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Reconsidering Education for Sustainable Society: An East Asian Perspective

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Reconsidering Education for Sustainable Society: An East Asian Perspective*

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Abstract

Human society can no longer avoid and ignore ecological and sustainability issues. Is it impossible for human and nature to reconcile? Isn't there a way for human and nature to coexist properly together? Don't we need to make conscious efforts to find a way to construct a sustainable society? What can education do? A transition from a development-centered paradigm to an ecology centered paradigm is urgent. An East Asian perspective of education and learning offers a good framework from which to reconsider development-centered, industrial age-based education. An ecology-centered paradigm pursuing a harmonious relationship between mankind and the natural world and all of its living beings is a solution that enables man and nature to survive together. The realization of a way of living and social institutions that promote the co-prosperity of man and nature will require significant changes. Development of capability for sustainable living with nature and other beings encompasses aesthetic and integrative learning which involves stimulating sensibility of relatedness with nature and attunement of the beauty in being together.

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Reconsiderando la Educación para una Sociedad Sostenible: Una Perspectiva del Este Asiático*

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Resumen

La sociedad humana no puede evitar ni ignorar los temas ecológicos y de sostenibilidad. ¿Es imposible la reconciliación entre la naturaleza y los sers humanos? ¿No hay ningún camino para la coexistencia conjunta entre ellos? ¿No tendríamos que hacer esfuerzos conscientes para encontrar el camino para construir una sociedad sostenible? ¿Qué puede aportar la educación? Para ello, es necesaria una transición desde el paradigma centrado en el desarrollo al paradigma centrado en la ecología. Dicho paradigma centrado en la ecología persigue una relación harmónica entre la humanidad y el mundo natural y todos sus seres vivientes y aporta soluciones que permiten al hombre y la naturaleza sobrevivir conjuntamente. La realización de una forma de vida así como de instituciones sociales que promuevan la co-prosperidad del hombre y la naturaleza requiere de cambios significativos. El desarrollo de la capacidad para vivir sosteniblemente con la naturaleza y otros seres abarca aprendizajes estéticos e intregrativos que traen consigo una estimulante sensibilidad relacional con la naturaleza y harmonía con la belleza de la existencia conjunta.

Palabras claves: Educación para una sociedad sostenible, perspectiva del Este Asiático, educación y el aprendizaje.

Mankind is now living in an extremely bipolarized world. While we are enjoying the most affluent way of life ever, on average, we are caught up in anxiety over when earth's ecosystem will be destroyed irreversibly. In parts of the world, poverty and diseases are claiming countless lives. In other parts of the world, numerous people are suffering from nutritional excess.

Countries around the world have begun to prosper since the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, however, the earth's ecosystem was seriously damaged and the price is being paid by the entire humanity. The confrontation between human and nature is getting worse and nature's retaliation against humanity is intensifying. Human society can no longer avoid and ignore ecological and sustainability issues. Is it impossible for human and nature to reconcile? Isn't there a way for human and nature to coexist properly together? Don't we need to make conscious efforts to find a way to construct a sustainable society? What can education do?

Is Human Society Sustainable?

James E. Hansen, a climate scientist and former director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, alerted the world when he testified before the US House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming on June 23, 2008 that "…now we have used up all slack in the schedule for actions needed to defuse the global warming time bomb" (New York Times, 2008). The international society was doubtful when Hansen warned twenty years earlier in his historic testimony to Congress on June 23, 1988 that global warming was underway. This time, however, people felt they had to heed his warning as there have since been a series of climate abnormalities including Arctic glaciers melting, the ozone layer depleting, and sea temperatures rising.

A report issued by the UN Environment Program (UNEP) confirms that about 50% of the world's wetlands have disappeared over the past century, 20% of the dry areas are on the brink of desertification, and

underground water is being depleted everywhere on the planet. Edward O. Wilson, a renowned American biologist, asserts that approximately half of the animal and plant species on Earth will become extinct by the end of the 21st century if the ecosystem continues to be destroyed at the current rate (Wilson, 2008).

In fact, Hansen's claim that the opportunity to prevent the demise of the ecosystem and humanity has already been missed is hardly new. As early as two centuries ago, Thomas R. Malthus, an English scholar influential in political economy and demography, argued that a population growth exceeding the growth in food production would put human society in a grim situation. Countries around the world dismissed Malthus' claim as a groundless worry, though, because population growth was matched with enhanced agricultural productivity driven by the industrialization of farming and progress in farming technologies.

Industrialization continued to expand throughout the world. Then in 1972, the Club of Rome echoed the concern of Malthus with its report *The Limits to Growth* where the authors warned that if the current system of economic growth continued, it would soon go beyond the limits our planet could endure and humanity would ultimately cease to exist. The Club of Rome report raised considerable public attention on resource depletion and environmental destruction resulting from the pursuit of economic growth, prompting the research community to embark on a number of related studies and policymakers to seek for measures to conserve Earth's natural environment. In spite of a series of warnings and suggestions, however, mankind did not change its growth policies and ways of living. Consequently, the sustainability of human society is being jeopardized.

In the face of this stark reality, the international community convened the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. Since the UN Conference which marked a turning point in the development of international environmental politics, governments have adopted a wide range of resolutions and conventions through summit meetings, experts have come up with practical suggestions, and international NGOs have called on governments for action. Still the results are significantly disappointing.

World powers' passive attitude to addressing environmental conser-

vation and wealth-gap issues became clear at the Earth Summit which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. The United States did not verify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, world powers took an ambiguous stance, drawing strong criticism from citizens around the world.

In 2008, the 34th G8 Summit took place in Hokkaido, Japan, for three days on such issues as global warming, soaring oil and food prices and poverty in Africa. At the Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change during the Summit, world leaders including seven African heads of state discussed ways to address Africa's poverty, and leaders of major CO_2 emitting countries including China and India agreed to develop a global plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that could take over the mandate of the Kyoto Protocol. But, the participating countries failed to reach a consensus which the world community had been looking forward to. This was because some leaders disagreed on measures that could weaken their own country's international competitiveness. So far, powerful countries have expressed interest in climate change, resource depletion and poverty issues but been very passive and skeptical in finding and implementing solutions. It is widely known that the United States is the strongest opponent of all.

While world leaders were wasting time, Arctic glaciers have melted at a faster rate and reports on signs of serious climate change in many parts of the world have increased. Accordingly, the world citizens' expectation on the 17th UN Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011 was great. At the Conference, country representatives discussed diverse measures to respond to climate change, but postponed a resolution on practical action plans including mandatory greenhouse gas reduction goals of each participating country. By doing so, they presented a huge disappointment to the world community instead of hope for Earth's future.

Countries around the world are competitively pursuing economic growth strategies while aggravating global warming and resource depletion. At the same time, the global wealth gap is widening: In some parts of the world, excessive consumption and nutrition are problems

while, in other parts, people are entrapped in poverty and diseases. Nonetheless, international politics is still obsessed with competition and confrontation. Meanwhile, world population has steadily increased to 6.6 billion today and is anticipated to reach 9.2 billion by 2050 testing Earth's capacity to sustain such a large population (Park, Glenn, & Godden, 2009).

In September 2008, the disruption of the Wall Street's financial system drove the global economy into crisis overnight. While experts had begun to send clear warning signals about an economic crisis at least one year earlier, people with vested interests who were enjoying immense wealth earned in an artificially booming economy cried "No regulations!" against measures aimed to prevent an economic crisis. And then the worry became a reality. Some said it is the "price for greediness." The global economic crisis stemming from problems with the world's financial system is still with us. Critical economists argue that the global economy may face a more fundamental crisis if the status quo of our current way of living and economic system is maintained. In summary, the survival of human society may be endangered if we stick to the conventional way of growth.

The idea of a "sustainable world" is to figure out how mankind can continue to survive without reaching a dead-end. The concept of sustainability, which began to draw public attention in the 1990s, is an attempt to escape from the obsession with quantitative expansion to adopt new growth strategies and international order that enable human to harmoniously coexist with nature (Joseph, Mahaffie, & Hines, 1997). In this sense, sustainability is a basic concept for the sustained survival of human society as well as Earth's ecosystem. Human society should grow in a manner that ensures a secure life for future generations. To achieve such growth, mankind should change its view about growth and ways of living.

Modern View of Nature and Education

Galileo Galilei claimed that the laws of nature are mathematical. René Descartes viewed nonhuman animals and the natural world as no more than machines and showed that all machines including artificial machinery could be explained by mathematical equations. Isaac Newton

clearly explained the laws of motion of every object with mathematical theories in *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. All of these scientific findings with respect to the perception and treatment of natural phenomena were made in the 17th century and later led to the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century (Doren, 1995).

The invention of the steam engine, a new motive power of machinery, triggered the Industrial Revolution. Afterwards, a variety of machines powered by motors with significantly enhanced efficiency and capacity expanded the Industrial Revolution, opening up a new era of industrialization in human history. In this era, the dominant belief was that human reasoning will continue to advance by developing and utilizing natural resources with machines. Industrialization brought about new production methods, economic structures, social institutions, and ways of living. At the same time, a human-centered view of nature that humans are entitled to take advantage of the natural world for their happiness was emphasized. In other words, the era of industrialization was dominated by a development-oriented paradigm in which human views nature as a subject of exploitation. Each country pursued economic development through industrialization which was often an objective of national development.

The significance of education in an endeavor to promote national development through economic growth has been stressed since the early stages of industrialization due to the rising demand for skilled manpower for automated production lines. Skilled manpower required training. They not only needed training for skills that were required when working with machines, but also training for adaptation to new production systems based on the division of labor. In order to nurture skilled workers in large numbers, it was inevitable to set up schools that could offer systematic education. As industrialization coincided with the creation of nation states, countries needed to seek to nurture skilled workers as well as educated citizens. Establishing schools for systematic education was very suitable to the needs of the time. Accordingly, countries around the world created mandatory school education systems.

The contents of school education varied from country to country as well as from student group to group, even in a single country. However, the overriding purpose of education was by and large the same: Nurturing skilled workers for industrialization and educated citizens for

national development. Therefore, there was no difference between advanced industrial countries and less industrial countries in that the goal of school education was economic growth and national development, although the goal was more emphasized in less industrial countries. The characteristics of school education in the era of industrialization were summarized by Robert Hutchins as follows:

> The common assumption of this period was that education was the road to national development and that efforts to build up schools and universities would almost automatically result in industrialization and prosperity... (Hutchins, 1968, p. 54)

Over the past two centuries, most of the countries which pursued industrialization succeeded in economic growth leading to a number of benefits. Warm and comfortable clothing, food and nutrition, improved housing, transportation, telecommunication, medicine, and life expectancy have made phenomenal progress. The median-income households in today's world are enjoying a high standard of living which was hard to imagine 200 years ago. At least half of the world population is leading the most affluent life in history.

However, industrialization also brought serious disasters to the planet, mankind and the natural world. The previous paragraphs may be sufficient to explain the seriousness of the disasters brought about by the economic growth-oriented policy of the industrialization era to Earth's ecosystem. The reality faced by the global ecosystem is putting mankind and other living species on Earth on the brink of extinction.

Some scientists argue that the current problems with the ecosystem could be addressed through new scientific and technological findings, and some capitalists and politicians agree. It is true that new technologies are reducing the emissions of air pollutants and innovative chemical products are contributing to relieving water and soil pollution. However, it should be noted that there is too much evidence suggesting problems with the ecosystem in spite of such hopeful achievements.

What we should focus on here is to reconsider the direction of education. Education geared for industrialization perceives human beings as tools for economic growth and thus concentrates on injecting knowledge and skills to students while moral, socio-cultural, and ecological aspects of human life

are neglected. Hutchins noted that economic growth-oriented education ultimately came down to inhumane education by saying as follows:

> The aim [of education] most often emphasized was not to promote understanding or to raise the level of intelligence or to help people to become human through the use of their minds: it was economic growth. This aim... was nonhuman, inhuman, or antihuman (Hutchins, 1968, p. 54).

In a nutshell, our view of nature since the Industrial Revolution was that nature could be explained by a scientific method and that we could develop and exploit nature for our convenience. The ability of using powered machines to develop nature and provide economic growth became the barometer of a nation's development. Accordingly, nurturing skilled workers through school education became an essential element for national development. As a result, even mankind together with nature became resources and tools for economic growth.

Western and Eastern Views of Nature

What is the background against which Galileo, Descartes and Newton could make such significant scientific findings in the 17th century? Their scientific ways of thinking have their roots in ancient Greece. Philosophers of ancient Greece thought that they did not belong to their object of observation and explanation. Put differently, they separated themselves from their object. The premise was that truth is independent from the self who pursues the truth that is mankind itself.
From this viewpoint, nature is separate from man and object to analyze in a rational way, such as with mathematics. Often the goal is, to explain or dominate. The 17th-century scholars discovered this scientific methodology. The result was the start of the industrial revolution that developed and utilized nature. The industrialized human society "exploits" the natural world and views it as an object to dominate.
This Western view of nature is in contrast to that of the East (Nisbett, 2005). Confucian scholars in ancient China did not separate nature and man. Rather, they view them as one. Confucius believed that the natural world and all the living beings represent the essence of ethics that

maintain the order and harmony of the universe. Mankind is not an exception. He believed that human and nature are interconnected and should maintain a harmonious relationship.

According to the teachings of Buddhism which was born in India, all living beings are in the eternal cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Buddhism believes that a human being, in the current life, may be reborn as another kind of animal in the next life. Likewise, an animal in the current life could be reborn as a human in the next life. Therefore, the natural world and "I" are not separate but interconnected. Nature is not an object to dominate but part of me.

The difference in the way of viewing nature between the East and the West is often reflected in works of art. While Eastern artists painted landscapes frequently expressing communion with nature well, Western artists mostly expressed interest in the human body in their works. This point was mentioned by Ng as follows:

> In the West, the human form is the point of central interest throughout most of its history, from the sculpture of the ancient Greeks to medieval and Renaissance paintings of the Holy Family and classical figures, to the Dutch interiors and portraiture of the 17th and 18th centuries in the French and English schools. Landscape as a major theme emerged comparatively late, in association with the romantic movement. In China, it is otherwise. Although Man is the main focus of Confucian philosophy, Chinese artists from the eighth century or earlier found their inspiration in Nature as a whole. Landscape painting... enables the artist... to feel a sense of communion with Nature, and to know himself as part of an orderly cosmos (Ng, 2001, p. 52).

The traditional Eastern view of nature, however, has lost its influence significantly as Western philosophies and knowledge paradigms prevail in today's world. Since the 19th century of imperialism, things Western have dominated the world from ways of production and consumption to thinking and esthetic preference. At the same time, Eastern philosophies, thoughts and aesthetics are being regarded as something obsolete and feeble by many people even today.

As the moon waxes and wanes, there is a sign of change. There is no time left to resist such a change as a crisis of earth's ecosystem is also a

crisis of mankind's survival. Departing from a viewpoint of seeing nature as an object to conquer, we should accept nature as an ecological partner necessary with which the crisis must be mutually survived. A transition from a development-centered paradigm to an ecology-centered paradigm is urgent. An East Asian perspective, especially, Confucius' perspective of education and learning offers a good framework from which to reconsider development-centered, industrial age-based education.

Confucius' Perspective of Education and Learning

For Confucius, human life should be about attaining harmony and education and learning should be oriented towards that harmony. Confucius' concept of '*ren*' (love, benevolence, humanity) is a key concept to understand what it means to attain harmony in life and why education and learning are so directed. For Confucius, learning is a journey to attain harmony with the world and education should be oriented to help learners to take forward this journey. Confucius' concepts of '*li*' (ritual, property) and '*yi*' (appropriateness, rightness) are central to elucidate the nature of this journey which entails an integrative and aesthetic educational approach. In the following, based on the three concepts of *ren*, *li*, and *yi*, Confucius' perspective of education and learning will be illuminated, especially his orientation and approach to education and learning.

We begin with the concept of '*ren*'. The character of *ren* is a combination of person and the number two, so the notion of relationality is at the heart of the concept of *ren*. When asked to explain *ren*, Confucius answered "to love people" (*Analects*, 1:2). Becoming a person of *ren* begins with the "will to benevolence" and requires consistent efforts to learn within the context of a community of relationships (Cheng, 2000, p. 35). Becoming a person of *ren* is, in a sense, a transformative, relational learning effort to become more human.

There are two aspects of *ren*: the internal and external. To examine oneself is internal transformative, relational learning and to love others including nature is external transformative, relational learning. With these *ren*-motivated transformative, relational learning efforts, mutual

respect and mutual benevolence is practiced, which leads to the creation of a social, moral, and ecological harmony. *Ren*-oriented learning emphasizes learning to flourish together with other beings in the community and the world.

Ren-oriented learning requires moving away from separated, individualistic, having-oriented living and towards learning for a relational, integrative, harmony-oriented living. A person can either realize harmony with life or merely struggle to win over others depending upon where one's mind is oriented and how serious and sincere one's will to learn for harmony with life. For Confucius, a good society encourages mutual flourishing, coexistence, and co-sustainability and is based on harmonious relations, through which a good life is fostered.

Confucius' concepts of *li* (ritual, property) and *yi* (appropriateness, rightness) are principal to elucidate the nature of the journey to attain harmony with the world, which entails the integrative and aesthetic approach to education and learning. When asked how to practice and develop *ren*, Confucius said it is "to subdue oneself and return to *li* (ritual)" (*Analects*, 12:1, Hsu, 2000, p. 331). Confucius' notion of "to subdue oneself" cannot be merely understood as the suppression of immediate pleasures but rather should be viewed as a conscious and consistent set of self-cultivation efforts.

