<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneity of Older Learners in Higher Education (2018)</td>
<td>Adult Learning (article from SagePub)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting age-friendliness: One college’s town and gown approach to fostering community-based and campus-wide initiatives for inclusiveness (2019)</td>
<td>Gerontology &amp; Geriatrics Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing as identity-work in higher education: forming a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ (2019)</td>
<td>Studies in Higher Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD by Publication : Panacea or Paralysis? (2019)</td>
<td>Africa Education Review Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The three goods of higher education; as education, in its educative, and in its institutional practices (2019)</td>
<td>Oxford Review of Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## ARTICLES FOR UTM SENATE MEMBERS

### “Higher Education Credentials”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The meaning-making of educational proficiency in academic hiring: a blind spot in the black box (2019)</td>
<td>Teaching in Higher Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘When it comes to what employers are looking for, I don’t think I’m it for a lot of them’: class and capitals in, and after, higher education (2019)</td>
<td>Studies in Higher Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational upgrading, career advancement, and social inequality development from a life-course perspective in Germany (2019)</td>
<td>Research in Social Stratification and Mobility (article from Elsevier)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Heterogeneity of Older Learners in Higher Education

Phyllis A. Cummins, PhD¹, J. Scott Brown, PhD¹, Peter Riley Bahr, PhD², and Nader Mehri, MA¹

Abstract: Recent years have seen growing recognition of the importance of a college-educated workforce to meet the needs of employers and ensure economic growth. Lifelong learning, including completing a postsecondary credential, increasingly is necessary to improve employment outcomes among workers, both old and young, who face rising demands for new and improved skills. To satisfy these needs, many states have established postsecondary completion goals pertaining to the segments of their population ages 25 to 64 years. Although it is not always clear how completion goals will be attained for older students, it is widely recognized that community colleges will play an important role. Here, we use data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to examine enrollment trends by part-time and full-time status for students enrolled in Ohio’s public postsecondary institutions from 2006 to 2014. Unlike previous research that considers all students 25 and older as a homogeneous group, we divide older learners into two groups: ages 25 to 39 and ages 40 to 64. We find that adults in these age groups who attend a public college are more likely to attend a community college than they are a 4-year institution and are more likely to attend on a part-time basis. We discuss the implications of these trends and their relevance to college administrators.

Keywords: community colleges, enrollment patterns, part-time, older learners, attainment goals

Middle-aged and older workers represent an important segment of the labor force in the United States, with adults ages 40 to 64 accounting for nearly half of all workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2017). People are remaining in the labor force at older ages for multiple reasons, including increased longevity and better health, as well the shift from defined benefit to defined contribution pension plans (Munnell, Aubry, & Crawford, 2015). Although labor force participation rates (LFPR) for both males and females in the 55 to 64 age group have increased over the past several decades, the same is not true for males in the 45 to 54 age group. LFPR for males in this age group were 89% in 1996 but are projected to fall to 85% by 2026 (U.S. BLS, 2017).
There is a substantial variation in LFPR depending on level of education. For example, in July 2018, the LFPR for individuals between the ages of 45 and 54 with only a high school diploma was 76%, whereas 83% of those with an associate’s degree and 88% of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher were in the labor force (U.S. BLS, 2018a). New “good jobs,” which Carnevale, Strohl, Cheah, and Ridley (2017) define as paying US$35,000 per year for those below age 45 and US$45,000 per year for ages 45 and older, usually require some level of education beyond high school. Over the past several decades, good jobs for individuals with an associate’s degree grew by more than 80%, whereas good jobs requiring only a high school degree declined. Since 1991, Ohio’s blue-collar jobs experienced a decline of 24% while gaining 13% in skilled service jobs (Carnevale, Strohl, & Ridley, 2017). In sum, a high school diploma alone is no longer adequate in today’s labor market.

While unemployment rates were lower for older adults as compared with younger age groups during and following the Great Recession, which lasted from December 2007 until June 2009 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018), older adults experienced substantially longer durations of unemployment as compared with younger workers (Cummins, 2015; Rix, 2013), suggesting the need for skill upgrading to become reemployed. Adults ages 55 to 64 who become unemployed are still experiencing long durations of unemployment: in July 2018, the mean duration of unemployment for this age group was 34 weeks as compared with 19 weeks for individuals 25 to 34 years of age (U.S. BLS, 2018b). Older adults who are unemployed for long periods of time often experience losses in pension and retirement sources, jeopardizing economic security in retirement and, for some, forcing extended working years (Munnell, 2015). Education and training are key tools to address these problems (Elman & O’Rand, 2002; Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2005).

**Importance of Postsecondary Credentials**

Advanced technologies and automation in a global economy have increased the need for continual skill upgrading. A skilled and credentialed workforce is recognized more and more as necessary for economic growth. By 2020, an estimated 65% of all jobs will require postsecondary education and training, a substantial increase from 28% in 1973 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Despite the demand for a well-educated labor force, only 46% of individuals ages 25 to 64 in the United States have an associate’s degree or a higher level credential. Ohio’s proportion with an associate’s degree or higher is similar at 45% (Flood, King, Ruggles, & Warren, 2017). These figures hide considerable heterogeneity within this large age range. Data from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS) demonstrate that 48% of 25- to 39-year-olds in the United States have obtained an associate’s degree or higher, as have 49% of 40- to 49-year-olds, but only 43% of adults ages 50 to 64 have completed an associate’s degree or higher. Ohioans in the 50 to 64 age group with an associate’s degree or higher is 39%, well below the U.S. average (Flood et al., 2017). Nettles (2017) projects it will take until 2056 for 60% of the 25 to 64 age group in the United States to attain a postsecondary credential, with wide variations based on race, ethnicity, gender, and age.

Drawing on the work of Carnevale et al. (2013) and the Lumina Foundation’s (2017) strategic plan, Ohio established a goal that 65% of its residents ages 25 to 64 will have an associate’s degree, certificate, or other postsecondary credential of value by 2025 (Ohio Department of Higher Education [ODHE], 2017) and 40 other states have established similar goals (Lumina Foundation, 2017). To meet the needs of Ohio’s employers, the ODHE (2017) estimates that an estimated additional 1.7 million adults will need to attain a high-quality postsecondary certificate or degree.

Postsecondary credentials are increasingly important for adults of all ages. However, they may be especially important for middle-aged and older adults as a means to indicate to employers that they are motivated and capable of learning new skills, and to signal other unobservable attributes, such as motivation, character, perseverance, and work ethic, as suggested by signaling theory (Cummins, 2015; Weiss, 1995). Moreover, globalization and automation along with more rapid skill obsolescence have increased the need for investments in human capital to ensure productivity among those currently in the workforce (Becker, 1962; Cummins, 2015; Farkas, 2009; Schuetze, 2007). Like
other forms of capital, human capital is prone to depreciating over time (Schultz, 1961), again supporting the notion that continual investment is needed, particularly in a rapidly changing technological environment.

Empirical studies have identified complex relationships between age and human capital investment. For example, analyzing 1995 National Household Education Survey data, Simpson, Greller, and Stroh (2002) found varying patterns of investment in human capital across age groups. Late career workers (50-65) were more likely to participate in credentialing programs, formal job-related training, and computer-based on-the-job training compared with younger workers (Simpson et al., 2002). These findings suggest that patterns of investment in human capital vary across age groups, but not in the way a tripartite model of the life course would suggest (cf. Sterns, 1986).

Purpose of This Study

Public community colleges provide an ideal setting for middle-aged and older adults to improve their skills and obtain a credential (Bahr & Gross, 2016). Open enrollment policies and low tuition as compared with baccalaureate institutions make them especially attractive to adult learners. In both Ohio and the United States, well over half of adults in this age group who enroll in a postsecondary institution attend a public community college (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2014). Of those, about three quarters attend on a part-time basis (USDE, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2014). Yet, our knowledge about this group is limited as most research that examines older learners treats all students 25 years of age and older as a homogeneous group (e.g., Bean & Metzner, 1985; Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2007; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). There are many reasons to think that doing so may hide important heterogeneities. As noted earlier, CPS data show that middle-aged and older adults are substantially less likely to have attained a postsecondary credential than are younger adults. Thus, following a job loss, this older group may be especially in need of retraining or skill upgrading to obtain employment. Family structure is also a notable and relevant difference between older and younger adults. While adults in their 20s and 30s are more likely to be single or in the early stages of marriage and family formation, adults over 40 are more likely to be married and to have children attending college (Cohn, 2011; Trends in Higher Education, 2017) and may also have responsibilities for aging parents (Pierret, 2006). These differences point to the unique challenges faced by older workers and students. For example, adults over 40 may need to remain employed to pay for the education of their children and therefore have less financial and temporal flexibility to obtain retraining compared with a younger, single adult. Most education research examines ages 25 and older as a group and enrollment patterns may differ for subgroups within that broad age category.

Informed by these broader issues, and focusing on public postsecondary institutions in Ohio, we address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Among students ages 25 to 39 and 40 to 64, do greater proportions enroll at a community college as compared with a baccalaureate institution and do the patterns vary by age group?

Research Question 2: Among students ages 25 to 39 and 40 to 64 enrolled at a community college, do greater proportions enroll on a part-time basis as compared with full-time and do the patterns vary by age group?

Given well-established differences in economic well-being and family structure between younger and older students, described earlier, as well as some evidence that late career workers differ in how they approach obtaining credentials and training (see Simpson et al., 2002), we expect to see notable differences in enrollment patterns between these two age groups. While the majority of adult students attend community colleges (USDE, 2014), we include baccalaureate institutions in our analysis to gain a better understanding of their enrollment patterns.

Method

Date Source

Data come from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2006-2014) and Jaquette and Parra
IPEDS data are collected annually by the NCES from every Title IV-eligible college, university, and technical/vocational institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, IPEDS, 2014). We limit our analyses to 22 of the 23 public Ohio community colleges and all 14 public Ohio universities. Rio Grande Community College is excluded from our analyses due to its unique structure, which affects the comparability of reported data. Rio Grande Community College, a public community college, is a combined with the University of Rio Grande, a private baccalaureate institution, and reports data to IPEDS as a single institution, which prevents decomposition of community college data for this school.

We selected Ohio for this analysis because of both the number of community colleges in the state and the number of students enrolled. In 2014, Ohio ranked sixth in the United States in total enrollment in public 2-year institutions (Ma & Baum, 2016) and ranks seventh in the total number of community colleges (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). In addition, as a larger population state, Ohio data are less subject to erratic changes from year to year that are typical when sample sizes are small. Last, with a median age just over 39 years, Ohio ranked as the 15th oldest state in 2010, providing for potentially sizable enrollments of older students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). This analysis is part of a larger study currently underway that is examining educational and labor market outcomes for older students enrolled in Ohio's community colleges.

Analysis

We focus our analyses on the period from 2006 to 2014, which include the potential effects of the Great Recession on enrollment trends among older students. Of note, enrollment data are not available for seven of the community colleges in odd numbered years over this period (e.g., 2005, 2007, etc.). We, therefore, limit our analyses to the years 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014. We map trends in adult student enrollment using end of semester enrollment counts. Adult students typically are collapsed into a single group of 25- to 64-year-olds. We divide this group into 25- to 39-year-olds and 40- to 64-year-olds to explore heterogeneity among older students. The age of 40 years is used as a cutoff between groups because 40 is the lower threshold to which federal civil rights protections apply with regard to age discrimination (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018).

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. We have focused on only one state to explore enrollment patterns among older learners. While Ohio is comparable to a number of the larger states in the United States, and it has geographically diverse postsecondary institutions and includes a substantial mix of urban and rural geography, findings in other states could differ. In particular, states with very different geographical characteristics and populations may show different enrollment patterns. Future research should explore whether similar enrollment patterns also are found in large rural states (e.g., Montana) and highly populated dense urban states (e.g., Rhode Island). In addition, we noted declining enrollments in 2014 following a period of increased enrollments resulting from economic pressures due to the Great Recession. As IPEDS data beyond 2014 become available, it will be important to see whether these declining enrollment patterns continue, stabilize, or even reverse.

Results

More than 115,000 students ages 25 to 64 were enrolled in Ohio's 14 public universities and 22 public community colleges each year from 2006 to 2014. Although most of these students are 25 to 39 years of age, a meaningful fraction of older student enrollment is made up of adults ages 40 to 64, and that fraction peaked at 15.3% in 2012. It is interesting to note that students below age 18 represented 4.1% of community college enrollment in Ohio and increased to 8.3% in 2014, which coincides with stronger emphasis on dual enrollment programs. Table 1 shows enrollments by age group in Ohio community colleges between 2006 and 2014.

Enrollment at Community Colleges Compared With Baccalaureate Institutions

Enrollments for Ohio's working-age adult learners (ages 25-64) increased substantially during and for a period following the Great Recession, which ended in 2009. Total enrollments, including both part-time and full-time enrollments, for the 25 to 39 age group...
peaked at community colleges in 2012, when a total 67,067 students were enrolled. This pattern is mirrored for 40- to 64-year-old students with peak community college enrollment 30,169 in 2012 (see Figures 1 and 2). At baccalaureate institutions, the same but less pronounced pattern is observed with a 2012 peak enrollment for both 25- to 39-year-olds (43,829 students) and 40- to 64-year-olds (15,149 students). In recent years, U.S. patterns for community college enrollment for these age groups are similar to that of Ohio (NCES, 2011, 2016). Among older students, those from the 40- to 64-year-old group have a stronger preference for community colleges compared with 25- to 39-year-old students: in 2014, 59% of 25- to 39-year-olds were enrolled at a community college as compared with a baccalaureate institution whereas 64% of 40- to 64-year-olds were enrolled at a community college.

### Community College Part-Time Versus Full-Time Enrollment

In 2014, of Ohio’s learners ages 25 to 64, about 61% who attended college attended a community college and, of those, 74% attended on a part-time basis. There are, however, differences in these patterns between the 25 to 39 age group and the 40 to 64 age group, with

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**Table 1. Ohio Community College Enrollment by Age Group, 2006-2014 (Percent)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than age 18</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-24</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25-39</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 40-65</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 65 and above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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**Figure 1. Ohio public postsecondary total enrollment ages 25-39, 2006-2014.**

the older group being more likely (65% vs. 59%) to attend a community college and also more likely (77% vs. 72%) to attend on a part-time basis. Because the majority of adult students attend community colleges, we focus on those institutions for our analysis of part-time and full-time enrollment patterns.

Patterns for Ages 25 to 39

Total community college enrollment for the 25 to 39 age group peaked in 2012 at 67,067 and declined to 56,114 in 2014. Part-time community college enrollments for 25- to 39-year-olds are substantially higher than any other enrollment group, peaking at 43,742 in 2012 and declining to 40,371 in 2014. Indeed, part-time community college enrollments for this age group are typically about double the levels of full-time community college enrollments. While both part-time and full-time enrollment declined between 2012 and 2014, full-time enrollment declined substantially more, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of total enrollment.

Patterns for Ages 40 to 64

Figure 4 shows trends for 40- to 64-year-old community college students and, although similar in many respects, reveals some important differences compared with 25- to 39-year-old students. As noted earlier, the older age group is more likely to attend part-time (77% vs. 72%). Similar to their younger counterparts, all types of enrollments peaked in 2012 from their pre-recession lows. Likewise, all enrollment types decline in 2014. Part-time community college enrollment far exceeds full-time enrollment throughout the period of analysis, typically being double or greater than full-time enrollment. As with the 25 to 39 age group, between 2012 and 2014, full-time enrollment declined substantially more, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of total enrollment.

Discussion

Little research has examined the heterogeneity of working-age adults (age 25 to 64) with regard to their enrollment patterns at institutions of higher education. We focus explicitly on this group and explore differences between students aged 25 to 39 compared with those aged 40 to 64. Our results indicate a number of similarities between these groups. The effects of the economic downturn known as the Great Recession are clearly evident in enrollment patterns of all older adult learners as significant increases in enrollment are observed for both 25- to 39-year-olds and 40- to 64-year-olds during and following that period. Moreover, this increased enrollment is found for both groups regardless of enrollment location (baccalaureate
vs. community college) or enrollment status (full-time vs. part-time). In addition, both age groups show enrollment declines by 2014.

Nevertheless, some notable differences emerge between these two groups. Part-time community college enrollment for the 25 to 39 age group is substantially larger than other categories examined. There is a consistent pattern of enrollments among 40- to 64-year-old students throughout the analysis, with part-time community college enrollment substantially exceeding full-time enrollment. During the period of very low unemployment rates currently
experienced, part-time enrollment may be the only option available to many individuals. In addition, community colleges offer the skill upgrading many middle-aged and older adults’ desire to advance in their careers.

This preference for part-time enrollment among older adult learners is consistent with human capital findings that note substantially different investments in training based on age. Simpson and colleagues (2002) noted that older workers were more likely to engage in training that was on-the-job, work-related training in credentialing programs and less likely to work toward obtaining general skills, such as interpersonal and communication skills. Their results point to a similar conclusion—variation within the 25- to 64-year-old group may express the economic realities of human capital investment, with older students more focused on occupational skills as compared with younger students. While all older learners clearly favor the community college setting (the highest enrollments for all 25+ students in Ohio from 2006 to 2014 are in this location), more older students above the age of 40 have an additional tendency toward part-time enrollment.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Enrollment patterns discussed are likely well known to community college educators, but the implications of these patterns merit further exploration. Middle-aged and older workers are increasingly important to economic growth in the United States, and continued skill upgrading across the life course is needed to ensure a workforce that is competitive in a global and technological advanced economy and to meet credential attainment goals. Despite the importance of lifelong learning (Cummins & Kunkel, 2015) and credential attainment, enrollment by the 25 to 64 age group at community colleges has declined in the recent post-recession years. This decline is consistent for both 25- to 39-year-old and 40- to 64-year-old students and for full- and part-time enrollment. Older students are more difficult to recruit than high school students; they are more dispersed and may be reluctant to return to college if they have not been in a classroom for an extended period or lack self-confidence about their ability to succeed (Blumenstyk, 2018; Fletcher, Hansson, & Bailey, 1992). Identifying strategies to increase enrollment by this age group and building an institutional environment with services and supports to maximize their chances of success are important both for maintaining a viable labor force and to increase the likelihood of economic security in retirement. Adult students tend to work more hours per week than traditional age students (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015), which can limit their ability to utilize college services and supports, especially if those services are not available in the evenings or on weekends. The availability of student services at times that are convenient is necessary to facilitate enrollment and success of adult students.

As noted earlier, the ODHE (2017) estimates that, by 2025, an estimated additional 1.7 million adults will need to attain a high-quality postsecondary certificate or degree to meet employer needs. A 2017 report by the Lumina Foundation (2017) observes that, nationwide, as many as 5.5 million additional postsecondary credentials could be awarded to additional American workers by 2025. A relatively untapped segment of this market for postsecondary credentials are middle-aged and older individuals who exited the labor force but, if retrained in a new occupation, could return to the workforce. Because a high proportion of adult learners attend public community colleges on a part-time basis, it is critical that these institutions provide flexible scheduling to encourage enrollment by both employed and un/underemployed older students. This is especially important in periods of low unemployment, as are currently being experienced. Further research is needed to identify specific strategies to market to this age group and to ensure that programs and services are tailored to meet the unique needs of older students so they can achieve their educational goals. Given the differences found between the younger portion of older learners compared with learners above age 40, it is important that any such strategies accommodate heterogeneity among older learners.

**Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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across the life course with emphasis on gender and race differences in physical and mental health.

Peter Riley Bahr, PhD, serves as Associate Professor in the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan. His research deconstructs students’ pathways into, through, and out of community colleges and into the workforce or on to four-year postsecondary institutions.

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Promoting age-friendliness: one college’s “town and gown” approach to fostering community-based and campus-wide initiatives for inclusiveness

Rachel Filinson\textsuperscript{a} and Marianne Raimondo\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Gerontology Center, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI, USA; \textsuperscript{b}Institute Education in Health Care, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI, USA

ABSTRACT
Rhode Island College has spearheaded state-wide age-friendly initiatives while simultaneously fostering three principles of Age-Friendly Universities on its campus. The principles consist of dialogue with advocacy organizations for older adults, enhanced student understanding of the impact of an aging society that includes its benefits, and promotion of gerontological research in higher education. The challenges encountered in grafting age-friendliness onto both “town” (the community) and “gown” (the campus) have been limited resources, small-scale endeavors, barriers to dissemination of information, and difficulties in mobilizing older adults to share governance. The enlistment of students addresses these challenges by the unpaid work they provide in exchange for course credit; their deployment as navigators for older adults to better utilize social media and as producers of age-friendly educational content; cultivation of their collaboration with community agencies to assist older adults via informal, temporary, flexible arrangements; and participation in inter-generational learning experiences that can bolster volunteering.

KEYWORDS
Aging in place; college students; community-academic partnerships; intergenerational service learning; livable communities

Introduction
Beginning in 2016, Rhode Island College\textsuperscript{1} (RIC) successfully obtained grants from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to spearhead state-wide efforts to promote age-friendliness. The original seed money was sought to advance the work of a legislative subcommittee of the (Rhode Island) Long Term Care Coordinating Council (\textsuperscript{2016}), constituted in 2014, to enable the state’s growing older population to remain living at home and in community settings. The goals of the initially funded project were to forge a coalition of providers, community agencies and other stakeholders engaged in services and advocacy for older adults; inventory deficiencies in services for the older population within the state; identify best practices for promoting age-friendliness; draft a strategic plan; and develop a legislative agenda to impact policy. A second year of funding was devoted to implementation of the legislative agenda and strategic plan (Age-Friendly Rhode Island, \textsuperscript{2016}), spurring municipal age-friendly endeavors, piloting a program that integrated behavioral health within senior housing, recruitment of local businesses for age-friendly ventures,

\textsuperscript{1}Rhode Island College is a public, comprehensive college, with 88\% of its approximately 8500 students being undergraduates.

\textsuperscript{2}Rhode Island College has spearheaded state-wide age-friendly initiatives while simultaneously fostering three principles of Age-Friendly Universities on its campus. The principles consist of dialogue with advocacy organizations for older adults, enhanced student understanding of the impact of an aging society that includes its benefits, and promotion of gerontological research in higher education. The challenges encountered in grafting age-friendliness onto both “town” (the community) and “gown” (the campus) have been limited resources, small-scale endeavors, barriers to dissemination of information, and difficulties in mobilizing older adults to share governance. The enlistment of students addresses these challenges by the unpaid work they provide in exchange for course credit; their deployment as navigators for older adults to better utilize social media and as producers of age-friendly educational content; cultivation of their collaboration with community agencies to assist older adults via informal, temporary, flexible arrangements; and participation in inter-generational learning experiences that can bolster volunteering.

