of distress (Stallman, 2010), while 48% of another sample of university students were distressed (Leahy et al., 2010). In 2015, it was reported that 52.9% of a sample of university students experienced some level of stress (Papier, Ahmed, Lee, & Wiseman, 2015), while another study found that about one in four university students experienced severe or extremely severe psychological distress (Larcombe et al., 2016). A 2019 study found that 65% of the university students in their sample were psychologically distressed (van Agteren et al., 2019). Furthermore, Australian studies found the prevalence of depression among university students was 8% (Farrer, Gulliver, Bennet, Fassnacht, & Griffiths, 2016; Said, Kypri, & Bowman, 2012), while between 12.6% (Said et al., 2012) and 17.5% of the students had symptoms of anxiety (Farrer et al., 2016).

Elevated levels of psychological distress are spread across the university study body, regardless of the year of study or disciplines (Leahy et al., 2010; Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Researchers have thus been attempting to identify correlates of psychological distress among university students. High academic workloads, exams and assessments, and difficulty of studies have been identified as major sources of stress for students (Gomanthi, Ahmed, & Sreedharan, 2012; Lin & Huang, 2013). A literature review by Sharp and Theiler (2018) found that sociodemographic and situation factors (e.g., gender, age, sexuality, living arrangements, financial situation, caring for family members), personality and psychological attributes (e.g., poor coping abilities, lack of confidence, low self-esteem), and academic and performance-related factors are sources of students' distress. Many students are also worried about money (Sharp & Theiler, 2018) and maybe working part-time. The competing demands of work, study, and family responsibilities may be contributing to psychological distress (Leahy et al., 2010).

Transitions, such as the commencement of university study, are related to an increased susceptibility to lower psychological wellbeing (Brooker & Woodyatt, 2019). Students enter unfamiliar environments, requiring them to adapt to new social and academic environments (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009). As such, first year and second year students experience the highest levels of psychological distress (Stallman, 2010) and depression (Farrer et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Said et al., 2012) of the university student population. Higher education institutions have a duty of care to students, as psychological distress has detrimental effects on students' lives. High psychological distress may have adverse effects on students' general quality of life (Vaez & Laflamme, 2008), and is linked to problematic health behaviours such as excessive alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, and suicidal thoughts (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). Students who experience severe psychological distress have a reduced capacity for work and/or study activities, as elevated levels of distress lead to greater disability (Stallman, 2010). Psychological distress is associated with reduced academic performance and engagement (Stallman, 2010), thus having implications for retention and completion rates (van Agteren et al., 2019). The attrition rate approaches 50% in enabling programs (Hodges et al., 2013; Pitman et al., 2016). To decrease attrition rates and increase academic success in enabling programs, it is important to understand enabling students' mental health.

Literature on wellbeing initiatives and mental health within university education in Australia has been emerging over the past decade. However, research investigating the psychological wellbeing of students enrolled in enabling programs is largely lacking. This research will contribute to the understanding of students' mental health within enabling education. The purpose of this research is to investigate psychological distress among enabling students from a regional university in Australia. This research aimed to (a) determine the prevalence and severity of psychological distress as measured by the DASS-21, (b) determine if there are relationships between psychological distress and demographic variables, and (c) examine differences in psychological distress between subgroups of students.

Method

Data collection

Potential participants were recruited online through e-mails sent to all students enrolled in the enabling program in Session 1, 2019. The emails were sent by the researcher, on Tuesday of Week 4. Participants were invited to participate in an online survey about students' use of their time, their "grit" (i.e. the ability to persevere and passion for long term goals), and their stress and anxiety levels. A link (web address) to the survey was provided. The online survey was supported by Qualtrics research software. An information statement was provided at the start of the online survey, and consent was implied by completing the survey. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time of the study and were able to skip any questions they did not want to answer. Ethics approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of this Australian university (approval number ECN-16-039). A total of 687 students were invited to participate in the online survey. Within a three-week response period (Weeks 4 – 6 of the session), 92 students completed the survey. Eight surveys were discarded, as they were largely incomplete. The study sample was 84 (completion rate = 91.30%; response rate = 12.23%).

This study used a cross-sectional design with an online survey consisting of self-report measures assessing psychological distress, grit, and students' use of their time, and provided demographic information. Students' depression, anxiety, and stress were assessed with the

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale – 21 Items (DASS-21). The DASS-21 consists of 21 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 0 meaning that the participant felt the item did not apply to me at all, to 3 meaning that the participant felt the item applied to me very much or most of the time (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS-21 consists of three subscales (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and the scores from each item under each subscale are added up. The scores obtained using the DASS-21 provide a dimensional description (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Higher scores for each subscale indicate increasing severe emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. Cut-off points for levels of severity allows for grouping of scores into "normal", "mild", "moderate", "severe", and "extremely severe". The DASS-21 was selected for this research as it has been used in several research studies with university students (e.g., Larcombe et al., 2016; Osman et al., 2012; Papier et al., 2015; van Agteren et al., 2019), thus making comparisons possible. Previous studies have reported good internal consistency for the subscales, ranging 807 - .909 (Osman et al., 2012; van Agteren et al., 2019).

Final grades (in percentage format) were acquired from the Blackboard Learn learning management system as an indicator for academic success. Students' grit and the use of their time will be reported separately.

Participants

The sample consisted of 84 students (Managing Your Study subject = 66; Communication at University subject = 63; Applying Quantitative Concepts = 53; Studying Science subject = 46; Issues and Enquiry in Arts and Business subject = 8). Students were enrolled in Session 1, 2019, in one or more of the subjects, and in online and/or on-campus modes of study. Participants were aged 17 to 60 years (M = 28, SD = 10.47). The majority of participants were female (77.4%). Almost half (51.2%) of the participants were enrolled in on-campus study, with 40.5% studied online, 4.8% were enrolled in on-campus and online study, 3.6% did not disclose their study mode.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tests were used to

explore the study population's characteristics. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability and internal consistency of the DASS-21. Median (Md) and/or mean (M) values of the measurements with standard deviation (SD) were reported. Variables were not normally distributed, thus non-parametric tests were used. The level of significance was set at $p \leq .05$. Spearman rank order correlation (rs) analyses were undertaken to examine the associations between psychological distress and students' final grades, age, gender, and study mode. Kruskal-Wallis tests were undertaken to access differences in psychological distress between different age groups, gender, and study mode. Bonferroni corrections were made to control for possible type 1 error for contrast analyses. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS, Statistics 24 (IBM SPSS; Chicago, Illinois).

Results

In the current study, the DASS-21 subscales had good internal consistency: depression (α = 0.915), anxiety (α = 0.884), stress (α = 0.842). Mean scores for the DASS-21 subscales were calculated for the total sample: depression M = 23.60 (SD = 9.97) with 48% of participants experiencing severe or extremely severe depression; anxiety M = 22.99 (SD = 9.17) with 80% of participants experiencing severe or extremely severe anxiety; stress M = 28.58 (SD = 8.88) with 59% of participants experiencing severe or extremely severe stress. None of the participants had normal levels of depression and anxiety, with only 5% of participants having normal levels of stress. The severity levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as measured by the DASS-21 is shown in Figure 1. Mean depression scores were higher for male students (M = 25.37, SD = 12.65) than female students (M = 23.08, SD = 9.09); mean anxiety scores were higher for male students (M = 23.53, SD = 11.41) than female students (M = 22.84, SD = 8.57); and mean stress scores were marginally higher for female students (M = 28.69, SD = 8.49) than male students (M = 28.21; SD = 10.30).

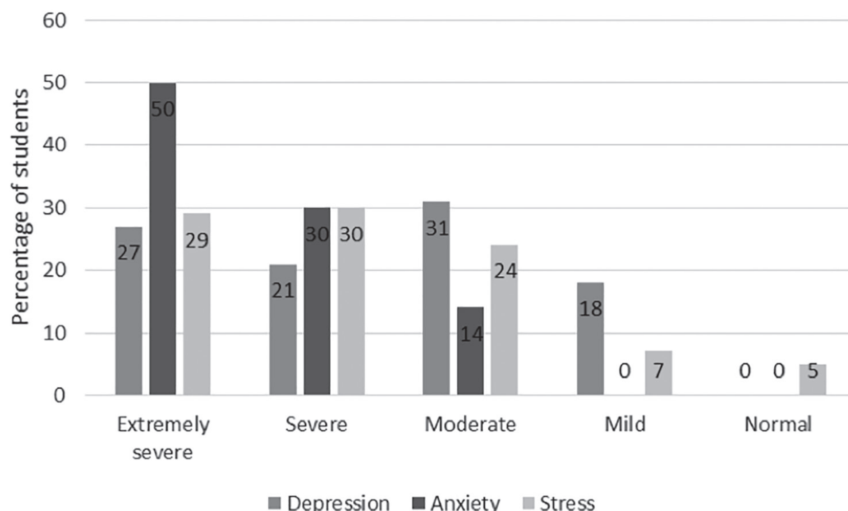

Figure 1. The severity of students' depression, anxiety, and stress as measured by the DASS-21

Spearman rank order correlation analyses found significant correlations between age and depression, and age and anxiety, but not between age and stress. Significant correlations were found between anxiety and the final grades of the Communication at University subject and the Applying Quantitative Concepts subject and between depression and the final grades of the Issues and Enquiry in Arts and Business subject (Table 1). No significant correlations were found between gender and psychological distress, nor between study mode and psychological distress.

The mean final scores achieved out of a possible 100 was: Managing Your Study subject M = 64.64 (SD = 21.39); Communicating at University subject M = 62.29 (SD = 23.25); Applying Quantitative Concepts subject M = 64.98 (SD = 22.09); Studying Science subject M = 66.94 (SD = 18.67); Issues and Enquiry in Arts and Business subject M = 58.13 (SD = 22.20).

Table 1. Spearman rank order correlation between depression, anxiety, and stress as measured by the DASS-21 and the participants' final grade and age

	Age	Final Grade				
		Managing Your Study	Communicating at University	Applying Quantitative Concepts	Studying Science	Issues and Enquiry in Arts and Business
Depression	-.253 (r_s) .021 (p) 83 (n)					-.825 (r_s) .012 (p) 8 (n)
Anxiety	-.324 (r_s) .003 (p) 80 (n)		-.271 (r_s) .033 (p) 62 (n)	-.376 (r_s) .013 (p) 43 (n)		
Stress						

Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed a statistically significant difference in depression across different age groups (Group 1, n = 15; Group 2, n = 15; Group 3, n = 13; Group 4, n = 13; Group 5, n = 14; Group 6, n = 13), $\chi 2$ (5, n = 83) 18.63, p = .002; with a revised alpha level of 0.003. Participants aged 22 – 25 years recorded a higher median score (Md = 32) than the other age groups (Table 2).

Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed a statistically significant difference in anxiety across different age groups (Group 1, n = 14; Group 2, n = 15; Group 3, n = 13; Group 4, n = 13; Group 5, n = 12; Group 6, n = 13), $\chi 2$ (5, n = 80) 19.34, p = .002; with a revised alpha level of 0.003. Participants aged 22 – 25 years recorded a higher median score (Md = 28) than the other age groups (Table 2). No statistical significant difference in stress were revealed across different age groups (Group 1, n = 14; Group 2, n = 15; Group 3, n = 13; Group 4, n = 13; Group 5, n = 14; Group 6, n = 13), $\chi 2$ (5, n = 82) 9.86, p = .079; with a revised alpha level of 0.003.

Table 2. Comparison of psychological distress between different age groups

	Age group					
	Group 1: ≤ 18 years	Group 2: 19 – 21 years	Group 3: 22 – 25 years	Group 4: 26 – 31 years	Group 5: 32 – 38 years	Group 6: ≥ 39 years
Depression	15 (*n*) 23.73 (*M*) 11.13 (*SD*) 22 (*Md*)	15 (*n*) 25.20 (*M*) 8.68 (*SD*) 22 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 32.15 (*M*) 9.88 (*SD*) 32 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 18.61 (*M*) 5.85 (*SD*) 16 (*Md*)	14 (*n*) 21.00 (*M*) 7.18 (*SD*) 18 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 20.92 (*M*) 11.91 (*SD*) 14 (*Md*)
Anxiety	14 (*n*) 24.71 (*M*) 11.41 (*SD*) 20 (*Md*)	15 (*n*) 25.73 (*M*) 7.81 (*SD*) 24 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 31.08 (*M*) 11.27 (*SD*) 28 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 18.61 (*M*) 3.86 (*SD*) 20 (*Md*)	12 (*n*) 18.00 (*M*) 2.70 (*SD*) 18 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 19.38 (*M*) 7.18 (*SD*) 16 (*Md*)
Stress	14 (*n*) 29.00 (*M*) 12.25 (*SD*) 24 (*Md*)	15 (*n*) 30.80 (*M*) 5.65 (*SD*) 30 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 33.38 (*M*) 8.58 (*SD*) 34 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 26.77 (*M*) 9.29 (*SD*) 24 (*Md*)	14 (*n*) 26.43 (*M*) 6.33 (*SD*) 28 (*Md*)	13 (*n*) 25.08 (*M*) 8.97 (*SD*) 24 (*Md*)

Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed no statistically significant difference in psychological distress across study mode nor gender.

Discussion

Enabling students in this study experienced psychological distress at higher levels than Australian undergraduate university students reported in previous studies and the general Australian population. The majority of participants reported elevated distress levels, with only 5% of students experiencing normal levels of stress (Figure 1). All other students (i.e. 95%) experienced above normal levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. This study provides preliminary evidence of very high levels of psychological distress in enabling students: 80% of

participants experienced severe or extremely severe anxiety, 59% experienced severe or extremely severe stress, and 48% experienced severe or extremely severe depression (Figure 1). These results showed evidence of distress higher than the typically reported values of 25 - 65% found in Australian university students, and closer to the prevalence of 83.9% that Stallman (2010) found. Students enrolled in the enabling program are typically from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and maybe juggling multiple responsibilities as single parents or carers of elderly parents, may lack social support, have financial constraints, and may have mental and physical health issues (Taylor et al., 2018). These variables alongside the transition to university study may put enabling students at increased risk of psychological distress. This study showed evidence of distress much higher than the general population. The most recent Australian data show that 13% of the general adult population experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The severity of psychological distress among enabling students in this exploratory study is concerning and warrants further research.

This study found no significant difference in psychological distress between female and male students, and no significant relationship between gender and psychological distress. This is in contrast to previous studies that found higher levels of distress in female than male students (Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013; Leahy et al., 2010; Stallman, 2010), depression (Brougham et al., 2009; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Said et al., 2012), and anxiety (Farrer et al., 2016; Said et al., 2012). In this study, younger students generally had higher psychological distress than older students (Table 2), with significant differences in depression and anxiety across different age groups. Previous studies also reported lower psychological distress among older university students compared to younger students (e.g., Larcombe et al., 2016; Stallman, 2010; van Agteren et al., 2019). This is also consistent with the prevalence rates of psychological distress across different age groups in the general population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018) with better mental health with increasing age (Burns, Butterworth, & Crisp, 2019).

Research indicates that psychological distress has a negative impact on academic success (Sharp & Theiler, 2018; Stallman, 2010). This study partly supported the notion, as anxiety was inversely related to academic success in two subjects, and depression was inversely correlated with

academic success in one subject (Table 1). Previous studies indicated that students experiencing severe psychological distress may have reduced capacity for study activities for 10 days or more (Stallman, 2010; Stallman & Shochet, 2009). Spending quality time studying is related to academic success (Brint & Cantwell, 2010), thus, a reduced capacity for study activities for a number of days can have detrimental effects on students' academic performance. Missing scheduled classes are associated with attrition, with an increased absence from class resulting in a lower probability of completing the academic course (Whannell, 2013). Stallman (2010) explained a sick day for a student means that academic tasks are delayed and may add time pressure to students, leading to increased academic demands. This added time pressure is further exacerbated as students transitioning to university study are faced with unique and challenging circumstances (Richardson, King, Olds, Parfitt, & Chiera, 2019), and have many competing demands on their time, including work, study, and family responsibilities (Leahy et al., 2010). Students must manage their time effectively, but academic success is not necessarily related to good time management skills (Nieuwoudt & Brickhill, 2017). This is because students have to make "constrained choices in relation to what is available to them, the degree of risk involved and their sense of commitment to other aspects of their lives, such as employment and family" (Burke, Bennett, Bunn, Stevenson, & Clegg, 2017, p. 35). Students may have good time management skills, but they may simply not have enough time available for study.

Psychological distress appears to be prevalent in students studying online and on-campus, with no significant relationship nor differences found between study mode and psychological distress in this study. While studies have investigated the differences between various factors associated with psychological distress among university students, there is a lack of literature investigating the psychological wellbeing of students studying online. Regardless of the students' study mode, gender, and age; responding to student distress is a common part of an educator's role in enabling programs (Crawford & Johns, 2018). Many university educators report feeling not equipped for responding to students' distress (Brooker, Baik, & Larcombe, 2017), as most university educators are not trained counsellors (Crawford & Johns, 2018). University educators indicated that support and training for educators around mental health literacy are needed (Brooker et al., 2017) since educators provide academic and

non-academic (personal) support for their students as it is not possible to separate the academic from the non-academic when viewing the student as a whole person (Crawford & Johns, 2018).