Ritual (*li*), composed of deity and ritual vessel, originally, was understood to be the "rules of proper conduct in religious ceremonies" (Hsu, 2000, p. 336). Confucius extended ritual to include both good manners and an ideal social order. Later, the meaning of ritual was expanded to encompass "all established ethical, social, political norms of behavior, including both formal rules and less serious patterns of everyday behavior" (Li, 2007, p. 318).

What was Confucius saying when he said that "to return to *li*" is to practice *ren*? Does this imply that the way to practice *ren* is simply to follow or to conform to *li*? "To return to li" embraces self-initiated, voluntary, autonomous action because one makes a conscious choice whether to return to *li*. Moreover, being capable of performing a "return to *li*" requires self-reflective learning because superficial and incomplete returning leaves one in an uncomfortable position. A morally empowered, free person within a community context is required for a

successful "return to *li*."

Li (ritual) can be understood as cultural grammar and ren (benevolence, love) as the mastery of a culture (Li, 2007). This implies that "community cultivates its members through *li* toward the goal of *ren*, and persons of *ren* manifest their human excellence through the practice of *li*" (Li, 2007, p. 311). This does not necessarily mean, however, that *li* leads to *ren* and that person of ren always follow the rules of *li*. Likewise, a person of ren may not always follow the li, because a person of ren would not be a blind follower of *li*. A person of ren, under some circumstances, may suspend or revise *li* (*Analects*, 9:3). To become a person of ren, a master of culture, a person needs to have deep understanding of culture and to be able to manifest the best way of living in that culture. A master of a culture is not only intellectually competent to 'know that' and 'know how' but also creative, exemplary, and influential in complying with *li* in that culture.

The two concepts, ren and li, are dynamically related. The concept of *yi* (appropriateness, rightness) plays a crucial role in this dynamic relation. Yi is the integrative, aesthetic dimension of li (ritual) learning. Confucius said "junzi (a person of ren, an exemplary person) is neither bent for nor against anything; rather, he goes with what is appropriate (*yi*)" (*Analects*, 4:10; Chan, 1970, p. 26). For Confucius, a person of ren acts on one's sense of what is appropriate (*yi*). To do so extends the human way. Under some circumstances, *yi* may require us to depart, to suspend or to revise *li* in order to be true to ren. Confucius promotes the aesthetic cultivation of *li* rather than its rigid obedience. Such rigid obedience would deny *yi*'s personal, creative, reflective, and contextual appropriation. Absent of *yi*, *li* (ritual) education and learning degrades to rigid formalism and strict moralism.

Appropriateness or *yi*, for Confucius, cannot be derived from a universal moral calculus but, rather, derives from a careful process of personal discovery with consideration of other beings in the community and the world. *Yi*, which emphasize personal appropriation and discovery, can be seen as the moral expression of synthetic reason, and its creative aspects further augment the aesthetic dimension of ritual(*li*) learning. Persons who cultivate and realize a ren-oriented relational self are virtuoso performers who use their *yi* to create their own unique appropriation of their community's social and ecological patterns. *Yi*

strengthens the integrative, aesthetic dimension of moral and ecological self-cultivation because it results in the "embodiment of the good li and the personal creation of an elegant, harmonious, and balanced soul" (Gier, 2001, p. 292).

What is crucial in ritual(*li*) learning for ren-living is to awaken the integrative, aesthetic sensibility. This sensibility entails the process of inspirational stimulation directed toward emulation and culmination rather than a process of cognition-oriented learning.

One's intrinsic relatedness through ren, when adequately cultivated and resonated, puts a person in definitive communication with others-something an isolated self can never do (Tan, 1999, p. 117). Confucius queried "Is ren so far away? If I want it, it arrives here instantly" (*Analects*, 7:29; Kim, 2006, p. 112). The reason why ren seems so far away is because one's sensibility is not attuned to its beauty. If one's sensibility is in sync with the beauty of ren, he or she would naturally want it. A person who can see and sense the beauty of ren can also seeks and enjoys it (Kim, 2006, pp. 112-113).

Confucius said, "To know it (learning or the Way) is not as good as to love it, and to love it is not as good as to delight in it" (*Analects*, 6:18; Chan, 1970, p. 30). Confucius makes an important distinction between being able to know, being able to like or love, and being able to enjoy, the way. Knowing is related to objects for knowing; liking or loving is related to the relationship between knower and the known; enjoying is related to the unity of the knower and the known. For Confucius, the highest level of understanding or learning is the attainment of integration of self, the knower and the world, the known. This is the reason why Confucius regards the person of humanity (*ren*) higher than the person of knowledge (chih) by saying that "The man of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity. The man of knowledge cultivates humanity for its advantage" (*Analects*, 4:2; Chan, p. 25). The natural ease of the ren person is rooted in her being able to attain a harmony of self and the world. On the other hand, the person of chih (knowledge) is the person who knows what needs to be known but has not yet arrived at a harmony between the self and the known. What is implied is that cognitive learning and knowing is limited for a person to fulfill ren living and to attain harmony with life.

Educational and learning orientation is embedded in people's perspec-

tive of what life is or should be about. And people's perspective about life and learning are deep-seated on socio-cultural, political, historical contexts. For Confucius, most big and small problems and issues in life and the world have much to do with people's incapability to live together in mutually flourishing, and co-sustainable ways. This issue of co-sustainability in life, for Confucius, is a matter of relations with the world including nature. Therefore, settling this issue of co-sustainability, which becomes a global issue with environmental challenges, incorporates cultivating the capability to make harmonious relations with the world.

Confucius' view of transformative, relational learning to attain harmony with life requires the learning efforts to "return to li". An appropriate "return to *li*" entails an integrative and aesthetic approach, in which the concept of *yi* plays a crucial role. Learning to "return to li" includes transforming unfair, incongruous, and disharmonious relations with nature, other beings, and the world into harmonious relations. This transformative, relational learning encompasses holistic, aesthetic, and integrative nature which transcends individualistic, and cognitive approaches to learn.

Education for Sustainable Society

An ecology-centered paradigm pursuing a harmonious relationship between mankind and the natural world and all of its living beings is a solution that enables man and nature to survive together. The realization of a way of living and social institutions that promote the co-prosperity of man and nature will require significant changes. Accordingly, the will to achieve the goal should be equally strong.

The starting point for such changes is education. The first change needed is in the mind-set and our behavior. Therefore, we need to change the direction of education first. Efforts should be made to break away from the education of the industrial era. The paradigm of education should be shifted from nature-exploitative education to new one, namely 'nature-friendly education'. Most countries have used school education as a tool for economic growth, and consequently school education was mobilized in conquering and exploiting nature. Now the direction of school education should be reset toward nature-

friendly education. In this attempt to shifting paradigm in education, Confucius' *ren*-motivated education and learning proffers a satisfactory perspective.

Nature-friendly education should be promoted in a close linkage between school education and adult education. Adult education should be a primary focus. While the effect of school education becomes apparent only after a long period of incubation, the effect of adult has immediate impact. Moreover, adult learners could form groups to exert a strong influence on each segment of society as well as the government. To build a society that promotes the co-prosperity of man and nature, the participation of diverse civic groups is absolutely necessary.

School and adult education as well as a wide range of other learning activities should offer the contents listed below to the target learners properly in accordance with the students' level of interest and proficiency. Here, nature as a subject for teaching/learning should be understood as including forests, fields, mountains, wetlands, deserts, lakes, rivers, and oceans as well as the plants, animals, water, soil and air that exist in them. Also required are new curricula for schools and adult education programs, and teaching/learning materials.

1) <u>Contact with nature</u>: Inspire interest in nature through interaction with nature felt with the five senses including vision and hearing.

2) <u>Understanding nature</u>: Help to understand nature's way of survival and the inter-dependency of all living beings, especially human beings, and the natural environment.

3) <u>Experiencing life in nature</u>: Provide opportunities to experience living in the natural environment with minimum civilized tools either in a group or individually.

4) <u>Integrated self</u>: Enlighten students on the fact that a human being, an element of the complicated global ecosystem, is also a part of the entire network of lives.

Development of capability for sustainable living with nature and other beings encompasses aesthetic and integrative learning which involves

stimulating sensibility of relatedness with nature and attunement of the beauty in being together. It is urgent to nurture and re-educate teachers and adult educators who can provide nature-friendly education. At the same time, diverse facilities and tools should be prepared that enable students to contact and experience nature.

The policy direction a government chooses for education is very important, as the government's influence on decision making and budget allocation is significant. Therefore, the only way to make a policy desirable by citizens is to reinforce the civil society's power over the government. It is important to exert such power through elections. Putting consistent pressure on the government through civic groups can be also effective. For a new paradigm such as nature-friendly education to be achieved, it is essential that the citizens practice their collective influence to that effect. International organizations could have influence on a government's policymaking to a certain extent by raising points for the reform of education and winning public support. Cities are obliged to prepare diverse learning opportunities for the citizens for their empowerment to switch from nature-exploitative education to nature-friendly education. Doing so would open a road toward an era of reconciliation and co-prosperity of man and nature, through which sustainable society can be constructed.

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El Recurso al Debate Público en los Procesos de Reforma Educativa: Análisis de la Experiencia Española (1969-2012)

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Public Debate as a Tool for Policy Making in Education Reform Processes: An Analysis of the Spanish Experience (1969-2012)

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Abstract

In the last decade we are facing a significant change in the way in which public policies are being built and developed. The process is characterized by a growing participation of citizenship in policy making. It does affect very diverse fields, education among them. One of the main novelties consists in using public debate as a policy tool for identifying problems and defining possible solutions. If some relevant examples are well known in the international scene, Spain has also seen in the last fifty years several experiences of launching a public debate as a previous step to starting educational reform processes. The paper deals with such practices, reflecting about their characteristics and the conditions to be met by this kind of initiatives. Taking the 1969 White Paper as the starting point, debates launched around the reform processes associated with the 1990 and 2006 Education Acts are analyzed.

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Resumen

En las últimas décadas estamos asistiendo a un cambio significativo en el modo de construcción de las políticas públicas. El proceso, que se caracteriza por la creciente intervención de los ciudadanos en la formación de políticas, afecta a campos muy diversos de actividad, la educación entre ellos. Una de las principales novedades consiste en el recurso al debate público como instrumento para la identificación de los problemas y la formulación de posibles soluciones. Si en el ámbito internacional contamos con ejemplos relevantes, también en España se han desarrollado diversas experiencias de debate público con carácter previo al lanzamiento de reformas educativas. El artículo pasa revista a dichas prácticas, reflexionando acerca de sus características y las condiciones que deberían cumplir este tipo de iniciativas. Tomando como punto de partida la elaboración del Libro Blanco de 1969, se analizan los debates impulsados en torno a la elaboración de la Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE) en 1990 y la Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE) en 2006.

Palabras claves: Política de la educación, reformas educativas, Ley General de Educación, Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, Ley Orgánica de Educación

Entre los años 2003 y 2004 se desarrolló en Francia un proceso tan ejemplar como novedoso de debate público acerca del futuro de la educación. La preocupación manifestada en relación con la situación del sistema educativo y la conciencia de la necesidad de introducir cambios de cierta entidad impulsaron al Presidente de la República, Jacques Chirac, a convocar un gran debate nacional sobre la educación, en el que todos los ciudadanos franceses pudiesen manifestar su opinión, de manera individual o colectiva. Para llevarlo a cabo se constituyó una comisión independiente del Gobierno, presidida por un funcionario buen conocedor del sistema, Claude Thélot, antiguo director de Evaluación y Prospectiva en el Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Durante los meses de septiembre de 2003 a marzo de 2004 se celebraron 26.000 reuniones públicas a las que asistieron más de un millón de participantes, se abrió un sitio Web que recibió más de 400.000 visitas y unos 50.000 mensajes, 1500 personas se dirigieron por escrito a la comisión y unas 300 asociaciones diversas hicieron llegar su parecer y sus propuestas. Como resultado de ese proceso, en el año 2004 se elaboró un cuidado y voluminoso informe de síntesis y se elevaron al Gobierno las conclusiones alcanzadas, para su estudio y posterior adopción de las medidas y las normas necesarias (Commission du débat national sur l'avenir de l'École, 2004). El proceso, realmente ejemplar, sirvió posteriormente de base para la elaboración de un libro en que el presidente de la comisión analizaba la experiencia desarrollada y planteaba algunas conclusiones y recomendaciones acerca de la conducción de este tipo de procesos, cuya lectura resulta de gran interés (Thélot, 2005).

La puesta en marcha de una iniciativa de este tipo se explica fundamentalmente por el cambio que se está produciendo en las últimas décadas en las condiciones en que se construyen las políticas públicas. Los canales tradicionales de legitimación de las decisiones políticas en los sistemas democráticos, generalmente de base parlamentaria o representativa, están dejando paso paulatinamente a mecanismos más participativos, especialmente en aquellos ámbitos que requieren actuaciones de largo alcance, que exigen plazos más dilatados que los

limitados ciclos gubernamentales. Es el caso de políticas como las medioambientales, educativas o de salud pública, cuyo impacto se aprecia en periodos largos de tiempo. En estas nuevas circunstancias, muchos ciudadanos consideran insuficiente dejar la decisión en manos exclusivas de los políticos (aun de los legítimamente representativos). Pero delegar la decisión en los expertos tampoco resuelve satisfactoriamente la cuestión, pues su credibilidad está asimismo sometida a crítica. Hoy muchos ciudadanos consideran que tienen la misma legitimidad para tomar decisiones que aquellos, o al menos para definir las bases que permitan tomarlas. Podríamos atrevernos a decir que vivimos una época de creciente intervención de la ciudadanía en la construcción de las políticas públicas. Y en consecuencia, habrá que explorar nuevos medios para asegurar la participación ciudadana en asuntos que no contaban tradicionalmente con su concurrencia. Si alguien tiene dudas acerca de la realidad de este fenómeno, le basta con observar qué sucede actualmente en los medios de comunicación, donde los comentarios y las aportaciones de los lectores y oyentes cuentan con tanto espacio como los juicios de los especialistas, o con mayor razón aun puede interesarse por los mensajes que circulan por las redes sociales, donde explícitamente se trata de construir colectivamente la información desde una perspectiva horizontal y no jerárquica. No cabe duda de que las condiciones están cambiando muy rápidamente.

En la construcción de las políticas públicas se han distinguido canónicamente varias fases: la aparición y definición del problema, el estudio de soluciones, la toma de decisiones, la ejecución de la política, y su evaluación (Puelles, 2004, pp. 80-83). En este nuevo contexto, la consulta y el debate público ocupan un lugar relevante, especialmente en las primeras fases del proceso. No cabe duda de que la participación social y ciudadana puede resultar muy influyente en lo que se refiere a la definición del problema, incluido su diagnóstico preciso, el análisis y discusión de posibles soluciones e incluso la orientación general de la toma de decisiones. Aunque los gobiernos, los expertos y las administraciones tienen un espacio propio que resulta irreemplazable, la participación ciudadana puede realizar una contribución inestimable.

Este proceso de recurso al debate como instrumento al servicio de la construcción de las políticas públicas ha sido paulatino y todavía no

parece haber llegado a su fin. Es precisamente de lo que tratan estas páginas. Su objetivo consiste en analizar cómo se ha introducido en España este tipo de prácticas, cómo han evolucionado y en qué punto nos encontramos. No se pretende analizar el conjunto de las políticas educativas, ni menos aún la legislación producida. Siendo asuntos de indudable interés, desbordan este espacio y la intención del autor. La pretensión es bastante más simple y se limita a reflexionar acerca del desarrollo reciente en España de una tendencia que se detecta en el plano internacional y que tiene una gran relevancia. El foco se ha puesto concretamente en los debates realizados con carácter previo al inicio de procesos de reforma educativa, cuando se ha intentado transformar con cierta profundidad la realidad del sistema educativo. Esa es la modesta pretensión de estas páginas.

La elaboración de un diagnóstico como novedad política: el Libro Blanco de 1969

La Ley General de Educación (LGE) de 1970 produjo un cambio de gran transcendencia en el sistema educativo español, que ha sido objeto de diversos análisis. En el número extraordinario que la Revista de Educación le dedicó veinte años después de su aprobación (Varios autores, 1992) se pueden encontrar juicios certeros acerca de diversos asuntos, como la vinculación de la reforma educativa con la política tecnocrática de esos años, que determinó el carácter híbrido de la LGE, tradicional y moderno al mismo tiempo (Puelles, 1992), la función que la reforma desempeñó para la legitimación del orden social desde nuevas bases culturales, en un momento en que las agencias tradicionales del régimen ya no eran capaces de cumplirla eficazmente (Ortega, 1992), o la interpretación de la EGB como culminación del proceso histórico de implantación de la escuela graduada en España (Viñao, 1992).

Pero, al margen de la valoración concreta que se haga de la ley y de la reforma que puso en marcha, lo que aquí se pretende subrayar es la novedad que llevó aparejada en lo que hace a los procesos de construcción de las políticas educativas en España. El hecho novedoso consistió básicamente en la elaboración y difusión de un diagnóstico

riguroso de la situación del sistema educativo y unas propuestas asociadas de reforma, con carácter previo a la presentación y aprobación del texto legal. El elemento central fue el conocido Libro Blanco, cuyo título exacto era en realidad La educación en España. Bases para una política educativa (MEC, 1969a).