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Aging in place; college students; community-academic partnerships; intergenerational service learning; livable communities

Introduction
Beginning in 2016, Rhode Island College\textsuperscript{1} (RIC) successfully obtained grants from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to spearhead state-wide efforts to promote age-friendliness. The original seed money was sought to advance the work of a legislative subcommittee of the (Rhode Island) Long Term Care Coordinating Council (\textsuperscript{2016}), constituted in 2014, to enable the state’s growing older population to remain living at home and in community settings. The goals of the initially funded project were to forge a coalition of providers, community agencies and other stakeholders engaged in services and advocacy for older adults; inventory deficiencies in services for the older population within the state; identify best practices for promoting age-friendliness; draft a strategic plan; and develop a legislative agenda to impact policy. A second year of funding was devoted to implementation of the legislative agenda and strategic plan (Age-Friendly Rhode Island, \textsuperscript{2016}), spurring municipal age-friendly endeavors, piloting a program that integrated behavioral health within senior housing, recruitment of local businesses for age-friendly ventures,

\textsuperscript{1}Rhode Island College is a public, comprehensive college, with 88\% of its approximately 8500 students being undergraduates.
and incorporation of age-friendly elements into regional and statewide planning processes. Through the appointment of an executive director, administrative support to the ad hoc subcommittees within the state overseeing separate domains of livability (for instance “housing”, “public spaces”), and systematizing communication and outreach via a webpage and newsletter, the final two years of funding are directed to solidifying a formal structure and the foundation to sustain evolving age-friendly efforts.

In the course of reviewing the literature on age-friendliness, attending professional conferences with thematic tracks on the topic, and preparing publications and presentations on our work (e.g. Filinson, Raimondo, & Maigret, 2016), we became aware of the specialized branches of age-friendliness directed to specific segments of the population, such as people with dementia (e.g. Charras, Eynard, & Viatour, 2016; Healthcare Denmark, 2018) and particular locales in the community, such as college campuses (e.g. Montepare, Whitbourne, Vacarr, & Silverstein, 2016). Our interest piqued by the latter, we explored the opportunity for our campus to become a designated age-friendly university simultaneously with galvanizing age-friendliness across the state. Though our administrators have not yet formally applied for the designation, we have worked to lay the groundwork for application for the AFU (Age-Friendly University) moniker. To do so, we have documented how the age-friendly initiatives aimed at the community level (often abbreviated as AFCIs), in which we were engaged, have led us to serendipitously embrace the principles of AFUs. We have concluded that RIC is indeed well-situated to demonstrate adherence to at least three of the ten guidelines of the international age-friendly university initiative endorsed by the Association (Academy) for Gerontology in Higher Education (https://www.aghe.org/resources/age-friendly-university-principles).

In this paper, we map the application of the following three principles at Rhode Island College:

1. To ensure that the university’s research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.

2. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.

3. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.

Further, we identify the challenges to grafting age-friendliness onto both “town” and “gown” that have been obstacles to our work and commonly noted by experts in the field – limited resources, small-scale endeavors, barriers to dissemination of information, and difficulties in mobilizing older adults to share governance of age-friendly initiatives. Finally, we recount how the enlistment of students helped address these challenges and could serve this purpose in other AFCIs and AFU campuses.

**Age-friendly university principles**

The principles of AFUs that emerged at Rhode Island College are a function of the underpinning approach pursued to affect state-wide age-friendly innovations. According to the typology created by Scharlach and Lehning (2015), Rhode Island most conforms to
the “community wide planning” rather than the “cross-sector change” or “consumer driver support” approach. Community-wide planning consists typically of “planning, assessment, community awareness of the needs of older adults... These mostly are “top-down” efforts involving representatives from local governments, social service providers, universities, and other professionals” (Scharlach & Lehning, 2015, p. 141). Like other lead agencies in age-friendly initiatives, Rhode Island College could furnish research and funding raising capabilities, neutrality, and connections to a network of state, local and non-profit organizations, as well as other educational institutions (Grantmakers in Aging, 2015a). Consequently, we have been strongest in areas where we have leveraged teaching, research and grant-writing expertise of faculty and existing partnerships with service providers, advocates, and government officials; we have been weakest in catalyzing grass-roots participation by older adults and their immersion into the life of the College.

Table 1 provides an overview of how our institution has already embraced (3) age-friendly principles, with the columns headed by the names of AFU principles we have implemented, the rows listing the dates (in calendar years) of activities demonstrating implementation, and the individual cells summarizing the activity(ies) corresponding with principle and year. In the paragraphs below, we outline our adherence to each of these principles, through illustrations of their enactment.

Having jumpstarted age-friendly funding through the foundation sponsorship of Tufts Health Plan, we acknowledged the necessity to cultivate additional sources of financial support, understanding that evidence-based practice and measurable outcomes were requisite to attract and maintain funding (Grantmakers in Aging, 2015b). New avenues of research (and accompanying funding) that dovetailed with the core mission of building age-friendly community were pursued by RIC faculty involved in the Tufts grants, multiplying the scholarship at our institution focused on aging and luring additional colleagues to collaborate. These included a state grant to design gerontological training modules for community health worker apprenticeships; a state grant to produce policy briefs on aging in community, based on data collected from the age-friendly projects (see Filinson & Maigret, 2017a, 2017b; Raimondo, Lawrence, & Maigret, 2017); a local grant to embed behavioral health clinicians in a HUD funded high-rise serving older adult and a Ryan White grant which engaged interdisciplinary student teams in providing support to older adults living with HIV/AIDS. As our campus’ research was driven increasingly towards gerontological content, so we steered our yearly, publicly accessible, CEU offering (free) gerontology conferences towards topics relevant to age-friendliness. In assembling at one annual event participants ranging from (all living) previous directors of the state unit on aging to resident service coordinators in senior housing to older adults launching a virtual village to students testing the waters of gerontology, we were able to provide a forum for discussion on how opportunities to bolster age-friendliness could be optimized. These research and public discourse activities are summarized in Table 1 in the first column of activities.

Another dimension of our stance towards building age-friendly community, with implications for becoming an AFU, had to do with our orientation towards the role of older adults in the age-friendly enterprise. There is a risk of age-friendly efforts devolving into the designation of older adults primarily as future clients and beneficiaries of expanded and improved public services. We consciously chose an alternative strategy (see Neal, DeLaTorre, & Lottes, 2015) asserting that investments to retain older persons in
### Table 1. Activities associated with AFU principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of activities</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Age Friendly University Principle 6: To ensure that the university’s research agenda is informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.</th>
<th>Age-Friendly University Principle 7: To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.</th>
<th>Age-Friendly University Principle 10: To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015–present</td>
<td>Awarded to RIC a series of Tufts Health Care Plan Foundation “Building Age-Friendly Rhode Island” grants</td>
<td>Ongoing review of Gerontology Program curriculum to emphasize positive contributions of older adults</td>
<td>Faculty collaboration with AFRI (Age-Friendly Rhode Island) partners such as state unit on aging, senior centers, Senior Agenda Rhode Island, AARP-RI, Housing Works, Meals on Wheels</td>
<td>Faculty developed collaboration with Lt Governor office partner, AARP-RI, Housing Works, Meals on Wheels, Senior Agenda, Rhode Island, AARP-RI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>Awarded to RIC, (state sponsored) grant to develop gerontology curriculum for community direct care workers</td>
<td>Ongoing review and enhancement of program curriculum in Health Care Administration (HCA) to emphasize positive contributions of older adults</td>
<td>Students attended conference sponsored by Senior Agenda Coalition where they had opportunity to interact with seniors attending the conference Health Care Administration courses incorporated guest speakers on healthy aging</td>
<td>Faculty partnered with Senior Agenda Coalition to collaborate on policies to improve transportation and other supports for older Rhode Islanders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017–present</td>
<td>Awarded to RIC, varied funding sources to support insertion of behavioral health specialists in senior housing</td>
<td>Students participating in HIV-AIDS training learn about resiliency of older adults living with HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Partnership with a health care system to provide health education programs for older adults in the community</td>
<td>Faculty expanded partnerships with housing providers/organizations; community action programs serving older adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Conference held at RIC on “Building age-friendly community”</td>
<td>Report prepared on contributions of older Rhode Islanders to the community</td>
<td>Faculty forged partnerships with municipalities (city mayors, town councils, town managers) to engage them in AFRI initiative.</td>
<td>Faculty participate in ACL funded grant on Alzheimer’s disease with DEA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Conference held at RIC on “Making changes for healthy aging”</td>
<td>HCA senior seminar (capstone course) included project on aging HCA policy courses included analysis of state legislation related to older adults</td>
<td>Dialogue with public transit authorities and AAA executives re: transportation challenges for older adults</td>
<td>Data collection and analysis conducted by faculty (and students) in preparation for state plan on aging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Conference held at RIC on “Social relationships in later life”</td>
<td>Development of new intergenerational service learning course; and intergenerational program Information about RIC Gerontology Program shared within campus diversity outreach</td>
<td>Faculty participate in ACL funded grant on Alzheimer’s disease with DEA.</td>
<td>Data collection and analysis conducted by faculty (and students) in preparation for state plan on aging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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the community translate into investments for the community as a whole, given the valuable assets, material and otherwise, the old can continue to offer. One of the members of the age-friendly team gathered data on the contributions of older Rhode Islanders to the state in terms of Social Security wages, taxes paid, jobs held, volunteer and caregiving services offered and other indicators of social and economic output. The ensuing report was disseminated to a variety of audiences (for instance, AARP-RI) that included students enrolled in gerontology courses. The exercise encouraged a wholesale review of our pedagogy to assure that we frame the characterization of older adults in the curriculum in a way that avoids equating them with mounting burden and dependency and instead emphasizes strengths and intergenerational exchange. Rather than an aging population being seen as a demographic catastrophe to be feared, particularly in a state with the highest proportion of older adults aged 85 and above, students are enlightened to the advantages it may engender, using readings (e.g. AARP, 2014; Coughlin, 2017) that confirm the prospective dividends. And, rather than viewing old age being a time in life to dread, students are exposed to models of generativity and activism in later life that resonate across the generations (e.g. Taylor, 2017). Our most recent innovation is the development of an intergenerational service learning course where students will partner with older adults to assure the latter can remain active in the community, even as volunteers. These activities related to gerontological education are summarized in the second column of Table 1.

Critical to the success of age-friendly metamorphosis in the community was the formation of a coalition of champions, consisting of public officials, the state unit on aging (Rhode Island is too small to have AAAs), the nonprofit sector (e.g. Meals on Wheels), housing policy groups, academic institutions, aging advocacy organizations (such as Senior Agenda Rhode Island), mutual support associations (such as The Providence Village), faith-based institutions, and others. A number of these partnerships pre-dated the establishment of a coalition, with previous alliances formed in teaching (for instance, coalition partners were guest speakers in classes, adjunct faculty, supervisors of College interns), research (collaboration on grants) and service (such as reciprocal board/committee memberships). The antecedent web of relationships between the College and the community provided a natural gateway for the formation of an AFCI (known as AFRI or Age-Friendly Rhode Island), mirroring the trajectory in Portland, Oregon where one of the first age-friendly communities was created (Neal, DeLaTorre, & Carder, 2014).

The joint age-friendly venture deepened the ties between the College and these external agencies, in part by presenting novel ways to cooperate. As an illustration, in 2014, the state unit on aging (Division of Elderly Affairs), mandated by the Administration for Community Living to develop a four-year state plan based on the needs and interests of older Rhode Islanders, was persuaded that the data collected in focus groups of seniors could concomitantly provide a baseline needs assessment for the age-friendly project. Subsequently, faculty from Rhode Island College organized and carried out the focus groups, analyzing their findings for the dual objectives of the development of the state plan (State of Rhode Island, 2015-2019) and determination of gaps in services and resources to be addressed in an age-friendly strategic plan. The symbiotic relationship continued in 2018, with a new cycle of focus groups for the next iteration of the DEA’s state plan and to monitor changes in unmet need occurring since the advent of age-
friendly interventions. Most recently, DEA engaged RIC faculty in an HHS ACL ADPI (Alzheimer’s Disease Programs to States and Communities) grant submission which will involve the development and delivery of training in dementia for primary care practitioners and community-based case management agencies. Therefore, with an array of activities, the College and community partners pursue a common purpose of improving the lives of older adults within our state. These activities pertaining to collaborations with agencies serving older adults are summarized in column 3 of Table 1.

Although the community-based age-friendly work preceded and led us to discover the AFU framework, efforts in both town and gown now reinforce each other in a circular fashion. However, the AFU framework has the value-added dimension of making us aware of those areas of age-friendliness (embodied in the seven principles we have not yet realized) where our campus remains lacking. Further, we envision that when we shift from de facto to official AFU status, we will gain opportunities to exchange ideas and learn about best practice models with other campuses in the AFU network and that the reputation of our institution as a leader in the age-friendly enterprise will be boosted.

**Challenges to building age-friendly community and college**

“Town” and “gown” age-friendly efforts face similar challenges, even when initiated and directed from the highest levels. Both types struggle to acquire sufficient resources to prompt real change and be sustainable. Due to inadequacies in available support often confronted, many initiatives are stymied in scope and the extent to which constituent populations can be affected. When successful interventions are identified or introduced, information about their existence may be not easily accessible to those who could most benefit from them. Likewise, making older adults aware of age-friendly projects, involving them in grassroots participation, and nurturing their leadership can be difficult to achieve. Each of these challenges – for both community and campus – are detailed below.

A paucity of resources bedevils both age-friendly initiatives, which typically operate on a shoestring budget, and public institutions of higher education, hurt by the trend of a declining share of tax-supported revenue. Heightened awareness by state legislators of the age-friendly movement has led more to rhetorical support of the concept than to passage of significant increases in funding. In Rhode Island, the cost-free declaration by the General Assembly of a state-wide “Age-Friendly Day was the state legislature’s swift deliverable whereas meaningful increases in funding have taken years. Moreover, the revenue enhancements that have occurred largely restore budgets (e.g. for senior centers and free bus passes) to prior – and insufficient – levels. College administrators similarly back the notion of age-friendliness, without offering resources to finance it; instead, they look to assess the prospects for it attracting additional revenue streams (e.g., expanding enrollment of older students retooling for second and third careers). Strategies to expand enrollment, nevertheless, remain primarily fixed on the traditional age student pursuing conventional college credentials.

Small-scale endeavors characterize age-friendly activities in many senses, whether in reference to town or gown. Within the community, such activities usually cannot encompass all eight domains of the WHO livability model and they cannot be easily scaled up to serve large populations or certain segments of the population. They struggle to alter the
interpersonal and broad environmental transactional processes which influence successful aging (Greenfield, Oberlink, Scharlach, Neal, & Stafford, 2015) and consequently narrow their focus to modifying individual older adult behavior to become more healthful (Scharlach, 2017). Within some higher education institutions, accomplishing all ten age-friendly objectives may be aspirational more than attainable, especially in regards to the essential integration of older adults into educational, research, health and wellness, cultural and recreational activities across the campus.

In the Rhode Island age-friendly project, working groups produced tangible results more easily in some domains than others. Finding housing developers or nursing homes willing to build new or repurpose existing structures with state-of-the art age-friendly amenities proved much more challenging than facilitating multigenerational civic engagement experiences. Within RIC, linking students to older adults in conventional settings such as assisted living facilities or senior centers turned out to be much easier than pairing them with adults over age 35, to be served by the Rhode Island College’s HIV-AIDs Co-Exist project, despite nearly half of those living with HIV estimated to be aged 50 and older (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.).

In the capital city, Providence, age-friendliness progressed due to a confluence of factors that included the leadership of the mayor touting a “silver economy” (see description of 2017 conference at https://tappingintothesilvereconomy2017.sched.com/list/descriptions/), an NSF grant that partnered (Providence-situated) Brown University with Hasbro, the toy manufacturer, on the ARIES (Affordable Robotic Intelligence for Elderly Support) project to design assistive products for older adults (Brown University, 2017), and the presence of an Aging 2.0 affiliate that stimulates innovations to address challenges and opportunities of aging (see https://www.aging2.com/providence/). In contrast, other municipalities, particularly in rural areas, were more reluctant to embark on age-friendly projects, constrained by fewer resources and lacking nascent experiments within their bounds. At the College, age-friendly interest has taken root in a constellation of health and social service occupation oriented departments, while being largely ignored in others.

Sweeping transformations of our communities’ and College’s built environment and capacity to render them more age-friendly were acknowledged to be unrealistic initial goals. A frustrating illustration was the offer by the State’s Executive Office of Health and Human Services of Medicaid funded grants (channeled through RIC) for projects to introduce health care system and workforce development innovations. To procure most of the funding, however, an accountable entity would need to provide (currently) billable services to individual patients, thereby circumscribing rather than enlarging the means of delivery of needed services to Medicaid beneficiaries and underlining change at the micro more than systemic level. For Rhode Island College, which does not have a medical clinic on its campus, and for RIC students who were not majors within traditional health care fields like nursing, the request for proposals was primarily a non-starter. In short, our age-friendly pursuits, whether in the community or at the College, were uneven with respect to what aspects could be tackled, where they could be tackled, and how much environmental modification, rather than change in individual older adults, could be tackled.

Barriers to dissemination can cause age-friendly activities to stumble or may threaten their very existence. A case in point for the statewide age-friendly work has been the Rhode Island Livable home modification grant that enables homeowners and renters to
retrofit their residences to nationally recognized accessibility standards by reimbursing
50% of the cost, up to $5000. Although an important step to assisting older adults to age in
place, the program has suffered from poor uptake, owing to a paucity of information
outside the website and insufficient explanation of the program’s purpose and operation.
Within the College, ongoing unfamiliarity with the Gerontology Program has meant that
many students are neither advised that they can minor in Gerontology nor made aware of
other aging-related educational options.

Greenfield (2018) in her analysis of nine newly formed age-friendly community initia-
tives notes the complexities of composing messages directed to diverse audiences and
simultaneously supporting a variety of platforms for communication, a complexity that
echoes in our own endeavors. Although younger adults, including students, embrace social
media, Age-Friendly Rhode Island’s social media modalities (Facebook & Twitter) have
been considerably underutilized. As older citizen experts in Bowling Green, Kentucky
discovered (Grantmakers in Aging, 2014), an old-fashioned means of spreading informa-
tion (a widely circulated, paper “Community Calendar”) to increase awareness of existing
age-friendly resources could be more effective than high tech alternatives in broadcasting
information to an older constituency. Within Rhode Island, a series on aging, featuring
local and national experts, produced via a popular, local radio program, was better suited
for reaching older adults than online, interactive methods of communication yet not likely
a draw for younger persons.

An unfortunate unintended consequence of informational deserts can be efforts wasted
on “reinventing the wheel” because it is not known that the wheel had been already
invented. For example, the food insecurity working group of Age-Friendly Rhode Island
had considered nutritional illiteracy to be a significant concern to be counteracted by
developing wellness programs that conveyed information about healthy cooking and
eating. Months into the research it was discovered that numerous programs with these
goals and outcomes already exist within the state, but a scarcity of peer educators to teach
their content prevented them from being offered. Therefore, a shortage of person-power,
not of suitable curriculum, was the problem that was hidden because the programs
themselves were unknown. At Rhode Island College, the wheel risks constant reinvention
due to administrator turnover, which requires our being endlessly vigilant to educate new
executive hires about age-friendliness and restart the conversation about seeking the AFU
designation.

Concern about older adult involvement is a recurrent theme within AFCIs and
AFUs, with a goal that older adults should play a central—not symbolic or token –
role within age-friendly work. Nevertheless, apart from involvement in needs assess-
ment activities, older people may tend to be invisible within the movement, with
underrepresentation of those disadvantaged socially or with respect to health (Buffel
& Phillipson, 2018). Age-Friendly Rhode Island gathered the perspectives of older
adults through focus groups, but the engagement of older adults as co-producers of
an enhanced community was the unanticipated result of many faculty, social service
agency partners and advocates for older adults being old themselves. That governance
might technically be in the hands of the old in senior positions reflected more the top-
down approach to building age-friendly community than the effective recruitment and
mobilization of the state’s elderly citizens. Nor did the composition of the leadership
 correspond with a diverse cross-section of the older demographic. Within Rhode Island
College, older adults were frequently the subject of research being conducted, but virtually never co-researchers of aging or age-friendliness. Coincidental with the launch of the AFCI was the publication of Rhode Island’s low national ranking with respect to the rate of volunteerism (Corporation for National & Community Service, n.d.), which pertained to older adults and decreased further in 2014. Therefore, we were tasked with dramatically democratizing the participation of older adults concurrent with the apparent decline in their civic engagement.

**The role of students**

In Buffel, Handler and Phillipson’s (2018) examination of age-friendly cities and communities in global perspective, with case studies of cities across three continents, universities, academic centers, elder academies, and intergenerational learning are infrequently mentioned. They figure chiefly as adjunct partners in AFCIs managed by statutory entities, for instance, in Manchester, England (McGarry, 2018) or NGOs, for instance, in Hong Kong (Phillips, Woo, Cheung, Wong, & Chau, 2018). In previously published reports on AFCIs that do underscore the critical and frequent involvement of academics in their advancement, the mention of student contributions to the endeavors is often incidental and the corollary effects of participation in AFCIs on campuses may be ignored altogether. In a review of best practices, we purposely tracked evidence of the engagement of students (and younger adults) in age-friendly projects, albeit limited, and noted their versatility in executing a variety of tasks. As our project unfolded, we shifted from opportune to deliberate insertion of students into its planning and implementation. In doing so, two of the impediments to building age-friendly community and higher education in Rhode Island were surmounted, at least partially, by the deployment of students and the remaining two are within our sights to be addressed in incipient efforts. Student participation was devoted to a dual purpose of expediting the growth of age-friendliness in the community while also fortifying an age-friendly agenda at their institution of higher education. Contemporaneously, students have reaped benefits from their placements within the projects, including their understanding of the impact of an aging society, and have stimulated and legitimized interest in age-friendliness at the College.

The students involved in RIC’s age-friendly work are often, but not exclusively, those who are enrolled in gerontology courses. Gerontology courses attract students from a wide range of disciplines and most students in the courses are NOT gerontology minor or certificate students. Moreover, the Gerontology Program at Rhode Island College is a minor that can be combined with any major, with the prerequisites for the core courses based on the number of overall credit hours attained rather than on prior completion of discipline-specific entry-level courses. In this way, we recruit students with heterogeneous backgrounds and majors.