Enabling students and educators asked for dedicated counselling services to provide timely pastoral care to students (Willans & Seary, 2018) to increase students' psychological wellbeing and prevent the development of mental illness. This will also prevent educators from taking on a pseudo-counselling role which can be detrimental to the students' wellbeing (Crawford & Johns, 2018). While some researchers call on universities to develop interventions/programs focused on providing knowledge and resources for students targeting mental health (e.g., Farrer et al., 2016; Papier et al., 2015; van Agteren et al., 2019), others argue for a whole-of-curriculum approach to student wellbeing taking into account all aspects of the curriculum instead of a single program (Brooker, McKague, & Phillips, 2019). Other researchers assert that mental health is complex, and as such may require more than generic catch-all interventions (van Agteren et al., 2019); the support should match the need of the individual student (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Students can access mental health services on campus; however, many universities have limited services or may have a waitlist due to high demand (Kitzrow, 2003). Furthermore, many students do not seek help or receive treatment (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007; Stallman, 2010). In fact, if most affected students would seek help, the existing services would be overwhelmed (Stallman, 2012). The ratio of university counsellors to students is very high in Australia with an estimated ratio of 1:4,340 (Stallman, 2012). University counselling services do employ a range of formats to deliver services to students in an attempt to support them, but they are hindered by limited resources (Stallman, 2012). Inadequate counselling support is not only detrimental to the student's wellbeing but could increase attrition rates. Online interventions have the potential to decrease psychological distress (Farrer et al., 2013). Online interventions that are designed for university students are needed, to address issues specific to university study. Online interventions designed for university students can increase academic success while improving their psychological wellbeing (Frazier et al., 2016; Ryan, Shochet, & Stallman, 2010; Stallman, 2010). One such universal targeted online intervention designed specifically for Australian university students is thedesk (https://www.thedesk.org.au/

about). This online intervention is free and available to all Australian university students and aims to supplement existing university support services (Stallman & Kavanagh, 2018). University students indicated that they are likely or very likely to use online programs for psychological distress, with students experiencing severe psychological distress preferring this format of help (Ryan et al., 2010). Online interventions designed for university students may thus be an important part of the solution to increase students' psychological wellbeing, potentially improving academic success and decrease attrition rates.

Limitations and future research

It is acknowledged that the current study had several limitations. The small sample size limits the generalisations that can be made from the results obtained. The response rate was also relatively low. Future studies could collect data from a larger sample and also across institutions to ensure appropriate generalisation of findings.

The study relied on quantitative measures. Although the DASS-21 is a reliable and valid scale for measuring psychological distress, qualitative measures could be used in future studies to identify the stressors associated with enabling education. It may also be good to investigate students' coping mechanisms to identify students' strategies and gain insight into the support and services students seek and require. Research is needed so that students can be provided with timely resources, to help students cope with psychological distress and to enable students to reach their academic potential.

The present study is limited by its cross-sectional design. Future studies could collect data from various times during a session to allow the examination of time effects. Furthermore, self-selection bias also presents a limitation of sampling. For example, students experiencing high levels of distress may have been more motivated to participate as compared to students experiencing less distress, thereby inflating the prevalence of psychological distress. However, previous research has reported similar high rates among university students.

Conclusion

This study provides quantitative data on an estimate of the prevalence of psychological distress in enabling students. The majority of students

(95%) in the sample experienced above normal levels of psychological distress: 48% of the students experienced severe or extremely severe depression, 59% experienced severe or extremely severe stress, and 80% of the students experienced severe or extremely severe anxiety. Younger students generally had higher psychological distress than older students, with significant correlations between age and depression, and age and anxiety. However, gender and study mode were not related to psychological distress. These findings suggest that enabling students, similar to undergraduate university students, are an at-risk population for mental health problems. This study highlights the need for further research on the psychological well-being of enabling students. Resources to support the psychological wellbeing of students are needed, as many university educators are not sufficiently trained to respond to students' distress, and university counselling services often have a waitlist due to high demand.

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Try before you buy: using enabling programs to negotiate the risks of higher education

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For some students, entering higher education entails considerable risk – that is, the potential for harm or uncertainty. This is particularly true for students entering university via an alternative entry, enabling program. This study explored student experiences in Tasmania, Australia, as they progressed through their first semester of study in an enabling program, using the lens of risk to consider the issues and challenges they faced, and the strategies they employed to negotiate these.

Qualitative data were collected from both students and staff via semi-structured interviews. A complex and nuanced relationship between risk and opportunity emerged. While considerable risk was clearly evident, students and staff both preferred a narrative of opportunity. However, this narrative did not prevent students from proactively managing risk. In this process, the enabling program emerged as a 'safe space' where risk could be unpacked and managed and where they could 'try out' university.

These findings highlight the considerable strengths enabling-program students bring to their university experience, sitting in opposition to the more common characterisation of such students as disadvantaged and lacking. They also challenge the way in which enabling-program

outcomes are measured, particularly in terms of attrition, rendering current understandings of them incomplete.

Keywords: *higher education, enabling program, access, risk, disadvantaged student, opportunity*

Introduction

The dominant discourse of higher education in Australia is one of opportunity; that is, that education provides a well understood and legitimate pathway to improving one's social position (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). It paves the way to higher incomes, better jobs, better health and better outcomes for one's children. (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Bynner, Dolton, Feinstein, Makepeace, Malmberg & Woods, 2003). Yet, not everyone gets to go to university, and even for those that do, some students are more likely to succeed (complete their course) than others.

Students in enabling programs typically represent those students who struggle to get to university, and those who struggle to stay. Common characteristics of enabling-program students, such as lower levels of education attainment, disrupted educational journeys, coming from low socio-economic (LSES) backgrounds and being mature-aged, (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011; Kemp & Norton, 2014; Habel et al., 2016; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016) are all indicators of low university engagement and attainment (McKenzie and Schweitzer, 2001; Rienks & Taylor, 2009).

While the experience of enabling-program students has begun to attract attention, the focus of research has largely been on how programs impact students, that is, how they support or hinder students to succeed, rather than on how students interact with programs, the strategies students use and develop to negotiate their experiences. This paper explores some of the unique characteristics of enabling-program students and how they manage the risks that they face in entering university.

It outlines the proactive way one cohort of students approached their study, and how this makes enabling programs particularly unique phenomena within university environments. This in turn has important implications for how students are viewed and how success is understood and measured.

Background

University participation, how to increase it and how to make it more equitable are topics which have been on the public and political agenda in Australia for the past 40 years. Starting with the Dawkins White Paper (1988) there have been a number of reports and policy initiatives implemented by successive Australian governments to increase participation, particularly from under-represented groups. One of these initiatives has been the provision of university preparatory, bridging, access or enabling courses (hereafter called enabling programs[1]) to support participation from under-represented groups and to increase participation more broadly. These programs, which facilitate entry into university for domestic students otherwise not eligible for enrolment (Clarke, Bull, Neil & Birney, 2000), are now run in the majority of Australian universities (Pitman, Trinidad, Devlin, Harvey, Brett & McKay, 2016).

The majority of participants in enabling programs are mature-aged students (Hodges, Bedford, Hartley, Klinger, Murray, O'Rourke & Schofield, 2013; Pitman et al., 2016). However, as noted by Ross and Gray (2005) some younger students also select enabling programs as an alternative pathway to higher education. Many enabling-program students have previously rejected education or have been rejected by it (Munns, Nanlohy & Thomas, 2000; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016). Enabling program students also typically occupy some position of disadvantage (Clarke et al., 2000), either because they belong to an equity group that is under-represented at university, including students from a LSES background, regional and remote students, students with a disability as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Koshy, 2017); or because they belong to a group that has a higher attrition rate than average when they do go to university. These include students who enter with a low Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) score or who have lower levels of educational attainment, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students from refugee backgrounds and mature-aged students (Rienks & Taylor, 2009; Australian Government, 2010).

The biographical backgrounds of most students in enabling programs puts them at a position of disadvantage relative to other students. A lack of prior knowledge, understanding and resources due to low levels of previous academic attainment, can mean students are under-prepared

and struggle to transition (O'Shea, 2016). First-in-family students can lack access to resources to help them adjust to the demands of the higher education environment (Collier & Morgan, 2008). Financial stress (Tones, Fraser, Elder & White, 2009; Stone & O'Shea, 2013) and emotional stress, particularly feelings of not belonging and a lack of confidence (Hinton-Smith, 2012; Kasworm, 2010; Reeve, Shumaker, Yearwood, Crowell & Riley, 2013) are common.

Personal circumstances, particularly of mature-aged students, also play a significant role in the lives of enabling-program students. Students are often faced with complex life circumstances (Stone, 2009; Morison & Cowley, 2017), poor health (Crawford & Johns, 2018), work and/or finance stress (Stone, 2009; Hodges, et al., 2013), as well as self-esteem issues and unrealistic expectations of university life (Habel et al., 2016). In all, the challenges faced by students typically found in enabling programs are significant.

Theoretical lenses

Two key theoretical positions were applied to this study. The first of these is risk. Risk in Western societies has become a widely used concept to explain events which occur contrary to expectations, and which frighten or cause harm (Lupton, 1999; Lim, 2011). A sociocultural approach to risk, commonly found in sociology and political science (Lupton, 1999; Lim, 2011), was adopted in this study. This sees risk not just as an objective hazard, but as a phenomenon situated in a range of social and cultural contexts and a product of a person's life, history, personality and culture (Douglas, 1985; Lim, 2011).

Ullrich Beck (1992) theorises that the increasing individualism of late modernity has created an increased preoccupation with risk. Beck sees the welfare state, mass education, improved living standards and the second wave of feminism as particularly important in breaking down the structures of traditional roles imposed by class, gender and families. In this state 'class biographies, which are somehow ascribed, become transformed into reflexive biographies, which depend on the decision of the actor' (Beck, 1992, p. 88). Thus, while life choices are more flexible it is now up to the individual to take advantage of them. According to Beck, educational and other 'institutional biographies' (Beck, 1992, p. 131) now play a greater role in determining status than previous class

and gender structures. Here the individual's decision-making becomes paramount, and the individual is required to pay for poor decisions or decisions not taken in these realms. What might previously have been characterised as a 'blow of fate' (Beck, 1992, p. 136) is more likely to be seen now as some kind of personal failure. Thus, the individualisation of choice comes with the individualisation of the responsibility and risk attached to that choice.

The second key theoretical lens applied to this study is Bourdieu's theories (1986) of social reproduction and capital. These theories form a basis for examining the participation and experiences of students hitherto marginalised from higher education. Bourdieu allows us to conceive of higher education as not necessarily an environment which allows each person entering it to operate equally (Habel et al., 2016) but rather one where some people have privileged access to the resources and knowledge (cultural capital) and people (social capital) required to succeed. This privileged access particularly relates to the concept of the 'hidden curriculum', a term coined by Sambell and McDowell to describe, 'What is implicit and embedded in educational experiences in contrast with the formal statements about curriculum and the surface features of educational interaction.' (1998, pp 391-392). The hidden curriculum accounts for the differences between 'curriculum as designed and curriculum in action' (Semper & Blasco, 2018). In addition, the more overt skills and knowledges embedded in university-level study can be categorised as a specific form of cultural capital, that of 'academic capital' (Roberts, 2011). Thus while, as in Beck's conceptualisation, old boundaries have broken down, barriers attached to class, knowledge and association continue to exert an influence and inhibit the success of students from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds such as those typically found in enabling programs.

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital are seen by some as limiting the types of capital available to an individual. Various researchers have argued that by concentrating on the resources available to an individual only in terms of cultural and social capital, important elements are missed (Yosso, 2005; Côté, 2005). Côté (2005), describes one of these missing elements as 'identity' capital. Identity capital represents 'attributes associated with sets of psychosocial skills, largely cognitive in nature, that appear to be necessary for people to intelligently strategize and make decisions affecting their life courses

(i.e., to individualize), especially in the absence of cultural guidance and societal norms, as in the case of de-constructed late-modern societies' (Côté, 2005, p. 225). These strengths and capacities enable individuals to negotiate different circumstances and experiences in their work, educational and social lives. What may be lacking in cultural, social and academic capital can be compensated, in part at least, by identity capital.

Methodology

This research was undertaken with students and staff from the University Preparation Program (UPP) enabling course at the University of Tasmania (UTAS), Australia. UPP has been and remains a key initiative by the University to increase participation from under-represented groups and to address issues related to the low levels of educational attainment in the state. A constructivist epistemology whereby meaning is constructed, not discovered, was adopted. This comes from an understanding that there is no 'single truth' and that 'there are multiple realities and therefore multiple truths' (Wetherall, Taylor & Yates, 2001, p. 12). These 'realities' can be explored and put together to build understanding relevant to a point of time and circumstances. This methodology was useful in exploring a concept such as risk, which is deeply embedded and influenced by an individual's life, history, personality, and culture (Douglas, 1985). What might be one person's risk is not necessarily another's.

A qualitative approach was adopted in the study which allowed for the documenting and interpretation of individuals' experiences and their perceptions of risk (Ezzy, 2000). Within this overall approach, grounded theory was used to enable key concepts to emerge organically from the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both students (n = 23) and staff (n = 6) from the three UPP campuses in Tasmania at Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. Students participated in two interviews, one at the start of their first semester, and one at the end of that semester. Staff participated in one interview at times convenient to them. The student interviews provided a real-time exploration of their journey into higher education, while the interviews with staff provided a longer-term perspective of the UPP program and its participants. Staff interviews were used to expand on, and triangulate results.

The first student interviews took place within the initial 3–5 weeks of students starting their program and the second interviews at the completion of their first semester of study.

All but two participants were mature-aged students, that is, having a gap from the completion of high school (up to year 12) of two or more years; 14 students were first-in-family; 12 students came from LSES backgrounds; and 21 of the 23 participants failed to successfully finish year 12 (that is, the final year of high school). In fact, several left in year 10 (n=7), or year 11 (n=7). Twenty of the 23 participants did not qualify for direct entry into an undergraduate degree and thus needed to complete UPP before gaining admittance to the university.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analysed using an inductive coding methodology to identify emerging themes. Themes were entered into NVivo data analysis software as nodes and continued to be adjusted and changed in response to ongoing analysis of the data. A process of axial coding was applied to identify 'core phenomena' (Creswell, 2012) which form the basis of the findings below.

Findings and discussion

A key finding from the data analysis was that entering university via an enabling program entailed significant risk - financial risks, health risks, relationship risks and risks to one sense of identity and self. Students had a clear understanding of these, yet they preferred to downplay the impact and instead concentrated on the opportunity university education promised.

That students understood university was risky was evidenced by the fact that they proactively planned how to manage the risks they faced. In this planning, UPP emerged as an important and intentional 'risk mitigation' strategy.

The proactive management of risk showed these students to be thoughtful and strategic, a notion that sits in opposition to more common characterisations of enabling-program students as disadvantaged and lacking.

Emerging notions of risk

In the interviews held at the beginning of the semester, the students

in this study were able to articulate a range of issues which they felt had the potential to impact on their success and wellbeing as they embarked on university study. These included financial loss or strain; relationships, confidence, identity and health being compromised, changed or negatively impacted; and the prospect of not coping, failing or dropping out, reinforcing a lack of confidence and potential future alienation from education. These issues were a combination of limited social, cultural (Bourdieu, 1986) and academic capital (Roberts, 2011) as well as complex personal and life circumstances.

Many students had already spent considerable time thinking about how their lives might be impacted by attempting university studies and then making significant changes to their personal circumstances before starting. These changes included moving house, changing jobs or work patterns, moving in with parents, negotiating with partners and families, and adjusting their lifestyles and financial habits.

Despite making adjustments, nearly all the students in the study approached their first semester with a sense of self-doubt and fear, encapsulated in the words of Nicky (24) who claimed, 'I was, excuse the language, I was shit scared. I thought oh, no, what am I doing? ... You idiot, you can't do this.'

The risk in what they were doing was for most students compounded by the multiple issues and challenges they faced. Participant Lisa (42), for example, was in emergency housing at the start of the semester. She was from a LSES background and left school in year 10, subsequently completing only a Certificate 1 TAFE course[2]. In addition, Lisa was the first in her family to attend university and was a single parent with four children, one of whom had serious health issues and was often unable to attend school. She also managed a serious health condition herself. Despite being highly motivated to change her life circumstances both for herself and her children, Lisa was, not surprisingly, at the time of the first interview feeling extremely overwhelmed by the university environment. Lisa described herself as feeling unprepared and out of place and was fearful and uncertain about surviving the semester.

Several students articulated a sense of shock of what the reality of attending university really meant. Claire (50) explained:

> *It was a really big shock to my system. I really didn't realize ... I*

> *didn't have any idea as to how much time the University took up study-wise. I didn't realise any of this.*

The term 'juggling' was used repeatedly by participants, with its sense of pressure to keep everything in play, and the possibility of things being dropped or crashing. Hugh (29) mused that it could all 'end in disaster'.

However, despite the clear existence of risk and the fact that students clearly articulated a sense of uncertainty and the possibility for harm, an interesting paradox emerged when students were asked directly if they thought what they were doing was 'risky'. Faced with a direct question about risk, only four students described taking on study in UPP as a risk. Two students were concerned about the stress of study exacerbating existing health issues. One felt it might all just be too much, and another was concerned about the impact on their mental health. Five other students also acknowledged the risk in what they were doing, but more in general terms, that is, in terms of the bigger decision of going to university and completing a degree, rather than enrolling in UPP per se.

By far the greater response to the question of risk was one of denial or a weighing up of risk against opportunity. Debra (58), for example, rejected the notion of risk outright. 'No. I'm not taking a risk. I don't see it as a risk. I just see it as an opportunity, having a go at something. It's not a risk, definitely not a risk.'