Diversos especialistas han puesto de manifiesto la novedad que implicaron los métodos de trabajo aplicados para la puesta en marcha de la reforma educativa. Como afirma Manuel de Puelles, "la verdad es que nunca en la Administración española se había abordado una reforma desde presupuestos técnicos tan rigurosos" (Puelles, 1992, p. 19). Conviene recordar que el proceso fue llevado a cabo por un equipo de reconocidos profesionales, entre los que destacaba Ricardo Díez Hochleitner, funcionario de la UNESCO, Secretario General Técnico del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia y después Subsecretario, que fue el verdadero piloto de la reforma. Manuel de Puelles ha llegado a afirmar que formaban "un grupo competente, eficiente, que pronto demostraría una gran capacidad de trabajo y de innovación", para concluir que "sin duda, su aparición fue algo excepcional en la Administración Pública española" (Puelles, 1992, p. 19). Algunos de sus componentes nos han dejado, años después, su narración de la intrahistoria de la LGE, que resulta de indudable interés para conocer cómo se desarrolló el proceso (Blat Gimeno, 1992; Díez Hochleitner, 1988, 1992). Es sabido que el equipo ministerial se reunió durante una semana en Buitrago y de allí salió pergeñado el Libro Blanco. A continuación se preparó el texto, en cuya redacción participaron destacados pedagogos y técnicos de la administración de la época. El proceso fue muy rápido, pues se circunscribió al último trimestre de 1968.

El Libro Blanco consta de dos partes de extensión desigual. La primera, a la que se dedican casi doscientas páginas, está dedicada a analizar la situación educativa existente, mientras que la segunda, de algo menos de cincuenta páginas, presenta las bases para una nueva política educativa. Resulta realmente sorprendente el rigor con que el documento analiza la situación educativa, poniendo de relieve los defectos del sistema y sus notables insuficiencias. Como botón de muestra, baste con citar dos expresiones que aparecen destacadas en negrita al comienzo y el final del primer capítulo y que ofrecen un

diagnóstico demoledor: tras comenzar diciendo que "la organización de la educación en España suscita serios reparos", finaliza afirmando que "la serena consideración de los hechos analizados en este capítulo debe determinar la toma de conciencia social ante tan graves problemas y el propósito de darles una solución urgente" (MEC, 1969a, p.15, p. 33). Lo que más llama la atención del tono general del documento es que, de hecho, implica una crítica abierta de la labor educativa de treinta años de franquismo, por más expresiones elogiosas que se dedicasen a la política educativa precedente. No es extraño, por lo tanto, que provocara recelos y resistencias diversas, que se hicieron patentes a lo largo del proceso de preparación y aprobación de la ley. Como nos narra el propio Díez Hochleitner, el Libro Blanco estaba destinado a ser guardado en un cajón de la Presidencia del Gobierno y fueron las graves circunstancias políticas las que aconsejaron rescatarlo, sin duda con la intención de contribuir a propagar la supuesta voluntad modernizadora y aperturista del régimen (Díez Hochleitner, 1992, p. 273). Pero ello no obsta para que, aun finalmente aprobada la LGE por las Cortes, sufriese duros ataques, el más dañino de los cuales consistió en privarle de la financiación necesaria para poner en marcha la reforma, dejándola así gravemente lastrada.

Más allá de los avatares del Libro Blanco y la LGE, que no son el objeto central de estas páginas, lo que hay que destacar es que, por primera vez en España, un proceso de reforma educativa se basaba en la publicación y debate de un diagnóstico riguroso con una serie de propuestas asociadas. Si bien no se puede calificar de novedad en el ámbito internacional, sí que lo era en nuestro país. Como veremos más adelante, la práctica, sin llegar a universalizarse, se generalizó notablemente y fueron varios los procesos de reforma posteriores que adoptaron esta práctica. Volveremos sobre ello.

La pregunta clave que debemos responder es en qué medida estamos ante un verdadero proceso de consulta y debate público. En la introducción del Libro Blanco, el ministro Villar Palasí planteaba que se trataba de un documento "que se somete a la consideración general del país", con el propósito de lograr "una auténtica participación", puesto que no se trataba "de imponer estas ideas, sino lanzarlas al debate crítico de la opinión pública" (MEC, 1969a, pp. 7-8). El Libro Blanco debería servir para poner orden en el debate, cuya secuencia consistiría en

"describir un panorama de problemas graves y sugerir las soluciones apropiadas", afirmando igualmente que "está ya preparado el Ministerio, con el mecanismo orgánico indispensable, para recibir, contrastar y acoger cuanta crítica constructiva se suscite, e incorporar lo razonable al esquema legislativo que haya de formularse" (MEC, 1969a, p. 7).

Así pues, las declaraciones explícitas parecían suscribir la voluntad de llevar a cabo un debate público acerca de la reforma propuesta. Ahora bien, cabe legítimamente preguntarse por la concreción de dichas intenciones. Díez Hochleitner afirma que se proporcionó regularmente información a los medios de comunicación, "con vistas a suscitar un clima apropiado que llevase a interesar a la opinión pública y favoreciera un mejor entendimiento de las cuestiones técnicas planteadas" y que se organizaron "numerosas reuniones de debate con diversos sectores y estamentos sociales para informar sobre la reforma propuesta y discutir su alcance, incluidas reuniones masivas con estudiantes universitarios (que muy pronto me fueron impedidas), con claustros de profesores, con grupos sindicalistas, padres de familia, religiosos, militares, empresarios y público en general" (Díez Hochleitner, 1992, p. 271). No obstante, el paréntesis que incluye esta última frase y la enumeración de los participantes en las reuniones parece apuntar a un tipo de público seleccionado y próximo al régimen, excluyendo a los sectores opuestos que hubiesen podido desbordar el debate.

De hecho, la opinión más extendida entre los estudiosos apunta a la falta de un debate público rigurosamente democrático, debido a la ausencia de participación de diversos sectores. Así, Manuel de Puelles manifiesta su parecer de que el Libro Blanco fue más tecnocrático en su procedimiento de elaboración y discusión que en sus contenidos, al sustraer el debate acerca de la educación a los claustros escolares y universitarios, dejándolo en manos de técnicos (Puelles, 1992, p. 22). Y Félix Ortega afirma que "faltó un debate público, entre los diversos agentes educativos y sociales implicados" (Ortega, 1992, p. 39). En apoyo de dicha tesis, puede recordarse que, de los organismos invitados a manifestar su opinión, emitieron sus informes solamente el Consejo Nacional del Movimiento, la Organización Sindical, el Instituto de Estudios Políticos, la Comisión Episcopal de Enseñanza, el Consejo

Superior de Investigaciones Científicas y algunas asociaciones de profesores, universidades y hermandades de inspectores (MEC, 1969b). Y para completar el panorama, el propio Blat Gimeno afirma que "lamentablemente, esa rica contribución de comentarios, críticas y sugerencias, solamente se aprovechó en parte por la excesiva prisa en la elaboración de la Ley General de Educación impuesta por motivos políticos" (Blat Gimeno, 1992, p. 293).

En resumen, esta primera propuesta de llevar a cabo un debate público, como paso previo a elaborar una nueva legislación educativa y emprender la consiguiente reforma, estuvo seriamente lastrada por el contexto político en que surgió. No hay motivos para dudar de la intención de sus promotores, que de hecho dieron a la luz el informe más crítico acerca de la situación del sistema educativo que se había elaborado hasta el momento por la propia Administración del Estado. Pero el férreo control político impuesto por el régimen hacía no solo inviable, sino incluso quimérico, un intento de ese tipo. La democracia orgánica franquista imponía sus reglas y no iba a permitir que se incumpliesen. Bastante hizo con permitir que se aprobase la LGE, aun rebajada en sus formulaciones iniciales, como respuesta a una situación política grave. Pero el entorno estaba lejos de poder considerarse democrático. Y en ese contexto no era posible promover un debate público verdaderamente abierto.

En todo caso, hay que señalar que esta primera experiencia de construcción de una política educativa recurriendo a instrumentos de participación (aun siendo limitados) instauró la práctica de plantear un diagnóstico riguroso de la situación existente y unas propuestas articuladas de reforma. Si bien ese modo de proceder no se ha respetado en todas las ocasiones que lo hubiesen demandado, el Libro Blanco continúa siendo un elemento de referencia.

El debate público como elemento destacado de un proceso de reforma: la experiencia de la preparación de la LOGSE

Dos décadas después de haberse aprobado la LGE, en 1990 el sistema educativo español se veía de nuevo convulsionado por la aprobación de otra norma legal de profundo impacto y alcance, en este caso la Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE).

La norma era el punto final de un proceso de reforma puesto en marcha tras la victoria electoral socialista de 1982 y que alcanzaba en ese texto legal su punto culminante. Hay que recordar que la corta y agitada etapa transcurrida desde la aprobación de la Constitución Española de 1978 había impedido adaptar completamente la normativa educativa a las disposiciones constitucionales. En consecuencia, sería a partir de 1982 cuando se llevase a cabo esa tarea, comenzando por la promulgación de la Ley de Reforma Universitaria (LRU) de 1983 y la Ley Orgánica Reguladora del Derecho a la Educación (LODE) de 1985.

Al tiempo que se aprobaban dichas leyes, se ponía en marcha un nuevo proceso de reforma del sistema educativo, orientado a revisar el modelo establecido en la LGE. El proceso comenzó por la puesta en marcha de una serie de reformas parciales de carácter experimental, entre las que sobresale por su importancia la Reforma de las Enseñanzas Medias, un interesante y original intento de hacer una reforma educativa contando con la participación y el compromiso del profesorado y de los centros docentes, que ha sido recientemente objeto de recuerdo y revisión por parte de sus protagonistas (Menor y Moreiro, 2010). El proceso no tuvo tanto impacto ni proyección externa como hubiese correspondido a su indudable interés, pero sentó las bases para proceder a cambios posteriores de mayor envergadura en el conjunto del sistema educativo español.

Así, en 1987 el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia lanzaba un Proyecto para la reforma de la enseñanza, que incluía un conjunto de propuestas de actuación (MEC, 1987). El documento estaba organizado en cuatro partes. La primera planteaba un diagnóstico sintético de la situación educativa española (desde luego, mucho menos exhaustivo que el del Libro Blanco de 1969) y analizaba las experiencias europeas de comprensividad escolar que podían servir de orientación y las reformas emprendidas en España en el lustro anterior. La segunda se centraba en el estudio de las condiciones exigibles para la mejora de la calidad de la enseñanza y planteaba la necesidad de renovar el currículo. La tercera presentaba una propuesta detallada para reestructurar los niveles educativos existentes, con objeto de transformar la estructura heredada de la LGE. La cuarta finalizaba presentando las líneas generales que debería seguir el proceso de reforma.

Tanto en la introducción, firmada por el ministro José María Maravall,

como en el último capítulo, se subrayaba la voluntad de promover un proceso de debate con carácter previo a la elaboración de una nueva ley. Desde este punto de vista, el último párrafo del documento resulta revelador: "El Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, al presentar este Documento, asume el firme compromiso de propiciar el diálogo y la participación, con la voluntad de alcanzar el mayor acuerdo posible y de impulsar con prudencia y realismo, pero también con decisión política, una renovación de la educación capaz de ilusionar al conjunto de la sociedad española" (MEC, 1987, p. 185). En la introducción se avanzaba que la propuesta presentada por el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia a toda la comunidad escolar y al conjunto de la sociedad española era "a un tiempo un documento de definición y una invitación al debate" (MEC, 1987, p. 10). Esa voluntad se remachaba una y otra vez: "Es preciso que todas las asociaciones e instituciones, colectivos o individuos que desde dentro o fuera del mundo de la educación estén en condiciones de realizar contribuciones parciales o generales al debate las den a conocer por escrito. La Administración dispondrá los medios adecuados para que alcancen una difusión amplia y sean conocidas por los restantes miembros de la comunidad escolar. No podemos permitirnos el lujo de desperdiciar ninguna sugerencia, ninguna opinión valiosa en un asunto de esta trascendencia" (MEC, 1987, pp. 15-16).

Unos meses más tarde, el Ministerio presentaba un nuevo proyecto de reforma, dedicado a la educación técnico profesional (MEC, 1988a). Se trataba de un proyecto explícitamente continuador del anterior, centrado en un tramo formativo considerado especialmente problemático. Como decía el Ministro Maravall en su prólogo, no se traba de cerrar el debate abierto el año anterior, sino más bien al contrario: "La propuesta que el lector tiene en sus manos no cierra en modo alguno el debate sino que por el contrario lo potencia en este campo específico" (MEC, 1988a, p. III).

Como afirmaría posteriormente el Libro Blanco de 1989, a lo largo de casi dos años innumerables organizaciones empresariales y sindicales, colectivos profesionales, administraciones públicas, entidades colegiales, centros docentes, fuerzas políticas, instituciones religiosas, personalidades con experiencia y órganos de representación enviaron sus comentarios y reflexiones (MEC, 1989a). Las respuestas enviadas, tanto las favorables como las opuestas, fueron publicadas por el Ministro de Educación y

Ciencia en una serie de cinco volúmenes genéricamente denominados Papeles para el Debate (MEC, 1988b). En los cuatro primeros se recogían las respuestas de todos los participantes, mientras que el quinto y último tenía carácter de informe de síntesis.

Si el debate de 1969 había estado muy sesgado y limitado en realidad a algunos participantes seleccionados, el de 1987-1989 se caracterizó por su apertura y su carácter realmente público. La novedad del primero había sido la elaboración del diagnóstico más completo que hasta el momento ha acompañado un proyecto de reforma educativa en España, mientras que la del segundo fue la realización de un debate público y transparente con total publicidad de las aportaciones recibidas. En este caso podemos hablar de un debate propiamente dicho, al margen de cuál fuese su efecto real sobre el texto resultante y del grado de incidencia práctica de las contribuciones recibidas. Parece claro, a la luz de las declaraciones mencionadas y de otros escritos que nos han dejado sus promotores, que el objetivo del debate propuesto no era otro que alcanzar el mayor grado de acuerdo posible en las líneas de la reforma. Merece la pena llamar la atención acerca del hecho de que el gobierno socialista contaba con una cómoda mayoría absoluta en el Congreso de los Diputados, lo que le permitiría aprobar cualquier ley sin dificultades especiales, pero que ello no fue óbice para promover un acuerdo con otros grupos parlamentarios, que finalmente se consiguió. Ello dio mayor legitimidad a una reforma que vendría a alterar profundamente el sistema educativo español y que generó no pocas controversias y dificultades. Por lo tanto, desde el punto de vista de la construcción de políticas educativas, cabe calificar de acertada la estrategia seguida.

Tras cerrar el proceso de debate de los dos proyectos mencionados, el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia elaboró y publicó el Libro Blanco para la reforma del sistema educativo, que presentaba el proyecto final de reforma (MEC, 1989a). El documento, ciertamente voluminoso, constaba de cinco partes. La primera presentaba la situación educativa existente y justificaba la necesidad de la reforma. La segunda dibujaba la nueva configuración del sistema educativo, detallando su estructura y ordenación. La tercera analizaba los diversos factores y procesos del sistema educativo que deberían ser objeto de reforma. La cuarta se dedicaba a la planificación del proceso de cambio. La quinta y última incluía la memoria económica y los recursos necesarios para implantar

la reforma. El Libro Blanco se complementaba con otras publicaciones: la serie dedicada al Diseño Curricular Base de cada una de las etapas educativas (MEC, 1989b, 1989c, 1989d) y el Plan de investigación educativa y de formación del profesorado (MEC, 1989e) que debía servirle de acompañamiento. A diferencia del Libro Blanco de 1969, en el que el diagnóstico ocupaba una parte predominante, el de 1989 estaba más preocupado por la propuesta de reforma.

Si hay que dar crédito a las palabras del ministro Javier Solana, recogidas en el prólogo del Libro Blanco, las distintas aportaciones realizadas a las propuestas de 1987 y 1988 "no solo han contribuido a enriquecer las posiciones originales sino que no son escasas las ocasiones en que han aconsejado la modificación de las propuestas de partida. El Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia no ha sido víctima de de imprudentes y falsos pruritos y no ha tenido, por tanto, inconveniente en revisar su oferta cuando la abundancia de cualificados juicios discrepantes han evidenciado la racionalidad y la oportunidad de soluciones alternativas" (MEC, 1989a, p. 6).

El Libro Blanco significó el punto de partida para la elaboración y preparación de la LOGSE. El preámbulo de la ley, una pieza jurídica de bella factura, recoge nuevamente el sentido del proceso de debate, justificando su necesidad en aras del necesario consenso y la búsqueda de "un acuerdo esencial y duradero" sobre los objetivos fundamentales de una reforma que habría de extenderse en el tiempo (MEC, 1990, p. 11). Y finaliza insistiendo nuevamente en la necesidad de participación social como exigencia ineludible para el logro de sus objetivos. Así pues, búsqueda de acuerdos, participación, transparencia y construcción de consenso son los propósitos explícitamente planteados a la hora de plantear un debate público acerca de la reforma propuesta.

Aunque la experiencia de debate público que acompañó la preparación de la LOGSE fue la más completa y emblemática de los años ochenta y noventa, no fue la única. La preparación de la Ley Orgánica de la Participación, Evaluación y el Gobierno de los centros docentes (LOPEG) de 1995 se basó en un modelo similar, aunque considerablemente más sencillo y abreviado. En un primer momento, el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia presentó el documento titulado Centros Educativos y Calidad de la Enseñanza. Propuestas de actuación (MEC, 1994a), que incluía un

conjunto de 77 medidas para mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza. El documento fue sometido a debate público y, a partir de las respuestas obtenidas, se preparó un segundo documento de síntesis del debate (MEC, 1994b), que sirvió de base para elaborar el anteproyecto de la nueva ley.