The first barrier that student engagement addressed has to do with the paucity of assets to devote to age-friendly work. With neither substantial resources to evaluate the effectiveness of existing (community) services and (campus) educational opportunities for older adults, nor to expand those found to be of greatest utility, we have had to marshal volunteers to assess the existing network of programs for older adults and determine how their quality and efficiency might be improved with no or few additional inputs (see model of Atlanta Regional Commission, 2015). Students are a vital component of the volunteer
force, offering an antidote to limited resources by the unpaid work they provided in exchange for course credit or volunteer experience. Undergraduate students participated in data collection for the AFCI in those domains that tend to be given low priority in focus groups and interviews with older adults. White (2016) noted that transportation, educational and social concerns, and household supports tend to be the issues that are highlighted by surveyed older adults while the built environment and public spaces are domains that are ignored. Ferguson and Henry (2016) recommend employing students to assess these overlooked elements of environmental accommodation. This is precisely what we did in various courses at RIC in which a regular or extra credit assignment involved a neighborhood audit, with a checklist adapted from one developed in Chicago by those affiliated with a university (Johnson, Eisenstein, & Boyken, 2015). Students also documented through photographs age-unfriendly features in the observed neighborhoods. Students rounded out our needs assessment at the same time that they empathetically gauged the environment by adopting the point of view of an older adult needing to navigate it. Students interned at the (virtual) Providence Village, collecting data it had requested to assist in determining which services to next offer its members. Students assisted a collective of community agencies (that includes, for instance, a nursing home industry group and a veterans group) in facilitating community conversations around the state on caring for older adults and persons with disabilities. Through their collaboration, students honed their own research skills, professional assimilation, and expertise on age-friendliness, validating it as a subject of inquiry at our college.

A second avenue through which students proved they could enhance AFCIs and AFUs has to do with their dismantling barriers to dissemination of information. Pstross et al. (2017) describe a service learning model at their university in which students serve as mentors and navigators for older adults to better utilize social media, thereby better accessing information. Rhode Island’s version of such a program is called “Cyber-Seniors” which embodies the philosophy of an international non-profit organization of the same name (see http://cyberseniorsdocumentary.com/) by bringing together (typically undergraduate) college student mentors and older adults at senior centers and other community sites (such as PACE, low-income senior housing and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) to teach seniors how to use technological devices and apps. Student participants meet requirements of multiple departments, majors, and programs through coursework, internship hours, independent study credits and experiential education hours. Empowering older adults to seek knowledge and communicate with unfamiliar technology, the program also encourages intergenerational relationships that can equally enrich student lives.

Students contributed to reducing obstacles to information most dramatically through their participation in efforts to craft and disseminate age-friendly educational content both in the community and on campus. These efforts included the organization of an annual gerontology conference held at Rhode Island College. Because we realized that change at the individual rather than environmental level could more readily be embraced and because we wanted to emphasize the agency of older adults themselves, the half-day events aimed at presenting self-help strategies for individuals to maintain or improve their quality of life. For example, our 2017 annual gerontology conference provided the Rhode Island Healthy Aging Report’s (available at https://healthyagingdatareports.org/rhode-island-healthy-aging-data-report/) findings on behavioral modifications that
individuals could achieve to better their health, described evidence-based healthy living programs and discussed interventions to foster beneficial effects of caregiving. The 2018 conference focused on optimizing social relationships in later life, whether romantic, intergenerational, or sexual.

Additionally, students were engaged in coordinating facility training on behavioral health for professionals in nursing homes and home health agencies and were co-evaluators on a program that incorporated behavioral health specialists within publicly subsidized apartments housing older adults. (Graduate) students from various disciplines were co-investigators on the policy briefs that summarized inadequacies in information and referral, housing, transportation, and senior centers within the state and recommended evidence-based remedies to improve them. Further, they searched for and submitted abstracts to appropriate professional meetings for the presentation of age-friendly project findings.

For application to the remaining barriers to age-friendliness, discussed above, our student participatory template is in its embryonic stages. A strategy by which students extend the scope of age-friendly initiatives, currently being explored, hinges on their ability to metaphorically put “new wine in old bottles.” Parker et al. (2013) detail a project in which students interviewed local congregations and senior service agencies concerning service gaps and developed local, state, and national directories of resources available on the internet as well as a prototype of an age-friendly website. In their model, referred to as “town and gown,” no new resources were created, but outreach by students cultivated enhanced partnerships between academic centers, public agencies, and faith-based organizations and amplified the impact of information held separately by each. We are studying concrete ways in which similarly, at our institution, students could help catalyze information sharing among age-friendly stakeholders. Our objective is to regularize the ad hoc arrangements in which community and university partners learn from one another about best practices, are alerted to grant opportunities, such as the AARP’s livability community challenge, and can disseminate to their constituents the availability of free, local, age-friendly venues, such as a Memory Café (which offers interactive and therapeutic activities for individuals with memory loss and their caregivers).

AFCI pioneers (see DeLaTorre, 2014; Glicksman and Ring, 2016) have recommended extending age-friendliness by seeking occasions to inject an age-friendly perspective where it normally might be overlooked. We have attempted this approach both on campus and in the community. At RIC we have noted the growth of administrative entities within the institution focused on stimulating diversity on campus. We have worked to incorporate age-friendliness as a bona fide component of this amplifying focus on inclusiveness. Within the community, our affiliated AFCI has encouraged proposals submitted for local recreation grants to embed healthy aging and universal accessibility elements; similarly, a hospital partner was convinced to sponsor educational programs within senior centers and senior housing. We are searching for other ways to reimagine pedagogy so that student input can add maximum value to services and benefits that already exist. A potential example would be student interns screening for the social needs of older (especially low income) adults in a large hospital system and offering referrals to community resources.

A paradigm shift of tactical economy, espoused by Handler (2018), recommends replacing permanent age-friendly products and designs with more informal, temporary,
flexible procedures. It is a suggestion that parallels the adoption of “pop-up volunteerism” by a major philanthropic organization in Rhode Island, in which service is requested for time-limited, narrow sets of tasks. We are considering how student practica, internships and field experiences could adapt pop-up volunteerism to become more dynamic in efficiently responding to age-friendly needs and interests and to work in concert with, rather than on behalf of, older adults.

Corresponding with the reinvention of active learning and action research by students, a final mechanism through which students promote age-friendliness in community and on the campus concerns intergenerational programs. Older adults may be enticed to participate in age-friendly ventures when they are tapped by younger generations and when the focus is on greater livability for all rather than greater accommodation for only seniors. Emlet and Moceri (2012) assert that elder-friendly communities should enable older adults to both be socially connected and to contribute to their community, with intergenerational programs being the vehicle to achieve meaningful interactions along with social reciprocity. Older adults suffer social exclusion in both their neighborhoods and on college campuses, despite their significant contributions to supporting younger family members, volunteerism and community activism. Intergenerational experiential learning could be key to reversing the exclusion, with active aging outcomes for older adults (e.g. Teater, 2016) and among students, more positive perceptions of older adults (e.g. Penick, Fallshore, & Spencer, 2014) and greater interest working and volunteering with older adults (e.g. Kalisch, Coughlin, Ballard, & Lamson, 2013). Through their ongoing interactions and relationships, students can come to view older adults as people to learn from and with rather than “subjects to be studied” (Zucchero, 2011) while older adults engage in a college-sponsored experience. A new service learning course being launched at Rhode Island College will embrace such an intergenerational orientation in which students would both assist older adults in need but also join with older adults in providing service to the community. It is expected to provide meaningful contact between college students and older adults, promote positive student attitudes about growing old, and facilitate productive aging among older participants in the course.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, institutions of higher education are often partners in age-friendly community initiatives—even assuming leadership roles – without comprehending how their institutions are invariably being transformed by such participation nor examining how their own campuses could be improved by a more intentional adoption of age-friendly principles. We recognized early on in our involvement in an AFCI the synergistic potential for simultaneously working in town and gown to advance age-friendliness. In attempting to overcome the challenges to the age-friendly agenda, which include its sustainability, we discovered a repertoire of short-term tactics and more long-term strategies that utilized student involvement.

Rhode Island College’s approaches to student engagement correspond with the (3) age-friendly university principles to which it adheres. Students have been integrated into gerontological research proposals (e.g. a plan to create a fact book of key indicators of well-being and age-friendliness across the state, with data collected and analyzed by students); their coursework offers understanding of the aging population through direct
interaction with that demographic (being paired up with older adults in service learning courses) or environmental audits of the communities in which older adults live; and they interface with our community partners in vital ways (e.g. assisting in focus groups of older adults for the Division of Elderly Affairs’ preparation of a state plan). As we move towards implementation of other age-friendly university principles, we expect to find additional and novel ways to incorporate students into the processes of improving age-friendliness. The emphasis on student participation guarantees a continually refreshed cadre of low-cost advocates, balances the “top-down” approach of our AFCI with a “bottom-up” network of prospective researchers, evaluators, service providers, and policymakers, and may actually foster, through intergenerational exchange, the increased engagement of older adults in age-friendly work.

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We offer our utmost appreciation to the countless students and older adults who have enabled the State-wide (Rhode Island) and College-wide (Rhode Island College) efforts to enhance age-friendliness bear fruit.

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**References**


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<td>Academic writing as identity-work in higher education: forming a 'professional writing in higher education habitus' (2019)</td>
<td>Studies in Higher Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
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Academic writing as identity-work in higher education: forming a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’

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ABSTRACT
This paper reconceptualises academic writing in HE in order to explore how the symbolic significance and practical importance of academic writing in higher education is a constant presence, despite remaining elusive and difficult to define and/or execute in practice. I apply Bourdieu’s (1985) concept of ‘habitus’ and ‘doxa’ to take an ‘otherwise look’ at how academics gradually develop what I call a ‘professional writing in higher education writing habitus’ which both informs and constrains notions of professional identity in higher education. This ‘professional higher education academic writing habitus’ has multiple dimensions and is shaped by individuals’ writing experiences both within academia (at graduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral level) and beyond. In the paper’s conclusion, I argue that a greater awareness of the tacitness and complexity of practices around academic writing have clear implications for academics wishing to develop a more confident and innovative approach to their own development as academic writers.

KEYWORDS Professional identity; academic literacies; career development; communities of practice; academic acculturation

Introduction

In positioning academic writing as a form of professional identity-work in higher education this paper deploys a broadly postmodern conceptualisation of identity(ies) which reflects Butler’s (1990) key idea that ‘… identity is a signifying practice’ (145). It contends moreover, that individual academics are constantly engaged in the construction and presentation of professional ‘selves’ and identities through the production of academic writing Drawing on Bourdieu, I am going to characterise professional identity-work for academics as a:

[…] struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy, that is, to determine which properties are pertinent, effective and liable to function as capital so as to generate the specific profits guaranteed by the field […] (1984, 11)

I will be arguing that professional academic writing functions as a key ‘property’ determining the conditions and criteria of legitimate membership for academics in the ‘field’ of higher education.

I will also be considering the variations that exist between higher education institutions, which are further divided along disciplinary lines, specialisms and sub-specialisms (and the various Schools and Faculties within each university). Across these various lines of travel I will be arguing that academics’ professional identities are inevitably and constantly constructed and reconstructed.

I will also explore, through my construction of a ‘professional academic writing in higher education habitus’ how academics’ professional, work-based writing identities can also be understood as part of a wider ‘lived complexity’ (Sucharov 1994), which cannot be separated from their other personal, social and cultural identities through membership of other communities which change as their
careers progress (Archer 2008). Nor can one ignore how individual academic identities further intersect with class, ethnicity and gender affiliations. Indeed, Clegg (2008) describes how academics’ highly differentiated academic writing identities are not a fixed property [they are] part of the lived complexity of a person’s project and their ways of being in those sites which are constituted as being part of the academic environment [...]. (329)

In addition, individual academics’ roles and responsibilities may change substantially over time resulting in ‘shape-shifting portfolio’ professionals (Gee 1999) who develop ‘boundaryless careers’ (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). All of which means that far from being a smooth, progressive trajectory towards a fixed professional status, professional academic identities are perhaps best understood as part of a constant process of professional ‘becoming’ and/or ‘unbecoming’. Using these terms Colley and James (2005) illustrate the extent to which individuals in the Academy experience the process of developing an academic identity as a ‘disrupted’ process, characterised by ontological uncertainty and feelings of inauthenticity. Similarly, Leathwood and Read (2009) in her study of female further education lecturers, describes professional identities as ‘fluid, shifting and constructed through difference and exclusions’ (391). So that:

[…] the meanings associated with ‘being’ an academic and what constitutes ‘academic work’ are always in process. (Archer 2008, 385)

Within all this complexity, as I discuss in the next section, dominant higher education writing conventions and the communities of practice that they support, frame and inform academics’ individual experiences of academic writing and their induction into and construction of legitimated professional writing identities.

**In what ways does academic writing inform professional identities and capital in higher education?**

(1). This paper contends that there is an important, if often unrecognised link, between academic writing and professional identity and capital in higher education. This is because academic writing is one of the principle means by which academics enact professional capital as experts and specialists in their disciplinary fields. I also consider the extent to which professional writing identities are nested inside various sectoral, disciplinary and institutional Bourdieusian fields, creating what I have called a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ which both informs and performs their professional capital. However, I also acknowledge that professional academic writing, as an elevated form of ‘writtenness’ (Turner 2018) appears much more stable than it actually is. This is because the operation of higher education linguistic capital can be usefully defined, like any form of capital, as a:

[...] configuration of positions comprising agents (individuals, groups of actors or institutions) struggling to maximize their position [...]. (Maton 2008, 698)

An examination of the functions of professional academic writing in higher education can usefully involve, therefore, an exploration of how they underpin ‘the configuration of positions’ on offer to academics in their professional lives. For this reason, my examination of academic writing identities is less about personal or professional writing preferences or choices and more about the different subject positions that are available for individuals to take up within higher education’s dominant institutional discourses and disciplinary communities of academic writing practices (Kendall and Wickham 1999, 54). (1) To this end, I extend Reay’s (2004) idea of an ‘operationalised habitus’ to specifically explore how, over time, disciplinary-congruent academic writing practices in higher education accrete and shape academics’ professional writing identities in various and complicating ways.

Academics are ‘worker(s) in the knowledge economy’ (Ball 2013, 120) and their academic ‘knowledges’ are largely presented for wider consumption through professional academic writing practices
and the resultant artefacts of their trade. Even the act of speaking as an academic is bolstered, either explicitly, by reference to written notes at the point of speaking, or implicitly through the status conferred on extempore utterances which are subsequently legitimated through a body of written, published work. The context of this research is therefore, in many ways, mundane because it concerns itself with academic writing practices, which constitute, along with academic reading, much of the core, day-to-day work of professional academics in higher education. It also important to acknowledge that professional academic writing is also central to academics’ relationship to the Research Evaluation Framework (REF), as many of them are under great pressure to get published by the very competitive, heirarchised academic publishing industry.

Higher education is, therefore, saturated in academic writing practices which facilitate the core business of higher education, that is, processes of academic knowledge production and exchange. Academics are expected to endlessly read, analyse, assess and compare written texts, such as reports, academic papers and books, undergraduate assignments, postgraduate dissertations and doctorates. They also produce written teaching materials and textbooks for student consumption along with research reports, monographs, articles and textbooks for publication. This perpetual production and consumption of texts, along with an adherence to systematic protocols around peer-review and observance of conventions governing the use of quotations, citations and bibliographies are all clear manifestations of the ways in which higher education academic writing practices are constantly re-inscripted through an inexhaustible exchange of knowledges mediated via constant interactions between academics with academic writing artefacts of one kind or another.

Discourses informing academic writing and the practices that emerge out of them are treated throughout this paper as a productive, rhizomic muddle, mess or ‘entanglement’ (Barad 2007), in which academics, as groups and individuals, are enmeshed in myriad ways. Material things and processes involved in academic writing in higher education, such as written texts, and writing practices, are also constantly inter and intra-acting with academics as part of their everyday working lives. It is through this rhizomic muddle, mess and the resultant entanglements that academics’ professional identities are formed/informed, amongst other aspects of their working lives, by what I am calling a ‘professional higher education writing habitus’. (2). My identification of this ‘professional higher education writing habitus’ arose initially out of primary research conducted as part of my doctoral thesis. In brief, I carried out a small qualitative survey with self-selecting teaching staff (32) in one Education Faculty in a post-1992 university who responded to an open online elicitation to discuss their academic writing experiences since their time as undergraduates.

The status of higher education academic writing

Through higher education academic writing practices academics ‘distribute, transmit and evaluate’ their educational knowledge within distinct social power relations, so that:

[...] to a greater or lesser extent they, [academic writing practices] are involved in educating people [academics and those outside of academia] about the sociolinguistic order they live in. (Fairclough 1995, 220)

(3). To understand the extent to which academics’ professional identity and capital are informed by the ‘sociolinguistic order’ of their academic writing within the Academy I invoke Bourdieu’s (1984) idea that one of higher education’s most important social regulatory functions is to reproduce cultural and economic power. Specifically, Bourdieu argued that higher education achieved this through the production of privileged forms of what he termed ‘linguistic capital’ (1977). According to Bourdieu’s 1977 paper, ‘The economics of linguistic exchange’, linguistic capital is denoted by the authority, confidence and prestige accorded to high-status language users when they speak or write. Individuals with ‘high’ linguistic capital therefore, have authority and can ‘command’ particular readings of their utterances. Higher education academic writing practices are clearly demarcated in society as one such exclusive ‘linguistic field’, a distinction which can nonetheless accommodate numerous disciplinary differences (Maton 2008). Therefore, the link between the development of
an academic’s professional identity and capital and their production of disciplinary-based academic writing functions as a direct manifestation of the power of linguistic capital.

Moreover, Bourdieu and Waquant (1992) state that the production of high-status forms of academic literacy, such as the doctoral thesis, edited book collections, monographs and academic journal articles, embody cultural as well as linguistic capital, which for academics, denotes high professional status within the Academy and beyond in wider society. Sullivan (2001), drawing on Bourdieu and Waquant’s work further defined linguistic capital as, ‘the ability to understand and use “educated” language’ (893). This function can clearly be seen in action with regard to elevated professional academic positions, such as Reader or Professor, which usually require applicants to evidence, through peer-review of one sort or another, a sustained ability to write at an advanced academic level within their disciplinary field. One can, therefore, characterise academic writing as a privileged and exclusive linguistic form, which signifies not only the high status of the institution from which it emanates and the inferred ‘learnedness’ of the academic producing it, but also the educatedness (potential or otherwise) of the intended audience who consume it.

The high stakes attached to higher education academic writing make it especially sensitive to claims and counterclaims with regard to the authentication and legitimation of what is ‘good’ or simply acceptable academic writing. To show how academics develop and maintain, for themselves and their students, ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ higher education academic writing identities I have adapted and combined Cummins’ ‘Academic Expertise Framework’ (2009) and Polanyi’s (1966) notion of ‘tacit spaces’ (see Figure 1 below) to help explain how the interconnectedness that characterises a professional academic writing habitus develops though everyday work practices in higher education. The resulting hybrid illustrates how the development of particular academic writing practices are mediated, not only at a macro level, through contact with institutional signifiers, such as ‘graduateness’ (for students) and ‘professional expertise’ (for academics); but at a micro level, through the constant interactions and interplay between colleagues, students and texts within the Academy.

Figure 1. Adapted version of Cummins (2009) and Polanyi (1966) in French (2014).
I also use my adaptation to analyse the extent to which this mediation of professional identity through academic writing practices and conventions creates opportunities for professional academic ‘identity negotiation and identity investment’ (264) as individual’s become educated and/or embark on a career educating others and developing their academic writing.

With its emphasis on the interplay between discourse, power and interpersonal spaces where disciplinary knowledges are generated and professional academic identities are negotiated, Cummins' framework helps elucidate the ways in which higher education academics are rhizomically positioned and subsequently empowered or disempowered by their relationship to the academic writing practices and texts that mediate their micro-interactions and movement through inter-personal spaces in higher education.

These macro and micro interactions around academic writing practices inform the ‘professional higher education academic writing habitus’ discussed below which over time help to develop and support quite distinct professional writing identities over the course of academics’ working lives.

Conceptualisations of academic writing in higher education

It is relatively straightforward to identify certain desired and/or technically accurate features of formal academic writing involving syntax, spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, actually understanding and articulating what constitutes ‘good academic writing’ in higher education, both within and across academic disciplines, at any level and for any purpose (for example, assessing summative assignments for undergraduates or peer reviewing for an academic journal) is notoriously difficult (Street 2005; Lillis 2001; Ivanic and Lea 2006; Turner 2018). This is largely due to its essentially abstract and situated nature. (5). My analysis of the qualitative data collected as part of my thesis (which focused on lecturers’ perceptions of academic writing in higher education) reinforced my belief that identifying ‘good’ academic writing, in any given context, is always a complex, fluid and potentially contested process. This realisation in turn encouraged me to develop a rhizomic model of a ‘professional higher education writing habitus’, which aimed to conceptualise how academics’ professional identities are formed and recognised through the production of different kinds of professional academic writing.

Initially, in order to try and capture the complexity and multiplicity of academic writing practices which constitute my notion of a ‘professional writing in higher education writing habitus’, I contrast traditional ideas about academic writing with an alternative conceptualisation, which draws heavily on Street (1984) and the whole New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement that his work helped to create. (6). Most significantly for my research, NLS established that language was not just a neutral technology of communication. Important NLS researchers like Barton and Hamilton (1998); Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanic (2000); Gee (1996) and Street (1984, 1995) all helped replace the concept of ‘literacy’ with ‘literacies’. Moreover, they insisted that it was incorrect and potentially damaging to treat literacy as the product of a unitary, autonomous skill set that could be taught or learned independently of its context of use.

The traditional conceptualisations of academic writing outlined on the left hand side of Figure 2 below reflects the broadly utilitarian, technicist model of academic writing that prevails in higher education. Furthermore, it explains why many academics develop particular and predictable orientations towards their own and their students’ academic writing (Ivanic and Lea 2006).