Others acknowledged the risk, but discounted it, despite what might seem to an outsider to be quite detrimental outcomes. Hugh (29), in his response to the question of riskiness, for example, talked of the potential for quite serious harm, but then dismissed it:

> *I wouldn't say it's a risk because even if I dismally fail at this, then I just have to brush off the dirt and pick something else, start again, or try again. Potentially I could be setting myself up for a bit of a downfall psychologically if I do really make a mess of things. Then I'll need to find another way to re-establish self-confidence and that sort of thing, but really ... no, I don't think it's anything major.*

Other students flipped the question and spoke instead about the risk of not doing UPP.

> *Not probably for me, because having recently hit rock bottom,*

> *I sort of I ... don't know ... the greater risk is doing nothing, because then I'm at risk of being at that low point indefinitely and ... I'm not really seeing it as a risk, I'm seeing it as one huge positive step forward. (Rachel, 26)*

Thus, while students clearly identified risks they generally preferred not to frame their experience in these terms. Instead, they looked for strategies which would help them negotiate and manage the risks they faced. UPP emerged as a significant strategy in this process.

UPP – a 'risk negotiation' space

The way students thought about risk can be further understood by looking at the reasons for enrolling in UPP. As previously outlined, from the University's perspective one of the primary functions of UPP is to help students, who do not currently qualify for admission into an undergraduate degree, to gain entry. Twenty of the twenty-three students in the study did not meet entry criteria, and a reasonable assumption would have this as a primary motivation for their enrolment. However, in reality, when asked only one of the participants gave this as their reason for enrolling in UPP. Rather, the participants indicated that they were using UPP to negotiate the many challenges and issues, both personal and academic, that they had thought about when deciding to enter the higher education system. This makes it clear that the students understood there was a risk (because they were actively trying to manage it), even though they were generally reluctant to name it as such.

Twelve of the students indicated that they were using UPP to prepare academically for degree-level study. Eva (39) indicated she was, in fact, 'very scared about' having to write an essay, and this, plus a desire to learn 'what's expected at university', were the main reasons why she enrolled. There was also an understanding from students that they might need a broader skill-set than any they already possessed. Olivia (36) summarised this idea of needing a broad skillset to undertake university when she said that she had enrolled in UPP to 'learn how to succeed'.

Beyond these overt roles of UPP, the participants described using the program to assess their own capacity, both intellectually and more generally, to manage university study and life and to negotiate their

futures. For first-in-family students such as Sandra (56), who left school in year 10, UPP allowed her to assess 'if I can handle it, handle the assignments … understand the assignments in the first place.'

Other students were assessing more than their academic ability or capacity; they wanted to test how they could manage specific challenges, particularly health issues. For Julie (48), UPP represented the opportunity to see if she could manage her mental illness sufficiently to undertake study. In particular, she wanted to be sure she would be able to transition to a degree without negatively impacting her two children:

> *I'm coming to it though because … I want to see how I go with my depression, how well I can cope, start learning about what's expected of me, and start getting myself in that mindset. If I think I'm comfortable at the end of the UPP, and I can cope without it inflicting on the two people that live with me … then I'll give it a go.*

Single parents Lisa (42) and Olivia (36) both saw UPP as a supported space to assess their ability to manage their many responsibilities; as Lisa put it, 'to see if it all fits.'

Another important element of the capacity-testing role of UPP was in helping students come to terms with issues of self-confidence and doubt. As explained by Rachel (26), doing UPP provided her with the chance to see how she measured up to other students, to ensure that, 'I'm not insane, I'm not the only one, I'm not the oldest.' She saw this as part of the process of getting some 'control of the demons of self-doubt' and also 'learning that it is possible to belong and to fit in.'

In addition to being a place to prepare academically, and to test one's ability on a range of fronts including health, responsibilities and self-doubt, UPP was also utilised by students in this study to explore options and possibilities, both for future university study and for their future in general. Several of the participants came into UPP uncertain, not only of what they might study at degree level but whether they would study at all. For these participants, UPP represented a place where they could explore university without making too great a commitment, either financially (by not accumulating HECS debts) or personally.

Student capacity and enablers

Despite being uncertain about their future, the students were able to articulate a range of personal resources which they brought with them and which they thought would help them succeed. In this way, UPP became a place where self-doubt and personal agency, concepts that are more commonly seen as contradictory (Duggins, 2011), co-existed; where students could use their identity capital (Côté, 2005) to exert agency in the face of the structural impediments created through a lack of cultural, social and academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Roberts, 2011). They were unsure if or how they would manage higher education, but in the 'try-it-out' space provided by UPP, they felt they could use their own resources to make an attempt.

Of the 23 participants in this study, 20 identified their own determination, persistence and/or desire to succeed as a resource they would rely on to succeed. Jo (19), for example, explained how she had been helped in the past by her persistence: 'I've never missed a day of work. I've never called in sick. I do tend to not slack. If I know I'm supposed to be somewhere I'll be there'. Bradley (48) described himself as 'determined', someone who could carry on despite setbacks, 'I just get up and I fall down. I get up and I fall down.'

Life experiences were also identified as a key resource for succeeding in UPP. For those who had been in the workforce before, the structure and work habits of that environment were resources they felt would be useful as they transition to higher education. Jack (29), for example, described himself as a successful businessperson and a hard worker: 'I know I'm not lazy. I've some decent life experiences ... it's [confidence from previous life experiences] a bit of self-empowerment'. The experience of raising a family, or travelling, were also seen as providing organisational and coping mechanisms. As Olivia describes, 'At home with the kids, everything's just ... it's military, literally military camp at the moment'. For others, managing and coping with negative childhood experiences had required the capacity to adapt to difficult situations. Noah (36) felt that dealing with domestic violence and the divorce of his parents had given him the 'ability to adapt very well' to change and new things.

By relying on these personal attributes, students, who lacked cultural or social capital, instead used their identity capital and the space provided by UPP to proactively manage the experience. They did this by thinking ahead about the issues that might impact them as they embarked on

their studies, and then making significant changes to their personal circumstances before starting UPP. Secondly, they purposefully used UPP to 'try out' university to see how university study could be accommodated into their lives; to see if and how they would cope and fit in intellectually, socially and emotionally and whether or not university study would afford them ultimate benefit.

As predicted by Beck (1992) they were both taking advantage of new opportunities opening up to them, and putting the responsibility for managing the associated risks largely on themselves.

Conclusion

As a relatively small, qualitative study on the experiences of one group of students, this study has a number of limitations. These include that it only looked at on-campus students, it adopted an 'opt-in' recruitment strategy meaning there was no proactive attention to diversity in the student cohort interviewed, and that the diverse nature of enabling programs in Australia always makes conclusions difficult to apply outside of the particular context of the study. However, despite these issues there are some key insights to take away from the study.

While a number of researchers have looked at the issues and challenges students transitioning to university from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds face, only relatively recently have they begun to examine what resources and actions students themselves bring to managing these situations (O'Shea, 2016; McKay & Devlin, 2016). This study adds to this literature by demonstrating that the students were both aware they were entering a space of risk and that they took purposeful and proactive action to address these risks.

Highlighting the proactive ways students negotiated risk and the resources they brought with them to do so is a powerful way of negating some of the unintended consequences of conceptualising students as disadvantaged or at risk. As Lupton (1999, p. 115) notes, associating people with levels of risk '...serves to reinforce the marginalised or the powerless status of individuals'. In the context of higher education, students such as those in this study could be seen as resource intensive; needing extra services and support; as not being quite equal amongst their peers; and having little to contribute to the environment generally (Abbott-Chapman & Easthope, 1998; Lawrence, 2002; Smit, 2012;

O'Shea, 2016). However, the students in this study displayed significant determination, forward thinking, proactiveness and resilience in planning their first semester of study. They also showed significant bravery in entering a world for which they knew they were not well prepared, and which they really had very little information or evidence to guide how they might survive or succeed. What they lacked in cultural and social capital, they made up in identity capital. Their intention to use personal qualities such as persistence and determination as principal weapons in their fight to overcome such hurdles speaks to an underlying acceptance that the path ahead was difficult. The students did not expect to progress without struggle. Rather than just being seen as marginalised and disadvantaged, enabling-program students can be seen as having significant strengths and qualities to bring to their ongoing university studies, and that these should be acknowledged, celebrated and harnessed by universities.

The fact that poorly prepared students, students with a disrupted educational past who do not as yet have an accurate understanding of what university entails, or whether or not they will be able to manage in this environment, are using UPP as a 'try before you buy' space also has significant implications for attrition. In the 'try it out' process, some students will come to understand that university is not the right place for them or not the right place for them at that point in time. In fact, Hodges et al. (2013, p. 5) argue that some 'attrition from an enabling program is actually desirable, as the enabling program is playing the role of a "filter" prior to an undergraduate program'. This type of attrition does not necessarily come with negative outcomes and for some can in fact represent a new and positive experience (McInnis, Hartley, Polesel & Teese, 2000; Hodges et al., 2013; Merrill, 2015).

Even for students who decide university is the right place for them, the reality of university life, and of managing the many complexities of both background and personal circumstances may prove too difficult and they may either withdraw or simply stop attending (Hodges et al., 2013). Hodges et al. (2013) and Willans and Seary (2018) indicate that complex issues, particularly personal ones (for example, finances, housing, relationships, work, health, juggling responsibilities and confidence and other major 'life events') are important factors in student attrition in enabling programs. With a concentration of students impacted by these factors in the enabling program space, it is not surprising that enabling-

program attrition rates are higher than undergraduate rates (Hodges et al., 2013).

While attrition is always an issue of concern this study provides a case for both better understanding these figures and for accepting a higher attrition rate as a natural by-product of the enabling-program process. Different, more realistic standards, not degree-level standards, should be applied to this sector. Exactly what these standards should be still need further research, but clearly a broader understanding of the impact of attrition, both positive and negative, is required. It is important that outcomes for enabling-program students be measured in more than just retention and attrition statistics, and that a more comprehensive view be taken to acknowledge the significant social, personal and educational outcomes of such programs.

Endnotes

[1] Australia's vocational training framework, as described in the Australian Qualification Framework, starts at Certificate 1 level. A Certificate 1 provides entry level skills and knowledge for work or community participation, and for ongoing training and education (Australian Qualifications Framework, 2018).

[2] There is both a specific and more general understanding of the term 'enabling' program in the Australian higher education environment. The specific understanding relates to eligibility for funding under the Commonwealth Government Grant Scheme (CGS) 'enabling load' banner. In this case courses must be a bridging program offered prior to or concurrently with award study; available to domestic students only; attract no HECS fees; allow students to qualify for university entry; cannot be credited to award study; and supports participation by disadvantaged groups (Clark et al., 2000). A range of other enabling-like courses are offered which may not qualify for federally subsidised funding but are still referred to as 'enabling programs'. Some of these charge fees.

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About the author

Lynn has worked extensively in the field of adult learning at all levels from EAL/adult literacy to higher education both in Australia and overseas. In recent years she worked as the Manager of Pre-degree Programs at the University of Tasmania, supporting students from a variety of backgrounds to enter higher education via enabling programs and other alternative pathways. She now heads up Tasmania's only dedicated LGBTIQ+ service provider (Working It Out) and continues to apply her love of adult learning to building capacity within her own organisation and others.

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Factors likely to sustain a mature-age student to completion of their doctorate

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Abstract

Mature-age postgraduate students are those who are late to higher education or have returned to postgraduate study after an educational hiatus in industry. While some mature-age students seek a postgraduate qualification out of extrinsic motivations such as for vocational reasons, there are older non-traditional students who seek higher status; cultural, social, financial, or symbolic. However, some undertake doctoral study with intrinsic motives (based on an intrinsic desire or love of learning) which may have an extrinsic outcome. Mature-age students, who are a subgroup of non-traditional students are categorized demographically by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as being over the age of 35 years. This paper analyses empirical and peer reviewed journal and book research with additional secondary data collected from contemporary sources to inform the literature of the aspirations, motives, and outcomes of mature-age doctoral students.

Keywords: *andragogy, doctorates, postgraduate education, motivations, aspirations, vocational and personal outcomes*

Introduction

Within Australian higher education postgraduate studies, there is an increasing population of non-traditional mature-age students who are undertaking a doctoral qualification. They may be returning postgraduate students who commenced but did not complete their doctorate, higher education graduates who are returning to higher education after a hiatus in industry, or who commenced higher education from an industry experience or with a vocational education and training qualification (Daniels, 2012).

According to Daniels (2012), there is a growing need for research into Australia's ageing population resulting in an increase in the working age of most Australians. This has resulted in the questioning by some mature-age working people as to whether to retire or continue working, either in the same industry or commencing a new career path (Shacklock, 2005). Research into the retirement intentions of workers by Westwood and Lock (2003) identified five factors relevant to mature age workers; valued outcomes, work centrality, role identification, important work goals, and societal norms. Shacklock (2005) defined a sixth factor, health, and finances, (that is particularly pertinent in mature age doctoral students) which extend these five retirements intention factors. A work and financial situation, and health usually determine the intention and decision to continue working, to which Shacklock (2005) added the variable grouping of 'influences on the intention to continue working' (p.252). The negative influences are 'high levels of bureaucracy, lack of recognition, and work and time pressures' while positive influences within this grouping include 'a passion for working [and/or learning], a life partner, and external interests' (p.252). These positive influences are posited to be analogous to the motivations of mature-age people to enrol in higher education programs culminating in a doctoral qualification.

The motivations for mature-age students undertaking postgraduate doctoral research degrees have received little attention from research into doctoral studies, although there is an increasing volume of research that has commenced within the last few years. Mostly, this research has originated from the United States of America, Canada, and the United Kingdom with some Australian research having been completed with enrolled doctoral students.

According to Ryan and Deci (2017) motivation supports eudemonic wellbeing which they consider is an essential factor for personal and professional growth such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The processes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation assist this development by the internalisation and integration of goal-oriented behaviour (Elliot, Dweck, & Yeager, 2017) such as self-directed learning (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008) and social expectations, resulting in psychological coherence, integrity and wellness. These are necessary personal attributes to undertaking a research doctorate as they are the embodied motivations and dispositions of the student and are therefore an enduring disposition to complete a personal goal.

This paper explores the current literature in conjunction with empirical data collected during Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Education research degrees at an Australian regional university. The research is located in the adult education (andragogy) literature of Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson (2015) and the learner orientations of Houle (1961), which are the original themes considered applicable to this integrated approach to mature age doctoral learning. The goal is to inform the literature on the doctoral aspirations and motivations of mature-age students identified by Stehlik (2011) and Elsey (2007), by the integration of andragogy, learner orientations, and the lived experiences of five doctoral student or graduate participants.

The Nature, Motivations and Outcomes for Mature-Age Students

Mature-age Students

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000) identifies mature age people, 35 to 64 years of age with people who are over the age of 65 years being unclassified. This paper uses the terminology of mature age to refer to those students and graduates who are over 35 years of age at the time of the data collection and analysis. During 2019, 66% of the doctoral student cohort were over the age of 30 years with 30% in the age group 30 to 39 years, 19% aged 40 to 49 years, 12% aged 50 to 59 years, and 6% over the age of 60 years (Department of Education, 2020).

Mature-age students are usually employed within a professional management, consultant, academic, or mid-management role (Chesters, 2015; Elsey, 2007; Taylor & House, 2010) who have returned

to learning to enhance their career prospects or are planning for life after work (Shacklock, 2005). They return to or commence postgraduate higher education or vocational education and training with a repertoire of skills and knowledge from their respective industries and their employment role. Higher education mature-age students are articulate, literate and self-esteemed in their ability to graduate with a research doctorate (Elsey, 2007). As students they are self-sufficient in their ability to learn and undertake projects and at a student life-cycle stage which requires lesser personal contact with teachers and trainers. This characteristic of the mature-age student may determine their entry into learning programs under a special admissions system of recognition of prior learning or current competence (Open Universities Australia, 2020; Taylor & House, 2010). Being self-empowered from their industry experiences possibly ensures their resilience and motivations as external part-time enrolled students (Chesters, 2015), but not their successful completion of the doctorate.

Learning Pathways

While traditional students matriculate through the education system sequentially, non-traditional students delay their entry into or return to education or training due to various personal factors, employment dissatisfaction, unemployment or impending unemployment, or to gain required employment skills and knowledge (Dymock, 2013), or for situational reasons. Mature age students may have deferred their higher education and postgraduate education for marital, family, or employment commitments, or combinations of these reasons, and government designed societal strategies which attempt to raise the aspirations of people (Taylor & House, 2010).

Mature-age student admission into university education, other than a traditional matriculation pathway is achieved with open access; the recognition of professional and vocational skills and knowledge learned within industry. This provides an opportunity to achieve admission without formal academic qualifications. An assessment of the knowledge and skills of the prospective student, in conjunction with formal and/or informal qualifications can result in admission to a higher education program. Thus, a mature-age student may gain admission into an undergraduate or postgraduate university qualification outside the traditional educational pathway (Dymock, 2013). This assessment method

can be a motivator to mature-age students otherwise ineligible to apply for admission to a professional or vocational development program.

Mature-age Learning

Malcolm Knowles (1913 – 1997) identified six distinguishing principles of adult learning under the terminology of andragogy to differentiate adult learners from children and adolescent learners. The andragogic learning principles of adults include the learner's need to know, the self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, a readiness to learn, their orientation to learning, and their motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2015). These andragogic learning principles are both the motivation and the motive for adult, and mature-age student doctoral study.