En resumen, puede decirse que los gobiernos socialistas de 1982 a 1996 utilizaron sistemáticamente el debate público como un elemento destacado para la construcción de políticas educativas. Lo aplicaron en diversas ocasiones, si bien el caso de la LOGSE puede considerarse el más emblemático. Sus propósitos fueron múltiples. Por una parte, como afirmaron explícitamente en sus principales documentos, se trataba de construir consensos, buscar acuerdos, activar el entorno social a favor de la reforma propuesta y promover el sentimiento de apropiación de las normas producidas. Por otra parte, aunque no llegó a explicitarse, no cabe duda de que también pretendió difundir las propuestas de reforma, generar complicidades, explorar las posiciones existentes ante las nuevas políticas y sus límites respectivos, y promover la negociación de las normas. En suma, pretendió utilizar el debate como un instrumento genuino para la construcción de políticas en el campo de la educación, lo que fue una aportación importante de aquellos gobiernos.

La apertura de nuevas vías para el debate público: la experiencia de la preparación de la LOE

El último debate público celebrado con carácter previo a la puesta en marcha de un proceso de reforma educativa, hasta el momento de escribir estas páginas, tuvo lugar con motivo de la preparación de la Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE). En el mes de septiembre de 2004, la ministra María Jesús San Segundo presentó a la Conferencia sectorial de Educación, de la que forman parte los consejeros de Educación de las comunidades autónomas, y al Consejo Escolar del Estado, órgano máximo de representación en esta materia, un documento con el título *Una educación de calidad para todos y entre todos*, que presentaba un análisis de los temas más problemáticos del sistema educativo español y un conjunto de propuestas que convenía debatir antes de emprender cambios en la legislación (MEC, 2004). El documento estaba organizado en seis grandes bloques de temas, con un número variable de

capítulos, hasta un total de catorce. En cada uno de estos se comenzaba realizando un análisis de la situación existente, resaltando los aspectos especialmente problemáticos, se presentaban a continuación un conjunto de propuestas precisas y se finalizaba planteando algunas preguntas relativas a las propuestas realizadas, con objeto de promover el debate público.

En la introducción al documento, la propia ministra afirmaba inequívocamente la voluntad de promover la discusión acerca de las cuestiones suscitadas y de las propuestas presentadas: "Debido a la importancia del reto y a la necesidad de acertar con la respuesta adecuada, es preciso contar con una reflexión serena y amplia de la comunidad educativa y del conjunto de la sociedad, reflexión a la que invitamos a participar con la presentación de este documento. El texto que se ha elaborado aspira a propiciar un debate abierto, sincero y con vocación de futuro" (MEC, 2004, p. 4). Además de incluir estas palabras, la introducción se extendía en justificar el interés del debate y animar a la participación, con objeto de lograr un compromiso social capaz de impulsar la mejora del sistema educativo. Uno de los objetivos centrales de la iniciativa consistía precisamente en buscar acuerdos en una materia de por si controvertida: "Si se alcanza un amplio acuerdo social, por el que trabajaremos sin descanso, los responsables educativos podrán aportar sus criterios y sus principios, una vez garantizada una base común estable que cuente con el mayor apoyo posible" (MEC, 2004, p. 5). La expresión explícita de la voluntad de lograr un acuerdo ha sido considerada una novedad prácticamente inédita en la política educativa española (Puelles, 2007). Sin duda, la carencia de una mayoría parlamentaria suficiente para aprobar una ley orgánica con los únicos votos del Partido Socialista Obrero Español impulsó la búsqueda de acuerdos, que eran imprescindibles y finalmente se lograron.

Pero además de esta novedad, se produjo otra relativa a los procedimientos utilizados, que merece la pena destacar. En cierto modo, se podría interpretar en una primera impresión que se iniciaba un proceso de debate similar a los que se habían desarrollado en los años ochenta y noventa como preparación de la LOGSE y la LOPEG. Parte de las actividades previstas eran, en efecto, semejantes a las de entonces: seminarios y encuentros públicos, reuniones formales con diversos órganos de representación y solicitud de informes a diversas

organizaciones y asociaciones. Pero el avance tecnológico había abierto nuevas posibilidades de comunicación que valía la pena aprovechar. El desarrollo de Internet permitía organizar foros, recibir mensajes electrónicos y hacer pública la información recibida sin gran dificultad, lo que significaba un avance importante y una posibilidad de mayor interacción. La experiencia del debate francés sobre la situación de la educación, antes mencionado, demostraba que eran muchas y muy interesantes las nuevas posibilidades abiertas por dichos medios. En consecuencia, el equipo ministerial decidió aprovecharlos al máximo. Para dar coherencia a toda la actividad que se quería desarrollar se abrió un espacio web específico (debateeducativo.mec.es) en el que resultase posible seguir todo el proceso.

El debate público se desarrolló entre los meses de octubre de 2004 y marzo de 2005. La participación fue ciertamente amplia y quedó posteriormente registrada en un volumen de síntesis que complementaba la información disponible en la web (MEC, 2005a). En esos meses el Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia participó en un total de 212 reuniones y actos públicos, corriendo con la organización de 110 de ellos (además de los innumerables que fueron promovidos por diversas entidades por su propia iniciativa y de los que no existe una relación completa). En los buzones físicos y virtuales preparados al efecto se recibieron un total de 304 documentos de muy diversos orígenes y unos 46.000 mensajes electrónicos, faxes o cartas. Además, se abrieron seis foros de discusión, que registraron unas 21.500 intervenciones. El recurso a las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación permitió, como puede apreciarse, un aumento sensible de la participación de personas y grupos. Finalmente, para completar el proceso de debate, el Ministerio elaboró y publicó un documento que incluía los objetivos europeos y españoles establecidos para 2010 y la memoria económica de la ley (MEC, 2005b).

Una de las características más destacadas del proceso, además de sus notables dimensiones cuantitativas, fue su total transparencia. Todos los documentos recibidos en formato electrónico, cualquiera que fuese su procedencia, fueron colgados en el espacio web habilitado al efecto y cualquier persona pudo consultarlos fácilmente. La difusión de las posiciones expresadas, fuesen favorables o críticas a las propuestas realizadas, no tuvieron más restricción que la voluntad de sus autores.

Ese rasgo, que fue muy bien valorado en términos generales, contribuyó a sentar las bases para llevar a cabo un verdadero debate, que resultó de indudable utilidad para la posterior elaboración del anteproyecto de ley, que en julio de 2005 fue aprobado por el Consejo de Ministros y enviado al Parlamento para su tramitación.

Algunas reflexiones y una coda inevitable

Hasta aquí llega la presentación de las experiencias registradas en España de debate público acerca de la educación ligadas a la puesta en marcha de procesos de reforma educativa y formación de nuevas políticas en este ámbito. Aunque se han ido aportando algunos análisis y valoraciones al hilo de su exposición, vale la pena realizar un esfuerzo final de reflexión. Para ello, puede servir de referencia la experiencia francesa, ciertamente completa y rigurosa.

En el libro que Claude Thélot dedicó a recapitular aquella iniciativa, señalaba seis condiciones que deberían cumplir los procesos de debate público del tipo de los que aquí estamos analizando. Comenzaba destacando dos principios generales: a) respetar la independencia de la comisión u órgano responsable de la conducción; y b) comprometerse con su transparencia. A continuación, subrayaba dos precauciones: c) preparar los instrumentos del debate (diagnóstico, propuestas y cuestiones); y d) recoger la opinión de las personas alejadas del debate. Para finalizar, resaltaba dos factores esenciales: e) cuidar la relación con los medios de comunicación; y f) contar con el tiempo y los recursos necesarios (Thélot, 2005, pp. 15-40). Si bien no debe tomarse esta relación como si se tratase de un código universalmente aceptado, la calidad de la experiencia desarrollada y la capacidad analítica de sus actores principales autorizan a tomar dichas condiciones como referencia directa.

Al comprobar en qué medida se han cumplido dichas condiciones en las diversas iniciativas desarrolladas en España, llaman la atención varios aspectos. En primer lugar, y ante todo, hay que destacar que el número de condiciones satisfechas ha ido incrementándose con el paso de los años. Si el Libro Blanco de 1969 se limitó prácticamente a establecer un diagnóstico riguroso y a asegurar un adecuado contacto con los medios (que por otra parte estaban muy controlados y condicio-

nados), la experiencia de la LOE ha llegado a satisfacer cuatro de las seis condiciones, pues además de las dos anteriores se aseguró la transparencia del proceso y el empleo del tiempo y recursos necesarios. En ese sentido, los procesos de debate han ido ganando en calidad técnica, pero también democrática. Si los primeros intentos se redujeron a desarrollar unos buenos instrumentos, pero sin llegar a debatir en profundidad las propuestas presentadas, los últimos pueden calificarse abiertamente de conformes a las reglas de la construcción democrática de las políticas públicas.

Aceptada la existencia de esa democratización general del proceso, vale la pena centrarse en las dos condiciones que, a nuestro juicio, siguen sin satisfacerse. En primer lugar, hay que referirse a la independencia del órgano responsable de la conducción del proceso. Todas las iniciativas desarrolladas en España desde 1969 han coincidido en la conducción general del proceso por parte de las autoridades ministeriales, lo que es sin duda legítimo. No obstante, cabe interpretar que dicha característica ensombrece las conclusiones que puedan alcanzarse, dada las posibles interferencias y los sesgos que pueden producirse. Es verdad que, en un país tan descentralizado como España, las competencias del Ministerio de Educación son limitadas y las comunidades autónomas son también actores fundamentales del sistema educativo, con lo que la conducción ministerial tendría un menor riesgo de manipulación interesada que en otro tipo de contextos políticos. También lo es que este tipo de práctica de formación de políticas educativas, tan común por otra parte en países como el Reino Unido, no está arraigada entre nosotros, lo que dificultaría muy notablemente su aplicación. Y además podría aducirse que la transparencia del proceso impediría el uso interesado que resultaría posible en circunstancias de ocultamiento de la información. Pero no por ello es menos cierto que estamos ante la ausencia de una condición importante, sobre la que valdría la pena reflexionar. No sería imposible hacer recaer la conducción del proceso sobre una comisión verdaderamente independiente que asegurase su credibilidad, aunque no cabe ser ingenuo y haya que reconocer la dificultad de este tipo de práctica democrática.

En segundo lugar, hay que reconocer que las experiencias desarrolladas en España no han realizado un esfuerzo destacado por

acercar el debate a los que están alejados del mismo. Si esa carencia es importante en cualquier caso, hay uno en que resulta especialmente grave, como es la escasa participación en el debate de los centros docentes y sus órganos de gobierno. Es cierto que en la relación de participantes en los debates previos a la LOGSE y la LOE no faltan centros concretos, pero su número es muy limitado. Cuando tanto se habla de la necesidad de implicar al profesorado y a la comunidad escolar en los procesos de cambio educativo, esta falta de participación en los procesos de debate resulta especialmente grave. Si hasta los años noventa resultaba ciertamente complicado lograr que los centros educativos dejasen oír su voz, la expansión del uso de las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación la ha facilitado mucho. Nuevamente puede aducirse el obstáculo que supone la existencia de múltiples administraciones educativas responsables de los centros, pero se trata de una situación que podría superarse si existiese la voluntad política de promover su participación.

En resumen, puede afirmarse que la experiencia reciente española ha evolucionado, en términos generales, hacia la mejora de la calidad técnica y política de los procesos de debate previos a la puesta en marcha de reformas educativas. En ese sentido, podemos decir que hemos ido adoptando mecanismos más actuales y depurados de construcción de las políticas públicas en el ámbito de la educación, si bien queda camino por recorrer.

Y esta expresión utilizada - "en términos generales" –conduce a una coda inevitable para cerrar el trabajo. Como habrá advertido el lector perspicaz, las iniciativas analizadas no han incluido ninguna desarrollada durante los dos periodos recientes de gobierno del Partido Popular. No ha sido por casualidad, sino que responde a la realidad de los hechos. Durante el primer periodo de gobierno popular (1996-2004) se llevó a cabo la elaboración de la Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación (LOCE), que implicaba cambios importantes en el sistema educativo español. Pero, si bien se difundió un texto previo al anteproyecto de ley y se pidieron informes sobre el mismo, lo cierto es que dichos informes nunca se hicieron públicos ni se pudieron contrastar. Las reuniones celebradas fueron eminentemente reservadas y las públicas tuvieron un propósito divulgador o de convencimiento, más que de debate propiamente dicho. A pesar de las numerosas reacciones

contrarias que hubo a la LOCE en el medio educativo, la consulta de los documentos producidos y divulgados por el Ministerio transmite una sensación totalmente contraria.

La interpretación posiblemente más certera sea que para el Partido Popular el logro de un consenso en materia de educación no fue uno de sus principales objetivos. Si cupiese alguna duda de esa realidad, la propia ministra Pilar del Castillo la despejaba de manera explícita en una entrevista que le hicieron en septiembre de 2002 (Boletín del Ilustre Colegio de Doctores y Licenciados en Filosofía y Letras y en Ciencias, 137, septiembre 2002, pp. 3-7), en plena tramitación parlamentaria de la LOCE: "las cosas hay que hacerlas sin esperar el sí de todos, sería imposible y, además, una falta de responsabilidad. Si un político lo que espera es tener la palmada en el hombro de la oposición o no sabe de lo que está tratando o no está haciendo nada". Por lo tanto, "el tiempo de debate ha de ser el suficiente para hacer las cosas con rigor pero el tiempo no es el objetivo fundamental de una reforma, el objetivo es hacerla (…) El diálogo no se puede confundir con una tertulia de café o de amigos que no tiene más objetivos que hablar y hablar un día y otro día. El diálogo tiene una finalidad, si esa finalidad no se comparte se fracasa. Si el objetivo es hacer una reforma del sistema educativo y hay quien no tiene esa intención y lo que quiere es poner pequeños parches o hacer las cosas en una dirección diametralmente opuesta a la de uno, el diálogo se inicia pero se frustra". En esas palabras ponía la ministra de manifiesto que la voluntad de llevar adelante su reforma educativa primaba sobre la voluntad de consenso, que no sería sino secundaria y en todo caso instrumental (Tiana, 2007).

Algo similar está sucediendo en la actualidad con la tramitación del borrador de la nueva Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad de la Educación (LOMCE). El Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte colgó en su página web una presentación de cincuenta diapositivas, a falta de un diagnóstico riguroso. A continuación, abrió un proceso de debate consistente en proporcionar una dirección de correo electrónico a la que enviar los comentarios de las personas y organizaciones que lo estimasen oportuno. Se supone que todas ellas deberían enviar directamente al Ministerio sus propias contribuciones, sin tener la ocasión de contrastarlas ni confrontarlas en foros plurales. No se organizaron foros de debate en la red, ni mucho menos se aprovechó el

potencial de las redes sociales. Finalmente, el propio MECD utilizó supuestamente tales aportaciones para elaborar el anteproyecto de ley, que fue además cambiado sin justificación en una segunda versión.

Como puede apreciarse, estamos ante un grave deterioro de las condiciones del debate público en materia de educación. Aunque hemos visto que tanto la experiencia española como la internacional nos ofrecen ejemplos a seguir, no resulta grato concluir con esta coda. Esperemos que en el futuro esta de ahora sea una simple excepción en un camino de avance en la construcción democrática de las políticas públicas y no se convierta en norma.

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Urban Renewal, Migration and Memories: The Affordances of Place-based Pedagogies for Developing Immigrant Students' Literate Repertoires

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Abstract

This paper explores the affordances of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant primary school students' literate repertoires in the context of a long-term urban renewal project. It draws on data sets collected with teachers and students over a ten year period of collaborative research. These research projects have been informed by poststructuralist theories of space and time, educational research which considers the political, social and spatial relations inherent in literate practices and theories of place-based pedagogy. Longitudinal case studies, collaborative practitioner inquiry and classroom-based design experiments have been employed over the period of investigation. Data include student and teacher produced artefacts in range of media and modes portraying young people's relationships with place(s), real and imagined, at different times. This paper draws upon class sets of students' autobiographical writing and memory-related work. New theorizations of 'space' in the social sciences which emphasize the 'produced' nature of 'space' hold out significant potential for re-inventing critical literacies in school sites, when young people are invited and supported to imagine, argue for and make real material changes to the school buildings, structures, grounds, and even the use of space by different groups. We argue that young people's relationships with place(s) across time can provide rich resources for developing literate repertoires. Such activity allows for different youth subjectivities not constrained by dominant developmental discourses and opens up possibilities for engagement with spatial literacies and architectural discourses and practices normally reserved for adults and professionals.