Conversely, the problematised conceptualisation of academic writing in Figure 2 destabilises traditional ideas about the value and quality of academic writing in higher education. Problematising or reconceptualising academic writing in this way means it can be viewed, like other social practices in higher education, as part:

[... of a domain [... ] framed by its culture. Their meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members. [Such] activities thus cohere in a way that is, in theory, if not always in practice, accessible to members who move within the social framework. These coherent, meaningful,
and purposeful activities are [...] most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture. (Seely-Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989, 1)

Street (1984) also used this kind of situated conceptualisation of writing as a social practice to propose an alternative social, ‘ideological’ model of literacy which:

 [...] offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This [ideological] model starts from different premises than the autonomous model – it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill [...]. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being. (Street 1984, 7-8)

This more situated, ‘culturally sensitive view of literacy practices’ makes it possible to connect undergraduate academic writing development to the formation of a later distinct professional higher education identity. For example, I have argued elsewhere (French 2014, 2017) that successful undergraduate academic writing in higher education involves, not only the performance of disciplinary knowledge production and exchange, but a requirement to present what I have called specific ‘disciplinary-congruent academic writing’ through the writing practices adopted in doing so. Internalising this interconnection between the earliest successful undergraduate academic writing and the creation of a positive academic identity is, I would argue, the first step in the creation of a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ that carries some high-performing undergraduates onwards to a career as professional academics. In the next section, I explore how this link between writing and identity can be theorised through the work of Bourdieu.

**Mobilising habitus and doxa: developing a ‘Writing in a professional higher education habitus’**

(7). Having established the link between the professional identity and capital in higher education and academic writing, I now seek to show how Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa and habitus help to understand how and why professional academics begin and continue to write in particular ways within their given academic settings and discourses. Habitus, doxa and the notion of rhizomic modelling are mobilised in this paper to represent how individual ‘life-wide’ social and historical experiences of academic writing practices work together to develop an evolving ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ as outlined in the rhizomic map below (Figure 3). This specific adaptation and conflation of Bourdieusian and Deleuzian concepts seeks to reconcile, as I go on to discuss, both the constraints and possibilities experienced by higher education academics as they seek to establish themselves professionally through various writing practices as lecturers, researcher and experts.
Habitus, in its broadest sense, was characterised by Bourdieu in *The State Nobility* as

A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or a particular section of that world – a field – which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu 1996, 81)

Habitus is therefore constituted by everyday social interactions and practices within a given social field. Academic writing and wider professional choices in Academia take place within Bourdieusian fields, for example, institutional settings and disciplinary networks, which constitute, for the individuals who move within and across them:

… a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value … (Bourdieu, in Wacquant 1989, 44)

Doxa, another term coined by Bourdieu in 1977, is used to describe the wider tacit agreements and unspoken understandings which underpin accepted or expected behaviours or practices in any given social context so that it:

… provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility. (Bourdieu 1977, 60)

Doxa, in this paper, is used specifically to explore how an individual academic’s personally felt beliefs, values and everyday practice, are unconsciously influenced or informed by wider dominant disciplinary, institutional and social discourses. This means that I have looked to the uses and practices of academic writing:

… with an eye to the ways in which historical and social forces have shaped a person’s ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ and thus impinge upon that person’s actions in the moment …. (Bartlett and Holland 2002, 6)

This concept of a ‘person’s action in the moment’ is important as it is a reminder that habitus and doxa are not is not fixed things, they can and will change over time according to an individual’s experiences and surroundings.

What is interesting is that doxa often remains at an unconscious level ‘unless disturbed by events that cause self-questioning’ (Reay 2004, 369). However, if doxa is disturbed it can cause individuals to
begin to question or resist the norms or expectations that characterise their social environment or their place within it. This paper seeks to re-present academics’ ‘familiar universe’ of higher education academic writing development by representing it rhizomically as a form of habitus, rather than a smooth arc of growing competence and confidence. This allows one to envisage professional academic identity formation through asking questions like:

How well adapted is the individual [academic] to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting? [...] Are structural effects [affecting the production of academic writing] visible within small scale interactions? (Reay 1995, 369)

Figure 3 depicts, in rhizomic form, how an academic professional’s life-long and life-wide experiences of writing as well as the various roles and relationships that they support in higher education, such as; lecturer/student, student/student and academic/publisher, are completely entangled with each other. It is important to note that the rhizome (Figure 2) presents all these experiences, roles and practices on one plane, they are not heirarchised or ranked. Rather, what is significant is their interconnectedness. Moreover, the movement of any one individual across such a rhizomic map will be different and constantly subject, or open to change, as different writing experiences and relationships forge new professional academic writing connections.

The idea of habitus, when viewed as a rhizome like this, requires:

[...] a relational mode of thinking that goes beyond surface empirical practices [...]. (Maton 2008, 61)

(8). Relational in this sense means that the rhizome forces one to think about forms of academic writing in terms of how they are characterised or constituted by the various contextual relations within which individuals experience them (such as disciplinary networks). This is because although the higher education writing events and practices contained in Figure 2 share the same ‘surface empirical practices’, such as correct spelling, grammar and punctuation, they are also wildly different according to how, where and why they are experienced. Individual researchers, lecturers, academic writers and writing developers in higher education are always, therefore, feeding into and drawing on a whole range of writing practices. Some may be very distant, for example, childhood writing experiences, where one may have learned to write in a particular way for an exam, or have simply written stories for pleasure. However, experiences in adult life might mean one acquires other, distinct non-academic literacies through different forms of employment or participation in leisure activities. Whatever paths one takes, however:

[...] no two individual [writing] histories are identical and no two individual [writing] habituses are identical. (Bourdieu 1990, 46)

This diversity might give the impression that at every stage and in every aspect of academic life (as in any sphere of life) there is endless choice. However, in education, as in life, Bourdieu argued that pre-existing fields of activity sustain rules and/or taken-for-granted practices, like academic writing in higher education, that are imposed (without necessarily being explicitly stated) and which constrain those who seek to engage with them. The data collected from academics in my thesis, moreover, suggested that in higher education disciplinary fields structure professional academic writing practices by defining, albeit artificially, the range of possible and acceptable actions and behaviours available to those writing within them (Grenfell 2004). Bourdieu (1984) also explored how reification of social practices, like academic writing, can render them invisible and somewhat inevitable as alternative ways of doing things or thinking become ‘obscured by the realities of ordinary sense-experience’ (22). (9) Reification, in this way, helps explain, for example, the ‘discourse of transparency’ around academic writing practices identified by Lillis and Turner (2001). Such transparency is the result of the slow, often unconscious, acculturation of most academics into their disciplinary-based academic writing practices. The resulting ‘taken for grantedness’ around academic writing causes many academics to struggle to define what they actually mean by ‘good academic writing’. This is because they have internalised the conventions that they expect to see in students’ work to the extent
that they no longer see them as learned conventions they simply embody what ‘good writing’ self-evidently is.

Bourdieu (1985) also asserts that habitus does not mean that individual attitudes and behaviours are wholly predetermined by the established discourses and practices that characterise the fields within which they operate. Rather, he described how ‘choices’ can be viewed more productively as the product of a ‘system of dispositions’ (1990, 45) which emerge out of an individual’s participation in and exposure to a range of social settings and discursive ‘fields’ across their life-span. These dispositions, moreover, are characterised by a:

[…] vagueness … the more-or-less, which define(s) one’s ordinary relation to the world. (1990, 54)

Which is to say that they can exist as a set of external rules, assumptions and expectations, whilst being simultaneously internalised, and experienced as natural and given. Within Bourdieu’s theory of dispositions there are, even within identifiable fields of action, potentially limitless individual:

[…] possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions …. (1990, 54)

However, Reay’s (2004) operationalised take on habitus suggests that it actually functions to exclude some practices, or forms of practice, within a given field, as unthinkable (even though they may be entirely possible), whilst, at the same time, predisposing individuals towards other ‘certain, predictable ways of behaving’ (2004, 432). Similarly, Nash’s school-based research into attainment (2002) suggests ways in which habitus creates a particular ‘state of mind’ for educators, which is made up of ‘effective dispositions’ (46) that feel right within their wider educational framework or doxa in which they are working. As Reay (2004) points out, therefore, the choices any individual makes are often taken within:

[…] an internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable. (434)

As an example of how such an internalised framework can develop through the auspices of a ‘writing in higher education habitus’ one can consider how undergraduate writing for education purposes is inevitably framed and informed by the (often tacit) requirements of the discipline, which exert a primary regulatory function on their writing. However, and somewhat paradoxically, despite the disciplinary-congruent expectations which inform many undergraduate assessments, students are often told that they should be developing their own ‘academic voice’ (Lillis and Turner 2001). This kind of contradiction persists throughout any professional academic’s career, whether it be writing a doctoral thesis or responding to the request for revisions for a peer-reviewed journal. In this way, I argue that individuals, at any stage in academia never chose to write in a particular way for academic purposes, rather their academic writing can be seen as arising out of a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’, which itself is a:

[…] complex, internalized core from which everyday experiences emanates. (Reay 2004, 435)

which potentially create endless opportunities for what Reay (2004) calls:

[…] adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to ‘the way the world is’. (437)

However, as I explore in the next section, there is always potential for struggle around academics engagement with academic writing, not only due to the essential instability of writing as a process, but because of the ongoing tensions that exist between individual habitus disciplinary networks and communities of practice in higher education.

Communities of practice and disciplinary networks and their contribution to a professional academic writing habitus

Bourdieusian concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ are a useful way of exploring the influence of communities of practice, such as disciplinary networks, on the formation of professional academic writing...
identities within a rhizomic ‘habitus’ model. In their professional writing careers academics are constantly positioning their writing in relation to other, more established writers in their field, who themselves exemplify various theoretical and aesthetic writing identities through their careers (and who fall in and out of fashion). It was certainly the case that the participants who contributed to my thesis on lecturer’s perception of academic writing were very aware that they had to find their place amongst influential past and current members of their disciplinary-based networks and the academic writing communities which they supported.

Moreover, feeling that one belongs to and can contribute to one’s disciplinary network (or ‘field of action’) is a crucial component in novice academics’ belief that they are developing into ‘real’ academics (or not) (Lea 2005; Gourlay 2009, 2011; Leathwood and Read 2009). This sense of belonging as a professional writer in the Academy is linked to the abiding and complex relationship that I have discussed previously in this paper between the production of what is considered to be appropriate academic writing (by one’s tutors or peers) and the formulation of a positive professional academic identity. It is the nature of disciplinary networks and communities of practice to influence the academic reading undertaken in any subject area from students’ undergraduate days onwards. This is important because disciplinary reading informs, even if it is only in oppositionary terms, the kind of academic writing professional academics are required and expected to produce as recognised members of a particular disciplinary network or community of practice.

Like the academic literacies model outlined for students (Street 2004) it is clear that, in practice, academics usually end up, often haphazardly ‘socialising themselves’, with greater or lesser degrees of success, into an appropriate professional writing identity through their membership of various disciplinary networks and communities of practice over the course of their career. Moreover, individual academics may identify with particular professional communities, whilst their membership of such communities will be reinforced or marginalised through other social/cultural fields that they feel they belong to, or are excluded from, through say their sexuality, gender or political affiliation.

Academics usual, rather uneven progress within their disciplinary can be explained in part through Warhurst’s (2008) critiques how the development of educational professionals in higher education has often been unproblematically theorised through the concept of apprentice/master or communities of practice. He points out that communities of practice are characterised by different kinds of members and forms of membership with permeable and shifting boundaries and competing, as well as complementary, practices. Wenger (1998), moreover, acknowledges that individuals are always simultaneously members of a number of practice communities and that they always bring their prior experiences of community membership to each new community of practice that they join. Similarly, membership of a new community will modify previous learning experiences. Wenger (1998) writes:

[… we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves, and gain different perspectives. (159)]

Relationships between members in any community of practice are, therefore, never straightforward and always mutable. They often shift and need to take account of factors such as new hierarchies, emerging identities and changing relationships, which can all affect members differently as they join and leave different communities. For example, in higher education, students often ‘buddy up’ either formally or informally and help each other cope with the higher education experience. Whilst academics, who are often involved in their own research and professional development, simultaneously operate in higher education as teachers and learners, mentors and mentees. Each of these roles empowers or disempowers individuals, affecting professional relationships between them within communities of practice.

However, even when taking into account the shifting complexity of communities of practice it can be argued dominant academic writing discourses (embodied by different disciplinary fields) expedite the formation of a recognisable professional academic writing habitus for individual academics. That is to say, the disciplinary-based academic writing practices and the forms of legitimated writing that
they facilitate are largely contingent on the established conventions of the communities of practice legitimising their forms of production. One could therefore argue that membership of communities of practice and disciplinary networks function as a self-affirming, self-regulating, ultimately conservative force within the Academy, whilst professional academic writers emerge as the product of a self-referential and mutually reinforcing ‘professional higher education writing habitus’. Paradoxically, this occurs despite the fact that the most highly-regarded academic writing is usually presented as the supreme conduit for individualised intellectual understanding and expression.

These tensions, between individual academics and the professional groups (formal and informal) they are members mean that professional writing identities, like other aspects of professional academic identity such as teaching or supervising, are continually being made and re-made through a process of negotiation and struggle conducted at the level of action within in the field.

This means that it is difficult to claim a:

[...] unidirectional movement of novices from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership of a community of practice [...] (Colley and James 2005, 1)

instead, as this paper has suggested, the movement is more rhizomic, embracing the potentiality of each academic’s disciplinary academic writing experiences, professional opportunities and personal inclinations.

Conclusions
This paper has drawn attention to the extent to which professional academic writing practices inform and legitimate professional academic writing identities which are mediated and sustained though the development of a distinct a ‘professional higher education academic writing habitus’. I have tried to connect professional academic writing practices and the notion of doxa and habitus to a broadly postmodern theoretical framework about identity-formation and professionalism for academics in higher education. In doing so I have drawn attention to the extent to which disciplinary-congruent professional academic writing communities in higher education are often very conservative, encouraging compliance rather than fostering challenge and innovation, especially from new lecturers, such as those studied by Archer (2008). Moreover, the fact that conferment or assumption of a professional academic identity (by one’s peers) is usually dependent on an individual’s academic writing credentials, reinforces the idea, explored throughout this paper, that the reproduction of dominant academic writing practices are central to what it means to be a professional academic. Correspondingly, the formation of a positive academic /professional identity is partially, but crucially created and sustained through the development of what I have called a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’.

This paper has suggested that individual academic writing and writing development practices can be theorised as products of a broad ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ which can be viewed in the same way as Bourdieu’s notion of a ‘schooled’ or ‘cultured habitus’. All are structured and restructured by an individual academic’s historical experience of writing in and for disciplinary fields and educational settings encountered throughout their professional academic careers. Conscious knowledge of the doxa of higher education, its dominant discourses and the power relations that they underpin has implications, therefore, for the ease, or not, with which a successful ‘professional higher education writing habitus’ might be formed.

For this reason, this paper concludes that professional academics, would benefit (like students, who also often struggle with understanding what academic writing in their discipline actually is, or is for) from a greater critical, theoretical awareness of the ways in which academic writing experiences and expectations inform their professional identity. This awareness is important as it potentially opens up a space for individuals to consciously expand their professional academic writing habitus, to move more nomadically across the rhizomic landscape they inhabit as professional writers in order to explore more innovative, variegated forms of professional academic writing. This, in turn, could
diversify and invigorate the idea of what it means to be a successful professional academic writer in higher education.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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PhD by Publication – Panacea or Paralysis?

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Abstract

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by publication is gaining impetus as a format of doctoral output both nationally and abroad. This format has become the norm in some countries and within some disciplines. As more African institutions are considering formalising this format through institutional policy and practice, it becomes necessary to consider whether the format can act as the panacea to the ills of high doctoral dropout rates; low and slow doctoral throughput rates; and the academic isolation doctoral candidates may experience. This article, however, also asks the question whether a format could and should precede the function of the PhD, namely, that of developing responsible scholars. If institutional and supervisory imperatives are given precedence over students’ interests – thus if form does not follow function – the PhD by publication may mean academic paralysis for the doctoral candidate. It is against this background that a reflective, first-hand account of the PhD by publication is provided.

Keywords: doctoral education; PhD by publication

Introduction

The PhD by publication has gained impetus as a form of doctoral production. In this article, I argue that it is necessary first to consider the nature and purpose of the PhD before determining its form – form follows function, if I may borrow the phrase from the American architect Louis Sullivan (1896). Only after determining the function of the PhD does it seem prudent to deliberate on formats that serve the purpose thereof. The origins of the term Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) can be traced back to the ancient Greek

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1 I use the terms PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) and doctorate (the more general term) interchangeably in this article, even though the latter term may include multiple forms and programme structures not relevant to the typical PhD.
words *philos*, referring to a form of love, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom. Therefore, philosophy implies a love of wisdom, and a philosopher can be described as a lover of wisdom. Barnacle (2005) describes the essence of a doctorate as a perpetual desire and search for wisdom. The term “wisdom” in itself entails more than mere knowledge; it refers to a comprehensive understanding of knowledge, sound judgement, and insight. A doctor of philosophy is therefore more than a mechanic of knowledge, but rather someone who can work independently as a researcher; can judge knowledge; and can advise with insight. Barnacle’s (2005) argument that the doctorate sees the candidate transform from a scholarship student into a responsible scholar who can advise with wisdom therefore holds. A responsible scholar forms part of a scholarly community and the initiation into this community primarily takes place through doctoral studies. It would therefore be possible to argue that a PhD by publication as a form follows the functions of developing expert, responsible scholars and integrating them into the discourse of the disciplinary community, a notion which is supported by Breimer and Mikhailidis (1991). As such, the PhD by publication has become the norm in many countries, particularly in the Global North, and specifically within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

However, the forces that have driven the push to publish have not always originated from the noble intention of developing responsible scholars. The various national and international trends that have influenced the drive towards early publication are often managerial in nature – as becomes evident from the work of leading thinkers, such as Giroux (2014) and Altbach (2012; 2013). Adherence to quality assurance mechanisms characterised by an increased pressure for accountability, appraisal, excellence, effectiveness and efficiency aimed at curbing high dropout rates and addressing slow and low completion rates at the PhD level underlie many policies and practices supporting doctoral publication. In the South African context, the role of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) and the national subsidy and funding formulas as key strategic directives in propagating this form of the PhD are noteworthy. In addition, reports that South Africa produces relatively few doctorates; that active researchers are ageing; and that research continues to be an elitist activity amidst the existence of some well-resourced universities (ASSAf 2010; Backhouse 2008; Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015), act as catalysts in speeding up the so-called “production of PhDs” – including the PhD by publication. However, what is often not explicit in these national debates is whose interests are primarily served by publishing during the PhD – institutional stature and ranking, the supervisor’s academic credentials, or the student’s scholarly development?

Therefore, in the article I would like to give careful consideration to and provide a balanced view of this phenomenon that is called the “PhD by publication” from a South African point of view. On the one hand, I provide evidence in support of the form – in that it follows the function – but on the other hand, I would like to add a word of
warning – a cautious footnote that we as supervisors need to carefully consider the stakes for which we play, and the stakeholders. In doing so, I draw on the work of national and international scholars and add my own voice that speaks from experience having gone this route myself in achieving my PhD.

**Why Publish?**

The experience of doctoral study for students and supervisors is changing, with increased demands for shorter completion times and more “productivity” during studies – hence the pressure to publish. Universities are furthermore required to show greater accountability as governments and industry expect a return on investment by means of more rapid and public dissemination of research results and the delivery of employment-ready graduates (Boud and Lee 2009). Furthermore, publication holds many potential benefits for the student, supervisor/research team, university, and doctoral education as a whole. Research dissemination through publication schools the candidate in essential scientific communication skills and the publication process that is key to a further academic career. Doctoral students (and their supervisors) may benefit from peer review during the publication process as a form of formative assessment. Eventual publication may serve as an impartial indication (through blind review) of the originality and scientific merit of the work. Publication makes doctoral research work accessible to a wider academic audience beyond the thesis, and such exposure serves to build the scholarly reputation of the candidate, the supervisor(s), the research team (where appropriate), and the university. Publication can serve as a comparable standard of doctoral excellence across disciplines and national systems, which is important given the mobility of doctoral graduates. For these reasons Breimer and Mikhailidis (1991; 1993) and Breimer and Breimer (1995) propose that publication should form an integral part of doctoral education. These trends and arguments have (at least in part) led to two different kinds of doctoral dissertations. Firstly, there is the (more traditional) monograph, which is written as a unified and coherent work, and which is most commonly found in non-laboratory subjects. Secondly, the compilation dissertation has evolved, which comprises a number of papers written during a period of postgraduate training, as well as an introduction to and summary of the papers included.

Recent debates on the scope of the doctorate have raised concerns about whether the doctorate is seen as a representation of a life’s work, or part of a programme of training and a first relatively comprehensive research assignment. In addition, the PhD by publication leads to a consideration of what is seen as knowledge. As such, earlier notions of what counts as knowledge, research, and research training become questioned and contested in this format.

The plethora of recent publications on the PhD by publication – ranging from self-help instruction to more scholarly contributions – clearly indicates that the PhD via...
publication has become a hot topic in academe across the globe. In most European and Scandic countries the PhD as a publication has become the norm. It would be easy to uphold the PhD by publication as a type of gold standard to which students and supervisors alike should aspire – the panacea to the ills of low and slow throughput and publication output. However, Manathunga (2007) challenges the dual assumption of the “always/already” autonomous student and effective supervisor and therefore it has become essential that – above and beyond institutional imperatives – both doctoral students and supervisors are considered to be key stakeholders in the PhD by publication.

**Students and Supervisors as Key Stakeholders in the Publication Chain**

The PhD by publication challenges the traditional status of the PhD dissertation and opens up different routes to attaining a doctorate. And never before has the importance of the student-supervisor relationship come under such scrutiny as in this particular format – putting a light on in (what used to be) a private space (to loosely quote Manathunga 2005). In the traditional dissertation, the supervisor acted as the invisible second author (Paré 2010), but now becomes a visible and literal co-author (in some cases) and a publication broker who mediates reviewer comments (Kamler 2010). The publication route opens up writing to scrutiny, reflection, comparison and review (Murray 2010), highlighting the contributions from both the student and the supervisor. Avoiding shoddy science, inadequate scholarly reasoning and poor academic writing becomes the responsibility of all the authors involved. Therefore, the PhD by publication implies a shift in the power dynamics inherent to the student-supervisor relationship, in which the traditional apprenticeship model of supervision may no longer be appropriate. As an alternative format, the PhD by publication thus demands a different doctoral pedagogy.