The learner's need to know

The learning path of mature age students is a lifelong and lifewide quest for the appropriate knowledge and skills to solve a current problem, or to comply with changing laws that effect society or personal interest. Adulthood, parenting, social behaviours, developing technology, and task processes and instruments pertaining to adulthood need to be learned and understood regardless of occupation or lifestyle (Knowles et al., 2015).

Self-concept of the learner

In this respect, mature age learning is self-directed in what to learn, and self-regulated as to how and when to undertake this learning either formally within an educational institution, or informally from published information, or influential people who are considered informed and credible. Such learning issues are the volitional decisions mature age people make to satisfy a personal or professional need (Knowles et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1990).

Prior experience of the learner

For mature age learners, lived experiences, including theoretical and practical, provide the ontology or knowledge gathered to address the problem or situation, the epistemology or source of the information, and the axiology or believability the learner attributes to the informational source (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This knowledge is retained within

the person as cognitions to be applied to the solution to a situational problem (Knowles et al., 2015; Mezirow, 1990).

Readiness to learn

Adults and therefore mature age people have attained a level of life experiences that they use to determine the need for further learning. This may be a need for increased competency, the autonomy to determine that they require additional knowledge and skills, and the relatedness to interact with other persons to assist with the identification of, and the support to undertake a learning pathway (Elsey, 2007; Knowles et al., 2015; Stehlik, 2011). As identified by Houle (1961), adults are ready to learn when they are goal or activity oriented to achieve an intrinsic or extrinsic goal that will result in an improvement in their personal and or professional lives. Learning oriented adults are continuously ready to learn due to the intrinsic motivational need for knowledge.

Orientation to learning

A belief or philosophy in the benefits of learning new or innovated knowledge and skills, a disposition to learning, is necessary for mature age learners to commence an instructional program either formal or informal to achieve their life goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Adults seek learning due to a goal, activity of learning orientation to learning (Houle, 1961) which will achieve competence and autonomy in their lives and relatedness with others to satisfy this learning orientation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Houle (1961) concluded that the three determinants of continuing learning result from goal orientations of goal orientation, activity orientation, or learning orientation. Goal oriented adults learn as they perceive the need to learn – their learning is episodic, activity oriented learners participate when the learning has a perceived personal or career meaning, while learning oriented adults seek and accumulate knowledge for its own sake resulting in a continuous process of knowledge accumulation (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005).

Motivation to learn

Mature age people are motivated by a psychological need to learn as required. The motivation may be intrinsic or for the enjoyment of

learning, or extrinsic such as enhanced employment opportunities or ambition. Often the actual motivation includes a proportion of both types of motivation such as a need to learn for learning's sake, but within a field of personal and professional interest (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Goal achievement or the need to achieve is considered an intrinsic motivator for some mature age students as a personal rather than a professional goal, although achieving an extrinsic goal such as a career improvement is also a motivator.

The dominant motivation to learn is an intrinsic motivation which is a dispositional learning orientation towards higher education and vocational qualifications. Extrinsic motivations have a goal achievement orientation and an external locus of control from an activity orientation, that is, when the situation to learn occurs and is needed (Houle, 1961; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Motives to Learn

Motives are the reasons to undertake a particular course of action such as a higher education or vocational education and training qualification. Motives for enrolling in a program at a university include such factors as stability in lifestyle such as marriage, relationships, career, stage of life, interest, or social cause (Elsey, 2007) and an orientation to learn (Houle, 1961). Within many countries, educational programs exist, both financial and enabling, that provide the impetus for mature age people to seek admission into their preferred institute of higher education.

Five Doctoral Aspirations and Motivations

Mature age students enrol into doctoral programs with a variety of motives and ambitions concerning the actual program and their expected personal and vocational outcomes as acknowledged by Knowles et al. (2005). Stehlik (2011) lists five motives of mature-age students in commencing a program: career enhancement, personal development and interest, timing being right to undertake a doctorate, personal challenge, and self-fulfilment or personal quest (Skakni, 2018). The findings of earlier research by Elsey (2007) focused on the personal and professional or vocational aspects of undertaking a research doctoral program.

Career Enhancement

Career development was seen to be the predominant motive for commencing a learning program by many mature-age students. This included career advancement in the form of career promotion to higher level responsibility and financial reward either in a new field of employment or extending a current field.

Personal Development and Interest

Although closely aligned to career development, personal development includes the interests of the person in developing their analytical abilities, improving their understandings of their worldview through their lived experiences, and the fulfilment of lifelong aspirations to complete a higher academic qualification. This can result in a state of self-actualisation and personal satisfaction of their achievements.

Timing is Right

Many mature-age students defer their learning until the time is right which includes stage of life – children not living at home, stable relationships, financial stability, supportive family. These are the resources required to undertake a learning program. The right timing implies that the student has the personal freedom to devote time to learning in addition to other interests.

Personal Challenge

For some mature-age people the need to achieve personally is part of their personality or dispositions. These are goal achievements the person may define for their personal satisfaction or ambition, such as to achieve a doctoral qualification in a field of interest. Such motives are referred to as quests by Skakni (2018), self-fulfilment aspirations and motives.

Self-Fulfilment

Self-fulfilment is a eudemonic psychological belief that has a lifelong effect on the person in contrast to a hedonic or short term/immediate sense of accomplishment on the completion of an activity. The emotive state is likened to a quest for self-actualisation or ongoing contentment with one's life stage. This is the preferred outcome which results in the

psychological wellbeing of the person and its correlation with good physical health (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Ryan, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2019; Skakni, 2018).

The Five Doctorate Outcome Motivations

The applications to society of a doctorate are a series of outcome motivations for the completion of a doctorate as they reflect the intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations of the student. The learning or the knowledge and skills gained for doctoral programs are given by Elsey (2007) as the application of research knowledge, utilisation of skills gained to other purposes, sharing the benefits of the doctoral experiences, personal and/or professional empowerment, and capitalising on the doctoral journey to commence new developments or business innovation.

The Application of Knowledge

Mature-age graduates have applied the research knowledge from their doctoral projects in furthering their research experiences resulting in publication of journals articles and book chapters, conference, and other presentations, teaching and learning programs, doctoral supervision and coaching, and guest speaking.

Utilisation of Skills

The utilisation of skills overlap with the application of knowledge and the sharing of the benefits of the doctoral experiences with other students, which includes the technical aspects of doctoral education such as conceiving, planning, and implementing research and other projects. This ensures that the rigour and demands of academic research is transferred to other students as is the philosophy of research such as methodologies and methods of data collection (Elsey, 2007).

Sharing the Benefits

There are overlaps between some graduate outcomes such as personal development and professional empowerment, and the generation of knowledge and development of research skills (Elsey, 2007). These coinciding doctoral outcomes demonstrate the integrated beneficial nature of a doctorate in the overall development of graduates. That is,

doctoral candidates graduate with the psychological and vocational skills necessary to undertake their roles within, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. These outcomes are accentuated with the existing knowledge and skills developed within an industry environment and reflected in the satisfaction levels of the graduates.

Personal and Professional Empowerment

Personal and/or professional empowerment refers to the emotive aspects of doctoral research projects including self-belief, credibility, respect and trust, critical thinking, that is, self-development. Self-development or empowerment can in turn result in the commencement of new developments or business innovation. Where doctoral candidates are undertaking their research with a methodology which collects narrative or lived experiences, the methodology encourages self-reflection, personal development, and transformative learning. The transformation of a worldview results in better meaning-making which can produce improved self-identity and decision making by doctoral graduates, and a higher contribution to society (McAlpine, Amundsen, & Turner, 2014; Stehlik, 2011).

Business Development and Innovation

The knowledge and skills learned during the doctoral experience provide the self-confidence to undertake new employment pathways or business by innovation or differentiating an existing business model (Elsey, 2007).

Research Methodology

The research data was collected using a qualitative paradigm during two research projects: the first in 2015 and the second in 2020. The participants were either doctoral students or graduates of Australian universities. The data collection was undertaken with a preliminary survey for demographic data, and a personal interview which included oral or written narratives of the research participant's lived experiences relative to doctoral research degrees. The interviews recorded the phenomenological ethnographic lived experiences of the participants with the oral interviews being transcribed by the author. The data sets include the student or graduate experiences of the aspirations, motives, and outcomes of an Australian doctorate. The empirical data

is augmented with self-published social media data. Participants are referenced by a pseudonym to differentiate their experiences. Due to the small sample which included the collected lived experiences of five people, the analysis is not generalisable.

Research Findings

Although self-identified as an intrinsic learner, Carly's aspiration to attain a PhD was motivated by the desire for a specific research-based role within a university environment, an achievement goal, and a motive to learn for career enhancement. These aspirations were articulated as:

> *a few years earlier I had missed out on a job in Melbourne purely because I did not have a PhD, and it came down to two final candidates. I was told later by one of the supervisory panellists that I had, that I was by far the better candidate, but the Director of the Institute wanted someone with a PhD. So, I thought if a PhD is going to get me the jobs that I want, I had better get one*

Her doctorate was not completed, and her motives of personal challenge and career development have not been achieved. Carly has continued to work in a research role. Although not quantified, some withdrawing doctoral students do not return to university to complete their doctorates (Kiley, 2009).

For Clare, the aspiration to complete a PhD was also motivated by the aspiration for a career enhancement goal; to attain a lecturing position within a university. Clare expressed her aspiration for a PhD as:

> *My undergraduate degree was in social science ecology. I looked at ecology and international studies as double honours and degree was very much focused towards getting a government job as a policy person or [similar]. At that time, I was 37 and looked around at the people that were teaching, I thought 'no' this is where I want to be. I thought that all the academics that were teaching me had much better jobs than I could find anywhere else [and] the hours are flexible they do interesting [work] in universities and it is always great to work with young people*

The desire to change career and the enjoyment of learning provided both an extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Clare's aspiration of a PhD was not completed at that time, however, she has since re-enrolled in a PhD program. Her focus continues to be on career and personal development. Clare's contribution to society includes sharing the knowledge and skills learned during her doctoral experiences as a social researcher to develop cultural change within organisations.

James's motivation for undertaking a research doctorate was founded in family and possibly a predisposition subsequently influenced by his family's academic achievements; the majority were PhD graduates employed within various universities. His reasons for undertaking a PhD were given as:

> *It runs in my family. Basically, we are a bunch of academics. My sister is an Associate Professor, and she has been researching for most of her life, and my grandmother was a medical researcher. My father's always read, so we have always done this, and it seems I have been around people who have written a lot. In [one] sense it was a natural progression to develop work and develop my interest and develop my understandings [of] visual arts and philosophy. [These] are areas which will not get me employment so I've [got to] love it*

James, who had deferred his doctorate due to an accident, completed his PhD and continued his employment in the Arts field. While James had no stated goals, he did have a family orientation to learning, a readiness to learn, and an intrinsic motivation to learn. His PhD reflected his prior experiences which were evident in his professional and personal outcomes which were an enhancement of his career and improved professional credibility and a personal self-belief in his abilities. His contribution to society has been the establishment of a design company (innovation), a contract university lecturer role, and film production and set design. His art-based productions have resulted in national and international awards.

Susan commenced her doctorate prior to retirement, her aspirations were not career focused but were a post-retirement preparation goal. She had a readiness to learn, an orientation to learning, and sought intellectual stimulation as her ambitions after retirement were to research and publish, a new career as she states.

> *I am a great believer of lifelong learning [and] I am on the board of a regional men's group…I am co-editing books and writing my own based on my thesis…I am still a schoolteacher…I did not [complete] my PhD for career aspirations*

Susan's lifelong learning beliefs were the aspiration for her doctorate. She intended to develop her research skills and academic writing skills to enable the publication of this research. Since her graduation, she has published several articles and commenced another doctorate where she has attained an Honorary Researcher role. Her contribution to society is her commitment to community groups, where she applies the skills and knowledge gained from her doctorate, the publication of her research, and the sharing of her experiences with doctoral candidates at her university. Susan's outcomes are a personal and professional empowerment psychological achievement reflected in her research and writing activities.

John is an expatriate Australian vocational education and training teacher and administrator working overseas with his wife. His intention is to extend his career past retirement age and to continue in his current role upon the completion of his doctorate was the achievement goal of his PhD. He teaches within the same discipline as his career in industry, reflecting his prior experiences. He describes his aspirations, and his orientation and readiness to learn, of continuing his employment as

> *to reflect on my career…to assist me [to] reflect on my professional involvement in student lifewide learning…[and] to contribute to society*

Of his motives for extending his expatriate career, he states,

> *Geographically [this country] is also far more suited for travel compared to [Australia]. We have gone to Europe for 4-day weekends…[and] have been to many places in Africa and Asia… Workwise, we also enjoy working with 400 staff from about 50 different countries…[and] having lived [here] for 16 years, we have a good understanding of the culture*

John's motive for commencing a doctorate was to provide a better learning experience for his students and his belief in lifelong education, an intrinsic aspiration. He and his wife, who is employed at the same institution, are enjoying their time in their chosen country which provides

a base for their other external interests of travel and culture. They both intend to continue working in their respective roles while enjoying their overseas location and their organisational employment experiences.

Although all the research participants self-reported that they were lifelong learners, three who had withdrawn for personal or institutional reasons have completed, one is completing their doctorate, and one has not returned to complete their doctorate.

Discussion

The six adult learning principles developed by Knowles (1913 – 1997) in Knowles et al., (2015) are themes for the andragogic learning process whereas, the themes developed by Stehlik (2011) and Elsey (2007) are developed from the perceptions and lived experiences of doctoral students. Thus, they are specific to a particular cohort of adult learners – mature-age doctoral students. The three sets of themes can be used to analyse the experiences of the participants relative to their aspirations, motivations, motives, and their expected and actual personal and professional outcomes. Of the five research participants, one has withdrawn from their doctoral program, two are in the final stages of the doctorates, while two are doctoral graduates.

The diversity of experiences of these participants provides the basis for the interpretation and integration of their lived experiences with reference to the three groups of themes.

For doctoral students, the need to know is the result of an aspiration to improve their knowledge and research skills for higher level or a change in employment as stated by Carly and Clare, or for personal aspirations including altruistic reasons such as the sharing of this knowledge and skills with others, the aspirations of James, Susan, and John. This sharing is an application of their knowledge and the utilisation of skills developed from their doctorate. For doctoral graduates, Susan and James, the sharing of knowledge is to help others and to undertake research for dissemination by publication or oral presentation, or to better their decision-making capacities in their respective fields of endeavour, a personal challenge, and self-development.

Doctoral students, similar to all adult learners, will defer their doctoral programs until they have achieved personal and professional stability

(James) that allows for time and personal application to the required research process, learning and skills necessary for doctorate completion. This may also be part of the personal challenge theme or 'quest' (Skakni, 2018) and may include the self-fulfilment need of Stehlik (2011) which can induce the eudemonic wellbeing identified by (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This can also affect the student's readiness to learn or preparedness.

The prior lived experiences of the student, including personal and professional, can affect their self-concept or a belief in their abilities to complete a doctorate as demonstrated by the participants who returned to doctoral study after volitional or non-volitional withdrawal as experienced by Clare and James. The self-belief of doctoral students is a part of their orientation to learning (Houle, 1961) and their motivations to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Doctoral students have differing motivations to commence doctoral study which can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. Often, the motivation is a combination of the intrinsic, an internal locus of control and extrinsic, an external locus of control (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation is considered to have the more enduring effect on the completion of doctoral study as this belief is dispositional, that is, embodied and psychological and related to an orientation to learning. Such learning motivation develops the learner's self-fulfilment and self-concept, a belief in their own abilities, the situation of Susan, James, and John. The aspiration to complete a doctorate as a goal towards attaining an external benefit such as career status, or social, cultural, and symbolic recognition, and financial improvement is an extrinsic motivation, the motivation of Carly, Clare, and John. Often, mature-age people's motivation in seeking admission to a doctorate is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, referred to by Ryan and Deci (2017) as integrated extrinsic motivation.

Conclusion

The intention by mature age students to retire or continue working and complete a doctorate is determined by the intrinsic motivators of an enjoyment or passion for work and learning. These motivations are usually in combination with other motives such as being in a stable partnership relationship, and having interests external to the job; both may be intrinsic or extrinsic, or a combination of both motivators; an

integrated extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As conducting research itself is the process of the learning, this may be an intrinsic motivation and an enjoyment of learning for learning's sake. The aspiration to complete a doctorate may also be extrinsic and focused on professional development such as career enhancement or business development, goal achievements.

The data demonstrates some of the possibilities and influences that the experiences of undertaking a doctorate, whether complete or incomplete, can have on the professional and personal abilities of the person. The contribution to society of doctoral experiences has for many of the participants, included an improvement in self-development such as esteem, belief, and confidence (Elsey, 2007). The contribution to industry and professional development is the improved skills developed in the data collection process, analysis of the data, decision making and innovative development of businesses services and products that may result from these processes

This is of importance to the mature-age doctoral student and graduate as they arrive at postgraduate education with a complement of knowledge and skills from industry or academia. They usually require supervisory assistance with the academic rigours of research rather than the content of the research (Skakni, 2018; Stehlik, 2011). It is this industry knowledge and skills that mature-age non-traditional students bring to doctoral education which is the dominant differentiator with traditional doctoral students and graduates (Taylor & House, 2010). This ensures that their contribution to society from their doctoral experiences is grounded in industry practice and culture, and therefore, of application to society.