Remodelación Urbana, Migraciones y Memorías: Las Posibilidades de las Pedagogías Emplazadas en el Lugar en el Desarrollo de los Repertorios de Alfabetización de los Estudiantes Immigrantes

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Resumen

Este artículo explora las posibilidades de las pedagogías basadas en el espacio para desarrollar repertorios de alfabetización para estudiantes de educación primaria en el contexto de un proyecto de remodelación urbana a largo plazo. Este estudio se basa en los datos recogidos con profesorado y estudiantes después de diez años de investigación colaborativa. Estos proyectos de investigación se basaron en teorías postestructuralistas del espacio y del tiempo, en base a investigaciones educativas que consideran las relaciones espaciales, sociales y políticas inherentes a las prácticas de alfabetización y teorías de las pedagogías basadas en el espacio. Se utilizaron durante el período de investigación estudios de caso longitudinales, trabajo colaborativo con profesionales y experimentos de diseño emplazados en la clase. Las nuevas teorías del espacio en las ciencias sociales que emfatizan la naturaleza "producida" del espacio contiene un potencial significativo para re-inventar alfabetizaciones en espacios escolares, cuando se invita a jóvenes y se les apoya a imaginar, argumentar y realizar cambios materiales reales en los edificios de los centro educativos, en sus estructuras, suelos e incluso en el uso del espacio por diferentes grupos. Argumentamos, pues, cómo las relaciones con los jóvenes pueden proveer recursos ricos para desarrollar repertorios de alfabetización. Este tipo de actividades promueve diferentes subjetividades jóvenes no encorsetadas por los discursos de desarrollo dominantes y abre las posibilidades de participación en espacios de alfabetización, discursos arquitectónicos y prácticas normalmente reservadas para adultos y profesionales.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización, espacio, pedagogía, arquitectura, migraciones, memorías

Many people who re-settle in Australia as refugees or immigrants find themselves in sites of change, in places of urban renewal or in regional and rural towns undergoing transformations and seeking new workers. Hence children who may have already experienced a life of ongoing migration may reach their destination only to find that their new dwelling place is also subject to continuing re-development. This is the case in the inner western suburbs of Adelaide South Australia where the Westwood Urban renewal project represents Australia's largest urban renewal project to date. For over a decade schools in these changing communities have needed to re-invent themselves to address the learning needs of a constantly changing population living in changing material conditions, with the demolition and rebuilding of housing and services literally happening around them.

The affordances of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant primary school students' literate repertoires in the context of long-term urban renewal in this highly multicultural area are explored here. While educators informed by normative views of development often see change as disruptive, young people's experiences of life in different places can equally be seen as a resource, indeed as laying the ground work for resilient learning. A range of poststructuralist theories of space, place and time which foreground the politics and the constructedness of place and the dynamic nature of identity work underpin our research and development projects with teachers. Yet we also draw upon pedagogical approaches which are grounded in redressing the material inequities of young people's everyday lives and the consequences of those inequities on their educational trajectories. Our research combines approaches to critical literacy and place-based pedagogies which typically remain separate in educational research (Gruenewald, 2003), but which offer potentially rich educational experiences for students with diverse linguistic, cultural and geographically located histories. We argue that theorised and rigorous place-based approaches can enable migrant and refugee children to draw on past memories and imagined futures to produce complex and engaging texts and develop expanded repertoires of literate practice.

This paper draws from data sets collected with teachers and students in collaborative research spanning more than a decade. These research projects have been informed by poststructuralist theories of space and time (Dillabough, 2009; Foucault, 1979; 1980; Lefebvre, 1991; Lemke, 2000; Soja, 1996), the sociology of childhood (Uprichard, 2008), educational research which considers the political, social and spatial relations inherent in literate practices (Comber & Nixon, 2008; Hull & Schulz, 2001; Leander & Sheehy, 2004; New London Group, 1996), and theories of place-based pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). In particular Foucault's notion that we are freer than we feel, and that wherever there is power there is resistance, underpins some of the place-based pedagogical work accomplished by teachers in the course of these projects. Rather than understanding the school only as a disciplinary site, we consider *spaces of freedom* within the everyday situated worlds of school (Foucault, 1980). Theorizations of 'space' in the social sciences which emphasize the 'produced' nature of 'space' (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) hold out significant potential for re-inventing critical literacies in school sites, if young people are invited and supported to imagine, argue for and make real material changes to the school buildings, structures, grounds, and even to argue for the use of space by different groups. Such activity allows for different youth subjectivities not constrained by dominant developmental discourses and opens up possibilities for engagement with spatial literacies and architectural discourses and practices normally reserved for adults and professionals (Comber, Nixon, Ashmore, Loo & Cook, 2006; Horelli, 2006).

Recent theorizations of literacy (Janks, 2010; Kress & van Leewuen, 2006; New London Group, 1996) have emphasized the potential of design, both the potential of teachers designing rather than implementing other people's curriculum, and the potential of teachers making the space and time for young people to engage in complex multi-modal design work of their own as part of their literacy curriculum. The work reported here includes both teachers and students working as designers and producers of complex texts, in part based on memory and in part based upon their new learning as recently arrived Australian citizens in school.

The Studies: Collaborative Research on Critical Literacy, Place and Learner Identities

We have undertaken classroom research with teachers about critical literacy and learner identities for over twenty years, including longitudinal case studies (Comber et al., 2002), collaborative practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and classroom-based design experiments (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003). Over the last decade we have become more interested in the pedagogical affordances of place for extending diverse learners' literate repertoires and worked closely with a small group of teachers who were continually concerned with young people developing a sense of belonging in school and community that did not negate other identities and histories (see Nixon, Comber, Grant & Wells, 2011).

This paper is based on data from a series of small studies[I] (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Comber & Nixon, 2008; Comber, Badger, Barnett, Nixon & Pitt, 2006) and an ongoing related project, including the same teacher-researchers, *New Literacy demands in the middle years: Learning from Design Experiments*[II]. Here we draw on data from a small collaborative study – *Critical literacy: redesigning school learning in high poverty communities* – conducted in two primary schools where the teachers were designing place-based pedagogies to engage their students, many of whom were recently arrived refugees from a range of countries, including Sudan. Raphael's auto-biography, discussed below, was produced in the context of that study. In the larger ongoing project, a design-based experiment approach (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003) was employed involving three stages over a school year with teacher-researchers from three schools.

1. Informed exploration. Teachers and students engage in discussion about a possible place in the school or local area they would like to research and/or change. Teachers design a curriculum plan to research the place utilising relevant cross-disciplinary knowledge and sources of information and devise rich literacy tasks in relation to an action plan for the place informed by the students' and teacher's investigations. Specific outcomes at nominated milestones are negotiated.

2. Enactment. Implementation of detailed design-experiment in the classroom context. Teachers and students examine what is entailed in implementing place-based pedagogies and associated relevant rich literacy tasks, especially multi-modal environmental communications.
3. Evaluation. Teachers assess students' learning across a range of relevant tasks before and after the intervention.

In 2010 a new school was being built in one of the schools. Three primary schools were to be closed and their students and some of the teacher workforce amalgamated into one large school. Clearly this was the 'perfect site' for teachers and students to engage in placed-based pedagogy and critical literacy. Data generated by this project included student and teacher produced artefacts in range of media and modes portraying people's past and present relationships with the school. The data discussed here includes excerpts from a student and teacher produced book entitled *Memories: Ridley Grove Primary School 2010* (Wells, 2010).

Memory work, oral history and auto-ethnography are familiar approaches in cultural studies and qualitative research in the social sciences (McLeod & Thomson, 2009) and sometimes employed in schools as a way for young people to learn about the local community or older people's experience. However children's own memories have not been seriously explored as resources for assembling literate repertoires; more specifically their experiences of mobility and migration have frequently been seen as a hindrance to education rather than an asset. Young people's capacities to act as journalists engaging with and recording elements of change have also been under-tapped in schools. In what follows we briefly explore the pedagogical affordances of place-based memory work for developing immigrant children's literate repertoires.

Raphael's Story: Autobiographical Writing in Year 5

Raphael was in a Year 5/6 class at a western suburb school situated in the urban renewal area. The western suburbs are home to an extremely culturally diverse community, including Aboriginal families, recently

arrived immigrants and refugees, and first and second generation immigrant families. For example Raphael's class included Aboriginal, Ivory Coast, Malaysian, Sudanese, Chinese, Macedonian, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Anglo-Australian young people. 65% of students were classified as speaking English as a second language and 68% of students qualified for School Card, an indicator of poverty. In common with many classmates, Raphael's family had arrived in Australia having already lived elsewhere and, as such, they arrived with rich memories of life in different places.

As an introduction to her work on people in changing places over time, Raphael's teacher, Ruth Trimboli, had spent considerable time reading auto-biographies including *Born to Run* (Freeman, 2007), the auto-biography of successful Aboriginal Australian Olympic runner Cathy Freeman, and oral histories, including *Pilawuk: When I was young*, the story of an Aboriginal Australian woman who was part of the Stolen Generation who were taken from their parents as children (Brian, 1996). In using such literature Trimboli hoped young people would come to appreciate the importance of country to Indigenous people as, from her perspective as a literacy educator, she aimed to introduce them to different genres for portraying stories and memories of people in places.

Trimboli also assisted students to interrogate their memories, to research their own placed histories, cultures and mobilities as part of their preparation for writing an auto-biography. Each student in the class interviewed or surveyed parents, siblings and extended family and examined family archives. Students' cultural, linguistic, geographic and historical experiences were treated as serious data from which elements could be selected to tell their stories. The ultimate aim of this task was to publish the word-processed auto-biographies with a photo of their author on coloured card and to display these on the walls of the classroom so that all students could read the class set.

We share excerpts from Raphael's auto-biography (full text appended) in order to demonstrate the ways in which memories of places (real and imagined) can become rich resources for students' writing. Raphael's auto-biography recounts his experiences at key life transitions in specific times and places. The text proceeds in terms of key events: his birth, his brothers' birth, notification of permission to immigrate, the farewell party and flight to Australia, starting school

(with 3 changes in the first 3 years), making a home in the western suburbs initially accommodating a large extended family, taking a holiday, and finally imagining a future as an adult beyond school. That is, on one level the narrative proceeds chronologically and mirrors the passing of time.

However, the place-based nature of this assignment also resulted in an unusually lengthy and detailed piece for Raphael. There is evidence of sophisticated vocabulary and rhetorical constructions and other signs of significant mastery of conventional 'schooled' literacy skills. There are also amusing sub-plots, such as the farewell party prank, and tropes that transfer across places and time, namely the fruit trees. Trimboli commented: "Raphael was often a very reluctant writer/worker, but was very motivated to write about his life!" His mobility and his history of experience in particular times and places afforded rich material from which to craft a compelling text. His story of family migration tends to down-play the challenges faced in the move such as finding friends. This tendency to represent immigration and life in Australia in a positive light has been noted by other researchers working with refugee children from Sudan (Matthews & Singh, 2009). Young people from Africa tend to present an optimistic picture of their lives – past and present – despite many having suffered considerable trauma.

Before discussing some of the engaging aspects of his autobiography, we first summarise how Raphael has 'placed' and 'timed' his account.

Place	Time - Span	Event
Border of Uganda and Sudan	Spring 1995	Birth
Border of Uganda and Sudan	20th June 2001	Permission to immigrate to Australia
Village in home country Africa	23rd June 2001	Farewell party
Qantas Flight: Madagascar, Perth, Sydney, Adelaide	25th June 2001	Migrating to Australia

Gilles Street Pennington Ridley Grove	July 2001 September 2001-Dec 2003 Jan 2004 - 2007	Schooling in Adelaide, Australia
Richmond Ridley Grove	June 2001-2007	Living in the Adelaide suburbs
Richmond Torrensville West Hindmarsh Henley Beach Road MacDonald Avenue	June 2001-2007	Streets and suburbs where members of his extended family lived
Launceston, Tasmania and surrounds	2005	Visit to family and tourism

Raphael's initial account is based on his family history, as told to him by his parents, from his own birth in his great-grandfather's house on the border of Sudan and Uganda, to his aunty and uncle coming to visit, an event which we are told is recorded in family photos. His account brings together the material and the symbolic. For example, a key incident in the opening of the narrative recounts the occasion, just before they departed for Australia, when his mother planted a tree on his sixth birthday to commemorate his birth in that place six years earlier. He also recalls that the best thing he did with his father was to build a small cottage for the family 'to spend time together'. He has strong memories of the natural world in Africa and reports that 'we used to be like farmers'; he recalls the types of fruits that grew there and even a thieving baboon that stole the family's corn. The theme of the natural world and agricultural produce is revisited later in the narrative in the context of his description of backyard fruit and vegetables in the Torrensville and MacDonald Avenue houses of his relatives and in the landscape in Tasmania where he visited family.

The farewell party is given extraordinary status in his narrative: 'I will never forget it to the day I die.' In terms of the text, it is here that a sub-plot is introduced, recalling the playing of 'a really dangerous

game' – a version of chasey played in teams of 6 in tall trees in the jungle. According to Raphael one of his friends fell about 15 metres to the ground breaking an arm and a leg. Raphael was 6 at the time of this event and 12 when he wrote his auto-biography. Clearly he has researched the events in conversation with his family to supplement his own memories. What results becomes part of the family folklore and part of what can be represented to his peers at Ridley Grove Primary School as an entertaining and believable account.

The Qantas flights to Australia are also given considerable attention, from his crying on leaving, interrupted by the exhilaration of getting on the plane, followed by his fears that the plane might crash or he might fall out. The flight is clearly Raphael's first plane flight and the emotional and embodied nature of that experience appears to have stayed with him. His research allows him to fill his account with details and facts about the actual timing of flights, a refueling stop at Madagascar, seeing the iconic Sydney Opera House from the air, the amount of petrol carried by a jumbo jet, and so on. There is a mixture here of information supplied by family members, Raphael's own memories and wider research.

The journey to Australia and the account of the arrival are then followed with details of the movements of his extended family from one suburb to another, and one state to another, and the details of who travels with whom. There is sense of ongoing mobility and also connectedness with extended family beyond the local. 'My auntie and cousins came to live in Adelaide because they used to live in Tasmania .... My uncle Josh, my brother Wallie and I visited them back in 2005'. We also get a sense of Raphael's local travels across the inner western suburbs: 'Me and my two brothers go to visit my uncle and he lives in Henley Beach Road'. Raphael's auto-biography is characterized by movement from his jungle story, to the immigration story, the Qantas flight and ongoing local travels across the city and suburbs.

This piece of writing also shows that Raphael has been learning school-valued literary skills and techniques and that he takes considerable license in the ways that he makes meaning in order to engage his readers. For example, there is evidence that he both imitates and experiments with rhetorical strategies used by published authors in fiction ('in the lovely season of spring 1995, a boy was about to be

born'; 'the celebration was a success'), in first-person narratives ("believe it or not …'; 'Well if you read this biography ..') and in non-fiction writing ('Did you know that a jumbo jet …'). At the same time, he uses the kinds of devices that the teacher has probably explained are used to construct autobiographies, including ways to express times past ('In the lovely season of …'; 'I still remember …') and clauses that indicate the passing of time ('when the delay was over').

Finally, there are also traces in this text that Raphael's developing identity is connected with not only the remembered and embellished local particulars of places but also the more global aspects of popular culture. Travelling on an international airline introduced him to a world that 'looked and smelled fantastic', and where he was able to experience the pleasures of 'yummy food and cool music while my sisters were watching movies'. By the end of the narrative we know that living in Australia and being exposed to popular media culture (video games and 'gangster car' culture) had helped him develop an ambition shared by many teenage boys across the globe which is 'to earn enough money so I can buy a car and put a new engine, spoiler, two huge mufflers, level six and Nitrous plus a really cool Gangster paint job'.

The opportunity to research his coming to Australia and to this western suburbs school has allowed this young man to re-visit his past in conversation with his family and to recall key events. In crafting his auto-biography Raphael exercises power in the way he takes up the narrator voice, selecting what to reveal in terms of facts, what to include and/or embellish. In one sense his memories and those of his family, and what he selects for telling, are beyond the teacher's influence. In other words the teacher is not in a position to know better. Of course his teacher can and did make suggestions about what the auto-biography entails as a genre and how to improve his writing, by enriching it with imagery and details. Yet the final text allows Raphael considerable room to play. Memories – those of his family members and his own – become a resource for making meaning, even as he thinks about and imagines his future beyond the classroom. This is the identity work carried out by all young people. As Dillabough and Kennelly (2010) point out, "Young people necessarily navigate the gaps between memory, projection and possible futures" (p. 44).

While refugee and immigrant young people cannot avoid such identity work, it is rarely seen as a resource for schooling. Yet young people who have already negotiated life in different places and dealt with the demands of immigration may have considerable resilience and diverse sets of experiences to draw upon in assembling new literacies. However, often they are treated as if the reverse were true – as if they lack language, lack experience.

Memories

In 2010 in embarking on the *New literacy demand in the Middle years* project, teachers Ruth Trimboli and Marg Wells once again used literature to convey complex ideas about place, identity and time, by sharing books such as My Place (Wheatley, 1988), which portrays the history of a particular place in Sydney Australia from the perspective of culturally different children who lived there at different times (in the original edition from 1788 [colonization] – 1988). Teachers used this book to introduce the culturally diverse young people in their classrooms to a particular perspective on the history of a place, in particular those of Indigenous people, but also from the points of view of other groups of people who had immigrated to Australia. Other children's literature which was generative for their pedagogy included Jeannie Baker's (2004) *Belonging*, which visually depicts urban renewal and re-greening of the landscape, and *Window*, which also depicts through collage how a neighbourhood changes over generations through the view from a window (Baker, 1991). They also used Aboriginal author and illustrator Elaine Russell's (2001) *A is for Aunty*, which through an alphabet book recounting stories of Aboriginal people in specific places, gives young people a sense of the importance of place to Indigenous people and the Stolen Generation's experiences in places with family. In these ways the teachers brought in complex notions about the politics of places.

In addition, in developing their design experiments, they were influenced by the work of place-based educators. For example Trimboli specifically referred to the book *Place and community-based education in schools* (Smith & Sobel, 2010). As she put it:

> Place-based education is learning that is rooted in what is local—the unique history, environment, culture and so on .... of a particular place. I think the histories of people in a place are important to that place and are really a part of that place…. investigations of the lives of people in their own communities and their histories become a cultural aspect of that place where they are now living and learning.
>
>   I think it is important that kids still value their culture even though they are now living somewhere else. It's important that they don't forget their past, and that they see that their past history is as important as anyone else's, and that history is not just about the people who went to war, governed a country, or discovered something, and that other people will be interested to read it. I wanted them to develop and maintain a pride in who they are.