While universities often encourage student publishing, they are often not skilful in recognising the pedagogical work necessary to acquaint students (and in some cases supervisors) with the practices of publishing (Aitchison, Kamler and Lee 2010). Paré (2010) warns that rushing publication too early on in the doctoral learning process makes chance taking less likely, thereby reducing the potential for a challenging and transformative rhetorical experience (Paré 2010). Academic writing requires rhetoric (Murray 2010), that is, the art of effective or persuasive writing suited to a particular context. Successful academic writers adopt specific behaviours; develop specific attributes; and build peer relationships around their writing. Contributions to academic debates that are valued (and therefore publishable) are the result of a deep immersion in the discourse of a discipline – what Paré (2010, 33) refers to as “an immersion that happens over time through authentic engagement in an ongoing dialogue, and that happens only when a writer locates herself [sic] in the historical, ideological and intellectual threads of that dialogue”.

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Doctoral students therefore need rhetorical awareness and need to think about the way they write in their disciplines – what Aitchison (2010, 86) refers to as “writing to know and knowing how to write”. However, in a subsequent publication, Aitchison, Catterall, Ross and Burgin (2012) warn that there is still much to learn about student writing. This raises concerns of whether supervisors are equipped to support students adequately through the often tough and demanding publication process.

Ivanic’s (1998) work on writerly identity helps in understanding how students’ writing develops over time. Initially, the autobiographical self takes precedence in students’ writing, where aspects of their history, ideas and beliefs influence their writing and determine the issues they may choose to write about. In developing a scholarly identity, the discoursal self eventually emerges from the autobiographical self. The discoursal self becomes evident when the writer explicitly takes on the practices of the community for whom he/she is writing and adopts the style, genre and citation conventions of a discipline. But in order for work to be publishable, the writer needs to progress further to the authorial self, where there is a degree of authoritativeness in his/her writing. The authorial self becomes evident when a writer is able to make strong claims calling on appropriate evidence to position him/herself as an expert and a credible knower – that which is often referred to as the scholarly voice. Thus, being eloquent in an epistemic community requires more than knowing lots of things, the student needs to know how to think about those things (Lin and Cranton 2005). This eloquence requires the acquisition of both formal (knowing that) and informal (knowing how) knowledge (Lovitts 2005). Both such formal and informal knowledge are essential in succeeding to publish scholarly work, but neither is easily developed, which raises questions on whether all students are equally prepared and suited to publish during their doctorate.

Remenyi and Money (2004) cite a variety of reasons why writing a publishable paper is so difficult and why much scientific work is never published. Many of these reasons can also be translated into the Southern African context. Of course it is easy to lay the blame at the feet of un-prepared or under-prepared students, and this may indeed be a contributing factor as the abovementioned source attests. The burdens of students who not only have to master the dialect of science, but also do so in a second or third language, cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the realities of many doctoral students demand that they complete their studies part time, and they may not be employed in academe nor have aspirations to join the academic ranks. Such students may not understand what is required for their work to be publishable and they may have little need or motivation to publish their work in scholarly journals. Students may furthermore have unrealistic expectations, ambitions or targets, or are unable to know when to stop toiling over a text. Other students may have a fear of failure, and publication adds yet another layer of critique above and beyond that of the supervisor. These students may find it difficult to accept and respond to reviewers’ critique, and – even worse – outright rejection of their work, especially if they are well regarded professionals in their own capacity already.
lack of theoretical knowledge, methodological skills, and/or familiarity with journals in the field could all contribute to making a PhD by publication a tall order. PhD projects themselves may lack the focus and substance necessary for publication, or may be on high-risk topics that are difficult to get published. To be honest, it is difficult to condense a whole dissertation (traditionally a lengthy affair) into an article or a series of articles. Traditional dissertation topics are often too broad, requiring extensive methodologies, impenetrable theoretical frameworks, too many references – all aimed at displaying knowledge, but failing to address the actual dialogue among working scholars (Paré 2010). Add to this complex mix of influences in doing a doctorate at a distance – as is often the case in Southern Africa – it is easy to see why students may be struggling to complete their doctorate, let alone publish from it during the process. Paré’s (2010, 30) caution to “slow the presses” is therefore not unwarranted.

However, emphasising student deficits (or sufficiency) does not provide the whole picture. A PhD by publication requires a pedagogy that supports the publication of doctoral work, which – in turn – requires pedagogues who are engaged in publication activities themselves (Paré 2010). If publication trends (Abrahams, Burke and Mouton 2009; Mouton 2011; Mouton, Boshoff and Tijssen 2006) and supervisory capacity (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015) in the Southern African context are considered, it is obvious that there are limited numbers of potential supervisors who meet this requirement. The contribution of doctoral pedagogies towards building “creative capital” (McWilliam and Dawson 2008, 634) therefore needs to be (re-)considered, particularly in Southern African countries. If there is an institutional imperative and governmental drive to promote the PhD by publication, then not only is a critical appraisal of available supervisory capacity necessary, but also aligned professional development of academic staff. Unfortunately there seem to be few documented and concerted efforts that address the needs of students and their supervisors to create environments that truly nurture doctoral publication within the Southern African context.

Thus far I have painted quite a bleak picture for the future of the PhD by publication in South Africa if I were to focus on the current student and supervisor realities only. The PhD by publication is therefore not the panacea to all doctoral learning, supervision and throughput ills. I also think it is necessary to be realistic and honest about this. However, this does not mean I am arguing against the PhD by publication format in totality. Evidence shows that when pedagogical conditions that foster doctoral publication are created, both students and supervisors may benefit. In a national study among all eight New Zealand public universities, Sutherland, Wilson and Williams (2013) found that early career academics were more likely to be successful in all scholarly facets if they had published during their doctoral studies. Breimer and Mikhailidis (1993) found that candidates in medicine who completed publication-based theses had significantly higher profiles in terms of their key authorship positions. In addition, Aitchison et al. (2012) found that highly successful supervisors in various Australian universities
integrate writing for publication with writing the dissertation by planning a publication programme which dovetails with the dissertation itself. These supervisors sought reviewer comment as an explicit strategy for helping students to develop their academic writing, and in turn, the students benefitted from credentialised feedback. In such cases external peer review is often seen as the ultimate authority (even more so than that of the supervisor) and supervisors benefit from an expanded circle of readers who take on a ghost supervisory role, so to say. The article produced furthermore becomes substantive work for the eventual dissertation. In my own research, I have come across evidence where supervisors in particularly the natural sciences use this format to develop doctoral students’ creativity (Frick 2012). Seen against this background, the PhD by publication seems like a win-win format. So what can be learnt from these examples of good practice? What needs to be put in place to support the PhD by publication? What does a publication-oriented doctoral pedagogy look like?

A Publication-Oriented Doctoral Pedagogy

Seminal authors on the PhD by publication agree that this format requires pedagogical and environmental infrastructure. How does this translate into practice? Paré (2010 33) makes a strong case for the development of language skills (both reading and writing) in order to promote publication during the doctorate – a point well taken given the language diversity of the greater Southern African doctoral cohort. He furthermore rightfully asks whether students are provided with the space and opportunity to fail before they are exposed to the scrutiny of journal editors and reviewers. Ways in which such spaces and opportunities may be created include: doctoral seminars (Lee 2010); writing groups (Aitchison 2010; Paré 2010); writing retreats (Murray 2010); and working paper collections (Casanave 2010). Thus, there is much groundwork to be done before submission, and we as supervisors have the primary responsibility for supporting students throughout this process – from what Paré (2010, 33) calls their initial “textoids” to eventually publishable material.

Lee (2010) identifies eight pedagogical elements that are needed from the onset to support doctoral publication:

- designing the research with separable publishable elements;
- making explicit the theoretical and conceptual learning accomplished through each planned article;
- analysing the data so that it may lead to publishable results;
- actively seeking and selecting journals to target;
- drafting articles with the supervisors’ assistance;
• preparing drafts for presentation at work-in-progress seminars, and debriefing these presentations afterwards;
• responding to reviewers’ comments with the help of the supervisor(s) with a view to resubmitting the article; and
• resubmitting the article.

Thein and Beach (2010) add four supervisory practices that would support such a pedagogical approach. In their view, essential elements of an environment that fosters publication during the doctorate are: mutual engagement from both the student and the supervisor in collaborative research; co-authored research, which provides opportunities for mentoring writing development; reciprocal review and evaluation; and networking. Laboratory-based studies where the whole laboratory community (consisting of master’s and doctoral students, post-doctoral fellows, and one or more supervisors) works on aligned projects are therefore obviously well suited to this format (as is evident in the work of Breimer and Breimer 1995; and Breimer and Mikhailidis 1991; 1993). In the social sciences, researchers often do not have the luxury of such close-knit research micro-communities, thus it may be necessary to start thinking differently about how postgraduate programmes are structured. A recent study at Rhodes University (Boughey 2014) highlighted the benefits in terms of learning gains and throughput for doctoral students in the social sciences who worked on aligned projects and who slotted into a structured support system with regular meetings. Particular formats are therefore not limited to specific disciplines.

I consider myself fortunate to have been part of a PhD by publication process, as I completed my PhD by publication. Given the increasing national and international debates on the topic, I find myself reflecting upon my own experiences in this regard.

My Own Journey towards Publication

In reflecting on my own experience of the PhD by publication, I probably need to provide some background to my doctoral journey. By the time I reached the decision to pursue this format, I had completed two master’s degrees. The first one was in the sciences and the second one, in the field of education, had just been submitted for examination. It was decided in consultation with the examiners, the Dean of Education at the time, and my supervisors, to upgrade the latter to a PhD. Part of the conditions for upgrading from a master’s to a PhD entailed publication. At the time, both upgrading and publication were not well-established processes within the specific faculty and on hindsight it is somewhat difficult to separate these two processes in my particular case.

It was not an easy decision to pave the way in both cases (as this was not a common practice in the specific faculty at the time). There were no guarantees of success – the eventual doctoral product had to be examined by a new examination panel whose task
it was to consider the work on a doctoral level and who might not have been familiar with the PhD by publication format. Had it not been that the initial examiners, the dean and my supervisors encouraged and supported the idea, I would not have considered it as an option. My decision to pursue this route (i.e. not graduating from the master’s programme and starting anew with a doctorate) was rooted mainly in my desire to pursue an academic career and thus I needed to start building an academic profile. Publication formed a core element of this pursuit, and thus the alternative format suited my purposes and plans – a case of form following function. When I now deliberate on whether the publication route is a suitable option for a particular candidate, I consider whether he/she is hungry for it, that is, wanting an academic career definitely adds to the hunger. I was certainly hungry and motivated to make a success of the process.

Looking back, there were definite advantages to the process, but also distinct disadvantages. The advantages included getting feedback on my work from reviewers prior to examination, and refining my contribution accordingly. Having had three articles published and some more in review by the time the dissertation was submitted for examination boosted my confidence during the examination process and particularly the oral examination component. I was furthermore fortunate to have supervisors who made substantial input into my initial work, and then left me to fly solo – a wise pedagogical move, in retrospect. I started out publishing in local journals, and eventually progressed to international publications. The main advantage of my PhD by publication was that the body of work in total, not just the individual publishable units, provided a foundation on which I built my subsequent work and as such launched my scholarly writing into a particular direction. I keep returning to it, finding yet more ideas to pursue – even though the work itself has become somewhat dated. I can also see how my writerly identity has developed during the process, and thereafter. In the initial work I find much more of the discoursal self, with the authorial self emerging more in subsequent work. Keeping this development of voice in mind, I am glad that I was not pushed to publish too early in my own doctoral process.

The disadvantages included the lengthy turnaround time from submission to eventual publication. This could be especially concerning for students for whom the requirements are that their work needs to be published before they can graduate, as was the case in my situation. Being a part-time student aggravated the situation, as reviews did not always arrive at times when I could not give my full attention to them immediately. I was lucky not to receive reviewers’ comments that were too scathing, but I sometimes wonder how I would have reacted had I received feedback in the manner some subsequent submissions were treated in which the reviewers’ comments were not mediated by the editors. When I am asked to review papers, I always remind myself that there may be a doctoral student behind the work. It does not make me less critical, but it influences how I present my critique as I do not want it to cause scholarly paralysis.
If I had to do it again, I would probably take the risk again even though it was a stressful experience and definitely not an easy way out option. If I were to advise current and future students, I would caution them to consider their own motives carefully at first – the function – for pursuing this format, as well as the motives of those advising them. To my mind, the format should follow the function and therefore the student’s interests get priority above the often-vested interests of the supervisor or those of the institution.

Concluding Comments

Thus, considering the PhD by publication as an alternative route to the doctorate opens up the positioning of research education, and the doctorate in particular, to scrutiny. We as supervisors need to ask whether we (and subsequently also our students’ examiners) are not expecting too much of doctoral students following the PhD by publication format. In the words of Mullins and Kiley (2002, 371): “It’s a PhD, not a Nobel Prize.”

The HEQF (SAQA 2012) provides some guidelines on the outcomes expected on completion of the doctorate in general, but as it rightfully leaves room for different programme formats, it does not specifically speak to the PhD by publication. It is up to specific disciplines to determine the parameters of this format of the doctorate. However, such parameters will need to be aligned to the national guidelines and international standards within the different disciplines. Context-specific guidelines such as these may become increasingly important given the mobility and diversity of both students and supervisors, and the increasing internationalisation of research.

If we as supervisors were to agree that the main purpose of the PhD is to transform a scholarship student into a responsible scholar (Lin and Cranton 2005), then we need to ask how we can create opportunities for doctoral students to grow into responsible scholars. If publication is seen as a possible way of reaching this goal, then the question arises, how do we support students’ ability to contribute to the epistemic scholarly debate? In this regard, I have argued that both supervisor and institutional support and buy-in are crucial. Various considerations need to be kept in mind when deciding on a suitable doctoral format. Based upon scholarly literature and my own experience, I have made a case for considering the student’s interests foremost – neither the stature of the institution nor the contribution that possible publications would make to the academic standing of the supervisors. As such, we as supervisors need to consider the ethics underlying this format carefully. To whose benefit would publication primarily be? How is authorship and author order determined and negotiated? A further consideration is whether the nature of the project lends itself to this format and whether the timelines associated with the type of project would either facilitate or hamper completion should a publication format be followed. Are the available supervisors actively publishing in the field themselves so that they may mentor the student towards successful publication in the most suitable journals? Finally, should what journals are interested in publishing
be the directing influence for what counts as doctorateness? Careful consideration is therefore necessary before formalising a particular doctoral format by means of institutional policy, as some students, projects and supervisors may be more suited to particular formats than others. Therefore, the PhD by publication could either be a panacea or mean paralysis. It is necessary to stay true to the nature of the PhD where form needs to follow function – that of developing expert, responsible scholars, who are eloquent in the discourses of their disciplinary communities.

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ABSTRACT
Although there has been considerable debate in contemporary literature on the erosion of the public good in higher education, most of it has been concentrated on the word ‘public’ rather than on the notion of ‘good’. Further, the idea of higher education and the organisations for its delivery have become conflated through a focus on the ‘good’ as inherent, intrinsic, and instrumental. An idea is proposed, that: higher education is intrinsically good; that aspects of its practice are feasibly inherently good; and institutional practices are instrumentally good. These three goods are commonly conflated rather than interwoven in our policymakers’ understanding of the contribution that higher education has for human flourishing and what contribution higher education providers make to the economics of society.

KEYWORDS
Intrinsic; inherent; common good; higher education

In this paper, I investigate the difference between the essential nature of education and its systematic delivery through providers of higher education. I do this using notions of good in terms of what good higher education might be, what might be good pedagogical practice, and what can be expected as good of the practices of an institutional provider. In doing so I draw a distinction between the functionality and corporate nature of the university as a higher education provider with its financial accountability to government and other stakeholders, its educative rather than administrative practices, its ability to facilitate its students’ flourishing, and its contribution in terms of a public good to the wider community. As Barnett states, ‘higher education is both a concept and a complex social institution containing manifold practice’ (2014, p. 21). I want to suggest that higher education as a concept should not be considered as synonymous with universities (as in current UK law) or other formalised institutional providers, and I do so through a discussion of ‘goods’.

Basic premise
The two basic premises of this paper are:
That the contested notions of ‘education’ and what is determined as ‘higher education’, albeit overlapping concepts of flourishing, are different from the institutions devised to provide this education.
That there is a distinction between instrumental good, in that it is a means to achieve some other good, and goods which are good in themselves. In this second group, following Audi, I introduce a nuanced difference within goods in themselves by suggesting there are intrinsic goods which are something that is a permanent and essential characteristic attribute of the thing, and inherent good which belongs as part of the thing while not being one of it salient features.

This paper takes education as a learning process linked to personal development: intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social. It is about flourishing and realising potential within the constraints of context. As a learning process, it brings about change in a person’s thinking and capacity to do things, and helps people to come to terms with doubt. A more detailed definition is both ambiguous and contested (Carr, 2003): it is existential and involves life-changing experiences, and forms of it can be codified in qualifications, as measurable outputs, from the experience of institutional education; but essentially its occurrence is not reliant on qualifications.

The United Kingdom classifies education in a tertiary sequential process, with the first two compulsory cycles concerned with socialisation explored in terms of curriculum, values, and control through assessment, and the third phase higher and further education. Here the dominate discourse, but not exclusive, is skills to realise employment opportunities and enrich the economy. As the Universities Minister states: ‘Higher education is first and foremost education, and not all the benefits of education can or should be captured in future salary’ (2016). Yet, formal definitions of higher education conflate higher education as a term manifest in a credential such as a degree, tying it to the provider that delivers that credential. The 1998 Education Reform Act also defines higher education in Section 120(1) by reference to a list of courses in Schedule 6 of the Act. This is extended in the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act, which defines higher education as ‘education provided by means of higher education courses’ (2017, Section 83(1)). Indeed, Barnett (2017) follows this approach of aligning higher education with the university when he proposes a social philosophy of higher education as the social philosophy of the university.

The difference is surely more subtle than that, for the idea of higher education must precede the formation of courses designed to incorporate it and upon which higher education providers and higher education regulators set their frameworks. Indeed, as Barnett (2014) and Brubacher (1977) reveal, among the shifting conceptions of higher education there is a broad consensus around the underlying nature of higher learning that ‘seems to possess features of complexity, worthwhileness, elusivity and options’ (Barnett, 2014, p. 9). These are seen in the descriptors of the standardised levels of qualification frameworks, and this suggests that higher education is manifest in critical reasoning based on analysis, levels of specific knowledge, and skills of communication, leadership, and cooperation. It can be contextualised in qualifications yet also in ways of being.

Higher education providers are places where the practices of higher education pedagogy are shaped and delivered under the prevailing social and political demands. These practices are therefore tailored to the demands of the context in which higher education is viewed, and change over time. Currently they are foregrounded in consumer logic and employability.
This differs from, and can be contrasted with, the two major concepts of higher education that were promoted in Europe in the late 18th century by Humboldt and Newman. These shaped the institutions of the university, especially up to the point of their massification (Trow, 2010). For Humboldt, the central legacy is a form of personal flourishing or Bildung, a cultural flourishing that became the central Humboldtian principle for the ‘union of teaching through research in the work of individual scholars’. Humboldt wrote:

(We demand that Bildung, wisdom and virtue, as powerfully and universally propagated as possible, should prevail under its aegis, that it augments its inner worth to such an extent that the concept of humanity, if taken from its example alone, would be of a rich and worthy substance. (von Humboldt, 2000, p. 59)

For Newman, the university was a space for self-development and engagement, a process of intrinsic awakening that served society in that it was to develop a notion of common good and be able to question those who wished to totalise debate and discussion. He famously wrote in the Idea of a University:

I protest to you, Gentlemen, that if I had to choose between a so-called University, which dispensed with residence and tutorial superintendence, and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination in a wide range of subjects, and a University which had no professors or examinations at all, but merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years … if I must determine which of the two courses was the most successful in training, moulding, enlarging the mind … which produced better public men, men of the world … I have no hesitation in giving the preference to the university which did nothing, over that which exacted of its members an acquaintance with every science under the sun. (Newman, 1996, p. 105)

Newman draws a distinction between the concept of education and its institutionalisation, and the concerns that this might create. Similar thoughts are found in Oakeshott, who suggests that the graduating student would have ‘acquired some knowledge, and, more important, a certain discipline of mind, a grasp of consequences, a greater command over his power’ (2001, p. 115). He or she would have moved beyond the ‘intellectual hooligan’ and be ‘expected to be able to look for some meaning in the things that have greatly moved mankind’ (Oakeshott, 2001).

This distinction that all three make seems more blurred in the contemporary university, where the narrative, at least of government, is not the importance of the good in and of itself, but an external end, be it economic self-interest, national unity, or subservience to powerful others. I take this description and seek to understand it through the notion of the form of good.

I see higher education and the university (or any other institution which functions to deliver higher education) as two domains—of the university qua institution and qua edifying experience—as separate, even if seen as interacting. If the university presents itself as an investment opportunity, as it does currently, this may lead to certain kinds of practices within the university that privilege goals, such as skills training and CV writing within its curricula, creating a form of codified higher education as a simulacrum for employment and income. To achieve these goals, other institutional functions such as employer engagement, efficient resource allocation, and customer satisfaction reshape the university as a mere actor in a marketplace. Under contemporary conditions,
a degree holder enters a market of credits where education is assessed by a notion of value for money, and this is determined by the external values that these credentials can command. In doing so, the flourishing of the individual is dominated by his or her financial welfare. The university responds to its market by providing a form of institutionalised higher education and aligned practices that enable it to satisfy the demands made upon it. Indeed, it can be argued that its function has, to a greater or lesser extent, always been this, yet the expansion of participation has made it more explicit.

The lens of the good

To investigate the conflation suggested above, I use the notion of ‘good’ as an inherent, intrinsic, instrumental concept, following the distinction made by Audi (2004) in his book *The Good in the Right*. The basic premise of this argument is based on Audi’s distinction of good, applied to higher education as an instrumental good and a good in itself. In this latter category there are two interlinked but separate elements: intrinsic and inherent good. ‘The inherent which are in a sense dependent goods and the intrinsic, which as the proper end of the former are “more final”’ (2004, p. 126). Intrinsic good is good in its own right, and ‘one is commuted to taking it to provide a reason for action’ (2004, p. 130).

If education is an intrinsic good, then one should seek to educate oneself and others as a self-evident good. Inherent good contains intrinsic properties, which are revealed when we ‘appropriately experience’ (2004, p. 128), revealing the good as an educative practice. Thus, goods are not independent of their experience, and so differ from intrinsic good as providing reasons for action. Moore himself distinguishes between the whole and the parts in his principle of organic unities: ‘the value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts’ (2000, p. 79, original italics). Audi suggests that there is a further distinction between values of instrumental good and those which are good in themselves.

Does good in itself have any meaning?