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Guaranteed Minimum Income and Universal Basic Income programs: Implications for adult education

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Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) is currently the principal mechanism for fighting poverty and achieving social inclusion among a plethora of social policies in the European Union (EU). In GMI, education and vocational training hold a major role in fighting social exclusion and promoting social cohesion. The first part of the paper discusses the characteristics and limitations of the GMI scheme.

The second part of the paper discusses an alternative model for income support, intended to achieve a fairer and more cohesive society, the Universal Basic Income (UBI). We close by highlighting the potential of UBI schemes on reconfiguring that UBI schemes have on reconfiguring education, with an emphasis on adult education. On its own, UBI cannot challenge the neoliberal hegemony. However, UBI can become a means for shifting attention to alternative conceptualisations of social inclusion based on the creation of adult education for critical and participatory citizenship.

Keywords: *guaranteed minimum income, social policy, adult education, vocational training, social inclusion, poverty, universal basic income*

1. Social policies combating social exclusion: minimum incomes for social inclusion

Income support policies deal with a fundamental social justice issue, which is enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union (EU) (European Union, 1992). However, one of the major shortcomings of this Treaty and the EU's role in relation to fighting poverty and social exclusion in general, is that the EU has been designed around the prioritisation of economic competitiveness rather citizen rights, such as employment and a decent living.

In order to address this shortcoming the EU developed, though belatedly, some policy tools and designed specific policy interventions. One of them, is the Active Inclusion Program (AIP). Its aim was to support the inclusion and labour market participation of those of working age as well as those who cannot work (European Commission, 2010). The AIP rested on three pillars: (i) adequate income support, (ii) inclusive labour markets and (iii) access to quality services.

Perhaps the most important of the three pillars was the one that related to income support. The EU member states started seeking ways to link income and access to services, mainly through minimum income schemes, also known as GMIs. GMIs emerged at the beginning of the 1990s thanks to the European Council Recommendation (1992), which encouraged EU member states to develop programs guaranteeing their citizens a minimum income. As we discuss below, the role of education in combating poverty and social exclusion was important and it is reflected on another important EU communication, Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010), which set up concrete targets to be met by 2020. Among them, three are of particular interest:

- 75 percent of the population aged 20-64 should be employed
- the share of early school leavers should be under 10 percent and at least 40 percent of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

Throughout the 1990s and well into the early 2000s, various EU countries rolled out GMIs with considerable heterogeneity in terms of amounts of money available, requirements, duration, and recipient requirements.

These policies were directed, at least formally, at those having an income below the poverty threshold, that is to say below 60 percent of the median income in a given member state (Malgesini, 2017).

In 2018, the risk of poverty or social exclusion affected 109 million people or 21.7 percent of the entire EU28 population (European Union, 2018). Some of the worst affected groups are women (22.3 percent) and households with children, especially in East and South Europe. For example, Romania has the highest rate, 33.9 percent, of households with children under the poverty line, followed by Greece, 33.5 percent. On the other hand, in Slovenia this stood at 11.9 percent and in Czechia at 11.4 percent (Eurostat, 2019).

Despite the great heterogeneity of GMIs across the EU member states (Frazer and Marlier, 2016), two common characteristics prevail. First, a periodical payment is made, and, second, every program to a greater or lesser extent links receipt of this payment to the performance against a range of activities aimed at the social and labour market integration of its recipient. These activities may take place in a number of contexts (family, personal, health, educational, workplace or other) following a Personalised Integration Route-map, which invariably includes various commitments by the recipient to take part in and carry out activities proposed by social services. Amongst these, training courses and enhancing employability occupy a prominent position.

This plan is designed by professionals and is aimed at enhancing the recipient's social inclusion. It was in the context of the European Social Model based on public social welfare systems (Esping-Andersen, 2000) that GMIs first arose. We argue that, in nature, these schemes are social-democratic policies aimed at the inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in society. According to the fourteenth principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Union, 2019): "Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market" (2019: 20). In this way, inclusion was expected to be achieved in a twofold way. First, through enhanced access to consumption enabled by the guaranteed income. Second, through its linkage with the labour market given that participation in educational

and training activities intended to provide trainees with skills and qualifications. As the European Commission pointed out (2010) in its seminal document Europe 2020 Strategy: "…better educational levels help employability and progress in increasing the employment rate helps to reduce poverty" (2010: 9). In this way, employment is linked to education in a mechanistic manner, that is to say, a pipeline to social inclusion is constructed: socio-economic disadvantage entitles one to GMI; the latter offers access to a training course, which, in turn, offers access to the labour market. Finally, the labour market is the royal avenue to mainstream society and the cycle of social inclusion is thusly completed. Education and training, therefore, become subservient to the labour market. However, GMI for training and education-sponsored integration to the labour market as a means of combatting social exclusion was an expectation that was never fulfilled.

2. The Limitations of GMIs for Social Inclusion

GMIs include among their objectives combating poverty, increasing social cohesion and social protection of citizens. The 1992 Council Recommendation is the first European policy document that states these objectives explicitly: "…[We] recognize the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion…" (1992: 47). Despite the bold rhetoric, policies, such as the GMIs, suffer from a number of limitations and problems inherent in the theoretical and political assumptions underpinning them.

First, they are limited in respect of their ability to address their recipients' basic needs. Following Frazer and Maulier (2009: 24) only four countries in the EU (Cyprus, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Iceland and Switzerland) offer adequate minimum income support to ensure a decent living whereas the rest of the EU countries offer inadequate (or very inadequate) support. For instance, in 2017 the average amount that Spain paid GMI recipients was €435.80 per month (Spanish Ministry of Social Services, 2018), which was insufficient to cover basic monthly expenses, such as housing and living costs (e.g. the average rental price exceeded this amount). Therefore, GMIs do not fulfil their first and most important aim: to cover basic social needs.

Second, GMI schemes have been criticised for their stigmatising nature, as they focus on the poor as an individual, rather than on all citizens as a whole. For instance, a study conducted in 2015 (Eurofund, 2015) showed that potential beneficiaries from countries such as Bulgaria, Germany, Finland, Norway, Spain and Portugal among others, did not apply for the scheme because of the social stigma attached to these programs and the loss of privacy linked to the process of application.

Third, GMIs rest on complex bureaucratic and administrative procedures dedicated to assessing the financial, familial and social circumstances of their applicants. This assessment is aimed at checking the resources applicants possess and their compliance with the requirements attached to the scheme. It is administratively demanding and requires both complex initial decision-making and frequent updating of benefits received and recertification of eligibility (Gentilini et al., 2020). As a result, it is common to experience delays up to 10-12 months until the recipient starts receiving the first payment (Malgesini, 2017). Moreover, an attendant repercussion of this complex administrative process is the potential risk of intrusion into applicants' lives as well as the compromising position this places them by having administrators passing judgment on the way they live (Haag & Rohregger, 2019).

Fourth, GMIs tend to restrict poverty and social inequalities to a matter of individual control and responsibility, when their origins are fundamentally structural and socio-economic (Bauman, 2004; Piketty, 2014). The reliance on an individualised route-map to inclusion reinforces deficit assumptions about the GMI recipients and encourages a culture of 'poverty porn': 'Poverty porn produces a symbolic divide between the 'worker' and the 'shirker' and encourages viewers to scorn the lifestyles of those featured in the programs. Structural inequalities stemming from deindustrialisation and the precarity of the contemporary labour market are obscured, and instead poverty is represented as a lifestyle choice, with benefits claimants depicted as living it up at taxpayers' expense – further undermining welfare provisions.' (Pattison & Warren, 2020: 16).

3. Education as a Way Out of Poverty

From the Lisbon European Council (European Parliament, 2000) onwards, European policies for combating exclusion have increasingly

been based on the idea of 'individual activation' through enhanced employability and entrepreneurship (Hermann, 2007). The latter are the two linchpins in the grand scheme of making the EU *"… the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world"* (Commission of the European Communities, 2001:6).

Education in GMIs for inclusion is theoretically supported by the Human Capital Theory (or HCT for short) (Becker, 1964). According to it, education is an investment of an individual nature redeemable for a set value in the labour market (Schultz, 1962). Thus, education is one of the most important determinants of economic performance.

This theory sees education not just as an enhancement of an individual's employability, but as a key factor in improving productivity and economic growth as well as the quality and number of jobs available in a given nation (Becker, 1964). In this vein, education and training are the key pathways to accessing and succeeding within the global economy. This thinking is evident in key EU policies and directives designed to combat poverty and social exclusion (Council of the European Union, 2009), which require the poor to receive training in order to acquire the knowledge, abilities and skills most needed in the labour market (Muñoz & Bonete, 2009: 279). For example, the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 "Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion" highlights the idea that the labour market's needs are constantly evolving and *"to deal with these changes, people need to be equipped with sound basic skills, including literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Transversal skills, such as the ability to learn and initiative-taking, are essential to help people deal with today's varied and unpredictable career paths. Entrepreneurial skills contribute to employability of young people in particular, as well as supporting new business creation"* (European Commission, 2016: 14-15). In other words, *"Let's Make Education a Way Out of Poverty!"* (EAPN, 2018), is not only a political proclamation, but the very road-map into social inclusion that the EU started fashioning in the early 1990s.

Criticism of HCT in education is manifold. First, it rests on the debunking of the direct and automatic-like association between training, integration into the workforce, increased productivity and improvements in working conditions as an outcome of the economic growth generated by better-trained workers that HCT propounds. This association, though, is easily refuted, since most EU societies have the

most widely and best trained young people ever, yet unemployment and precarity have increased. The expectation that "the greater a nation's investment in education, the greater its economic development" never materialized. For instance, in spite of their investments in education, many developing countries did not experience the "take off" that HCT predicted (English & Mayo, 2012: 79). Further, "employability" does not necessarily mean "employment". In fact, working arrangements and job availability in a specific country or a given area within it depend less on individuals' training or the prevalent education system than on the balance between capital and labour. However, this relationship has been radically altered in favour of capital by neoliberal policies especially since the 2008 economic crisis (Harvey, 2012; 2013).

Second, education in HCT acquires a passive role as it is dedicated exclusively to training for skills required by the labour market (Apple, 1998:39). In other words, education, at all levels and in all its forms, is viewed as preparation for work, regardless of its intrinsic value. Furthermore, education is approached as vocational training to provide the labour market with the requisite basic skills (CEDEFOP, 2001:15). Under the HCT framework, adult education and lifelong learning -all around the world and especially in the EU- have lost not only any kind of emancipatory or critical potential (Freire, 1971), but also most of their humanistic origins championed by UNESCO (Lengrand, 1970; Gelpi, 1985), taking instead an economistic turn.

Third, education is treated in HCT as a consumer product, with a price tag in the labour market in the form of better employment chance for its incumbents. This view contributes to the marketization of education and the organisation of education systems along free market principles, such as open competition. In a plethora of EU strategic documents, the idea of lifelong learning tends to reinforce this consumerist outlook, as all EU citizens are expected to consume education throughout their lifetime (English & Mayo, 2012), in order to adapt to the labour market changes and keep up being employable. Lifelong learning, therefore, is conceived in purely individualistic terms, placing the entire responsibility for learning on the individual, so any potential failure to achieve can be explained away by "blaming the victim".

What is more, since 1970, there has been a gradual process where public services and utilities, such as, communications, transportation, health systems, banks, electricity, water and so on, have been privatized (Harvey,

2013). By extension, the time seems to be ripe also for the "businessification of education", that is to say for the turning of education into a business. Public education systems are increasingly, in terms of economic exploitation, similar to the international automobile industry (Hill, 2013): a whole virgin territory awaiting to be run like a private business.

Fourth, HCT offers a purely mechanical view of the link between employee and employer, without taking into account the ideological and structural aspects shaping the terms of contracts and working conditions in the labour market (Bowles & Gintis, 1975).

Fifth, according to HCT, unemployment and poverty are problems arising either because education does not provide adequate training or because socially excluded individuals or poor individuals failed to take proper advantage of the training, educational and work opportunities presented to them. Either way, the labour market and its capitalist logic get absolved as the causes of these problems, which are explained away as external dysfunctions which could be remedied by "better" educational courses with a stronger "entrepreneurial" spirit.

4. A Pedagogy of Deficit and an Education to Redeem the Poor

What are the implications of EU welfare systems having adopted GMIs and the attendant HCT that underpins them? The literature identifies a number of issues both in terms of income support schemes and the role of education and training in them.

GMIs' theoretical underpinnings are tightly linked to a transmission pedagogic model, in which educators transmit vocational techniques, abilities or skills, while trainees acquire them passively either in a purely theoretical way or in the shape of applying just those abilities needed for work. This conception of education severely restricts the potential of educators and educated and it decouples theory from practice. The latter is now understood as the sterile application of skills in a limited field of practice or area of work. Furthermore, GMIs adopt an instrumental approach to the educational syllabus and they offer an insufficient intellectual diet because they rely on a deficit model: GMI recipients are unable to understand and assess their own needs. Instead, they need to have their educational needs diagnosed by professionals, such as educators and social workers, who take part in designing training actions and route-maps for social inclusion.

In addition, training programs within GMI schemes may be considered as a pedagogy of deficit, in which the poor are seen as having a number of shortcomings and deficiencies in skills, knowledge and training, which extends to their attitude or personality, which make it difficult to integrate them into a wage-earning society. Thus, training in these schemes concentrates exclusively upon instilling vocational skills and enhancing the employability of these people as well as their changing their attitude towards taking up any opportunities that might be targeted at them. Such opportunities include preparatory training for work and training courses for specific skills, such as on how to draw up a curriculum vitae, how to succeed in job interviews, how to seek work over the Internet, on entrepreneurship and setting up one's own business as well as courses intended to provide social and attitudinal skills, such as on improving self-esteem, enriching one's personal skills, emotional intelligence and the like. This approach has been criticised for being a paternalistic pedagogy, a sort of moral orthopaedic (Deacon, 2005) set in a context where jobs are scarce and precarious (Standing, 2013), while emphasising the social inclusion of such groups fundamentally through integration into the world of precarious work and sometimes underground and informal economy (Colombino & Narazani, 2013).

Although this kind of training has as its declared objective the enhancement of employability and encouragement of labour market inclusion, in practice, it fulfils a different function. That is to say, it acts as redeeming the poor, since participation in these training courses by the socially excluded is a way for them to demonstrate their willingness to integrate. Furthermore, taking part in training acts as a mechanism of differentiation between the 'deserving poor', that is to say those who make an effort and deserve to receive some monetary assistance, and the 'undeserving poor', that is to say those who do not make enough effort and thus do not merit any financial help. This divide between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, denies any right to social citizenship (Marshall, 1950) under which all citizens have an entitlement to a modicum of economic welfare. Instead, the right to social citizenship becomes another traded commodity, that is to say something that must be earned by demonstrating a willingness to submit to integrative route-maps and undertake employability training (Gray, 2004). What is more, such approaches have been shown to lead to a culture of blaming and shaming the poor and to punitive treatment of the victims of socio-economic inequalities (Wacquant, 2009).

A corollary of these implications discussed so far is that GMIs through HCT have facilitated and legitimised an axiological reshaping and reconfiguration of education as well as of what is permissible and viable as social policy to address poverty and social exclusion. GMIs through HCT promote an idea of education and training as the 'great equaliser' with precariousness and unemployment integrated into this conception. Furthermore, training for employment contributes to a reinforcement of the predominance of competitiveness and individualism, which are characteristics of the neoliberal thinking. Inclusion becomes a matter of personal vocational skills or attitudes acquisition, with people competing with each other for jobs on the basis of their training qualifications. This practice elevates the notion of people as enterprising men [sic] (Foucault, 2008) in which individuals fully develop their nature in free competition with others through investment in themselves as human capital. In this context, the never-ending effort to adapt oneself to the constantly changing labour market needs, may give rise to different mental problems such as chronic insecurity (Harvey, 2013: 83), stress, alienation and erosion of the self (Sennett, 1999).

In addition, there is a deepening commodification of education and training and a growing businessificiation of poverty[1]. Training courses to cater for GMI recipients are now approached as products with possibilities for generating profits to private firms entrusted with the provision of such courses. Doubtless, this is not a market niche as lucrative as the pension industry, care homes for the elderly or higher education. Nevertheless, it is of sufficient interest to have attracted a number of stakeholders into the poverty business, in the shape of setting up training partnerships organised through quasi-market systems (Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1999). In this framework, public institutions take care of planning and organising training actions, which are then put into effect by third sector ("not-for-profit") providers, training partners, businesses, trade unions and other providers through public financing agreements.

5. Alternative proposals for social justice: the Universal Basic Income (UBI)

This section puts forward an alternative route to that marked by traditional social welfare policies. Given the manifest difficulties for liberal thinking in its current neoliberal guise when it comes to the distribution of wealth and the generation of more cohesive societies (Piketty, 2014; Harvey, 2013), there is a need to seek proposals and measures based on fresh ideas.

One of these proposals is the implementation of a universal citizen's basic income (UBI). While UBI is not a silver bullet (Haagh & Rohregger, 2020), it can create policy conditions that could make the challenging of neoliberal principles of human capital and employability as goals in themselves, possible.