Educational researchers have noted the ways in which elite private schools build on tradition, intergenerational family networks and the production of artefacts in the school and beyond which promote its distinction. Frequently the resources for such work are not available in schools serving poor populations. However the production of collective memories through year books, photographs and other memorabilia is now more readily accessible with the advent of new technologies which allow for easier self-publication. The teachers with whom we have worked for nearly two decades in the western suburbs were conscious that Ridley Grove Primary School was going to be demolished at the end of 2010 and that a new larger school (with a new name and identity and enrolling children from 2 other primary schools which were also being closed), decided to involve their students in conducting oral history interviews with current and previous staff and students to record, edit and publish a record of the school in a number of formats including 2 books. Here we focus on Marg Wells' book which was the culmination of her year-long design-based experiment which focused on how the learning areas of the current school were used and students' relationships with various places within the school (including the playgrounds, the Grove Gardens, the library, media studies room, the activity room, the canteen, their classroom, the Vietnamese room, the time-out room and so on). As part of developing children's understandings of the built environment they also conducted research across the curriculum focusing on the question:

Is **What** a building looks like affected by **What** it is used for and **Who** uses it?

We do not attempt to summarise the complex work across the curriculum that was accomplished by this teacher and her class in investigating these questions. However one goal was to enhance the children's capacities for and confidence with oral communication, given that many were learning English as a second language. Her literacy program included many opportunities for drama, for speaking and performing in front of the class and the school, readers' theatre and activities which required them to rehearse for speaking informally and formally in public. Wells explains.

> [Trimboli and I] shared a similar goal; to develop competent, confident communicators who can understand and embrace change. To do this I positioned my students as 'researchers'. Over the course of the year the literacy skills needed to research and document the new development were taught, practised, developed and built on. By researching what was happening I wanted my students to not only gain knowledge, experience, literacy skills and confidence but I also wanted them to be more prepared for the move to the new school next year and to cope with the change.
> How I developed these skills in Term 3 was in a topic I called 'Talking Walls'. The children conducted interviews to collect and record 'Memories' from the staff and students at Ridley Grove School in 2010 and make them into a book.

Drawing on the popular song title 'If walls could talk', and, inspired in part by Nadia Wheatley's *My Place*, Wells prepared her Year 4/5 students to interview current teachers and students about their memories of Ridley Grove Primary School. This positioning students as researchers is a key move in critical literacy (Comber, 1994) and orients students to question what is going on and why things are the way they are. Part way through this work, children from Wells' class outlined what they were doing at a school assembly:

> This term our topic is interviews. We are becoming journalists. This topic helps us with our speaking skills, confidence, listening skills

and note-taking skills. We are interviewing all staff members, all teachers and some students. Room 15 has to be very organized by setting their interview times with staff and teachers. We work in pairs … and use an interview checklist. …. We are doing this because it is the last year of Ridley Grove and we want to keep the memories alive.

The children's report to the school assembly makes it clear that they have actively taken up their roles as researchers and journalists and they fully understand the contexts for their work as memory gatherers in the school's last year. At a conference for middle years teachers later that year Wells outlined the details of her approach:

- All current staff and a selection of students from reception to year 7 were interviewed (48 staff and 58 students).
- Students formulated the questions for a general questionnaire that was given to all people before their interview so they had time to think and write down some notes. During the interview students asked questions and took notes for clarification.
- The data collection process was long, involved and demanding. Students worked with a buddy to carry out these tasks. They had to make appointments, keep a timetable, carry out interviews, take photos and/or recordings, write the information into a text, save it in a 'Memories' file on the computer, check their work and show it to the person they interviewed for approval, complete a checklist of tasks, complete a self-assessment sheet and get feedback from the staff members they interviewed.
- The number of interviews carried out by each group, and the person chosen to be interviewed, varied depending on the literacy level of the student.
- All interviews and photos have been put together in the 'Memories' book, a 'feel good' book that captures everyone's thoughts and memories. This book is finished and will go into the new school.

There is not space here to do justice to the complexity of the design of Wells' curriculum and pedagogy. Throughout the year students also observed the physical changes occurring on their school grounds and

interviewed the project manager regularly about what was occurring within the newly built walls which they were unable to see from outside. With guidance from him and their teacher, through Powerpoint displays including photographs and designs, they were introduced to the discourses and practices of architects, planners, project managers and so on. Importantly they were encouraged to question all aspects of the design and the use of space and even successfully challenged the lack of a space for drama and performance (Comber & Nixon, 2011). While collecting the memories of others about the old school, they were simultaneously witnessing the building of the new school and hearing about its design features. It is important to understand that Wells' approach focused on present, past and future equally. She believed students could learn about and prepare for change by rich engagement in the school's history and its current changing dimensions and imagining themselves into its future.

The resulting published book Memories is 50 pages in length. Most pages have several photographs of staff and/or students and quotations from the interviews recorded by Wells' students. Wells produced the book based on the students' written summaries of interviews they conducted, drawn from field notes and audio-recordings. From the point of view of Wells' original goals for students' language and literacy development, becoming researchers and journalists positioned them as powerful observers and listeners who needed to attend to their speaking and listening in order to guarantee the quality of the memories recorded. Below we refer briefly to just two pages from the book, which indicate how the multicultural make-up of the school was the object of comment for a number of respondents.

On one page of the book, the school counsellor is reported as telling students that she has enjoyed the cultural diversity at the school, noting that over the years there have been 'new cultural groups appearing. We have more cultural groups represented now than ever before. Indian and African students have only been here in the last few years'. Several other pages are specifically devoted to this aspect of the school. For example, on a page dedicated to ESL teaching and learning, the ESL teacher is reported as having 'enjoyed working with children from all around the world and watching them become good English speakers'. On the same page, the memories of two ESL tutors are also included:

> [They] have lots of fond memories of Ridley Grove. They have spent time with students from a variety of backgrounds and have learnt many things from them. They enjoyed the reconciliation events and loved watching Blessing dancing on the basketball court and walking to the rhythm of African drumming.

Finally, the memories of Blessing—the dancing African boy mentioned by the tutors—are featured on this page. For him, a strong memory of the school has been working with the ESL teacher and making progress with learning to read and write standard Australian English: 'she helps me with my literacy. I am getting better at adjectives and pronouns.'

Other pages featuring a range of LOTE and language and bilingual teachers testify not only to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the school but also to the significant impact on teachers and learners of collective experiences such as drama productions, 'culturally colourful end-of-year celebrations' and Christmas concerts. For example, the bilingual support officer reports that she:

> will always remember the first Cultural Festival she organized. The Vietnamese dance was hard work but she had a great time. She also enjoyed the play "Shrek" and a lot of other performances.

The Chinese language teacher also highlights the importance of embodied and collective performance in her happy memories of the school:

> Her memory of Ridley Grove is the time she spends with her students and when they work together to do singing practice. She also enjoyed the Christmas concert and Melbourne Cup [annual national horse racing event] celebrations.

Wells as the over-arching editor in charge of the book has produced a book with her class of students as co-researchers. The entire process ensured multiple opportunities for exploring the affordances of teaching and learning in a culturally diverse school.

Since this research we have increasingly been inspired by feminist geographer Doreen Massey's notion of *meeting places* – how in contemporary globalizing societies people are *thrown together* in places and need to negotiate ways of relating with each other and indeed with places. From our perspectives schools are indeed meeting places. Massey writes:

> Place …does change us…, not through some visceral belonging… but through the *practising* of place, the negotiating of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us. (Massey, 2005, p. 154).

Culturally diverse school communities certainly require negotiation, but they also hold within their walls the potential for significant learning, especially when teachers make place and the changing and relational nature of place the object of study, as was the case reported here. In reflecting on her design-based experiment, Wells commented on the students' learning:

> Student literacy skills have improved, but they may have improved anyway, following a more conservative curriculum. But what I have seen is the growth in self-belief. Students are more confident, organised, independent, interested, motivated and involved in their learning.

Wells' hopes for the students exceeded normative approaches to improved literacy performance. While improvements were achieved what she was seeking transcended what could be measured. She was ambitious in her aims to have the students understand, but not fear change, understand people's attachment to places and institutions, and understand that the way buildings are designed is not neutral, that it makes a difference to what can be done there, that even the authorised plan can be contested. Such a pedagogical vision contrasts sharply with Foucault's critique of the school building as part of a wider apparatus for containing, measuring and managing the child subject – the disciplinary institution. In appropriating the discursive practices of oral history and memory telling Wells and Trimboli hope to open up insider

story-telling and knowing positions to their young journalists; their aim is to lessen the silencing and alienation that can accompany immigration and re-settlement through ongoing activities designed to build the classroom as a meeting-place and to develop a collective identity and sense of belonging.

Concluding Remarks: Memory as a Resource for Writing

Wells' observations lead us to our concluding remarks in considering the affordance of place-based pedagogies for developing immigrant students' literate repertoires. We are aware that the data discussed could benefit significantly from further linguistic and content analysis. We have no wish to romanticize or overstate the effects of this small-scale collaborative research. However we do want to conclude by returning to a key tenet of critical literacy as captured some time ago by writing researcher Barbara Kamler who argued that: 'Writing, is never simply a skill, but is deeply constitutive of subjectivity' (Kamler, 2001, p. 54). Kamler's insight is particularly relevant to the case we wish to make here. As Wells modestly notes above, the students' measurable literacy skills did improve quite markedly during the period of the study; yet equally, if not more significant, were the durable shifts in their learning dispositions and their sense of belonging. Ultimately this is what will count for them in their educational trajectories and future lives.

The invitation to engage in writing about memories here, in the case of Raphael and in the research for the *Memories* book, is not motivated to bring the personal 'into the corrective space of the school' (Patterson 1993, p. 66), nor to make it the object of surveillance, nor to make it the site for therapeutic activity (Kamler, 2001), all criticisms that were made by feminist poststructuralist researchers of progressive approaches to writing pedagogy which made use of the writer's life worlds in order that it could be seen, noted and repaired. Also informed by Foucault, Hunter (1988) argued that child-centred pedagogies and normative social training operate together in forms of modern literacy pedagogy, contributing to the management of increasingly diverse populations, where the relationship between the English teacher and students is a key site for disciplinary practices and training in technologies of the self. The result was that English teaching was reduced to a series of binary

choices: freedom vs sophisticated social control, culture vs morality and personal growth vs useful skill.

In contrast, the work that was done in the context of place-based pedagogy in the school reported here made place and change the objects of study. Writers, texts designers (teachers and students alike) enjoyed considerable freedom in contriving the stories to be told, the representations to be included. Rather than being stuck in the local, this version of *place*, in Massey's sense, is already global as already relational.

> If we really imagine 'local places' relationally – as meeting places –
> then those relations may go around the world. In that sense 'the
> global' is just as 'real' and 'grounded', even just as 'everyday', as is
> the so-called local place (Massey, 2005).

The inevitable thrown-togetherness of classroom and school populations in sites of urban renewal makes it an unpredictable, un-manageable arena for social action. While some educators despair in the face of such uncertainty and governments try to address diversity by insisting on common standards, some teachers are able to work with the 'interjecting trajectories' (Massey, 2005) in creative and productive ways. Switching the pedagogical focus is an evener; it serves to position people similarly. Everyone can speak and write about place. Focusing on the shared changing spaces of the neighbourhood and the school itself further builds common ground for collaborative research, documenting and publication.

Our observations indicate people's relationships with place(s) across time, including children's memories and those of family and community, can provide rich resources for developing literate repertoires. Constituting the individual and collective memories of people who work and learn in schools as assets is part of a wider agenda to contest deficit discourses which circulate about poor and culturally diverse communities and the schools located therein (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Dooley, 2011). As Dooley (2011) has pointed out, how teachers attribute capability to learners becomes crucial to the curriculum and pedagogy that is enacted in the classroom and the range of learning opportunities young people are afforded. If teachers continue

to assume that immigrant and refugee children have no language or no experience from which to draw, or alternatively see their experience only in terms of a traumatic background to be forgotten, then the classroom learning community is subsequently impoverished. In the process of exploring memories -their own and those of their family and the wider school community- Raphael and his school-mates were able to accomplish positive identity work associated with respect for their histories. They were also able to forge improved connections with the school and neighbourhood as they learned about the history of the school and its former and current inhabitants. Their positioning as auto-biographers and journalists required their full intellectual participation in the classroom. They were no longer relegated to passive observation or seen as people without valuable knowledge to contribute.

Notes

[I] Some of the relevant projects focusing on place and literacy include in 2009, *Investigating literacy, Year 4-9*, Helen Nixon, Barbara Comber and Rosie Kerin, funded by Department of Education and Children's Services; in 2006 and 2007, *Critical literacy: redesigning school learning in high poverty communities*, Barbara Comber and Helen Nixon funded by the Australian Literacy Educators' Association; in 2003and 2004, *Urban renewal from the inside-out: Students and community involvement in re-designing and re-constructing school spaces in a poor neighbourhood*, Barbara Comber, Helen Nixon, Jackie Cook and Stephen Loo, funded by Myer Foundation

[II] *New literacy demands in the middle years: learning from design experiments* is an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project (No. LP0990692) between the Queensland University of Technology and the University of South Australia, The University of Sydney, The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)(SA) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) SA Branch. Chief investigators are Barbara Comber (QUT), Peter Freebody (The University of Sydney) and Helen Nixon (QUT). Partner investigator is Victoria Carrington (the University of East Anglia, UK). Research Fellow is Anne-Marie Morgan (the University of South Australia).

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Appendix

Raphael's Story (Original Spelling)

In the lovely season of spring 1995, a boy was about to be born. He was going to be named Raphael. When I was born my auntie and uncle came to see me at my great-grandfathers house which was near the border of Uganda and Sudan and that's where I was born. Three years later my little borther was born. He was cute because he was chubby. When I was a few months old I had so many picture taken and at home now I have every photo except 10 of them. On my six birthday me and my mum planted a small tree and she said "the person that gave me this plant it six years ago." I was so happy. On the 20th of June 2001 my families life was about to change forever. My mum got the certificate to come to Australia. We got pack and it took us about two days to get ready. On the 23 of June we had a huge party and almost the whole village came in party. The children went to play and we used to play a really dangerous game where you would have a team of six and go into the jungle and go high up in the tree and started playing chase. If one of your team mate get touched your whole team has to touch one player from the other team. One of my friends fell off a tree about 15 metres to the ground and broke his leg and arm. The celebration was a success except for the child that fell off the tree. I will never forget it until the day I die. Few hours before we left my whole family went to say goodbye to everyone we knew. The best thing I remember doing with my dad was building a small cottage for us to spend time together. Before we left on the 25th of June I remembered all the great time my family and I spent in Africa. We used to be like farmers you could see vegetables and fruits everywhere like peanuts, corn, potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, carrots, grapes, grapefruits and plenty more plants. I still remember this baboon that kept stealing our corn. Me and my sister gave it corn so it wouldn't steal a lot of them. It kept coming for more and more near the house every time. One day when we came from church it was sleeping in the house. When it woke up it saw some corn outside so it ran of and took the corn along with he/her. One day a group of people named the baboon hunters chased it away or even killed it know one knew. As we left to aboard the plant Qantas we waved our

final goodbye to everyone plus to my home country Africa. I cried and cried until we entered the plane it looked and smelled fantastic. I could hear the engines begin and got scared we meet crash. One of the attendants came and put on my seatbelt. When we were in the air I didn't want to touch the window because I though I would fall out and die. We stopped at Madagascar for petrol. Did you know that a jumbo jet uses 220,000 litres of petrol per tank? We stayed for a few hours and it was still about 10min before the sun rise. We were on our way to Perth or Sydney. We were in the plane for hours but I didn't mind because they had yummy food and cool music while my sisters were watching movies. We went to Sydney because I could see the Sydney Opera House. From there we stayed for about 30min because there was a delay at Adelaide airport. When the delay was over we left and landed and around eleven o'clock. When we got out of the plane some of our relative were waiting for us as soon as they saw us they started singing a traditional song to welcome us. We got driven to the house that we were going to stay at. We lived at Richmond and went to Gill street primary school for two months because that's how long we stayed there. After that we moved here to Ridley Grove. My sisters and brothers plus myself went to Pennington primary for about two years. Now only one of my sister goes to the same school as me at Ridley Grove school. There used to be eleven people living in our house but now four of them live on their own. On the 26th June my family would be six years living in Australia. Ever since we left Africa I've improved my English and have lots of new friends. At first I found it hard to find friends because I couldn't speak English really good. I wasn't going to enter the classroom until I saw one of my friend there and he left my old school Pennington Juniors. Me and my two brothers go to visit my uncle and he lives in Henley Beach road while my two big sisters live with one of their friends in west Hidmash. My auntie and cousins came to live in Adelaide because they used to live in Tasmania in some town called Lonstastan. My uncle Josh, by brother Wallie and I visited them back in 2005. One year after or so they came to stay. My mum went looking for house they could stay in and they found a house in Torrensville. In the back yard was lots of fruit trees. They moved from there to MacDonald Avenue were there was oranges and other fruit trees on the road and when I go there I bring back some fruits. Tasmanian is a great place

peaceful streets and wonderful places to see. There are mountains that you could climb and if you get to the top it looks beautiful because you can see a beautiful lake and the city. I want to work really hard and become successful and have a good future with a good job and have a house plus a really nice car. My mum wants me to be an aircraft engineer or work as an engineer. The reason why I chose to work hard to become and engineer is so I can buy a car and put a new engine, spoiler, two huge mufflers, level six turbo and Nitrous plus a really Gangster paint job. My uncle loves cars and I love them to because they are really cool. Believe it or not I want to pimp up my car because of a video game called "Need for Speed Underground". It inspired me to become and engineer so that I would know where the wires go and don't stuff up my car. Well if you read this biography you should know a lot about me and my ambition when I grow up.