When we say that education is good, we tend to be making an assertion of its intrinsic good and, at the same time, endorsing it as a good for something. Yet, as Reid suggests, asking what education is good for is a conceptual error: it is to treat something that is intrinsically valuable as if it were instrumentally valuable—as if it were good only as a means to some independently specifiable end (1998, pp. 319–340). My concern here is not, however, whether education in itself constitutes moral worth or moral goodness for I accept that it does, but with the state of affairs that makes goodness a thing that is worthy of choice.

Whether we think that higher education is dominantly good for the individual in a sense of prudence and self-interest or in a moral sense of supporting the common good of the community depends on our understandings of good and of higher education, both of which are contested, as we have seen above. Does education have intrinsic good value, such as beauty, truth, and knowledge have, in that this good implies that something that is good gives reason to make it happen? If so, then it is incumbent upon societies and humanity, as the right thing to do, to enable all to benefit from it.
Moreover, it implies that what is intrinsically good is a fitting object of desire and, as Lemos states (2009, p. 9), involves having an adequate idea of something (this is discussed in terms of Audi’s appropriateness). Or, should we consider education or a credentialised form of it good in the sense that it attracts value? If so, then clearly the answer is yes, for its worth in the credentialised form can be measured by external criteria (money, pleasure, power), and the provider of education undertakes this transformative function and tries to sustain the value of so doing.

So, when we say that education is good for an enhanced chance of employment, we imply that we support educative activities that bring rewards first to the individual and then to others; when we say that art is good, we support a more general aesthetic that it is good for all those able to appreciate it; and when we say that education has a common good, we mean that it has an intrinsic value that enhances the good of the community. When we talk of education as a good in this way, we might be endorsing a notion of human flourishing. This meaning is distinct from a goal of economic prosperity and has its meaning not in terms of functionality but as an absolute good, in the same way that justice is good. This is not to deny that other things may be good and that they might be comparatively more significant in certain circumstances or, indeed, that something might have properties of goodness yet not be good. Clearly, good serves a meaningful function when used to describe higher education and its providers, but can we be clear on what it means by clearing some of its ambiguity?

What is good

We might say that the word ‘good’ is semantically entangled. In doing so, we

grasp the meaning of ‘good’ by understanding what would count as an argument for or against something’s being good. And we understand that by understanding, first, that what counts as an argument depends in part on what sort of thing is being evaluated. (Clark, 2002, p. 32)

We might consider this in a person: their type of conduct, an outcome, a character trait, a sensation, a reputation, or an intellect; and understand the relevance of such things that have intrinsic value as patience, fairness, thoughtfulness, and perseverance to the evaluation of character, and so on. In this picture, one can form well-grounded judgements that a person’s character is flawed or sound in some respect, or that a person has acted well or badly on certain occasions.

There is a plethora of other ethical philosophies, but in contemporary literature this issue is chiefly recognised in Moore’s ethical theory of value, which is probably the most influential contemporary axiology of good that has been developed. Moore famously asserts that such goodness is the only reason to justify action for, if it is not good, we are not justified in pursuing it. However, Moore states that: “‘Good’ then, if we mean by it that quality which we assert to belong to a thing, when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition’ (2000, p. 62). It is intrinsically good.

Moore, indeed, is very clear in his Ethics (written after Principia Ethica), where he suggests that good has three potentialities: it can be intrinsically good; it can, to various degrees, be the intrinsic whole of something (that which I assume is best referred to as inherently good); and thirdly it can, to various degrees, be useful through generating
good effects. Moore points to potential for confusion, for we use ‘good’ in all three senses, and often interchangeably. The argument that Moore goes on to make is that things might be wholly or partially intrinsically good and have useful effects, yet might not thus create the distinction that he wishes to highlight. As he succinctly puts it, ‘nothing is commoner than to find people asking of a good thing: what use is it? And concluding that, if it is no use, it cannot be any good’ (Ethics, 2013, p. 117). Yet this utilitarian notion of good as functionality is necessarily dependent on external powers, powers that an educated person, with or without credentials, can question.

Making such judgements is dependent on our norms and the political collectives present, which we assimilate when we are thrown into this world at birth; as we become educated of the world and through which we reveal our potential. To make choices, we need to be able to make these norms explicit and to evaluate what is settled upon as standards in terms of, say, flourishing and well-being. Questioning these norms comes from appreciating what they are and what they stand for. The ability to do this is a contributing factor in being educated, and bears a relationship to higher education. Should flourishing be taken as an endorsed form of those societal norms, it denies autonomy, for we might claim that no system of values can be binding on someone unless they choose to make them so and, to do so, they must have the capability to do so. This point leads me to deny that what is good in terms of flourishing, so defined, is necessarily intrinsically good, notwithstanding that this failure can lead to materially and culturally impoverished lives, yet lives that, when freely chosen and not destructive of others in that they prevent freedom of their choice, are intrinsically good. If this is done, then an intrinsic good that might replace it is an idea of what is good in terms of what one envisions one’s life to be: not as an isolated actor within the flex of society but as a member of any particular society whose intentions are good, benign, and, as such, not evil. These require our educative insights and, in order to bring these to bear, it might be argued that one has to have taken a stance on one’s life. Having taken that stance, an informed, appreciative, notion of what is intrinsically good will motivate one’s agency.

**Goods of higher education**

Making informed choices leads me to how the good might be applied to higher education and, indeed, whether higher education offers or has ever offered anything other than instrumental goods.

Can education be considered outside of the practice that delivers it? Is the intrinsic good not in education but in the flourishing or contentment that it can lead to? For instance, as Ozolin suggests, ‘it is not possible to maintain that education is intrinsically good because it is about the development of the whole person, if it is intrinsically good because it contributes to the growth of business and the economy’ (2013, p. 158). Indeed, this is the essence of education that might be conceived by Newman, Peters or White: that the objective of education is to widen our understanding of the world, to allow one to appreciate it better and to transform the educated person’s perspective of the world.

In these senses, it is feasible to argue that the practice of education is inherently good, for it enables the emergence of the intrinsic values of flourishing and contentment.
through the ‘expansion of the mind’. It does this for the intrinsic good of the self, yet does so in forms that are culturally relevant and so, as such, it is not an intrinsic good in and of itself. Yet it is concerned with the mutually contradictory expectations of self and the others that it allows. Also, educative practices can be applied to activities that are indeed evil, as in the development of criminals, terrorists, and other malfeasants.

One needs to be tighter on the terms applied to education where it is institutional and where there are many forms of the practice that may be associated with education in terms of the structures that it takes. Education, therefore, is not marked only by what might occur at a university or the outcomes of the provider. To this end, the next section considers education as a practice within the constraints of higher education providers.

### Education as an institutional practice

Notwithstanding my earlier comments that higher education is not institution-bound, I want now to consider education when it is, as in the case of higher education providers. Much has been written about the common or public good of higher education, and I do not want to rehearse the argument here or comment on the shifts in focus in educational policy, as this has been done well by others (see Jonathan, 1997; Marginson, 2011; Nixon, 2012; Williams, 2016). The public good, at its best, ‘ties universities into a larger process of democratisation and human development’ (Marginson, 2011, p. 418). This has resonance with Nixon, who suggests that the public good is ‘a common commitment to social justice and equality’ (2012, p. 1). In essence, it alludes to activities that refer to benefits or resources that are accessible to all. In this form, it includes better informed citizens leading to improved democracy and a more inclusive society and knowledge conceived of as an end in itself through participation in HE [higher education] rather than its outcomes’ (Williams, 2016, p. 622).

Defining public goods in this way envisions them as the end products or commodities produced by the higher education sector, while noting that they may be intangible and take either a collective or an individual form. Nixon (2012) considers the goods of higher education as human capability, human reasoning, and human purpose. In this form, education is seen primarily as a means to the production of social or economic capital. Education functionality has no end in itself, other than developing a more economically productive workforce, and risks seeing a public good as no more than the aggregation of self-interest—a neo-liberal and rights-based approach that potentially disavows civic and communal obligation. Indeed, Nixon considers that public good continues to rest on the assumption that strong democratic societies require educated and informed publics that are both inclusive and questioning: ‘Within such societies, knowledge is the most public of all public goods—and education, therefore, is an indispensable resource, the benefits of which cut across a range of public interests and concerns’ (2017, p. 1).

Do institutional practices differ from educational practice within them? And can they enhance the public good as Nixon suggests? To address this, I have selected the not-for-profit part of higher education, as this is voluntarily undertaken, normally by adults, and involves the public as stakeholders and often as funders. Is higher education more than a consumeristic activity intended as a means of improving consumption activity? Is it, or ought it to be, a transformative activity with its own intrinsic
values? Should it seek onto-epistemological change based on learning as an ever-evolving triadic interplay between teachers, learners, and that which calls to be learned? It is best served by academics who care and can be trusted to reach a level of competency that enables them to retain the trust of the public. In this sense, the practice of education, rather than merely teaching, is aligned with MacIntyre’s notion of practice that has good as internal to that form of activity, such as in the ‘enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology’ (2007, p. 187). For MacIntyre, a practice is not just a set of technical skills upon which undesirable central control is hidden in the simulacra of a notion of professional status as may be laid down by institutions, such as universities. For they are ‘characteristically and necessarily concerned with external goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards’ (2007, p. 194). By distinctively aligning practice with internal (intrinsic goods) and institutions with external goods, although this is contested (e.g. Hager, 2011; Smith, 2003), MacIntyre offers us a framework on which to consider the complex notion of value inherent in not just teaching per se but in public higher education. The benefit on the ‘private dimension has both intrinsic and exchange value, and benefit on the public dimension has both inherent and instrumental value’ (Jonathan, 1997, p. 59). However, pressure is being applied by governments for more rigorous managerial controls on teaching, framed in terms of value for money and control of important aspects of educative practice, stealing its intrinsic value due to the ‘acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care of common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution’ (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 194).

For an example, I have searched final policy discussion papers for the word ‘good’ and offered an integration of how it is used. I chose to do this as it allows a comparison of the detailed legal language of law used to codify policy ideas. In the United Kingdom, the paper ‘Success for a Knowledge Economy’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016) sets out a range of reforms to higher education and the research system. In this document, the word ‘good’ is used nine times and, on two occasions, it is used twice in the same section. Its first use concerns ‘good value for students’ (p. 11). The next mention is as a qualifier—the ‘good practice framework’ (p. 24)—and the others ‘good negations’ and ‘good and excellent valuation’ (p. 32), ‘good outcomes of teaching’ and ‘good quality teaching’ (p. 43), ‘a good proxy for student engagement’ and ‘a reward for good performance’, and once negatively, in ‘teaching was not good enough’ (p. 46). In all cases, the word ‘good’ is used as an adjective, and its impact is reliant on the meaning assigned to ‘good’. Higher education as a good, whether private or public, is not mentioned.

As this is an indicative investigation, to expand its reach I have taken two recent Australian government documents: ‘Review of Research Policy and Funding Arrangements—Report’ (November 2015) and ‘Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education’ (May 2016). In the first, ‘good’ is used as an adjective, twice concerning ‘good protocol’ (p. 58), and negatively, referring to metrics ‘not being a good measure of knowledge’ (p. 71). In the second and much smaller report it is used in the same way three times: twice in response to ‘good value for money’ (p. 11) and as ‘a good deal for taxpayers’ (p. 18). Its third mention relates to ‘reducing cost barriers to a good education’ (p. 16).

Indeed, I think that education passes an important test of inherent good in that it exists not only when it is desired but when it is merely present, and that it is regretted when absent. This sense of good makes it desirable, and there is choice over its intrinsic
values: good or bad. If we explore this in a little depth, we are able to suggest that education as an institutionalised practice has the power to enhance private benefit, as well as public. It can be codified within certain curricula and delivered through providers, which can reflect meritocracy as well as privilege. It can be delivered by those who value the interrelatedness of a complex and detailed understanding of their subject at a level that transcends the skills of practice and is contextualised in the knowledges of humanity. This is achieved in forms of pedagogy that go beyond the reality of the inchoation of instrumental understanding to reach levels of enlightenment that, rather than easing the achievement of its commodified private good, see the skill and content of such an instrumental understanding as problematic of the whole purpose of education.

Nevertheless, we still need two issues to be resolved. The first is, what are the bearers of intrinsic value? Can they be abstract as well as concrete, and how can we recognise that aspects of education practice are in such a state of affairs? It may be obvious that the provision of higher education, which has abstract properties of emancipation, justice, and self-independence, might be good in principle, but education only becomes an intrinsic good when there is a state of affairs that exemplifies these properties; that is, people who are more emancipated, have greater social mobility, or are treated more justly. It is in the actual that the intrinsic value resides, not in the abstract imagining of the good, although this may have good-making properties. Thus, to know whether education is an intrinsic good, we need to know what the practice of higher education results in; that is, as Lemos states, ‘that a certain state of affairs obtains’ (2009, p. 20). In this sense, a form of higher education may have intrinsic value, based on the good properties that it advocates, yet the form of higher education practice that it provides may not be so defined.

So, to judge if higher education is intrinsically good, we need to know that those who engage in its practice possess the properties for which we might claim it is intrinsically good. At best, these seem difficult to sustain and, at worst, seem to indicate that the claim applies to individuals. This, of course, opens up questions of alternative provision of these good properties. Again, this does not state that there is no intrinsic good in higher education, even if other activities achieve the intrinsically good properties better, only that a blanket assumption that something desired and worthy but not achieved can have intrinsic value. Indeed, this is of critical importance to those who write on the future of higher education or critique the current state of affairs. I accept that it is feasible to devise an idea or ideal of the university as a state of affairs but, unless feasible and ultimately achievable, the properties themselves cannot be considered as intrinsically good. In this respect, UK higher education, for instance, is yet to show clear evidence that higher education provides this.

However, without such intrinsic values, the notion of education and its attributions as an inherent good is ruptured. This is the case with instruction, unlike education, as no intrinsic values are implied beyond the appropriate social benefits or where educative practices attempt to inchoate a specific way of life. In the first case, any educative practices involved in instruction are morally inactive and are instrumental, and in the second what values exist are intrinsically moribund, requiring the practices to be successfully instrumental, at best, and, at worst, negative for those involved. Society clearly has choices over the form of education that it wants and, as the above example
of public versus private good illustrates, the shift has been toward self-interest. In so doing, it has taken the distinctiveness of educational providers away from a mission of societal support in the ways envisioned by Kant (2005) in the *Conflict of the Faculties*.

**Inherent good, not intrinsic good**

Education as an intrinsic good is difficult to support, as it institutionalises practice, especially when paid for, which interweaves an external purpose whilst retaining an intent of personal transition, and it can enhance one’s own well-being as well as that of others. I want therefore to suggest that higher education is inherently a good, for it cannot be wholly an intrinsic good when it is provided as a means to something else. It may retain properties of good if its intrinsic values are taught to enable an understanding of what society takes as good, in normative terms. Moreover, it retains this inherent notion of good even when it does not promote intrinsic value but is conceived of as offering a good within the domain of normative expectation. It does not encourage the development and accumulation of knowledge for personal use in ways that can causally and directly harm others and, as a secondary consequence of its means to an end, the benefits may diffuse out to others in the longer term. The inherent good of higher education can then be found in its forms of education that constitute its practice—values such as seeking truth, critical reasoning, rationality, and practical judgement, and understanding one’s physicality. Educational practices bring potentiality to actualism in students in ways that require a recognition of the intrinsic value of education and recognition that to achieve them as the end goal there is value (inherent) in practices themselves.

The issues raised above have implications for how higher education providers are funded. Longden and Bélanger (2013) ask, ‘should it be assumed axiomatically that university-level education should be under the direct control, regulation and funding of the State?’ (p. 501). Indeed, if we are unable to establish the intrinsic good of higher education, this seems an important question to ask rather than to allow what is public and private in education to be determined as a political–social construct. Yet, as we fail to conform to the notion of public, the critical goals of education in terms of purpose, ownership, and access return to the elite. The elite have already found a way to enjoy the benefits of a system designed to offer open access through the ability to pay off debt and so not to incur loan interest payments. We need to retain the ever-diminishing notion of non-financial personal flourishing, not the commodification of knowledge and the experience as desire satisfaction, in which there can be little justification for government subsidies. Marginson (2007) makes a strong case for the public nature of knowledge, arguing that ‘private goods depend on public goods nested in the institutional settings where value is created’ (p. 362). But is this what we should hope for from our policymakers?

**Conclusion**

Maassen and Olsen (2007) have argued that the rate of change in higher education policy has accelerated in recent years, and this is having a number of impacts on the public good and the public trust invested in higher education. It seems likely that clarity will need to be sought through discussion of what good higher education has, and
distinctively ask what it creates for society when we discuss the issues of democracy, justice, and freedom in society. We need to recognise and act on the good of higher education and not to be seduced by the dominant policy discourse of personal power, wealth, and pleasure as manifest in institutional providers. It is a question of whether private instrumental goods are allowed to play a dominant and destructive role in the overall institutionalisation of higher education which I have suggested should be a mix of all three forms of good discussed. To conflate them in such discussions as public and private good can mislead debate and decision making.

Notes

1. The opposite, applying to bad values and uses.
2. I have gone further elsewhere and argued that this stance ought to lead to one’s contentment, suggesting that higher education can play a part in this.
3. This raises the issue of the right to education, which I will discuss in another section.
4. MacIntyre also suggests that practices are grounded in their own tradition, so the providers (explicitly universities and farms) must change with them (see 2007, p. 222).

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Paul Gibbs is a professor of the University, founder of the Centre for Education Research and Scholarship, a Distinguished Professor at the Open University in Hong Kong, visiting Professor at the University of Technology, Sydney and visiting Fellow of the Centre for Higher Education Policy, New College, Oxford. He has published four books in the last two years: Transdisciplinary Higher Education; Why Universities Should Seek Happiness and Contentment; The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education; and Transdisciplinary Theory, Practice and Education: The Art of Collaborative Research and Collective Learning. The author has four more books in various stages of production. Professor Gibbs is also Series Editor of Springer Briefs on Key Thinkers in Education and Debating Higher Education: Philosophical Perspectives for Springer Academic Press and Editor-in-Chief of Higher Education Quarterly. He is a founder board member of the Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Association.

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The Development of “Asian Academic Credits” as an Aligned Credit Transfer System in Asian Higher Education

Taiji Hotta

Abstract
During the last two decades, Asian countries have attempted to establish several aligned academic credit systems as part of the harmonization process of their higher education systems. However, these systems have not been widely used among universities in the Asian region. This article analyzes the current trends in credit-related governmental regulations and university systems in 24 Asian countries and territories. Moreover, it asserts the concept of “Asian Academic Credits,” (hereafter, AACs) as a new widely effective aligned system of academic credit transfer within Asia and also with other regionally aligned credit systems in the world. AACs can serve as one of the vital components for a new era of Asian higher education that provides a regionally aligned, flexible, and innovative learning environment for students throughout the entire Asian region.

Keywords
Asia, higher education, regionalization, credit transfer, student mobility

Introduction
In 2017, there were approximately five million students worldwide who studied abroad, a 25% increase since 2012 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] & Institute of Statistics, 2018b). A large portion of

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this population studies in Western nations, especially English-speaking countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Chan, 2012; Daquila & Huang, 2013; Knight, 2013). This is because many international students seek more academically advanced universities. They also try to acquire better educational credentials, including English proficiency, to obtain better job opportunities in both their home and host countries. The Asian region has been a main contributor to this population of five million students. For example, students from the Eastern, Southeastern, and Southern Asian regions under UNESCO’s categories have been regularly contributing about 37% to 38% of these international students and have been responsible for half of the recent one million student increase. Nevertheless, this same region accepts only one-half million students (about 13%) from overseas (UNESCO & Institute of Statistics, 2018a). In fact, only nine out of 25 countries and special administrative regions receive nearly 90% of this half million population who study in the Asian region. These statistics clearly indicate that the flow of international students in Asia and the world is very skewed. One-way flow to academically more advanced nations in Asia as well as the world is still the dominant phenomenon and seems not likely to change in the near future.

However, there is a new trend indicating that countries, traditionally not popular destinations for international students, have begun receiving more international students. In Asia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong are expanding the number of international students on its campuses (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Institute of International Education, 2013; Knight, 2011, 2016; UNESCO, 2013). This is due to the strong motivation of many Asian governments and universities to accept international students for various reasons, including improving their international reputations, reacting to recent population decreases, anticipating economic benefits, and promoting cross-cultural understanding in the region. To attract international and domestic students at home, some governments and universities have concluded new academic exchange agreements, hired foreign professors, and now provide courses taught in English. Others created transnational universities or double, joint and twinning programs with western universities.

Although those efforts were undertaken mainly by universities, governments of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (hereafter, ASEAN) region established the ASEAN Community in 2015 (ASEAN, 2015). As part of this effort, ASEAN nations have planned the “harmonization of higher education,” which attempted to create a regionally aligned credit transfer system (Chan, 2012; Yavaprabhas, 2014). It was due primarily to the positive perception of Europe’s major restructuring of higher education, the “Bologna Process” (de Wit, 2007). However, merely establishing an aligned credit transfer system is not adequate to attract international students to Asian universities. Among ASEAN nations, there are many differences in terms of economic, political, and social factors, including the quality of education.

This situation exists throughout the entire Asian region, as well. Therefore, if Asian nations seek to enhance the attractiveness of their higher education offerings, they must improve not only their educational systems, but also the economic, political, and social conditions in all member states (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Chan, 2012). If those
basic conditions improve along with the development of an aligned credit transfer system, universities will be able to compare, contrast, and understand the differences as well as similarities among their educational offerings. Thus, they can establish mutually trusted relationships among universities, governments, and even with industries. Consequently, students can acquire more globally attractive educational qualifications and credentials by studying in different nations and programs in the Asian region and earn academic degrees from traditional and even transnational universities more easily.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the feasibility of developing an aligned academic credit transfer system in the Asian region and to introduce the concept of Asian Academic Credits (hereafter, AACs), which defines one academic credit as representing a student workload of between 38 and 48 hr, including 13 to 16 hr of academic instruction. If all universities in Asia adopt this concept, it will allow students greater access to various kinds of education in different parts of the region without their being hampered or penalized by the conversion of academic credits. In addition, it could change some of the traditional structures and functions of higher education in Asia. Regionally aligned Asian higher education could create a more attractive educational market where many universities attract students from all over the world by offering unique and high-quality learning environments (Hirosato, 2014; Ratanawijtrasin, 2014; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

Issues and Challenges of Current Credit Systems

The academic credit system was invented by American institutions and is now being used by many Asian universities. However, the history of the academic credit system in Asia is rather short, especially for countries like Laos and Myanmar. Although the main focus of this study is the establishment of an aligned credit transfer system in Asia, it is important to question whether the academic credit system itself is the best way to recognize academic credentials in Asian higher education. There has long been a debate regarding the use of academic credit systems for recognizing educational credentials. The main criticism is that a single number of credits does not demonstrate evidence of academic achievement, but only estimates how many hours students spent acquiring knowledge and skills that are ultimately used for awarding degrees (Silva & White, 2015; Wellman & Ehrlich, 2003). Although the single use of academic credits will not prove the qualitative value of education, it will have more meaning if the academic credits based upon the amount of student workload and learning outcomes prove how many hours students spent at each step of the learning process and what kinds of knowledge and skills they acquired (Rauhvargers, 2011).