5.1 The Universal Basic Income (UBI)

The idea of a basic income or UBI is not a novel one, but it has enjoyed a revival since the mid-1990s (Murray & Pateman, 2012). UBI first emerged in Van Parjis's writings during the 1980s. According to one of its major proponents, UBI "at the least, means an amount that would enable someone to survive in extremis, in the society they live in … [and it] would be paid to each individual, regardless of marital, family or household status." (Standing, 2017: 8). Amongst other key features, UBI comes with no behavioural strings attached. That is to say, recipients need not take up undesirable jobs or enter education or training courses they do not deem appropriate. What is more, UBI goes beyond GMIs, because it is not limited to dealing with poverty through handouts, but is in itself a tool directed towards social change. UBI has the following structural characteristics (Raventós, 2007):

First, it is individual as it is granted to a single person, not to a family unit, as is the case with GMIs.

Second, it is universal covering all citizens and it is recognised as a social right. By contrast, GMIs are not universal, as they are means-tested and, as such, they are directed at selected, 'at risk' groups.

Third, UBI is unconditional as it does not take into account the situation and conditions of the person receiving the payment. By contrast, GMIs involve a valuation of, and check upon the income and individual situation of their beneficiaries, leading to the creation of a complex bureaucratic and administrative system.

Fourth, UBI is sufficient to cover basic social needs and living expenses, as its amount is fixed above the poverty threshold. By contrast, GMIs do not necessarily move their recipients above the poverty threshold and hence they do not allow them to cover their basic social needs. Arguably, GMIs are no more than a salary for poverty, aimed at avoiding social revolt against the structural determinants of poverty (Negri,

1998). On the other hand, UBI challenges the foundations of poverty by eliminating it.

5.2 UBI and education

Over the last few years, a number of studies have been undertaken into the technical and economic viability of UBI in different countries (Standing, 2017; Haagh & Rohregger, 2020). Currently, no country has a UBI scheme in place, although there have been several small-scale pilots (e.g. in Finland in 2017 to 2018, which sought to explore the effects of UBI) and a few larger-scale experiences (Gentilini et al., 2020)[3].

In a recent experiment in India, two pilot studies were run in 2011 to test the impact of basic income grants. Monthly payments were made to every man, woman and child in eight villages in Madhya Pradesh, while another village was used as a comparison. The results showed that nutrition among recipients improved and especially for young children whose weight-for-age significantly increased, especially among girls (Standing, 2013). What is more, better health led to improved school attendance and performance for a large number of children. Finally, “The scheme had positive equity outcomes. In most respects, there was a bigger positive effect for disadvantaged groups – lower-caste families, women, and those with disabilities” (Standing, 2017:25).

More recently, a two-year project in Uganda, showed that unconditional cash transfers led to increased school attendance, from 50 percent to 94.7 percent as well as increased health and other benefits (i.e. in launching new businesses and happiness). However, the evidence is much more nuanced than this. In a rigorous review, Bastagli et al. (2016) found evidence to suggest that cash transfers lead to an improvement in school attendance in the short term, though there is less clear evidence about learning outcomes. Finally, in terms of gender, cash transfers seem to have a positive impact on school attendance for girls as well as some increase in test scores and cognitive development.

Findings from two experiments in rural USA found significant improvement for grades 2-8 in attendance rate and teacher training and test scores. Moreover, large positive effects were observed among children from disadvantaged families. In New Jersey, it was found that significant improvement in terms of school attendance, while in Seattle and Denver a positive effect of adults moving on to continuing education was found (Widerquist, Pressman and Lewis, 2016).

Baird, McIntosh & Ozler (2016) found positive effects of an unconditional cash transfer program in Malawi on anthropometric indicators of children of adolescent beneficiaries two years after the program it had stopped. Other studies on UCTs, showed that they significantly increase schooling while they decrease child labour (Edmonds, 2006; Edmonds & Schady, 2012). Baird et al. (2014) found that both Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) and Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs) had an impact on improving school enrollment and attendance, with no significant difference between them.

Taafe, Longosz and Wilson (2017) found a narrow impact of CCTs on livelihoods, education, and health. What is more, conditionality is not always required to produce an impact, though it may lead to stronger effects. On the other hand, UCTs could generate more widespread impact across development objectives.

To conclude, UBI that offers support without conditions resembles many UCT programs already applied in various parts of the world. However, “the prevalence of some sort of conditioning—even if only notional—suggests that the unconditional feature of a UBI will be challenging to present practice in at least some places. The empirical evidence suggests that without conditions, there may be some mild reduction in service uptake. However, sizable impacts seem to be achieved by programs with well-implemented soft conditionalities, which are likely to be less administratively and cost demanding.” (Gentilini et al., 2020:34)

So, what could UBI achieve? Several possibilities emerge. First, UBI could lead to a considerable reduction or total eradication in the forms of poverty directly related to a lack of income (Raventós, 2007). A UBI scheme can achieve wealth redistribution that goes far beyond what is achieved by current GMI schemes, thanks to its universal nature and principles of mutual aid and strong solidarity. It is a proposal aimed at all citizens, not a measure directed solely toward the poor; hence, it is universal and non-stigmatising.

The second possibility is that it could contribute to re-establishing a balance of power between capital and labour by strengthening the workers’ hands when engaged in labour negotiations (Standing, 2013). In this way, it could encourage improvements in working conditions and reduce precariousness, as it would provide a financial safety net allowing workers to choose jobs free of constraint.

A third possibility is that UBI could stimulate citizen participation and forms of organisation based on co-operative principles (Wright, 2005). UBI gives support to municipalism, participative and direct decision-making by bolstering participatory budgets in which there is discussion about how funds are to be allocated and community matters to be managed. In turn, this favours the development of entrepreneurial initiatives, as it guarantees basic financial support allowing the blossoming of work projects based on co-operative approaches. In the present economic context, such projects face huge difficulties in starting up: uncertainty about future success or failure, possible financial viability or problems in gaining access to funding from the banking sector.

Lastly, UBI has the potential to change the public social imaginary by shifting the boundaries of what is possible. Although we are conditioned by the neoliberal imaginary (Rizvi, 2017) and the putative lack of alternatives (TINA), UBI provides the opportunity to change this hegemonic way of thinking. The promise of the UBI scheme is that it frees people from the compulsion to work for a wage and allows them to offer their labour power to the realization of social and human needs outside the market.

5.3 UBI and Implications for Adult Education

In the previous sections we discussed how human capital approaches almost all education as vocational training, as a subsystem of the organisation of production, providing the skills that the latter requires (CEDEFOP, 2018). In this section, we explore whether with UBI could help education move away from the principles of HCT and what its new principles could look like.

By breaking away from the submission to the entrepreneurial ethos and the centrality of employability that is integral in GMIs, education can more readily address broader social needs based on mutual support and solidarity. Education, in general, and training for adults in situations of social exclusion in particular, if they are to promote social justice, they must include a content stimulating critical reflection through questions that directly affect all those involved in the educational process. For example, new vocational training, if it is to be truly anti-hegemonic, it needs to incorporate reflections and explorations around the origins and consequences of precarious work, the social utility of the jobs for

which training is provided, the privatisation of education and other public services, as well as the root causes and role of poverty in capitalist societies. It would also need to address other aspects of social relevance for those participating and for the community.

It is, therefore, urgent to re-establish a balance between use and exchange value in education and especially adult education (Cascante, 2018). Thanks to the theories of human capital, the absence of this balance has two undesirable outcomes. First, it reduces the value of training as it is necessary to have an ever-larger portfolio of qualifications, certificates and diplomas to get even a precarious job. Second, it limits education to skills provider, thereby losing track of the real learning value or personal satisfaction it may bring, and falling into the vicious circle of educational consumerism.

Additionally, proposals for an alternative organisation of education based on UBI can take on a different character. Specifically, they can move away from banking models of education where a few (the education professional) design and select the content and pass it on, whilst the many (the trainees) receive and assimilate it in a more or less passive way. New proposals would emphasise teaching methods based on social interactions, debates and dialogues. Learners can acquire a much more active role both in the delivery of the educational activities and in their planning. This process can lead to the elimination of artificial divides, such as between expert-technicians, that is teachers, and passive recipients, that is trainees. Methodologies suited to this pedagogic model comprise reading circles and learning communities (Flecha, 2009), interest centres, action-research procedures (Kemmis & Carr, 1993) or dialogue education circles (Freire, 1971). Such methods pay attention both to the role and significance of social structures as well as to the interests and values of all participants. Instead of handing out mechanistic and individualistic road maps to acquiring skills for entering the labour market, the emphasis shifts to meeting the needs of people embedded in communities with social, environmental, economic, politic, spiritual and personal needs. By removing the mediation of the ideological state apparatuses and its market-oriented tentacles, such as private providers of training courses, space is created for interactions, debates and dialogues about the contents and themes of education, the nature of employment and the type of society that needs to be created.

6. Conclusion

The economic crisis that started in 2008 and the pandemic provide an excellent opportunity for advancing further the neoliberal agenda with ever-greater intensity, especially with regard to welfare policies and education. The latter has been infiltrated by a diverse set of stakeholders, such as businesses, charities and various other entities, who are active in delivering educational and training courses as employment fixes through upskilling. In turn, the involvement of third parties leads to a reduction in public spending and a growing trend toward reducing social rights.

Even a cursory examination of EU spending on training offers valuable lessons. For despite the fact that the EU embraced austerity since 2009, in the period 2011 to 2015 alone, more than €330bn was spent on vocational training intended to enhance employability and activation of the unemployed. However, this volume of expenditure begs the question why this money was not spent directly on job creation, quality employment of genuine social utility that would permit adequate labour market integration, strengthening a real safety net of minimum income to respond to the needs of the most marginalised. The answer is that, if it were, education for the poor would cease to be a mechanism for their redemption and would no longer offer itself as a business opportunity. For the latter, the education of the poor is a lucrative opportunity that attracts NGOs, enterprises, foundations, associations, and other stakeholders. While some are motivated by altruistic and philanthropic values, others have profit making incentives. In any case, the common denominator is that all of these actors have a stake in the poverty industry. Although they did not create this industry, they nevertheless benefit from its existence, making themselves co-dependent on it and the elimination of poverty inseparable from their eclipse. As such, their incentives lie more with the creation of training courses to fix a vaguely conceptualised skills gap rather than to eliminate poverty.

Consequently, traditional policies for combating poverty and social exclusion through education and training are largely ineffective. What compounds this situation is the effect of neoliberal welfare policies, which have resulted in increased socio-economic inequalities and poverty and have eroded the social fabric (Faulkner, 2013; OXFAM, 2017). With the predominance of neoliberal policies, the equilibrium

between the use and the exchange value of education has gone out of kilter. The use value has come to be measured solely by its exchange value. Moreover, the attendant sacrifice of its use value on the altar of employability is proving futile, since the exchange value of training diminishes continuously as neoliberal policies advance: more and more education is needed to obtain worse and worse jobs.

In this light, it is imperative that we seek alternative discourses and practices that break away with the neoliberal orthodoxy and its reliance on individualistic and mechanistic interventions. From the perspective of critical education, UBI can contribute to the objective of balancing the use value with the exchange value of education, giving a social sense to both of them. In addition, UBI could be used as a tool to re-imagine what is possible, as a means of making the work of creating a real utopia practicable (Wright, 2005). In this way, education can break loose from the centrality of employability and from the stranglehold of human capital theory.

Against the self-interested rhetoric of "there is no alternative" (TINA) imposed by neoliberalism, there is a need to explore discourses and practices that run counter to it and to weigh them in accordance to their possibilities in creating the conditions for greater social justice. UBI can be seen as such an asset within a complex counter-neoliberal strategy. This strategy would include actions in other spheres of activity (climate change and sustainability, de-growth, eco-feminism, municipalism and so on) that can contribute to social change by means of the gestation of a new order from within the contradictions and cracks of the old predominant social order (Holloway, 2010). While UBI is no panacea, we argue that it can foster communal processes over individual fixes as it based on a model of policy for social justice rather than individual deficit.

Endnotes

[1] For more about this idea of 'poverty business', see Rodriguez, J. (2013 & 2016).

[2] For more information on this pilot experiment, see shorturl.at/mYZ69.

[3] Only Mongolia and the Islamic Republic of Iran had a national UBI in place for a short period of time.

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In search of understanding biographical ageing - a research-based concept

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The aim of the article is to understand ageing as a process of lifelong learning through a whole variety of experiences, to consider what ageing in a biographical perspective means, and to investigate the process of biographical ageing within identity formation. The method of the project was based on the employment of in-depth narrative interviews with older Polish migrants now living in Sweden. The author argues that ageing is a natural process of the life cycle and is socially and culturally constructed and that consequently everyone experiences this process individually. One of the paper's conclusions is that we do not age according to the numbers of years we live, but due to our life experience and the social-historical contexts in which we have lived. Furthermore, we age due to the biography we re/construct while we are ageing during our life course. Ageing, from a biographical perspective, is a learning process in which people re/construct their lives with social, educational and cultural contexts and from which they draw from their experiences relating to social practices and historical events.

Keywords: *biographical ageing, older migrants, life experiences, lifelong learning, identity formation, narrative gerontology*

Understanding ageing and old age in the light of narrative gerontology

While ageing, we become (more) invisible. Older adults are often left with internal struggles about health, isolation, loneliness, lack of duties, money and sometimes about gender. They are often portrayed as 'the others', as unproductive and problematic for society and they try to escape from such labels as 'old' (Moen, 2016). The younger generation, often forget that the behaviours of the older people they face are based on the experiences they have gone through. Thus, considering the various experiences and historical events of diverse ageing cohort's population, we need to understand that such events might produce structural changes and contribute to the individualised trajectories of the life course and ageing process.

Peter Alheit (2018, p.11) asserted that:

> *"In the development of a modern society the life's journey is no longer predetermined therein but instead becomes more variable for both the individual as well as for whole groups in society through educational processes and social mobility, migration and technical-cultural change".*

This view corresponds closely with my way of understanding and perceiving ageing in a post-modern world. Ageing is no longer preordained and scheduled, there is no single pattern of ageing, although ageing is socially constructed, we are age individually. The meaning of age and ageing has varied in different societies, cultures and points in history (Hockey & James, 2003 p.4). Ageing is a process that is managed and negotiated by individuals in different ways, through the use of different resources and strategies, at various points in life, with different consequences and effects (Hockey & James, 2003). Ageing, in this sense, becomes more variable for both the individual and society, and multidimensional too. Understanding ageing as a process means that we are becoming older instead of being older. Ageing is a process of growing older, which is dynamic, interactive, subject to the twists and turns of life, chance, change and complication, and is exemplified by complexity, thus in this sense we become more unique and more distinctive with age, not less (Randall, 2007).

We can determine the objective age however, across the life course, each of us individually learns what aging is and then we feel or label ourselves

'old'. Referring to Giddens (1991), the post-traditional self, becomes an ongoing, embodied project, and I argue that ageing also turns into an ongoing, lifelong project. Ageing is a significant resource through which individuals construct their biographical narratives across the life course, both in terms of the past, looking back from old age and looking forward (Hockey & James, 2003). As Randall (2013, p. ix) claims:

"One of the more exciting developments in gerontology at present lies in the use of narrative approaches and perspectives in exploring the complex - yet under-researched – 'inside' of ageing. With its focus on biographical more than, say, biological aging, the resulting subfield, known loosely as 'narrative gerontology', is enriching our understanding of how we change subjectively over time; of how we change, that is, with regard to our sense of identity as a consequence of the continual weaving and reweaving within us of memory, emotion, and meaning".

Birren, Ruth and Kenyon (1996) have also stressed the importance of narrative within ageing studies because it provides a medium for investigating both the similarities and differences of human ageing over the life course. They emphasized that narratives may reveal some of the complexities and contradictions that are embedded in the experience of ageing and show the re/construction process of different identities over the life course. Moreover, employing the biographical approach to gerontology also enables us to identify how cultures, subcultures, or family patterns are reflected in individual lives. It can also reveal how some people adapt, expand, or fight the possibilities and limitations of the historical period in which they live (Birren, Ruth & Kenyon, 1996). These insights are important to this paper because by exploring ageing through narratives, we can learn more about the complex, "inside" of aging. Therefore, I use a biographical perspective as the research framework for developing the concept of biographical ageing and learning within identity formation as presented in this paper.

The biographical approach as the research framework

Acknowledging the work carried out to date by narrative gerontology (Birren, Kenyon, & Ruth 1996; Phoenix, Smith & Sparkes 2010; Randall, 2007) I focus my research on the biographical approach widely recognized and employed in the field of adult education (Alheit, 2009, 2018; Alheit & Dausien, 2002; Bron, 2000, 2007; Bron & West, 2000;

Dominicé, 2000). I use the biographical approach to investigate older people's life experiences, and their ageing and learning process in order to develop the concept of biographical ageing.

Peter Alheit (2018, p.13) highlighted three aspects of a biographical theoretical approach to lifelong learning: temporality, contextuality and reflexivity. This triad can be used also for the analysis of the ageing process. A biographical analysis requires the temporal order and re-order of learning and ageing within the lifespan (Alheit, 2018). Ageing is not a linear structure, but an 'ongoing process'. Time, in the context of ageing, intervenes in various time structures, such as past, present, future, daily life, historical and social time, work time, family time, free time, lifetime, which "leads to the construction of high-order structures of experience and meaning" (Alheit, 2018 p.13).