Exploring the Readability of Assessment Tasks: The Influence of Text and Reader Factors

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Abstract

Readability is the degree to which a text is matched to its intended and actual reader. The factors influencing readability, both text factors and reader factors, have been widely researched from the standpoint of attempts to maximise reader understanding of texts. The application of understandings in the area has not, however, always been applied systematically to the design and writing of assessment tasks and consequently test items are sometimes less accessible to the intended test takers than they might be.

This paper is an attempt to provide a wide ranging review of literature which bears on the task of the assessment designer in ensuring that assessment items measure what they are supposed to measure, and not just the reading abilities of the test takers.

Explorando la Comprensión Lectora como Tareas de la Evaluación: La Influencia del Texto y de los Factores del Lector

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Abstract

La comprensión lectora es el grado en que un texto se empareja con su lector. Los factores que influencian, los del texto y los del lector, han sido ampliamente investigados desde la perspectiva de intentar maximizar la comprensión lectora de los textos. Sin embargo, la aplicación de las interpretaciones en dicha área no han sido siempre aplicados sistemáticamente al diseño y escritura de las tareas de evaluación y, en consecuencia, las preguntas de los tests suelen ser menos accesibles a las intenciones de los examinadores de las que tendrían que serlo.

Este artículo intenta aportar una ampia revisión de la literatura que está relacionada con la tarea de evaluación del diseñador de ésta, en asegurar que los ítems de evaluación miden lo que supuestamente tienen que medir, y no solo las habilidades lectoras de los participantes en los tests.

Crisp (2011) has argued that, whilst part of the difficulty of an assessment task will, of course, be due to the intrinsic demands of the subject content of that task, the actual difficulty can be affected, sometimes in unexpected or unfair ways, by features of the way that questions are asked (Fisher-Hoch, Hughes and Bramley, 1997; Pollitt, Entwistle, Hutchinson, and de Luca, 1985). Ahmed and Pollitt (2007) argue that, "Putting questions into context inevitably involves using extra words to ask the question. If pupils have to read more text in order to answer a question then their reading ability is being tested as well as their understanding of concepts" (Ahmed & Pollitt, 2007, p. 203).

Research into the effects on test takers of the contextual variables of assessment questions has a substantial history. The Assessment of Performance Unit (1985), for example, claimed that context, that is the material surrounding a mathematics assessment task such as accompanying pictures and/or the embedding of the task in a real-life situation, could affect success rate on that task from a few percentage points up to 20%. Nickson and Green (1996) later found that the degree of context in which a mathematical question was set could affect pupils' choice of the correct mathematical operator with which to answer the question.

Schagen and Sainsbury (1996) have confirmed that reading ability can make a significant contribution to pupils' scores on Mathematics assessments, and the same conclusion can be drawn from the study by Shorrocks-Taylor, Curry, Swinnerton, and Nelson (2003) which found that the substitution of what the authors refer to as Contextual Number questions (problem solving) by number-focused data-handling questions improved the assessment scores of a number of the children taking this assessment. The suggestion was that the embedding of number questions within a heavily language reliant context had made certain questions more difficult for certain (but not all) children to answer successfully.

A similar picture emerges from research into the effects of language on learning, and hence assessment of learning, in science. Fang (2006),

for example, has investigated the linguistic demands of school science texts and concluded that these can make a significant difference to pupil understanding of these texts. If this is the case, then it is likely that this language may remain a barrier to pupils performing their best in assessments of their science knowledge and understanding, with this assessment often, necessarily, being carried out through the medium of language.

The accessibility, therefore, of the language through which assessments are made is a crucially important consideration for the designers of assessment instruments. The language used needs to be *readable* in the broadest sense, and the principles at work here are those underpinning the concept of *readability*. It appears that a number of factors can influence the readability of any text, and designers of texts through which assessments are made need to be alert to the influence of these factors.

The Nature of Readability

Readability is the study of matching a reader and a text (Gilliland, 1975). Arguably the most important pedagogic decision that teachers make is ensuring that learners are supplied with reading materials of an appropriate level of difficulty (Fry, 1977). Learners given reading materials that are too easy are not challenged and their learning growth can be stunted (Chall & Conard, 1991). Learners given reading materials that are too difficult can fail to make progress (Gambrell, Wilson, & Gantt, 1981), are frequently off task and may exhibit behaviour problems (Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason, 1987). Making the match is therefore a crucial skill for teachers, and its successful exercise requires knowledge of the readability level of materials.

Similarly, without understanding the readability of assessment questions, the test developer risks producing items that do not correctly match to the reading abilities of the learners for whom the assessment is planned. If the readability level of a test item is higher than the reading ability of the test takers, then it is likely that the item is not assessing the construct of interest (the subject matter) but rather the test taker's reading ability.

Explorations of readability gave rise to a significant body of research from the 1920s to the early 1990s, one of the major outcomes of which was the production of "readability formulae", that is, analyses of texts designed to give a quantitative measure of the "level" a reader would need to be at in order to read and understand them. Various definitions of the concept of readability have emphasised elements in a text associated with comprehension (or lack of it) on the part of the reader. Parts of the concept also referred to a person's ability to read a given text at an optimum speed. Finally, the concept also included motivational factors which affected a reader's interest in reading a text. According to Dale and Chall (1948) these three elements of the definition of readability were not separate, but interacted with each other. Thus, definitions of readability have never been entirely text-centric. However, despite the claim that, "Text and reader variables interact in determining the readability of any piece of material for any individual reader" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 203), approaches to the measurement of readability have usually involved objective estimates of the difficulty level of reading material derived from the application of formulae which generally took into account sentence and vocabulary difficulty.

Most studies of readability were carried out within a positivist paradigm (Janan, Wray & Pope, 2010) which saw text difficulty as determined by factors within the text itself, and reading as a matter of getting meaning from the page. However, views about the nature of the reading process have changed over the past 20 years towards a more interpretive definition which emphasises that making meaning through reading comes from a process in which the readers interact with texts. This new paradigm of reading has meant that research into readability has also changed (Janan et al., 2010). In this review, we will explore these two dimensions of readability by focusing firstly upon factors within the text itself, and secondly upon characteristics of readers.

Readability: Looking at Text Features

The effects upon reader understanding of number of text features have been well researched.

a) Word Difficulty

Word difficulty has to do with the reader's/test taker's understanding of individual words. It has traditionally been measured by word length, with the assumption that longer words are harder to read than short ones. It is often suggested that short words are perceived as more familiar and long words as more formal or technical and there is research that suggests that readers pause longer on longer words (Just et al., 1982).

Nevertheless, there have also been findings questioning the assumption that short words are always easier than long ones. There are, for instance, examples of monosyllabic words (e.g. *adze*, *gneiss*) found in lower secondary school text-books which are unlikely to be easy words for the pupils who read such books (Perera, 1980).

Neither is it always the case that longer words are harder to read. There are very few seven to eleven year olds, for example, who will not be able to read and understand words such as *tyrannosaurus* and *diplodocus*. Such examples suggest that the length of a word is not the crucial feature in whether it can be read easily or not. Children's motivation to read a word and their existing familiarity with it are much more significant indicators of reading ease.

b) Word Familiarity

Word difficulty is affected by word familiarity. In previous readability research word familiarity has referred to those words that appear in word lists such as the Dale-Chall (1948) list (revised in 1995 – see Chall & Dale, 1995). It is presumed that words which appear on this list will be relatively easy for children to read and that words which do not appear will be unfamiliar and more difficult to read.

It is certainly the case that, from analyses of English word usage, a fairly small number of words make up a substantial proportion of words in common use. Nation and Waring (1997), for example, using data derived from the Brown University corpus of present-day English (Francis & Kucera, 1979) show that over 70% of English text is composed of just 1000 words. One implication of this may be that, if the

text in written assessment tasks was limited to the first 1000 of these words, this would maximise the readability of these tasks.

Unfortunately, there are some questions about the validity of the means used to determine lists of familiar words such as this. Perera (1980) noted that many such lists, especially those used in readability formulae, were based on frequency counts done in the USA, although the formulae were still used in Britain, where patterns of vocabulary use were different. A comparison of the revised Spache (1974) list (American) with a British frequency count of children's written vocabulary (Edwards & Gibbon, 1973) reveals some discrepancies. Words such as *bonfire*, *doll*, *fairy* and *mummy* are listed as familiar words in the British list but not the American, whereas words like *cabin*, *candy*, *parade* and *neighborhood* are listed as familiar words to American children but not to British. It has also been suggested that, 'average word frequency is not a good predictor because many words are common at certain ages, but then become uncommon – such as "kitten". But … infrequency at higher grade levels does not make them difficult words' (Milone, 2008, p. 6).

c) Sentence Difficulty

The common belief regarding sentence difficulty is that the longer its sentences, the harder a text is to read. Hence, the average sentence length of a text has often been used to measure its difficulty. Most readability formulae have calculated this by dividing the number of words by the number of sentences in a text.

Care needs to be taken, however, in using sentence length as an absolute measure of reading difficulty. Short sentences may well convey conceptually difficult ideas. Also Perera (1980) argues that, at times, longer sentences are easier because they provide more clues to meaning and to the relationship between sentence elements.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that sentence complexity can make a difference to readers' comprehension of a text. In a classic study, Reid (1972) took sentences from a range of reading material produced for 7 to 8 year olds which she judged to be ambiguous in their syntactic structure. These sentences were then rewritten to make them less ambiguous and the two versions shown to 7 year old children who were

then asked questions about the sentences. Reid was able to double levels of understanding by modifying the sentences. Reid used her findings to advocate that greater consideration needed to be given to the linguistic structures used in early reading material, but also to suggest that children were disadvantaged in reading texts unless they had had a great deal of prior experience of texts with similar structures.

Thompson and Shapiro (2007) have identified four variables that contribute to sentence complexity: the number of propositions within a sentence, the number of embedded clauses, the order in which major elements appear, from simple, active sentences such as subject-verb-object (SVO) to passive sentences (OVS), and the distance between crucial elements in the sentence.

d) Cohesion and Coherence

Language features operating at the level of the word or the sentence may lead to accessibility issues, but one of the key features of a text is that it is not just a group of words and sentences. Instead, there is a structure in a text which glues the various text components together. In reading, the reader needs to construct a coherent, mental representation of the ideas which have been cohesively presented in the text. Louwerse and Graesser (2004) use the term "coherence" for the way ideas 'hang together' in a text and "cohesion" for the textual links through which coherent ideas are built up. The effects on readability of the cohesion and coherence of the texts used in assessment questions are often not explicitly considered by test designers.

Connor (1996) defines cohesion as "the use of explicit linguistic devices to signal relations between sentences and parts of texts" (Connor, 1996, p. 83). These cohesive devices are phrases or words that help the reader associate items or statements in a text with others elsewhere in that text, or outside. Halliday and Hasan (1976) originally identified four general categories of cohesive devices in texts: Reference, Substitution and ellipsis, Lexical, Conjunction.

Studies of cohesion in reading show that it can make a substantial contribution to readability. Chapman (1987) demonstrated that readers between the ages of eight and fifteen showed growth in their ability to perceive cohesion in text and to use it to support their comprehension.

This suggests that readers develop an awareness of cohesion over time and make increasing use of it to get meaning from print. However, if they lack sufficient experience and knowledge of the ways in which texts are cohesive and coherent, this can be a major hindrance to their comprehension. Other studies (e.g. Fulcher, 1989) have suggested that readers' failure to comprehend a text can result from their inability to follow the flow of cohesive ties within the text. A more complex picture, though, is provided by the research of Ozuru, Dempsey and McNamara (2009). They compared the reading of science texts which were deliberately written to have either high or low cohesion between sentences. They found that the effect of text cohesion depended both on the reading skill and the level of prior knowledge of the reader. Higher text cohesion seemed to benefit readers with poorer levels of prior knowledge. However, readers with lower levels of reading skill but higher levels of prior knowledge of the topic of a text tended to process the text more shallowly and actually perform less well on a subsequent assessment of their understanding. This finding replicates that of O'Reilly and McNamara (2007) and suggests that readers' difficulty in learning new concepts can be alleviated to some extent by making text more cohesive which makes readers less dependent on pre-existing knowledge. Yet, it seems that readers are not able to take advantage of increased cohesion unless they have sufficient reading skill. It seems important for teachers not only to work on improving learners' understanding of content, but also on their abilities to read to learn from texts (and their abilities to read effectively the ways in which assessment questions are typically written). A further implication relates to the need to improve the texts learners are asked to read, for both learning and assessment purposes (Beck, McKeown, Sinatra & Loxterman, 1991; Graesser, McNamara & Louwerse, 2003). Such texts need to be evaluated for their levels of cohesion but it should not be taken for granted that increasing the levels of cohesion, for example by spelling out all the cohesive links within a text, will benefit readers in the way it might be thought.

e) Content Structure and Complexity

Well-written text requires, in addition to coherence and cohesion, a

structure that readers can easily use to find the information they need and then to understand it correctly. Text can become confusing when information is inappropriately presented. When we read text, we build a collection of the concepts described therein, deducing these concepts from the words and phrases used within the text. We build certain interpretations out of these blocks of words which are not randomly organised, but obey quite strict rules of association.

When linguistic expressions combine into units for processing, many of the individual linguistic elements are ignored and the whole chunk is treated as one semantic unit. When a significant amount of information is conveyed in a relatively small amount of text, the reader can easily become confused. This problem is known as 'Propositional Density' (Kintsch, 1974). The greater the number of ideas expressed in a text, the more work is required of the reader to interpret the text correctly (Newbold & Gillam, 2010).

Kintsch and Keenan (1973) presented readers with sentences of constant length but varying propositional density. They found that, as the number of propositions in a text increased, so did both the time taken by readers to read the text, and the number of propositions they were able to recall from the text. This suggests that the unit of meaning that readers deal with in reading is the proposition. There is now quite robust evidence that high propositional density in a text adversely affects readers' understanding of that text (e.g. Barshi & Healy, 2002; Sonnleitner, 2008). The implication of this for assessment designers links with the earlier recommendations about sentence complexity in assessment questions. The more complex, and more propositionally dense the text of a question, the harder will that question be to answer, no matter what the test taker's actual content knowledge.

f) Legibility and Print Issues

Studies of legibility have researched factors such as character size, thickness of strokes, white space between strokes, dissimilarity of characters, leading, line length, quality of paper, colour of paper, and colour of ink (Waller, 1991, p. 342). Research has shown that legibility issues such as the size of font and typeface can affect reading and reading speed (Hughes & Wilkins, 2000, Wilkins, Cleave, Grayson

and Wilson, 2009). Eyles, Skelly and Lou Schmuck (2003) found, that a san serif font generally improved readability, although it has sometimes been argued that serif fonts ease reading because the serifs draw the eye along the line.

Text legibility is also influenced by the size of the font (see for example, Feely, Rubin, Ekstrom & Perera, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2009). Studies have shown that by increasing the font size the percentage of fluent reading is also increased (Feel et al., 2005) but small font sizes (below 12 point) are thought to make reading increasingly difficult, and are more stressful to the visual system (Wilkins et al., 2009).

Readability: Looking at the Characteristics of Readers

It is unlikely that two test-takers are going to perform exactly the same when faced with a test, especially one which involves the extensive interpretation of written language. Test-takers will each have individual characteristics which will affect, however slightly, their responses to assessment questions. As mentioned previously, an important omission in most research into readability has been the effect of various reader characteristics. Readability, we now recognise, is the products of the features in a text and the characteristics of a reader. It is, therefore, important for writers of assessment questions to take into account these reader characteristics if they are to work towards what Cole and Zieky (2001) have termed, "the new faces of fairness".

Understandings of the ways in which reader characteristics can affect the readability of assessment questions have been developed over a number of years through the use of Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis (Gierl, 2005; Zumbo, 2007). This is a well-established statistical procedure that has been used to identify individual questions in assessments that may be biased against particular groups of test-takers. Bias occurs when assessments produce different scores for members of different groups (e.g., groups with differences in racial, ethnic, language, cultural, gender, disability, or socio-economic status).

Although DIF analysis now has a substantial research history, it is still the case that we lack a full understanding of just WHY DIF occurs in educational assessments (Gierl, Bisanz, Bisanz & Boughton, 2003). To develop such an understanding requires an appreciation of the kinds

of test-taker characteristics which have been shown to affect the readability of the texts used in assessments. These characteristics will be examined in the following sections.

a) Physical Capabilities

Having a disability or impairment can clearly influence a child's reading ability. Some examples of impairment that can affect reading include autism, dyslexia and ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Children with ADD and ADHD have difficulties in concentrating on a task for any lengthy period of time (NINDS, 2011). Autistic children need special teaching techniques as they are often unable to interact with others. Dyslexia affects a child's reading ability in that it might be difficult for them to translate images to language and this may cause difficulty in spelling and reading (Just & Carpenter, 1987). There is also a range of physical capability issues which may affect readers, that is, readers who have specific learning difficulties, or hearing or visual impairments. Such issues are likely to have an even greater impact upon the accessibility of assessment texts for younger readers.