Today, many universities in the world, especially in Asia, count academic credits based upon the total number of teaching/contact hours. This tendency is based on the concept of “Carnegie units.” The “Carnegie Unit” was originally invented for the payment of teachers’ pensions and widely employed in the United States during the late 19th to early 20th century (Altbach, 2001; Ehrlich, 2003; Heffernan, 1973; Regel, 1992). Since then, this simple, systematic, and objective credit system using the
concept of “teaching/contact hours” has become very popular in determining the amount of teachers’ duty and often the actual salaries of teachers. At the same time, it became the main tool to determine students’ academic credentials for each class they attended, even though students spend more hours on homework and preparing for examinations. Thus, the “Carnegie Unit” did not reflect fully the time students spend learning new knowledge and skills.

Moreover, this wide use of “Carnegie Units” creates a problem for transferring academic credit from one institution to another. If the number of teaching hours per class is different, students face difficulties transferring credit even if the academic content is similar. This has caused graduation delays due to students’ having to repeat similar coursework at their home institution (Laitinen, 2012, p. 7). Therefore, the concept of academic credits must correspond to learning outcomes and demonstrate how a student acquires knowledge and skills by showing the learning process (Wellman & Ehrlich, 2003).

This leads to a second issue, why Asian higher education needs to establish an aligned credit transfer system. As stated earlier, an aligned credit transfer system in the region will improve the attractiveness of higher education in all member states. However, this will happen only if all member states make an effort to harmonize other parts of regional cooperation and co-develop economically, politically, and socially (Chan, 2012). Given these conditions, the development of an aligned credit transfer system will allow students to acquire different kinds of knowledge and skills not only from different nations, but also in different ways of learning, such as transnational and e-learning education without losing academic credit. This will promote more vigorous student mobility and produce more globally aware citizens (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Knight, 2016). As a result, it will lead to a regional political stability and economic cooperation in Asia. Furthermore, at a more successful stage, aligned regional higher education will prompt Asian students to stay in the region and eventually may attract international students from other regions of the world, as well.

Recent Development of Aligned Credit Transfer Systems in Asia

During the 1990s and 2000s, many Asian countries and territories experienced a rapid expansion of higher education institutions and their student populations (Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Chapman, 2009; Kim, 2010; Lee, 2007; Yonezawa, Kitamura, Meerman, & Kuroda, 2014). The development of European regional reform of higher education, called the “Bologna Process,” along with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (hereafter, ECTS) motivated leaders in Asian higher education to follow a similar path under the concept of “harmonization of higher education in Asia” (European Union Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region Secretariat, 2016; Kuroda, Yuki, & Kang, 2013; Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization-Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development [SEAMEO-RIHED], 2008). ECTS became a supporting mechanism enabling European higher
education institutions to develop various types of educational mobility without having to employ painstaking calculations to convert academic credits between different credit systems (Huisman, Adelman, Hsieh, Shams, & Wilkins, 2012; Regel, 1992; Teichler, 1997, 2010; Wolanin, 2003).

Because of the positive views on ECTS in Europe, during the last two decades, at least three types of credit transfer systems have been developed. In 1999, an international consortium of governments and universities, called University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (hereafter, UMAP), developed its regionally employed credit transfer system called “UMAP Credit Transfer System” (hereafter, UCTS) for their student mobility programs (UMAP-Japanese National Committee, 2017). Moreover, in 2008, the “Asia Cooperation Dialogue” (hereafter, ACD), a governmental consortium of 18 countries from the regions of East, Southeast, and South Asia and the Middle East, proposed the concept of the “Asian Credit Transfer System (hereafter, ACD-ACTS)” for future student mobility among their member states (ACD, 2011). Finally, in 2009, the “The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) University Network” (hereafter, AUN) developed the “ASEAN Credit Transfer System” (hereafter, AUN-ACTS) to promote student mobility among selected universities of the 10 ASEAN member states (Aphijanyathanm, 2010; AUN, 2009, 2010).

The development of both UCTS and AUN-ACTS was strongly influenced by the concept of ECTS. Table 1 shows definitions of each credit transfer system in Asia and ECTS. Due to the strong influence of ECTS, the original UCTS and AUN-ACTS required institutions to offer coursework totaling 60 credits annually, while ACD-ACTS required 30 credits. Moreover, AUN-ACTS originally required 25 to 30 hr of student workload per credit, while UCTS did not define any hours of student workload, and ACD-ACTS required 40 hr of student workload per credit. However, these initial influences from Europe have been changed due to some difficulties in applying the European model to Asian higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of system</th>
<th>Student workload per credita</th>
<th>Total number of credits annually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECTS (Europe)</td>
<td>25-30 hr</td>
<td>60 ECTS credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Original) UCTS (1999-2013)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>60 UCTS credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Original) AUN-ACTS</td>
<td>25-30 hr</td>
<td>60 AUN-ACTS credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACD-ACTS</td>
<td>40 hr</td>
<td>30 ACD-ACTS credits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source. The table was made by the author based upon the following documents in European Commission (2009), University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (1999), AUN (2009), and ACD (2011).

Note. ECTS = European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System; UCTS = UMAP Credit Transfer System; AUN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations University Network; ACTS = Asian Credit Transfer System; ACD = Asia Cooperation Dialogue.

aStudent workload includes not only academic contact hours in classes, but also other educational activities performed by students, such as homework, writing academic reports, attending internships, and doing field research.
AUN-ACTS stopped using the concept of 25 to 30 hr per credit. Instead, it started transferring credits based on the learning outcomes in each subject. Although this process simplifies the credit transfer system, it requires a strong mutual trust among participating universities, and it is possible for AUN members only because they so carefully select their members from the top ranking universities of each ASEAN nation. At present, the total number of member universities is 51 in ASEAN+3 nations (AUN, 2018). Furthermore, in 2013, UMAP changed from the old UCTS, which modeled ECTS, to the concept of AACs. Since then, UMAP has steadily increased its membership and now includes 237 participating universities from 15 different nations in the Asia and Pacific region (UMAP, 2018). However, there are some impediments to expanding the membership rapidly as UMAP requires a governmental endorsement for their universities’ participation. As for the ACD-ACTS, it is still in its developmental and promotional stage. The ACD High-Level Meeting on Asia Academic Collaboration is still developing both its mobility scheme for ACD-UN (university network) and an ACTS Task Force to establish ACD-ACTS guidelines for future student mobility (ACD, 2016).

Although all three credit transfer schemes in Asia have seen a certain level of expansion, the number of participating universities is still very limited compared with the total number of more than 7,800 higher education institutions in ASEAN countries and more than 3,000 higher education institutions in China, South Korea, and Japan (Sujatanond, 2016). Thus, it is still necessary to consider some other form of permeable framework each university can independently employ for student mobility. However, it needs to be a simple and systematic credit transfer scheme that will require some governmental support, or at least recognition.

**Key Characteristics of Credit Systems in the Asian Region**

To investigate the feasibility of developing a widely usable aligned credit transfer system, two studies were conducted between 2010 and 2014. One study was a Japanese governmental research mission to investigate the current educational framework of 13 ASEAN+3 countries (Hotta, 2010, 2011). ASEAN is an international community of 10 countries, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, and ASEAN+3 adds three more countries, namely, China, Japan, and South Korea aligned to promote regional collaboration and co-development. The data were collected by 11 Japanese, Korean, and Chinese researchers and the author, who worked in Japanese leading universities and a national agency, and 19 field experts mainly overseas during the period of January and February in 2010. The main data were governmental and university documents as well as various stakeholders’ opinions through semi-structured interviews. The study investigated general trends in credit and grading systems as well as systems of quality assurance in 13 Asian countries.

The other study was supported by a Japanese governmental research grant, called “The Grant for Scientific Research Type B (#24402045)” and conducted by the author.
and 11 another group of researchers from leading universities in Japan during 2012 to 2014. Although the number of factors for a comparative study of credits, grading, and quality assurance was increased to investigate in greater detail, the main focus remained the same with the number of targeted countries and territories expanded from 13 to 24. The additional countries and territories beyond the initial 13 included Bangladesh, Bhutan, East Timor, Hong Kong, India, Macao, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan. This section provides an overview of the general trends in higher education systems related to the regulations and systems of academic credit in 24 Asian countries and territories.

Three indicators are used because of their importance for the definition of academic credit systems. The first indicator is the number of student contact hours per credit; the second is the amount of student workload per credit; and the third is the average number of academic credits earned by students annually. The number of contact hours per credit is important because many Asian universities use this indicator to measure the number of credits earned by students (Hotta, 2010, 2011). However, it has been noted that the actual duration of a class session defined as one academic contact hour may vary from 45 to 60 min, as each institution or nation defines class duration differently. Furthermore, the second and third indicators, namely, the concept of student workload and the average number of credits earned annually, are used because these indicators are employed by existing credit transfer systems such as ECTS, UCTS, and originally AUN-ACTS, in Europe and Asia. The following are the general trends in 24 Asian countries and territories relating to these three indicators.

By and large, many Asian countries and territories do not have national standards for credit systems because there are many different patterns of credit systems among universities in each nation. Although these existing credit systems in Asia have miscellaneous differences, there are some similar trends in different country groups among the 24 countries and territories (see Table 2).

As for the number of contact hours, many credit systems in the 24 countries and territories count one academic credit for every 14 to 16 contact hours. In fact, 21 out of the 24 countries and territories include those hours as at least a part of their systems. This is often related to the number of instructional weeks in each semester. As most of the institutions in Asia use a two-semester system, they use a duration of 14 to 16 weeks of instruction per semester. This tendency indicates that many Asian higher education systems are strongly influenced by the concept of “Carnegie Units.” As for student workload, Table 2 indicates that 14 out of 24 Asian countries and territories reported no single regulation on how to count academic credits based on student workload. This is because the hours of student workload are often used only for practical training, such as internship and laboratory work, but not for regular lecture-discussion classes. Moreover, the difference between 10 and 54 hr of student workload is greater than that of the difference in contact hours per credit. Thus, it is more difficult to establish an aligned credit transfer system based upon the concept of student workload as it currently exists.

As for the average number of credits per year, Table 2 indicates a reported difference between 30 and 120 credits per year. Nineteen countries and territories indicated
### Table 2. General Trends in Academic Credit Regulations in 24 Asian Countries and Territories (As of March 2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of academic contact hours in class per credit&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Amount of student workload per credit&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Average number of credits students earn per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 13 to 14 weeks&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Greatly varied</td>
<td>Greatly varied, but minimum 40 credits (120/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>No single regulation, but 15 weeks&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Often 1 credit = 10 hr</td>
<td>120 credits (360/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>No regulation, but 14 hr (and 1 hr for reading)</td>
<td>No regulation, 35 to 42 hr</td>
<td>No regulation, 31 to 32 credits (124-130/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>45 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (fieldwork)</td>
<td>No regulation, greatly varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>No regulation, but often 15 to 16 weeks&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No regulation, but often 40 to 45 hr</td>
<td>No single regulation, 30 credits&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (120/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 1 credit = 14 hr</td>
<td>No single regulation</td>
<td>40 credits (160 credits/4 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 12 hr (and 1 hr for final exam)</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 1 credit = 10 hr from 2016, 1 credit = 20 to 30 hr&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt; at the University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>Greatly varied, but 31 credits (123/4) in one or 60 credits&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (240/4) since 2016 in the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 16-17 hr</td>
<td>No single regulation, greatly varied, but 40 hr (recommended)</td>
<td>Greatly varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>16 hr (actually 50 min × 16 weeks&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;)&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>42.7 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>36 credits (144/4)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (30 hr)</td>
<td>45 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (30 hr)&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>31 credits (124/4)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>16 to 17 weeks&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No regulations, minimum 48 hr</td>
<td>32 to 37 credits (130-150 credits/4 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of academic contact hours in class per credit</th>
<th>Amount of student workload per credit</th>
<th>Average number of credits students earn per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macao</td>
<td>No regulations, but often 14 hr (and 1-2 hr for reading and final exam)</td>
<td>No regulations, but often 42 to 48 hr (14-16 weeks × 3 hr)</td>
<td>Varied, for example, 42 to 48 credits (132-135/3 years) and 36 credits (144/4 years) at University of Macao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>No regulation, but often 14 weeks</td>
<td>40 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40 credits (120/3)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>No single regulation, but 14 hr (and 2 hr of reading and final exam)</td>
<td>No single regulation, but often 1 credit = 10 hr</td>
<td>120 credits (360 credits/3 years = 120 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>15 to 16 hr</td>
<td>40 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Minimum 30 credits (120/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>16 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No specific regulation, but at least 20 hr ([3+2] × 16 / 4)</td>
<td>40 to 44 credits (162-178/4) but also between 168 and 174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>13 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No single regulation, 39 to 45 hr</td>
<td>42 credits (167/4) in a program under semester system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines the</td>
<td>16 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (and 2 hr of reading and final exam)</td>
<td>48 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (and 6 hr for reading and final exam)</td>
<td>Greatly varied, but minimum 35 (140/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>No single regulation, but 13 weeks</td>
<td>No single regulation, but, for example, 39 hr at two institutions</td>
<td>No single regulation, for example, 34 to 40 credits (103-120/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (30 hr)</td>
<td>45 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (30 hr)&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>32-35 credits (130-140/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No single regulation, but 45 to 50 hr</td>
<td>30 (90/3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of academic contact hours in class per credit&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Amount of student workload per credit&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Average number of credits students earn per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>16 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (and 2 hr for reading and final exam)</td>
<td>No regulation, but often 36 to 54 hrs (2-3 hr × 18 weeks for internship)</td>
<td>Minimum 32 credits (128/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Minimum 45 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; for fieldwork and internships</td>
<td>30 credits&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (120/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>15 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Minimum 45 hr&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; for practical education</td>
<td>30 credits&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; (120/4)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source. This table was made by the author and 11 other research fellows, based upon the findings of a comparative study of 24 Asian countries and territories conducted between 2012 and 2015 with support from "The Grant for Scientific Research Type B (#24402045)" by the Japanese government.

Note. All numbers are either a definition of government regulations or estimated numbers commonly used by local universities. Actual numbers often differ greatly depending on the field of study. If there is too large a gap in the difference of hours and credits, the list selects the smallest number, as that tends to be the minimum requirement counted as legitimate and qualified by the government.

<sup>a</sup>The number of academic contact hours means the hours of class sessions students attend. This teaching hour is based upon the academic hour, which is defined by each nation and/or institution. The actual amount of time varies from institution to institution. For example, in the case of Japan, 1 academic hour often means 45 min of instruction; in the United States, many universities teach approximately 50 min. Thus, in this chart, 1 teaching hour will be counted as 1 academic hour, not based upon the exact length of teaching hours.

<sup>b</sup>The amount of student workload includes academic contact hours in class and the amount of time students spend outside of the classroom, on such tasks as homework, preparation for exams, and writing reports. If there is no clear policy on this type of self-study, the number of hours used is often the duration of internships or field research per credit.

<sup>c</sup>The number of weeks per semester was indicated as one credit is often calculated based upon the number of weeks per semester. If the duration of semester is 15 weeks, an institution tends to award one credit for every 15 hr of study in class.

<sup>d</sup>The number is determined by a national government and applies to all universities in that nation.

<sup>e</sup>The National University of Hong Kong was now in a transition period to change the length of their bachelor's degree program from 3 to 4 years at the time the research was conducted in 2014. Those numbers reflect the National University of Hong Kong’s plan, which started from 2016.

<sup>f</sup>The amount of workload only for seminar, laboratory, and field studies is under this definition by governmental regulations.
the average number of credits per year to be between 30 and 40. China and India responded, “greatly varied,” while Bhutan and Maldives are the only ones that require 120 credits per year. Bhutan and Maldives appear to align themselves with the system of “Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme” (CATS) in the United Kingdom (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008). Although the difference is large, the majority of countries and territories reported somewhat similar average numbers of credits per year, namely, 30 to 40. In summary, one academic credit in many universities in these countries and territories tends to stay within a range of 13 to 16 hr of academic instruction and have 4-year bachelor’s degree programs that require 120 to 150 credits for degree award.

The Concept of AACs

According to Table 2, the general findings from 24 Asian countries and territories showed large differences among credit systems of higher education. Many countries did not have specific nationwide regulations relating to their academic credit systems. However, it is also true that there are some similarities among countries where such systems exist. Based upon these differences and commonalities, any new aligned credit transfer system needs to fulfill two missions. One is to require a minimum number of conditions to transfer academic credits from one institution to another. The other is that the new system must to be applicable to all types of credit systems currently existing in Asian higher education. Based upon the above criteria, the concept of AACs was developed largely through discussions at several UMAP board meetings as well as “Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)” expert meetings between 2011 and 2014, where governmental and university representatives from the Asia-Pacific and European regions were in attendance. Consequently, the concept of AACs became the new concept for UCTS in 2013 (Hotta, 2014, 2017).

The definition of AACs is as follows: 1 AAC = 38 to 48 hr of student workload. This includes 13 to 16 hr of academic instruction.

The range of 38 to 48 hr of student workload per credit was developed based upon the most commonly reported practices, namely, 14 to 16 contact hours in the 24 nation comparative study. However, to include a small group of countries that count one credit for 12 to 13 contact hours, the range was expanded to 13 to 16 contact hours. As for the definition of AACs based on student workload, at first, the concept of defining student workload commonly used in the United States and other nations was used (Shimizu, 1998; Wolanin, 2003, p. 99). In this formulation, each hour of class time requires an additional hour of preparation for the next class and another hour for the review of studied class materials (Altbach, 2001; Harris, 2002; Shedd, 2003). Thus, one AAC became defined as 39 to 48 hr of student workload (13-16 contact hours multiplied by 3). Ultimately, student workload became defined as 38 to 48 hr to make it more comparable with systems of credit transfer elsewhere in the world (Hotta, 2014, 2017). Therefore, Asian higher education does not need to import the concept of ECTS directly, although the main concept of AACs is somewhat influenced by it.
Moreover, the concept of AACs adopted the definition of contact hours, although originally defined based only upon student workload. This is because currently many universities in Asia count the number of academic credits based on contact hours, except for nonlecture practical training. However, all universities in Asia eventually will need to use student workload for counting academic credits. This is a very important requirement for the effective use of AACs. Moreover, AACs should require an indication of learning outcomes associated with student workload (Wellman & Ehrlich, 2003, p. 121). The course syllabus should explain how students achieve each learning outcome, for example, by specifying what kind of activities they do both inside and outside of the classroom. An additional very important goal is that each university needs to be willing to accept a range of differences in the amount of student workload and associated learning outcomes central to the concept of AACs. If professors and registrars who evaluate credit transfer are too strict about the exactness of content, study hours, and learning outcomes of each subject, the effectiveness of AACs will be diminished and face the same difficulties for which other credit systems are criticized. Given adherence to these conditions, Asian universities will be able to transfer credits among themselves on a one-to-one basis.

Unlike ECTS and AUN-ACTS, AACs do not include requirements regarding the total number of credits per year, because AACs attempt to assure only the value of each course—not an entire educational program. In Europe, one major issue pertaining to ECTS is the difficulty of maintaining the principle of 60 ECTS per year among different academic disciplines (Markevičienė & Račkauskas, 2012). Many institutions and academic departments adjust the amount of student workload in various ways, although the definition of ECTS is clearly stated in their law. On the contrary, AACs allow each university to determine their own requirement of student workload for each degree program. Thus, AACs provide universities freedom to demonstrate the level of difficulty of their educational programs and allow them to transfer credits to and from institutions offering similar types of education.

The concept of AACs can realistically become an aligned credit transfer scheme for higher education in 24 Asian countries and territories (Hotta, 2014, 2017). This group would be far more comprehensive than any other group of countries and territories that are actively using existing credit transfer systems. In other words, by employing AACs, it would no longer be necessary to perform painstaking calculations to convert and transfer credits among thousands of institutions in the Asian region. However, this original concept was created mainly for regular lecture and discussion type of class sessions, but not for internships, field studies, and laboratory work, especially in medical and natural science fields, which may require far more hours of commitment from students.

Furthermore, the adoption and use of AACs would provide a methodology for making credit transfer between Asian universities and the following countries’ and regions’ universities easier than ever before. If the proposed conversion table between AACs and other credit transfer systems is accepted by all member states, AACs will extend the ease of credit transfer to universities in more than 100 different nations (see Table 3). As the world of higher education has become more and more integrated, it has promoted not only student and staff mobility, but also the mobility and integration of
Table 3. A Proposed Conversion Table of AACs With Other Credit (Transfer) Systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation/region (name of credit [transfer] system), and number of countries and territories</th>
<th>Proposed credit conversion with 1 AAC credit&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Equivalency in student workload</th>
<th>Teaching/contact hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASIA (AACs) (at least 24 countries and territories)</td>
<td>1 AAC credit</td>
<td>38 to 48 hr</td>
<td>13 to 16 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States (2/3 of institutions&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>1 credit</td>
<td>45 hr</td>
<td>15 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and neighboring countries (47 countries&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>1.5 ECTS points</td>
<td>37.5 to 48 hr</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England, UK (CATS)&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.0 CATS points</td>
<td>1 ECTS = 2 CATS points (however, 1 CATS = 10 hr)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America (CLAR)&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt; (18 countries)</td>
<td>1.5 CLAR credits</td>
<td>37.5 to 48 hr</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East (ANQAHE)&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt; (15 countries)</td>
<td>1 credit</td>
<td>45 hr</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source. The table was made by the author based upon the following documents: Regel (1992), European Commission (2009), Quality Assurance Agency (2008), Tuning Educational Structure in Europe (TUNING) Project (2013), and ANQAHE (2012).