The second aspect, mentioned by Alheit (2018), contextuality, seems to be crucial for ageing. For example, he has stated:

> *"The 'worlds' in which learning processes take place as individual and interactive practices are then not arbitrary learning environments but complex and inconsistently organized and multi- 'layered' social contexts of varying levels of relevance: there are concrete situations, life-settings and structured historical-social spaces that are marked by specific power structures and structures of inequality" (Alheit 2018, pp.13-14).*

The world, as we know it, that we experience, is given to us independently not as a system of individual unique objects, but as a world full of meanings, symbols and purposes. It is subject to constant changes. A person who lives in such a world discovers and explores it through their activities, experience and interactions with others. As Malewski (1997, p. 30) has noted, "the social world is an intersubjective structure which is continuously created by the exchange of sense and meaning in the course of social interaction".

The biographical approach aligns closely with learning and is embedded within societal structures and cultural contexts of interpretation (Alheit & Dausien, 2002). It considers an individual life in its entirety, in all its phases, as a framework for potential learning. Alheit (1995) has used the term 'biographicity' to explain how adults construct and reconstruct their lives as a way to understand their own life construction. 'Life

construction', is generated between twin poles of structure and subjectivity (Alheit, 2009) and is an ongoing forming process of a person's life. Life stories are never isolated products, rather, close links between the story and other social, cultural, and ideological contexts exist, they are contextual.

Reflexivity, the third aspect mentioned by Alheit (2018, p.14) refers to an individual's "learning being understood as a process of 'making experiences' and of the construction of meaning where the subject recursively refers to his or her experiences and yields new knowledge and adventures". Yet, as Schuller (1992, p. 19) has suggested, it is important to note that "not all individuals pass through the same set of stages". This notion of individual construction of meaning in the course of a life of experiences can lead to reflexive learning and ageing, which might change people's perspectives, and thus have transformative capacities (Bron, 2007).

Ageing in the context of identity formation

Each life is situated in a particular limited period of time and therefore besides the biological, social curve of life, there is also an individual curve containing the whole life. With great probability, we can discover in the biographies of people living in particular periods of time certain facts related to external events and accepted social norms. "People's lives consist of periods of different quality that are temporary, transient and at some point absolutely final" (Giza 1991, p.123). In a similar vein, Alheit (2002) has also indicated that everybody has a unique biographical plan, which is revealed while analysing narrative biographies. Nevertheless, narratives are not understood as a transparent window into people's lives as they age, but rather they show the on-going process of ageing and identity transformation. For example, Ruth and Kenyon (1996, p.2) have stated that, "every aging person is unique in important ways and, by emphasizing this uniqueness, we gain access to a rich perspective for the study of aging".

Biographical narrative interviews are designed to enable the interviewee to have the maximum freedom in expressing their own life story from their individual life course perspective. It allows the researcher to follow the meanderings of identity formation (Eichsteller, 2012). These meandering also mean that ageing, as part of our lives, has its own

dynamics with transitions, transgressions, and variable periods, and it is an individual process that leads to a unique biographical ageing plan. Each older adult has a subjective ongoing biography. They build up a biographical plan of everyday actions dealing with external structures and objective facts, life struggles (crisis and successes), hobbies, emotions, habits, and values. Awareness of responsibility for our life course can help us to deal with life's crises. "People have different expectations that sometimes are too difficult to meet, and they struggle to fulfil them as well as their wishes and dreams" (Bron & Thunborg, 2017, p.124).

In disengagement theories, older adults are considered to be incapable of fulfilling their previous roles (conneccted to their jobs) (Cumming & Henry, 1961), thus identity in older adults can be linked to rolelessness; a collective and shared 'aged identity' marked by decline, loss and withdrawal (Cook, 2018). This position of the identity of the ageing is, however, dismissed in more recent research (Bowling, 2008; Radtke et al, 2016). Thus, in my research, I argue that ageing is an integral process of the life cycle and is socially and culturally constructed, and consequentially everyone has a subjective experience of this process. Older people construct and reconstruct their identity in relation to their life experiences and their interaction with specific environments.

To analyse how life experiences shape the ageing process, I use a theory of biographical work (Bron & Thunborg, 2017), which is conceptualised as a process of formation and transformation of identity over different temporalities and in relation to the specific life settings in people's biographies. Biographical work has its starting point in peoples' experience of their own identity struggles and is located between current life situations and previous experience (Bron & Thunborg, 2017). Bron and Thunborg (2017, p. 122) point out how identity struggles might either lead to "processes of 'floating', that is, a feeling of being fragmented without past or present, and 'anchoring', i.e. feelings of belonging to a specific context or grounded in oneself". This process of re/constructing identity is unstructured, unplanned and timeless and creates spaces for multiple identities in people's biographies.

Background of the research

My wider research project of ageing is designed using a biographical approach. The concept of biographical ageing and learning or 'ageing

biographically' emerges from the analysis of data collected in a project with older Polish migrants. Older migrants are different from older adults in the host population and differ among themselves, and these differences need to be recognized (Wilson, 2000). Migrants are ageing in a country that differs from the country of origin in many cultural, social, political, economic, and even ecological respects. Learning to live in a new country goes hand in hand with ageing. Thus, migration is the context for the continual negotiation of who they are as they age in a foreign country. Migration is a process that emphasizes the importance of a life course perspective, which includes the ageing process.

The main research aim was to consider what it means to age while being a Polish migrant in Sweden, from two perspectives: time (past, present, future) and culture (Polish and Swedish) (Malec, 2012; Malec-Rawiński, 2016, Malec-Rawiński, 2017). I have operationalised this aim to better understand ageing as a process of lifelong learning through a whole variety of various experiences, to consider what ageing in a biographical perspective means and to investigate the process of biographical ageing within identity formation. The research questions are: How do the older adults' life experiences shape their biographical ageing and learning? How do the life experiences shape the ageing process and identity? What does ageing mean for the migrant?

The project's method employed in-depth narrative interviews with older age Polish migrants now living in Sweden. The participant cohort included a diverse group of participants from a range of professional, educational and gender backgrounds. The data collection was conducted in 2010 and 2011. I collected data from seventeen older age Polish adult migrants (men and women), who came to Sweden when they were aged between 30-40 years of age. At the time of the interviews, all participants were over 60 years of age, so most had lived in Sweden for at least 30 years. That they had lived both in Sweden and Poland, and between and in these two cultures, was the main criterion of participant selection. To recruit participants, I used a 'snow-ball' technique.

Data analysis was undertaken using a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992; 1995). Grounded theory requires that I follow a careful and discrete sequence of analysis, open coding, selective coding, the discovery and naming of categories (Glaser, 1992). The first stage open coding revealed certain similarities and differences in accordance

with the biographical patchwork of the participants' life experiences. Emergent themes were then coded selectively, and the categories were discovered. In the next analytical step, I analysed how life experiences shaped the ageing process and identity and thus employed a theory of biographical work (Bron & Thunborg, 2017). This theory inspired me to look at the aging process as the process of the re/construction of life trajectories and re/formation of identities as a lifelong process.

For this paper, I have chosen four cases for analysis from four participant's narratives: two men, Jan, and Stan, and two women, Maria, and Jadwiga. These narratives were chosen because I had identified some similarities in their individual biographies: both men are musicians and came to Sweden for musical 'gigs', and the women have been single mothers for much of their lives. To contextualise their biographies, in the following I present four short vignettes explicating their biographies. All participants' names are changed and all of them gave consent.

Vignettes of the interviewees

Jadwiga

Jadwiga was 90 years of age at the time of our interview. She first came to Sweden as a teenager for a summer course. During that course, the Second World War started, and she stayed in Sweden longer than she had planned. She had a Jewish background; all Jadwiga's family died in the Warsaw ghetto; she was fortunate to have survived while in Sweden. After WWII she returned to Poland intending to help rebuild her country. She described the birth of her son, in 1957, as her great happiness. She and her son lived in Poland until 1968, but after the political events in Poland Jadwiga, like many Jews was persecuted and forced to leave Poland. Jadwiga wrote a letter to a family where she used to work for when she had been in Sweden the first time and she obtained an invitation from them. This prior connection helped her, and with her son she migrated to Sweden. Their lack of money made their initial years in Sweden hard, but Jadwiga overcame these challenges. She worked as a housekeeper, for a few families, and as soon as her situation was stable, she recommenced her studies. When she finished her education, she found work at a university, where she worked until she retired. Her son moved to the USA; he contracted HIV while there and died

after returning to Sweden, still a young man. It was a difficult and hard experience for Jadwiga, losing her beloved son. After her son's death, Jadwiga became a volunteer in HIV/AIDS organisations. Jadwiga lived in Sweden until she passed away in 2019. In her final years Jadwiga's health deteriorated, affecting her balance, and she required a walker to aid her mobility. When her health deteriorated further, she moved to an assisted living facility with fulltime care until her death.

Maria

Maria[4] was 93 years old when I interviewed her. Her daughter had lived in Sweden for many years, so she migrated to Sweden after retirement for the purpose of family reunion. During WWII and by the age of 24, she was a commandant, lieutenant, general and a spy as well. She discussed the spirit of Polish patriotism and how she was very much involved in the liberation of Poland after the war. She was a brave and strong young woman. As a servicewoman, she was both a right and left-handed markswoman. As a spy she was on the watch all the time. She spoke German, so sometimes she pretended she was German. The necessity for conspiracy, on one hand, made her identity unstable, but on the other hand, it became a natural way of life. When WWII ended, her life went in unexpected directions. In Poland after WWII, a new communist political system took control of the country. Maria was arrested during a roundup, a "łapanka" or "kocioł" in Polish[6], and she was sent to prison and sentenced to death. However, she successfully defended herself against the death sentence. Thanks to a National Amnesty of 1947, after three years she was released from prison. After coming out of prison, she and her family were persecuted further. Although Maria had a daughter, she never got married. She worked hard and used all her capacities to create "a normal" home and family for her daughter. Migration to Sweden opened a new and transformative chapter in Maria's life. She effectively started a new life and while learning Swedish she immersed herself in Swedish culture. In the meantime, she had become an important person for the history of Poland. In the Polish town where she was persecuted and could not stay after leaving prison, they built and named the Chamber of Memory in her honour. I met her just before her death from cancer. She seemed fulfilled and happy with the life she had lived.

Stan

Stan, 65 years old at the time of the interview, was a musician all his life. He had been playing various instruments since he was a child. He was very good at playing and that made him a famous musician in Poland during the 60s. He travelled a lot internationally, giving concerts in Europe, in America and in Russia. The hotels in various cities and countries, became his home. He also set up his own band, which was popular in Poland at that time. He was married to a Russian woman but after a while they divorced. He came to Sweden for the first time for music 'gigs' around 1971. In Sweden at the beginning, he was a member of a band, but when the contract finished, he searched for some networks to find another 'gig'. He went to the north of Sweden where he was shocked by the cultural differences and where Swedish seemed very foreign to him. Searching for 'gigs' he went to England to play and to earn money to live on for short period, while he had already settled in Sweden. In the following years, he played with different bands in different places in Sweden. For the first couple of years, he did not speak Swedish but communicated only in English and he noticed how many Swedish dialects exist, which made Swedish even more complicated to him. In Sweden, he met another woman and when a son was born, it helped him to decide to stay in Stockholm. He was a teacher at various schools, but he gave that up as it was not for him. Thus, as he was bored of playing with a band, he tried to teach children to play various instruments. When he retired, he continued to give private saxophone lessons and travelled to Poland as often as possible or when invited. He used to have many women around him but now he is single. He likes the Swedish way of thinking and living, but he longs for Poland and recognition as a well-known musician.

Jan

Jan was 67 years old when I held the interview. When he was a child, his family migrated from the east to the west of Poland after WWII, due to the new formation of Polish borders. When he was a teenager, his father passed away and as a very young boy, he had to face many challenges and difficulties. He had to work to help his mother to make ends meet. To avoid military service, he attended the pedagogical school of music (two years after high school) where he set up a band with a few colleagues.

He wanted to play the guitar, but the teacher forced him to play double bass instead, and he started to like it. He practised a lot, and he played better and better. The band he used to play in won some prizes and he got some gigs outside Poland. In the meantime, he got married and his family started to grow. He learnt English from a book, so when he came to Sweden for the first time in 1972 to play with a Swedish orchestra, he already spoke some English. When the Swedish orchestra he had been playing with disbanded, Jan lost his job and returned to Poland. He started to renovate the house that his wife had bought. However, his network had already become wider in Sweden, so he travelled back and forth from Poland to Sweden to play gigs for around 10 years. During that time, he also went to the USA for a concert tour. When the period of martial law began in Poland (1981-83), he was in Sweden and he managed to arrange to bring his wife and two daughters to Sweden too, where they all received permanent residency. In the beginning, they lived in the north of Sweden, where he had music gigs, and then they moved to Stockholm. Two more daughters were born, which deeply rooted him to Sweden. He started to learn Swedish informally (tv, newspapers, books, in-formal everyday talks) and now he speaks Swedish very well. He got a Swedish driving license and became a taxi driver as his main job. He was retired at the time of our interview, but he still plays the double bass, though more for fun than as a way of earning money for a living. He has four daughters, which has made him a grandfather of many granddaughters and grandsons. A few years ago, he suffered a heart attack. The family and the music seem to be important.

Ageing within identity formation in the context of life experiences

The analysis of the four life stories revealed many categories for discussion. However, in the following I elaborate on the four main categories as follows: experiences of migration, Second World War experiences, post-war experiences, and family. These categories are the 'red threads' in the life trajectories of those four cases, and they are important issues for the ageing process.

As all the interviewees were older Polish migrants, migration was clearly one of the common (core) experiences that all of them have shared. Being a migrant is a challenge when encountering a new culture, new settings, and new environment. As the research shows, the 'gate keeper' to the culture, a facilitator who introduces the important issues to the

newcomer plays quite an important role, especially at the beginning of the migration process. Jan and Stan came to Sweden for musical gigs, which was a type of invitation, thus both had a gate opener, as did Maria and Jadwiga. Maria's daughter had already lived in Sweden for some time and Jadwiga knew a family who helped her. All of them have been living in Sweden for over 30 years. Thus, they are not so much Polish anymore and 'not enough/yet' Swedish. As Jan said:

> *I became too Swedish, for sure, because I do not know if I would have managed to come back to Poland, find myself there ... maybe, maybe? But I'm not sure. Well, a man is a bit weird, you know, a little bit you know, maybe a little strange. I do not know how to explain it, well... you get another perspective.....*

Sweden is for them a place of learning and becoming neither Polish nor Swedish – where they are forming something 'in between', and it is a place of ageing as well. Living 'in between' they negotiated who they are - they are anchored in Sweden but directed into Polish culture like Jan and Stan who long for Polish culture or like Jadwiga who said:

> *I was not and will not be Swedish. It is primarily related to culture and language. I am culturally linked without comparison, more to Poland than to Sweden. This ... that cannot be changed.*

Thus, encounters through migration were experienced parallel with the process of ageing, which had started already while they collected experiences of WWII and the post-war period in Poland. Experiences of WWII were like a weight Maria constantly carried with her as a vigilance to her nation, while they were unforgettable to Jadwiga in a different way due the loss of all her family during the war. The war left very painful traces in the life course trajectories of both women. When they migrated to Sweden, both women, due to their experiences and ethical backgrounds, became very engaged in Polish affairs – Jadwiga more from a Jewish perspective and Maria from a historical perspective.

Both men were born just after WWII, so they grew up in the destroyed Poland and they faced the consequences of the post-war political changes. The prolonged consequences of the post-war period were noticeable in the experiences of all four participants as experiences of 'floating' and 'anchoring' (see figure1). However, the consequences of

the post-war period are visibly marked in the experience of Jan's family, which was resettled from the east to the west of Poland due to the new formation of the Polish borders. Research has shown that it was very difficult and demanding for resettled families (Niedźwiecki, 2000). Many of those displaced people could not adapt to the place that was not 'theirs' – 'their' places were left in the east of Poland. As Jan said:

> *I was born in Radzyń, in the east of Poland, I was one year old, we came to ... near Wrocław to a small village ... (...) we were from the east, they [authorities] resettled us there, to the west, to the so-called regained land. And they [family] chose a cottage there, (...) I was about a year, we came to this village [sigh] (Jan)*

Jan also lost his father as a young boy, which made his life highly complicated. However, his musical skills gave him the opportunity to earn money and travel abroad, facilitating periods of floating and anchoring, in other words feelings of being fragmented without a past or a present, and at the same time feelings of belonging to a specific context (see Bron & Thunborg). Music, and the ability to play instruments were the passport to the world outside Poland for Jan and Stan. Stan made a significant career as a musician that gave him a permit to travel around the world. He used to live a very artistic life and he was very popular without having a 'real home' (hotels were his home), with periods of floating and without anchoring long in one place.

Maria was learning her entire life, and she experienced mainly floating periods in the post-war time. She said:

> *I was constantly learning, you know, I was constantly changing because actually this whole life is something else, I had to learn from something else, I didn't live just in one way but some object in a given time that forced me to live, the most difficult part was my private life because it was crammed full not in the way I would have liked, but the way it was fated to be [...] it caused a life that was not my life, but life for something, for some idea, or for some private thing, not mine, but let's talk about childhood and youth, there's not much to say because it is a short period, but the most wonderful one.... (Maria)*

Arrest, prison, the death penalty, and then persecution and attempted suicide, left unforgettable traces in Maria's life trajectory. As she said

(...) in the meantime, I had such a terrible experience that I wanted to throw myself off the bridge (...) I couldn't cope anymore, I went through so much, I was all strong, and then I became so weak that I completely broke down, but then somehow, I came back. She experienced anchoring when she migrated to Sweden, and then she started (...) the second part of my life [in Sweden] ... (It was) the better one (...). (Maria).