Abedi, Leon and Kao (2008) have confirmed that pupils with disabilities tend to perform in assessments at lower levels than those without disabilities. While their lower performance can be partly explained by their specific disability, there may be other factors that potentially interfere with this performance.

b) Reading Abilities

Reading abilities enable the reader to read meaningful language, to read any written form with independence, comprehension and fluency, and to mentally interact with the message from the written form (Downing & Leong, 1982; Just & Carpenter, 1987). Hence, the reader needs to master skills such as word attack and comprehension. It is obvious that, if a test taker is handicapped by lack of reading ability, then he/she will be much less likely to succeed in any form of text which involves reading, whatever the level of content knowledge he/she may have.

Research by Morgan, Farkas and Hibel (2008) suggests that what has become known as the "Matthew effect" (Stanovich, 1986), that is, a pattern of increasing advantage or disadvantage in reading skill development following an initial advantage or disadvantage ("the rich get richer, the poor get poorer"), is very evident in test-taking situations. Poorer readers are less able to access effectively the written language through which they are tested, and thus demonstrate lower abilities, causing expectations about their achievements, and perhaps also the level of material upon which they are tested, to be depressed even further.

c) Engagement/Motivation

Engagement or motivation in reading refers to the intrinsic drive to read for the knowledge and the enjoyment that it provides (Guthrie & Cox, 2001). Engagement is important as it drives the reader to use their best strategies for understanding and interpreting the text (Guthrie et al., 1997). There are many examples in the literature and in common experience of readers who can read beyond their normal levels when they are engaged and motivated by particular texts. It also seems to be the case (Martin, Mullis & Kennedy, 2007) that, while pupils in all countries have generally positive attitudes toward reading, those with the most positive attitudes tend to have the highest average achievement. In addition, motivational factors become more and more important as predictors of the ability to read for understanding as readers get older and develop their skills (Saarnio, Oka & Paris, 1990).

Research on test motivation suggests that this could be a crucial factor in obtaining high quality and accurate information from assessments in a range of subjects. One study found that test-taking motivation was positively related to subsequent performance on a cognitive ability test even after the effects of race and performance on the first test were controlled (Chan, Schmitt, DeShon, Clause & Delbridge, 1997). Another study found that the validity of a particular test was much higher for a group with more positive motivation towards test-taking than for a group with less positive motivation (Schmit & Ryan, 1992).

Although, as discussed above, the underlying reasons for the differential functioning of some items in assessments are still speculative (Roussos & Stout, 1996), one of the most widely discussed explanations is test takers' interest in the content of assessments and/or their emotional reaction to this content. Stricker and Emmerich (1999) suggested that both of these explanations could account for the different levels of responses to assessment questions.

d) Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge is an integral part of the comprehending process (Johnston, 1984). Hence, prior knowledge influences what is understood from text. Not surprisingly, pupils who know more about a topic understand and remember content better than those who have a limited background in the domain (Chi, 1985). This factor also comes into play during test-taking. Ozuru et al. (2009) found, for example, that, while understanding of a science text, as measured by performance on a set of assessment questions, was positively affected by reading skill, it was prior knowledge that was a much more significant predictor of success. This finding supports that of Bugel and Buunk (1996) who found that the differences often found between male and female success in assessments involving reading comprehension could largely be accounted for by differences in the prior knowledge that each gender tended to bring to the assessment.

One aspect of prior knowledge which has been extensively investigated is knowledge of the language of the assessment. Research conducted by Abedi and his colleagues has demonstrated that there is a substantial link between pupils' English language proficiency and their performance on assessments (in English) in mathematics, science, and social studies (e.g., Abedi, Leon & Mirocha, 2003; Bailey, 2000). Furthermore, several studies have found that assessments that are more linguistically complex produce larger performance gaps between learners of English as an additional language (EAL) and native English speakers (e.g., Abedi et al., 2003; Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter & Baker, 2000). These findings suggest that assessments in all subjects assess language skills as well as content knowledge and skills.

Butler and Stevens (1997) have suggested a number of possible responses to the problems caused by the language of assessments to EAL learners. These range from modifications of the assessment for these particular learners (e.g. carrying out assessments in learners' native languages, or modification of the language used in test directions), to modifications in assessment procedures for this group (including, for example, extra assessment time or oral directions given in the native language). A meta-analysis (Kieffer, Lesaux, Rivera & Francis, 2009) of studies of the effects of several of these 'accommodations' has, however, proved disappointing in finding little evidence that the assessment performance of EAL learners was much improved by them. What seems more important is to provide EAL learners with "targeted, explicit, and intensive instruction in the complex and specialized language that lies at the heart of each content area" (Kieffer et al., 2009, p. 1190).

Prior knowledge also includes the social and cultural backgrounds of test takers. The schema theory of reading comprehension proposes that the organisation of prior knowledge in a learner's mind provides a framework which enables understanding of the setting, mood, characters, and chain of events in a text. Readers acquire meaning from a text by analysing the words and sentences against the backdrop of their own personal knowledge of the world. Readers who share the knowledge background of the writer of a text 'come equipped' with the appropriate schemas for making sense of this text. The absence of an appropriate schema might be expected to lead to misunderstandings, which could be very significant in a test situation.

e) Gender

Gender differences in test responses have been commonly found in assessment research. Hamilton (1998), for example, found that, while male pupils were advantaged by the content of Science tests, particularly where they were required to bring to bear their existing, out-of-school knowledge, it was the format of the assessments which gave them the greatest advantage, with the use of diagrams being particularly salient. Gierl et al. (2003) produced similar findings in mathematics

tests, where males did much better than females on questions requiring spatial processing, rather than simple memorisation.

However, although there is documented evidence of gendered differences in reading achievement, as well as attitude, choice, and response for some boys (e.g. Millard, 1997), considerable evidence also suggests that this is not the case for all boys. Maccoby's (1990, p. 513) synthesis of decades of research on gender differences led her to claim that even when consistent differences between males and females were found, the amount of variance accounted for by gender was small, relative to the amount of variation within each gender. It has been repeatedly pointed out that boys are more different than alike, and that statistics lose sight of individual differences. We need, therefore, to be very wary of assuming that all individuals fit the characteristics of the groups they belong to.

Accommodations, Modifications and Universal Design

There is, therefore, a burgeoning range of reader characteristics which seem to have a significant effect on test takers' demonstrations of their capabilities in assessments. The traditional response of test development agencies has been to explore various assessment accommodations, including modifications of assessments and procedures for particular learners and groups.

Research has explored the effects of such accommodations but has rarely provided conclusive evidence (e.g. Stone, Cook, Laitusis & Cline, 2010). One example of this follows the review of literature by Rasinski (1990) that suggested that organizing text into smaller units could facilitate memory recall and improve comprehension for certain readers. Abedi, Kao, Leon, Mastergeorge, Sullivan, Herman and Pope (2010), however, found that doing this made no difference at all to the assessment scores of the pupils with disabilities that they studied.

Thompson, Thurlow and Malouf (2004) have argued for a more global approach to the issue and a move towards universal design in assessments, that is, the design and development of assessments that allow the participation of the widest range of test takers, and produce valid outcomes reflecting the true capabilities of everyone who takes them.

Thompson et al (2004) outline seven key elements which underpin the concept of universally designed assessments.

1) ***Inclusive Assessment Population***. Assessments designed for national use must try to include every pupil. They need to be responsive to growing demands – increased diversity, increased inclusion of all types of pupils in the general curriculum, and increased emphasis and commitment to accountability for all pupils.

2) ***Precisely Defined Concepts***. The specific constructs tested must be clearly defined so that all irrelevant barriers can be removed. An important function of well-designed assessments is that they actually measure what they are intended to measure. Test developers need to examine carefully what is to be tested and design items that offer the greatest opportunity for success within those constructs.

3) ***Accessible, Non-Biased Assessment questions***. Accessibility should be built into assessment questions from the beginning, and bias review procedures need to ensure quality in all items. Most importantly, items are developed by individuals who understand the varied characteristics of the pupils they are aimed at, and the characteristics of items that might create difficulties for any group of pupils.

4) ***Amenable to Accommodations***. The assessment design should facilitate the use of essential accommodations. Even though items on universally designed assessments will be accessible for most pupils, there will always be some who continue to need accommodations. For example, the use of Braille as an accommodation will be facilitated if the following features are avoided in the design of the assessment:
   • Use of irrelevant graphics or pictures
   • Use of vertical or diagonal text
   • Items that include distracting or purely decorative pictures, which draw attention away from the item content

These features are also relevant for pupils with visual disabilities who do not use Braille, and possibly also for the many for whom visual features may create distractions.

5) ***Simple, Clear, and Intuitive Instructions and Procedures***. All instructions and procedures should be simple, clear, and presented in understandable language. Assessment instructions should be easy to understand, regardless of a pupil's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

6) ***Maximum Readability and Comprehensibility***. Plain language guidelines should be used to produce readable and comprehensible text. Plain language has been defined as language that is straightforward and concise. Several strategies that have been identified for editing text to produce plain language are listed below:

 • Reduce excessive length by reducing wordiness and removing irrelevant material.
 • Avoid unusual or low frequency words and replace these with common words (e.g. replace "utilize" with "use").
 • Avoid ambiguous words - for example, "crane" should be avoided because it could be a bird or a piece of heavy machinery.
 • Avoid words with particularly unusual or irregular spelling patterns, e.g. "trough", "feign".
 • Avoid proper names and replace with simple common names such as first names.
 • Avoid inconsistent naming and graphic conventions, by avoiding multiple names for the same concept and inconsistencies in the use of font.
 • Avoid unclear signals about where test takers' attention should be directed by using well-designed headings and other graphic features (bold, italic fonts) to convey information about the relative importance of information and order in which it should be considered.
 • Mark all questions clearly by the use of an obvious graphic signal (e.g. bullet, letter, number) to indicate separate questions.

7) ***Maximum Legibility***. Legibility is the physical appearance of text, the way that the shapes of letters and numbers enable people to read text easily. Bias results when assessments contain physical features that interfere with a pupil's focus on or understanding of the constructs that the questions are intended to assess.

Conclusion

As we argued earlier, the concept of readability has developed over the past twenty years, in line with theories about the reading process. Traditionally, studies of readability have focused largely on features in the text itself. We have reviewed in this paper the major conclusions which can be drawn from this research, i.e. that the readability of a text is influenced by issues such as word and sentence difficulty, by cohesion and coherence, by conceptual difficulty, by legibility and print issues.

More recently, as more attention has been given to the role of the reader in reading, so attention in readability has focused more on the reader factors which may affect understanding. In this paper we have reviewed the influence of such factors as readers' physical capabilities, reading abilities, engagement/motivation, prior knowledge and gender.

A strong likelihood, of course, is that a modern concept of readability would need to take into account both these sets of factors and, indeed, a major interest for researchers is the way in which such factors might interact with each other. Such interactions are of importance as factors in the language accessibility of assessments. Test developers and designers need to understand the principles explored here if they are to produce "fair access by design" for all test takers.

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Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation & Residential School

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Reviews (I)

Rogers, S., DeGagné, M., & Dewar, J. (2012). *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation & Residential School*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation. ISBN: 978-0-9876900-4-3

Though their origins go back to the 19th century, the Indian residential schools reached their peak in the first half of the 20th century, when eighty of these schools were operating across Canada. Their main goal was simple: to transform the children of aboriginal people into the image of white Canadians. However, the consequences were not only complex and broader in scope, but also devastating for aboriginal children who were forced to be fully assimilated into a new culture and way of life. Hidden behind the mask of formal education, the Indian residential schools were part of an overarching colonial strategy that led to cultural, medical, spiritual, political, and material disruptions in the life of aboriginal people up to the present time.

Uprooted from their normal lives and familiar locations, more than 150,000 children ended up at the Indian residential schools. These publicly funded educational institutions were ruled by religious authorities who gave immediate priority to the teaching of the catechism. The commonly available instruction at these residential schools was focused on taking the aboriginal culture out of the children through the imposition of religious dogma. These practices, nevertheless, were only a small part of what were much bigger problems. The poor living conditions sharply accelerated disease rates, especially tuberculosis, which produced the most devastating effects upon aboriginal children. Worse still, they were victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, which not only impacted these children but

the next generation.

Speaking my Truth touches on these difficult issues at the Indian residential schools. Divided into three main parts, *Speaking my Truth* contains fourteenshort but poignant stories and a number of historical pictures selected by the editors Shelagh Rogers, Mike DeGagné and Jonathan Dewar, from the volume series *Truth and Reconciliation* published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in Canada. The stories illustrate the way that different aboriginal and non-aboriginal people have experienced these dramatic episodes and, importantly, how they have tried to overcome them in different contexts.

Two of the strengths of the book are the broad spectrum of the presented perspectives, and the fact that these situated views provide personal accounts to disturbing events that are usually represented by different means at a more abstract level. As stated in the foreword, the stories being told represent "the full range of emotions, from sorrow to joy, and not without humour". *Speaking my Truth* perfectly complements other works on Canadian aboriginal history that touch upon these issues from the single perspective of an author.

I myself come from a country, Spain, where the presence of one of the most shameful episodes of its past, marked by a civil war, is still characterized either by the denial of truth or the entrenchment of the positions; despite relatively recent governmental changes in how to deal with its supressed memory. I want by no means to compare two unrelated facts, but given my own experience in a country where, ironically, the silence of its past was the precondition of its established democracy, I have learnt to highly value gestures of reconciliation by recognizing past injustices and conveying apologies in order to take the first steps in the right direction to a better future for all of the people involved. Speaking my truth contributes to the complex process of reconciliation, and concretely, making people aware of where we come from in terms of past educational institutions and their relationship with aboriginal peoples in Canada.

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Amistad deseada. Aportaciones de Jesús Gómez y Ramón Flecha que están acercando la realidad a nuestros sueños

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Reviews (II)

Pocos libros se pueden encontrar tan interesantes en lo humano y en lo científico. El recorrido que se ofrece sobre los muchos y excepcionales frutos que la amistad deseada de Jesús Gómez y Ramón Flecha ha producido llega directamente al corazón y a la razón de manera profunda y continuada a través de las líneas cuidadosamente trazadas por su autora: la Dra. Elisenda Giner. Es imposible dejar de leerlo hasta que lo acabas. Y una vez se finaliza su lectura, el deseo no es otro que correr a seguir trabajando por una mejor sociedad y, sobretodo, hacerlo posible fortaleciendo tus lazos de amistad con esas personas que hace ya tanto tiempo que están ahí, contigo. Así pues, más que recomendable es indispensable para todas aquellas personas que, a través de la educación y las ciencias sociales no cejamos en el empeño de intentar segur contribuyendo a la mejora del mundo en que vivimos desde aportaciones que contribuyen a superar las desigualdades sociales.

También es importante resaltar que además de una biografía escrupulosamente documentada con más de 70 fuentes de información diferentes -una diversidad nada habitual en la mayoría de relatos biográficos-, este libro nace de una tesis doctoral defendida y desarrollada desde corroborados métodos de la mayor excelencia científica. Y, por lo tanto, el mejor homenaje a una amistad que, entre otras muchas cosas, se caracteriza por haberse centrado tanto en el aprecio por dialogar sobre las emociones, las relaciones y el progreso de los proyectos comunes como por consolidar, desde la más alta

entrega personal e intelectual, contribuciones científicas que puedan, fehacientemente, servir para la superación de las desigualdades sociales allí donde hayan personas humanas.

A través de la lectura de sus páginas disfrutaremos del privilegio de conocer los orígenes y los factores principales que han permitido desarrollarse y consolidarse contribuciones como la socialización preventiva de la violencia de género, el aprendizaje dialógico, las comunidades de aprendizaje, el Centro Especial de Investigación en Teorías y Prácticas Superadoras de Desigualdades (CREA-UB) y su metodología comunicativa de investigación, las tertulias literarias dialógicas o la misma Escuela de Personas Adultas de la Verneda-Sant Martí.

Y, también, seremos testigos de los ataques sufridos a lo largo de los últimos 20-25 años cada vez que aparecía una aportación transformadora importante, especialmente cuando de lo que se trataba era de denunciar la violencia de género en las universidades y trabajar para erradicarla. Todo un manual que nos acerca casi en primera persona a todo lo que puede significar iniciar proyectos innovadores y transformadores que se fundamenten en la comunidad científica internacional y que, desde ahí, cuestionen y en algunos casos se lleguen a plantear situaciones de reforma total de las estructuras de opresión.

Leyendo este libro nos convertimos en testigos reales de lo importante que es para tantos niños, niñas, personas y colectivos de acción social, que proliferen amistades similares a las de Jesús Gómez y Ramón Flecha, capaces de entregarse de tal manera que llegan a consolidar experiencias y métodos de investigación capacitadas para superar las desigualdades sociales más arraigadas.

Después de leer este libro no me cabe ninguna duda de el lector o lectora estará más y mejor preparado/a para sumergirse de lleno en una producción científica que realmente contribuya a la superación de las desigualdades y que, para ello, entenderá que una de las primeras cosas importantes a hacer es valorar como nunca antes lo había hecho a sus amigos y amigas, especialmente a aquellos y aquellas que desean también su amistad y pretenden hacerla llegar más allá del espacio y el tiempo.

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Thank you to 2012 Reviewers. On behalf of the *Multdisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* we deeply appreciate reviewers contributions to the quality of this journal. The journal owes this debt with those who have been peer reviewers during this period. Yours sincerely,

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Laura E.Gómez
Òscar Prieto-Flores
Editors

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