Jadwiga came back to Poland after WWII to help contribute to the rebuilding of a devastated Poland. After she gave birth to her much-loved son, she felt anchored. As she said (...) in 1957 my son was born. It was the greatest happiness. However, in 1968 her life turned into a period of 'floating'. She was persecuted and forced to leave Poland, for being Jewish.

> *In 68, I also had a lot of trouble. Someone ... I was at some conference when I came back, there was a star of David drawn on my door and I ... I didn't think about emigrating then. But ... I was invited by my friend, who was a professor in America, to Paris with my little son. In 68 on April 1, we left for Paris. And then it was May, and I got a telegram from my close friend in Warsaw that I was didn't have a job. I decided not to return to Poland and wrote to my bosses (Jadwiga).*

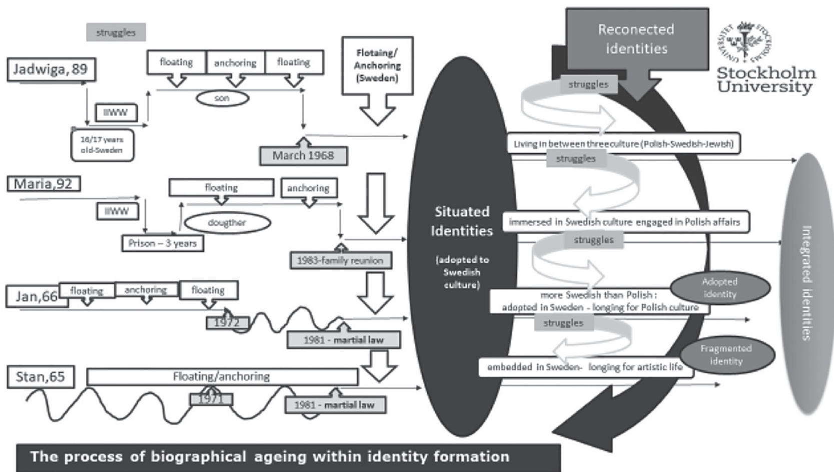
The beginning in Sweden was a floating period for Jadwiga as she said: *(...) well, I had a hard time experiencing this emigration. Already when ... we moved here, I used to wake up for years and I didn't know where I was.* Time went by and Jadwiga felt happy and anchored in Sweden *(...) now I am very happy to be in Sweden. And I am glad that we were in Sweden with my son (...) in general, compared to Poland, huge luxuries, unheard of.*

The family seemed to play a significant role in the context of the life decisions made by all four participants. Maria and Jadwiga's lives were spent as single mothers. Maria gave birth to her daughter in a floating life period and at the time she did not know what motherhood meant. Nevertheless, during her entire life, she took care of her daughter. Jadwiga gave birth to her beloved son in an anchoring period of her life and built up a very strong relationship with him. He convinced her to migrate to Sweden. Even though he passed away many years ago, she always celebrated his birthday with his friends. Stan does not have a family that he lives with, however, he has a son. When he was born,

Stan took the decision to stay in Sweden. Jan has a very large family: a wife, four daughters and many granddaughters and grandsons and he is involved in the family life. In 1981, he had the opportunity to bring his wife and two of his daughters to Sweden, which helped him to make the decision to stay in Sweden permanently.

Figure 1 illustrates the life trajectories of Jadwiga, Maria, Jan, and Stan. The periods of anchoring and floating and dates of the most important life events are marked. It presents the process of biographical ageing within identity formation through lifelong experiences that helped to recognize some of the categories of identities in the light of migrations.

Figure 1. The process of biographical ageing within identity formation.



Biographical ageing

Analysis of this paper's data shows that ageing, from a biographical perspective, is a learning process while people re/construct their lives with social, educational, and cultural contexts and while drawing from their experiences relating to social practices and historical events. Ageing is a learning process, with struggles and periods of floating and anchoring related to life experiences. As Alheit (2018, p.14) has claimed "the learning process takes place 'between' subjects and the worlds relevant to them – and these worlds change and are themselves

historically variable”. Ageing is immersed in life experiences and is a part of the single biographies.

Referring to the three aspects of the biographical approach mentioned above: temporality, contextuality and reflexivity (Alheit, 2018), the discussion of the four migration life stories shows that ageing is not a straight pathway but includes detours, interruptions, stops, disappointments, repetitions, ups and downs and consequently we do not age according to time only but as a result of life events and struggles we experience (like weddings, divorces, migrations, deaths, births, wars, journeys, accidents). Ageing is not a linear structure, it is an ‘ongoing process’. Time, in the context of ageing, ufolds in various time structures - such as past, present, future, daily life, historical and social time, work time, family time, free time, lifetime, which “lead to the construction of high-order structures of experience and meaning” (Alheit, 2018, p.13). Ageing is contextualized, the ageing processes that take place are both subjective and interactive. It is complex and unpredictable organized process with multi- ‘layered’ social contexts of varying levels of relevance. The analyzed variety of life situations, life-settings and structured historical-social-political events of the interviewed people show that ageing is socially constructed and contextualized. Thus, bbiographical ageing is a complex process of learning to deal with various life experiences through the entire life course. Life experiences intertwine with each other – work experiences, health problems, family struggles, happiness, love affairs, arguments, social problems, migration, stigmatization, floating, disappointment – in the context of social, cultural, political, and historical events and lead to identity re/formation. I understand ageing as the process of the re/construction of life trajectories and re/formation of identities as a lifelong process. This entanglement of various and unlikely life experiences makes the once life unique, uncommon and unpredictable in the context of ageing.

The ‘biographical knowledge’ (Alheit, 2018), coming from the life stories of older people who reflect on their lives, makes up a mosaic of happiness, love, illness, power, powerlessness, privileges, pain and death along with all experiences they go through, and is successively and constantly re/built throughout the ageing process. Telling a life story, the older persons can reflect on their unique life, their struggles and their life crises and can give them meaning in retrospect, grounded in their accumulated experiences and wisdom. This reflection can lead

into reflexive learning and ageing, which have the potential to change people's perspectives, and thus have transformative capacities (Bron, 2007). Self-reflexive ageing leads to accepting all the experiences and transitions that modify life trajectories, all the turning points in life, all the redirections of their life paths. It accompanies the reflective learning, which occurs in tandem with communication and interaction with others, and relations to the social and cultural context (Alheit, 2009).

Analysis of the four narratives also illustrates that ageing is a part of the process of forming and transforming identities. However, this process of forming and transforming identity involves struggles that may lead either to the process of floating, or anchoring (Bron &Thunborg, 2017). As the analysis of the whole interviews seems to suggest, identity formation is a lifelong process and involves ageing.

Being a lifelong process, the struggle for identity entails more than one identity that is in the process of forming and being transformed. The analysis of the four narratives presented a number of diverse identities, which I recognized and named such: ‘situated identity’, ‘working identity’, ‘integrated identity’, ‘adapted identity’ and ‘fragmented identity’. In all analysed cases, I recognized 'situated identity'. Since all they have been adapted to Swedish culture and the place of living and learning. That means they found Sweden as a safe place after being disconnected with their roots, while being persecuted in Poland (Maria), travelling back and forth (Jan and Stan) and because of forced migration (Jadwiga). As a close reading of the data shows, Jadwiga and Maria came close to developing integrated identities. Jadwiga was a knowledgeable woman, living in the context of three cultures and adapted successfully into Swedish society. Maria was immersed in Swedish culture and engaged in Polish affairs. Living in Sweden she started a new, a better chapter of her life. Stan and Jan present, on the other hand, a kind of ‘working identity’. They are in the process of forming an integrated identity, however, they have not reached it yet. Jan presents an adapted identity. He is more Swedish than Polish, he has adapted to Sweden – but still he longs for Polish culture. Stan presents a fragmented identity. He is embedded in Sweden, but he longs for an artistic life in Poland. As the analysis shows, it seems that the process of forming and transforming identities is parallel to the process of biographical ageing within identity formation, and that as we age, we do not have one identity, but we face identity struggles constantly.

Conclusion

The study of Polish older migrants in Sweden illustrates that they cannot be simply reduced to their migration experience, but that they also carry with them a myriad of relevant life experiences to the new host country, and rich opportunities for learning: lifelong and life wide. In post-modern society, ageing is no longer - if it ever was - a unitary experience, exclusively characterised by disability, dependency, or poverty (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, p. 209) - it is unpredictable and changeable. New technologies, such as the internet, open new possibilities for older migrants. They can, for instance, search for old friends or members of the family they had been disconnected from because of the Second World War or other experiences. They could be again connected with and visit old friends or family members all around the world. Sweden, the place of residence, gives the interviewees space for reconnection with the past and becomes a platform for the formation of situated identities.

To conclude, as my research shows, ageing is a set of life experiences in which culture, society, and external historical events (e.g. wars, cataclysms) are of great importance. Ageing is not a linear structure; it is an ongoing process. Ageing, from a biographical perspective, is a learning process in which people re/construct their lives with social, educational and cultural contexts and from which they draw from their experiences relating to social practices and historical events. Ageing is the background for forming and transforming identity. We do not age according to the numbers of years we live, but due to our life experiences and the social-historical contexts in which we have lived; we age due to the biography we re/construct as we age.

Endnotes

[1] Ten years have passed since I conducted the first interviews, but subsequent interviews with some of the original older Polish migrant interviewees, who are still alive, are in planning. Although many years have passed since I have conducted the first interviews, the richness and quality of the data are still valid and useful. I have kept in contact with some of these participants since the original interviews. I have talked with them, observed, and continued taking field notes thus my research has become an ongoing project. All interviews were conducted in Polish, which turned out to be an important issue for the

participants. They could easily express their emotions, feelings and talk about their life experiences.

[2] Some more discussion of Jadwiga can be found in Malec Rawiński M. (2016). Longevity and learning from the biographical perspective: Two case studies - locally rooted and globally oriented, Andragoška Spoznanja, Vol. 1, pp.43-56.

[3] 1967-1968 in Poland was marked by a violent anti-Semitic and 'anti-Zionist' campaign targeting Polish citizens of Jewish ethnic origin and 'cosmopolitans' after the June 1967 6-Day Arab-Israeli War. Student and worker demonstrations for freedom of expression and democracy were met by harsh repression and as a result, many leading, and many unknown, individuals with Jewish ethnicity were forced into exile or deprived of their livelihoods and professions.

[4] More analysis of Jadwiga's case can be found also in Malec-Rawiński, M. (2017), Ageing and learning experiences: The perspective of a Polish senior immigrant in Sweden, Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL), Vol. 57, nr 3, s. 421-439

[5] The main resistance force in German-occupied Poland was the Armia Krajowa ("Home Army"; abbreviated "AK"), which numbered some 400,000 fighters: one of them was Maria. Throughout most of the war, AK was one of the three largest resistance movements. The main goal of the AK was preparing and conducting the national uprising in case of advancing frontlines or general collapse of the German armed forces. There were complex hierarchical structures - staff, high commands of arms and services, territorial commands (regions, and on a lower level - districts), weapons were collected, officers and soldiers were trained, information about the enemy was gathered (Polish contribution to the Allied victory in World War 2 (1939-1945).

[6] The term łapanka comes from the Polish verb łapać ("to catch"). The term was also used for describing the tactic of cordoning-off streets, and the systematic searching of buildings. Such roundups, łapanka, were carried out by the Germans during the Second War World. However, the Soviets used similar tactics to round up middle-class Poles in the part of Poland that they occupied following the 1939 invasion of Poland. People were transported to labour camps in remote regions of the Soviet Union or into prisons after the Second War World.

[7] The Amnesty of 1947 in Poland was an amnesty directed at soldiers and activists of the Polish anti-communist underground, issued by the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. The actual purpose of the amnesty was the liquidation of coordinated resistance to the newly established communist regime. The promise of amnesty was not kept. Information collected during questioning of the "cursed soldiers" who had revealed themselves led to a later round of arrests and repression, including of those who stayed in hiding.

[8] A Chamber of Honour is a room, usually in a public building – town hall, public library or similar buildings - named in honour of a noted individual.

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Her research interests include adult education, older adults learning, social and critical educational gerontology, lifelong learning, biographical approaches, local community, education of social exclusion-risk adults. In recent years, Malgorzata's interest and research work has focused on socio-cultural and biographical perspectives on ageing and migration.

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Book review

Research methods for social justice and equity in education

Liz Atkins and Vicky Duckworth (2020)
First published 2019 and reprinted 2020 London:
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What is socially just research? Is it research that is participative and enables greater power to those being researched? Is it only about researching marginalised communities? Liz Atkins and Vicky Duckworth have produced a valuable book that addresses these questions and explores the principles of social justice and how researchers can use more ethical methods. If I was a new research student looking for a good book on critical theory and socially just research methods, I might start here. Better still, the book will appeal to teacher educators who want to help students research their practice. One exciting aspect of the book is that it is unashamedly written from the point of view of researchers in post-compulsory education.

In support, and rather unusually, the book offers plenty of examples of research projects that set out to address inequalities, it is knee-deep in citations of use to the new researcher. There's a good glossary, a broad bibliography and every chapter suggests further reading.

This publication is very timely. Most education systems are unfair because they are embedded in societies already weighted in favour of those with the most power. Because this unfairness has evolved historically, it is more pernicious and harder for everyone to see, and even harder to challenge. 'It is not possible to work in this sector,' suggest the authors in the introduction, 'without recognising the lack of equity in how education is structured and enacted and wanting to address this' (p3). Here I am reminded of the delightful book, 'Caliban's Dance: FE after the tempest' which suggests that a re-imagined further education (TAFE) might give students the capacities to engage critically, 'identify inequality and injustice, consider alternatives, and become actively involved in the positive transformation of society' (p177).

The book is divided into three broad sections. In the first there is an exploration and description of the theoretical concepts over four chapters. New terms are explained carefully and there are helpful glossaries, reading lists and a well-argued overview of what social justice might mean. The authors are careful to explain their positioning and see socially just research as one of the drivers to a '…more equitable, critical and democratic education system' (p11). The first section covers theoretical conceptions of social justice and equity; research methods in context; socially just research as ethical in itself; and provides valuable consideration of the well-worn conundrum of the education researcher as 'insider'. The assumption here is that action research and researching one's own practice is likely to be commoner among readers than paid-for research – and that the reader will be a reflexive researcher. It is a good broad introduction to the field. The first section argues that we cannot see research as socially just unless its aims and methods are seen to be 'doing social justice'- in other words to take into account the community and the common good more broadly. This is an appealing stance: it supports the argument that socially just research and social activism are closely related, that care for others and reciprocity are central to action research and practitioner research. In addition, critical pedagogy based on Paulo Freire's work is given a central place in this book - which is helpful to see. The authors take this further by reminding us

that participation in promoting social justice also assumes that the researcher will work with individuals and communities in helping them to shape social policy as part of the broader research purpose.

The second section allows the reader to explore other voices and contexts for research and includes a consideration of power and voice; emancipatory approaches to researching literacy work with adults; and broader global issues. By 'literacy' I don't mean the narrow instrumental teaching of English and its measurement through tests, and neither do the authors. Instead, Atkins and Duckworth write of literacy research in terms of emancipation and students as partners in the process -just as Paulo Freire argued in Pedagogy of the Oppressed . In this section too, there is proper consideration about making the research ethical in the broadest sense and throughout the process (i.e. not just sorted by an ethics application before you begin!). I found the authors' argument clear and full of useful exemplars. The pithy contributions of other researchers in their own words helps change the narrative voice, and provides examples of research projects and methods to illustrate socially just approaches to research.

The last third of the book offers a discussion of collaborative and participatory methods for researching in a socially just way, a useful consideration of ethnographic approaches, and concludes with a chapter on methodological creativity. The exemplars are once again interesting and thought-provoking.

Of course, no textbook on research is perfect. There are three small concerns for me. First, I found the short section on the history and philosophy of justice puzzling – rushing from Aristotle across belief systems and philosophy with little pause for breath. Better by far for the reader to look at Michael Sandel's excellent primer, 'Justice – what's the right thing to do?' which is both accessible and written for the layperson with great clarity by a philosopher. Second, I found the case examples infuriatingly hard to read because they are in finer type and printed in grey type on grey shaded pages. The publishers need to think again about the accessibility of their design styles. Third, the final chapter, 'Conclusions' is powerful but perhaps too concise. It raises excellent and powerful points but does not quite do justice to the breadth and depth of the previous ten chapters and all the 'case examples'.

There is an inbuilt bias to this useful book, of course, which the authors are very open about – their perspective is unashamedly related to research in post compulsory education and lifelong learning. Both

started out in nursing, then moved into further education colleges (TAFE). Both cut their teeth in literacy work with adults, like some of the best adult educators in the world. This 'adult education' background to my mind adds greatly to the value of the book. Nevertheless, there are examples here of research projects in all phases of education and in many different countries.

If, like me, you can sometimes hear yourself talking about critical theory like some throwback to the 1960s, or you are looking for ways to enrich discussions with students on critical theory and why it is such a significant research paradigm, this book will help you, and will inspire researchers to think more carefully about the research approaches and methods they use. More importantly, I think it gives researchers and research students the confidence and the argument to set their research within a social justice framework. Right now, when a global pandemic has shown governments how the gaps between rich and poor are widening, how inequalities in health and education reduce opportunities, and why listening to one another is more critical than ever – we need more social justice research.

Endnotes

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