Note. AACs = Asian Academic Credits; ECTS = European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System; CATS = Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme; ANQAHE = Arab Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

<sup>a</sup>Although actual conversions contain some small fractions, for example, 1 AAC equivalent to 1.5 ~ 1.6 ECTS, this proposed conversion table was made based upon the ease of credit transfer among a massive number of universities in a total of at least 106 countries and territories in the world.

<sup>b</sup>According to Shimizu (1998), about two thirds of American universities count one academic credit as 45 hr of student workload.

<sup>c</sup>Forty-seven member states participate in the Bologna Process, where the use of ECTS is one of the main requirements.

<sup>d</sup>The CATS has its own definition of one CATS point = 10 hr of student workload. However, CATS points on this table are calculated based upon the conversion principle of CATS points with ECTS, which was explained by the British Quality Assurance Agency (Quality Assurance Agency, 2008).

<sup>e</sup>CLAR stands for “Latin American Reference Credit.” (Tuning Educational Structure in Europe [TUNING] Project, 2013). It is a regionally aligned credit transfer system recently developed by a group of Latin American governments and universities. 1 CLAR credit = 24 to 33 hr of student workload and requires students to take 60 CLAR credits per year. However, it converts with ECTS on a one-to-one basis. Thus, in this Table, 1 CLAR point is treated the same as 1 ECTS point.

<sup>f</sup>One academic credit of ANQAHE member state’s higher education is equal to 45 hr of student workload (ANQAHE, 2012). ANQAHE is an association of 15 member states and territories in the Middle East region. The board member states and territories are UAE, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, and other regular members are Kuwait, Palestine–Ramallah, Qatar, Sudan, Yemen, and Gazza–Palestine.
Usefulness of AACs

Although the main mission of AACs is challenging, it remains rather straightforward. The issue is whether AACs can truly be effective for all universities in the Asian region. For success, AACs need to embrace a simple process, easily measure and ensure trust of other institutions’ educational credentials, and demonstrate flexibility in applying the scheme to various types of educational mobility. If Asian nations successfully continue their national developments and improve their quality of education, aligned credit transfer can serve effectively as part of their permeable framework of higher education. The following are some expected outcomes based upon such developments in the Asian region.

First of all, AACs can serve as a national common framework for universities whose governments have not officially issued any guidelines or regulations on the domestic academic credit system. As the study of 24 Asian countries described previously, many Asian nations do not have regulations for academic credit systems, and universities develop their own systems. Therefore, if Asian governments agree upon the concept of AACs, it will be easier for governments and universities to adhere to the same principles for credit transfer.

Second, AACs need to institute much simpler paperwork than before for university professors and administrators to handle credit transfer, which will be done among all universities in the Asian region on a one-to-one basis with no burdensome conversions required. This is because the definition of AACs takes into account the differences of various kinds of credit systems. Therefore, AACs will enable anyone who handles credit transfer to do so without complicated calculations and changes to the current credit system in each country. Furthermore, AACs will help professors and registrars make judgments/decisions about accepting academic credits from other institutions much more quickly as information associated with AACs will include details on the process of students’ educational attainment, for example, syllabi and transcripts. Academic credits based on student workload and learning outcomes will illustrate the similarities and differences of educational content as well as levels of difficulty both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Third, the ease of credit transfer associated with AACs can promote student mobility domestically and internationally. An important corollary function of AACs is helping universities identify suitable partner institutions. AACs can promote greater student mobility among many new or small size universities, despite their possible lack of an international reputation or membership in a regional Asian consortium. An increase in student mobility will undoubtedly enhance the level of cross-cultural understanding, especially among Asian students, and will promote greater social integration in the region (Yavaprabhas, 2014). An additional hoped-for-result would find the Asian region eventually developing greater regional security and peace in the future (de Wit, 2008; Hirosato, 2014).

Fourth, if many institutions in the member states were to improve their teaching and produce a cadre of talented students with global competencies, a surge in economic development throughout Asia might result. This ever-enlarging student cohort
would constitute a valuable human resource capable of effecting change far greater than that contributed by a few elite institutions in a handful of countries (Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Knight & Lee, 2012; Yavaprabhas, 2014). This is particularly important for universities that are not currently ranked internationally. Moreover, because AACs will provide a simple conversion formula with other credit systems in the world, as Table 2 indicates, its simple system will attract students from other parts of the world. That will bring additional opportunities for the Asian region to increase its global human resource capacity.

Finally, by measuring student workload, AACs will allow students to earn academic credits not only through regular lecture classes, but also through some nontraditional courses, such as online education and internships (European Union Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region Secretariat, 2016; Green, Marmolejo, & Egron-Polak, 2012; Hotta, 2017). Therefore, AACs stand to encourage institutions to establish programs such as double or joint degree programs with their partner institutions. This type of flexible education would give students the freedom to choose how, what, when, and where they learn as well as the pace and mode of delivery, as long as the amount of workload and learning outcomes meet their home institutions’ expectations (Delplace, 2016; Knight, 2008, 2010; Lee, 2007; Malaysian Qualification Agency, 2016; Neubauer & Kuroda, 2012). Those who will benefit most from such flexibility are students in remote areas where it is difficult to access high-quality education. AACs are positioned to play a central role in transferring credits from online education to a university’s bachelor’s degree program despite differences in methods, content, and even (perhaps) the quality of education. In this respect, eventually, AACs could serve as a “common and recognized credit system” for the world of “Edu-Glomerase” in Asian higher education, as Knight (2015) described. The concept of “Edu- Glomerase” is the stage of development in higher education where different kinds of education, including transnational, joint degree, and online education, will be in one platform without any conflict caused by the differences of modality.

Future Tasks for the Effective Use of AACs

Although this article does not intend to create any concrete action plan for the promotion of AACs, it is worthwhile to examine the possible use of existing organizations, regional activities, and mutual agreements among governments and universities on the harmonization process of Asian higher education. To promote the use of AACs, it is important to get cooperation from existing regional consortia and local universities as well as government support. Voluntary international collaborations of universities are also crucial to expanding the use of AACs. A governmental and university consortium, such as UMAP, needs to continue to promote the use of AACs for their student mobility program(s). AUN can use the concept of AACs as an optional reference point for their exchange program as AUN-ACTS is already in the same category of credit transfer schemes as proposed to the ASEAN+3 Ministers’ meeting in 2018. ACD too can employ AACs as a broader concept in their ACD-ACTS. Finally, relatively new student mobility programs mainly in ASEAN nations, such as “ASEAN International
Mobility for Students (AIMS)” and the “Great Mekong Sub-Region-University Consortium (GMS-UC),” initiated by the SEAMEO-RIHED (2018a, b), can also utilize AACs for their student exchanges, as the concept of AACs has already been introduced to all member universities in these regional student exchange schemes.

However, those student mobility schemes have limited the expanded use of AACs by virtue of all consortia’s requirement for membership and membership screening. Thus, to disseminate the concept of AACs to all universities in the Asian region, the governments in Asia need to endorse and promote the use of AACs. In this respect, the ASEAN Plus Three Education Ministers Meetings have already established some specific guidelines for regional student exchanges and approved the concept of AACs as a reference point at their meeting on the November 1, 2018 (ASEAN, 2018). In Asia, there are still many universities that prefer or require governmental endorsement before they implement new systems and approaches (Lee, 2007). Thus, approval by the ASEAN+3 Ministers of Education Meeting in 2018 is one good starting point for establishing some level of governmental recognition and permission for universities to use AACs.

As discussed earlier, in addition to student workload, the concept of learning outcomes has to be employed in AACs (Brewer & Leask, 2012; Hotta, 2014, 2017; Knight & Lee, 2012). If a course syllabus identifies the learning outcomes of that course, it is up to the instructor to indicate how students will acquire the knowledge, skills, and various competencies based upon the allocation of student workload for each educational activity. This could pose a challenge for the Asian community because the concept of learning outcomes is relatively new. However, the inclusion of learning outcomes along with the related means of achieving them is an important component for improving internal quality assurance.

Finally, a key to using AACs effectively is allowing students the freedom to choose their path(s) to acquiring new knowledge and skills from various types and sources of education (Sujatanond, 2016; Delplace, 2016). In other words, institutions need to recognize not only the academic value of traditional courses, but also the value of intensive workshops, online education, and other means of education offered by various types of educational institutions through all sorts of nontraditional coursework. In fact, this way of using AACs revives the original purpose of academic credits in the United States when Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard University created “elective courses” for senior students to acquire new knowledge with “academic credits” during the late 19th century (Shedd, 2003). The recognition of flexible education and the acceptance of AACs for students’ educational achievements as a part of the fulfillment of their degree programs might be a substantial challenge for most Asian higher education institutions. Nevertheless, it is imperative that Asian higher education institutions and governments move forward in adopting diversity and flexibility in higher education in the future.

**Conclusion**

It is important to remember that the concept of AACs was not developed from scratch. It was based upon the systems the majority of Asian universities are using now.
Moreover, the concept accommodates a range of differences among Asian universities, yet still encompasses an acceptable range for transferring credits from other institutions in the world. Thus, the effective use of AACs in conjunction with the concept of student workload, learning outcomes, and the adoption of flexibility in educational mobility will make Asian higher education more attractive than before. In addition, the concept of AACs will allow universities to spend more time examining the equivalencies of educational content from other universities because they will no longer need to convert academic credits from different systems. This permeability of regional higher education will allow universities to find suitable partner institutions and students to access various types of education through a regionally “harmonized” higher education. At the same time, it is important to note that AACs have the potential to affect negatively the regional development of higher education in Asia by engendering regional competition among universities to attract students and, as a result, cause potential brain drain among countries in Asia (Altbach, 2007; Findlay & Tierney, 2010).

Today, the concept of AACs has been adopted by UMAP member states as a new version of UCTS (UMAP-JAPAN, 2017). Moreover, the Fourth ASEAN Plus Three Education Ministers Meeting adopted the conversion table for different credit systems between Asian countries and other parts of the world using the concept of AACs in November 2018 (ASEAN, 2018). Thus, the concept of AACs can be used as an officially recommended principle for an aligned credit transfer system in Asia.

It is foreseeable that an academic system for recognizing student learning will eventually use competency-based evaluation to accept transferred students and award academic degrees in the future. Nevertheless, it still requires the concept of a credit system to measure and evaluate the detailed learning process each student goes through. The concept of AACs can help universities understand the value of coursework at other universities, and if clear learning outcomes are used effectively together with AACs, the level of trust in others’ educational programs would greatly improve. As a result, participating universities could increase student mobility and create a vital population for regional harmony and peace in Asia (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). To realize such an expansion of student mobility and the development of higher education in Asia, the aligned academic credit system must be simple, systematic, and effective for all universities. The concept of AACs thus qualifies as a critical vehicle for promoting a regionally aligned system of credit transfer in Asia.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The meaning-making of educational proficiency in academic hiring: a blind spot in the black box (2019)</td>
<td>Teaching in Higher Education (article from Taylor and Francis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The meaning-making of educational proficiency in academic hiring: a blind spot in the black box

Sara Levander, Eva Forsberg & Maja Elmgren

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The meaning-making of educational proficiency in academic hiring: a blind spot in the black box

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ABSTRACT
This article develops knowledge about the meaning and value ascribed to educational proficiency in the recruitment of full professors. Hiring processes reflect standards that organize academia and notions of academic scholarship, its value and quality, and agents involved have an institutional gate-keeping function. The empirical data, external peer review letters, is drawn from an old comprehensive research-intensive university, offering educational programmes within a broad range of scientific domains. Although a large variety of aspects are ascribed to educational proficiency, and variations do occur across scientific domains and reviewers, the main finding is a restricted notion. A special value is assigned to the scope of doctoral supervision and teacher training. Internal individual classroom performance is focused, while scholarly interaction is less emphasized. Reviewers primarily serve as gatekeepers of disciplinary research, not the education thereof, thus educational proficiency is no game changer in the context of academic scholarship.

Introduction
Academic hiring processes and their outcomes reflect standards that organize academia and concepts of academic scholarship, its value and quality. Much is at stake in the selection of academic scholars – for individuals, departments, universities and the society they are expected to serve. Agents involved in hiring processes have an institutional gate-keeping function (Merton 1973).

Recruitment processes are part of traditional bureaucratic structures of control. Today, they are also embedded in discourses on quality assurance and evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs), as a response to the rapid growth of the student body, increased costs and expected impact of HEI in competitive knowledge economies. In Europe this is reflected in the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Strategy and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (Schwartz and Westerheijden 2004).
Peer review of academic scholarship is a common task undertaken by faculty members, and the different contexts within which scholarship is reviewed have increased in importance and scope (Langfeldt and Kyvik 2011). Nevertheless, research exploring how academic teachers are recruited is scant (Hort 2009), and research rather than teaching has long been the priority in evaluation in academia (Bourdieu 1996). Further, most of the literature is anecdotal and speculative, often with a ‘best practice’ claim, rather than empirical (Lucal et al. 2003).

International initiatives, like the Bologna Process and others, has emphasized teachers as the single most important resource for student learning, and teaching skills have also been stressed in national and institutional policy (Cardoso, Tavares, and Sin 2015).

This study responds to calls to investigate evaluation of academic scholarship in recruitment (van den Brink 2010; Weiser 2012), especially aspects related to teaching (Subbaye and Vithal 2017).

**Aim and research questions**

This study illuminates a practice critical for the formation of Academia: peer review in academic hiring. Our focal point is the recruitment of full professors, a less studied level of faculty positions (O’Meara 2006). Although, research proficiency may be regarded the foundation for this level of position the aim of this study is, in line with Subbaye and Vithal’s summons (2017), to develop knowledge about educational proficiency2 in academic hiring. To meet this aim qualitative analyses of peer review letters3 (RLs) are carried out. Three interrelated research questions are addressed:

- What is the meaning ascribed to educational proficiency in the hiring of full professors?
- What value is assigned to various aspects of the meaning of educational proficiency and how is the value assigned?
- What is the value of educational proficiency in the context of academic scholarship?

The outcome of hiring processes might be considered the highest stakes a faculty member will face during their academic life (Weiser 2012) and the recruitment of full professors can be perceived as the ultimate faculty evaluation (Fairweather 2002). Research on the recruitment of full professors has been described as a unique opportunity to gain an understanding of the appointment of ‘the best’ (van den Brink 2010). The study is informed by the conception of peer review as a practice of evaluation and educational proficiency as an aspect of academic scholarship.

**The case University in context**

Our data are derived from an old Swedish comprehensive research-intensive university (henceforth the University), with educational programmes within a broad range of scientific domains. The processes of appointment are regulated through national and local appointment regulations and guidelines, embedded also in an international context. Generally there are two pathways to the chair in Sweden; through open recruitment in competition (as studied here) or individual promotion. In both cases, appointments are done within institutions and must rely solely on academic merits. Thus, the system is hierarchical and in some parts similar to the US tenure track system.
The proposal for a holder of a chair must usually be preceded by assessments from at least two peers external to the University, selected by the domain/faculty board. The reviewers have to be particularly knowledgeable in the subject area and independently conduct the assessments. The RLs regularly include (1) an assessment of the candidates’ eligibility, (2) selection of a top group and (3) ranking of top candidates. Research and teaching expertise are the two criteria of eligibility for a professorship. In the final ranking research and teaching expertise may be weighted differently depending on conditions defined in the appointment. In making their judgements and writing the RLs, the reviewers are provided the same information and have at their disposal policy documents, guidelines and the application files (CV, reflections on own research and teaching, selected publications, testimonials, etc.).

Agents involved in the hiring process are the recruitment committee, external reviewers, and the faculty board. The final decision resides with the vice-chancellor. Figure 1 illustrates the process (our focus in italics).

Peer review in Swedish higher education appointments was initiated in 1876 (Lindberg 2006/2007). The system was established to uphold unbiased assessments and to guide both the drafting of the matter and the final decision. The recruitment committee may go against reviewers’ ranking. This is however uncommon and the reviewers have a profound impact on the outcome. The external assessment of research quality has progressively been accompanied by the assessment of other merits, such as teaching and administrative proficiencies.

In many countries, appointment processes are conceived as mysterious and opaque, partly because of confidentiality and blind reviews (Lamont 2009; Weiser 2012). Appointment has been portrayed as ‘the most important and confidential of academia’s practice’ and as a ‘black box’ (van den Brink 2010, 10). The advantage of exploring peer review in academic hiring in Sweden is twofold. First, and in contrast to many other countries, due to the Swedish principle of public access to official records, RLs are available to research first-hand. This provides a unique opportunity to investigate the norms and values that organize Academia and the deliberations that influence faculty members’ careers. Second, peer review supposedly is more dependent on academic cultures and disciplines than on the national context and local evaluation criteria (Hammarfelt and Rushforth 2017). Thus, the implications of the findings stretch beyond the Swedish national context and are relevant for a broader, international, and cross-disciplinary audience.

**Theoretical framing**

The theoretical framing is informed by the conception of educational proficiency as an aspect of academic scholarship and peer review as a practice of evaluation. The object

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**Figure 1.** The process of hiring teachers at the University.
of knowledge lies in the intersection between educational proficiency and peer review. The objective is to explore and analyse how educational proficiency is constituted in an, for Academia, important evaluation practice.

**Peer review as a practice of evaluation**

While the diversity of contexts and practices in different nations and the terms under which academics are hired and employed are shifting, there are also crucial similarities (Elken and Wollscheid 2016). Consequently, the study is significant for an international audience.

Meritocracy is an assumed organizing principle in recruitment within higher education institutions. The selection is expected to be based on the assessment and valuation of merits relevant to the academic position. Peer review in hiring is a summative form of evaluation, recognized as a ‘process of determining the merit, worth, or significance of things’ (Scriven 2003, 15). Evaluation is qualitative in nature and relies on the descriptions and judgment of experts (Guba and Lincoln 1981), and the legitimacy is based on trust, integrity and fairness (Merton 1973). Closeness between applicants and peers may create tension between peer expertise and impartiality: ‘Peer review ought to be neutral, but not scholarly neutral / … / the evaluation should be based on scholarly discretion’ (van Arensbergen and van den Besselaar 2012, 25).

Engaging peers sufficiently qualified to review the application of colleagues is essential (Eisenhart 2002). Reviewers’ rank and affiliation are related to this issue. It concerns the credibility of the reviewer and is a matter of ethos (Weiser 2012).

Review letters of various kinds – with shifting purposes, content, forms and functions – are frequently used in hiring processes (Weiser 2012). They are context-dependent and differ in standardization and formalization across institutions. We focus on formally required public RLs written by external referees, which are in key positions and can be regarded as the prime gatekeepers deciding who qualifies as an academic scholar (Mark 2003).

Peer review is affected by human weaknesses and biases (Dyson 2015). A number of factors may influence the selection of ‘the best’ such as: values and beliefs (O’Meara 2006, 2016); stereotypical judgement (van den Brink 2010); reputation of alma mater, habitus and networks (Bourdieu 1996) and epistemic bias (Walker 2013). Consequently, questions have been raised about peer review as an effective, efficient, reliable and valid method (Lee et al. 2013). Further, time and resources are often limited.

Guidelines have been introduced to minimize reviewer bias, among them clarifying criteria (conditions that need to be met) and indicators (measures stating to what extent criteria are met). There is, however, evidence of negative effects of too specific and absolute indicators (Walker 2013). Multifaceted and complex phenomena like educational proficiency require contextually adaptable indicators to avoid rigid measures and oversimplifying outcomes (Elken and Wollscheid 2016). There is also a tacit dimension in the assessment of academic scholarship with implicit criteria based on professional judgement.

All these aspects may influence the way educational proficiency is manifested in the review letters.
Educational proficiency in the context of academic scholarship

By tradition and for plausible reasons, research performance is regarded as the cornerstone of the professorship. However, being a professor in Academia requires a broad range of academic competences. Humboldt (von Humboldt 1809/1810), argued at the beginning of the nineteenth century that teaching and research are mutually depending on one another. Today, teaching and research are the two main tasks of the professorate. Almost two centuries after Humboldt’s imperative a US movement emerged and discussions were initiated through Boyer’s renowned work (1990) towards a broader, integrated concept of scholarship. Especially the concept Scholarship of teaching and learning has been refined and now forms a platform for a wider international movement (Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone 2011) not least within Europe (Chen and Hyon 2005). Problems are, however, still identified 25 years later. Among them are lack of conceptual clarity, difficulties related to the assessment of scholarship, a focus on quantity rather than quality and a marginalizing of teaching qualities (Kern et al. 2015; Moser and Ream 2016).

In this study, academic scholarship is regarded as an umbrella concept comprising the many various activities that professors pursue during their academic life. Educational proficiency in turn, is understood as an aspect of academic scholarship. Since teaching and research are the two principal missions of Academia, it is especially relevant to explore how educational proficiency is evaluated and valued in relation to research proficiency.

From teaching skills to scholarship of teaching and learning

The literature on educational proficiency in academe is extensive. It ranges from various conceptualizations (e.g. Kreber 2002; Shulman 1986) to imperatives of how it should be valued and assessed (e.g. Fairweather 2002; Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff 1997; Ramsden et al. 1995). However, educational proficiency has mainly been focused in academic development literature and in policy analyses. Research has shown that educational proficiency is given less weight than research in academic promotion (Cadez, Dimovski, and Groff 2017; Chalmers 2011; Levander and Riis 2016; Young 2006). Although studies on educational proficiency are increasing in number (e.g. Parker 2008; Subbaye and Vithal 2017), empirical studies on criteria used in hiring and by search committees are sparse and there is no consensus on which criteria and evidence to use (Lucal et al. 2003; Meizlish and Kaplan 2008).

Assessment of teaching, compared to research, is often seen as problematic, lacking a proper basis for objective measures and something best evaluated by internal colleagues (see Weiser 2012). Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) however, advocated that the quality of teaching scholarship could be assessed by the same standards as the evaluation of research. They also found it possible to evaluate the quality of teaching by standards that transcend disciplinary differences, while others emphasized the disciplinary impact (see Guillory 2005; Shulman 1986).

Literature on educational proficiency reflects a widened perspective regarding the requirements of university teachers. The purpose of the following exposition of the literature is not to establish one single meaning of the phenomenon, but to illustrate the variation of conceptions identified. The variation constitutes an intellectual horizon for our analysis of the empirical data and for the discussion of findings.
Teaching skills, developed through ‘reflective practice’ (Schön 1983), comprise a fundamental aspect, and teaching excellence can be identified by students and peers (Kreber 2002). Teaching expertise or scholarly teaching (Kern et al. 2015) includes teaching based on educational research. Further, typical for a scholarly teacher is continuous development and self-evaluation. In effective combination with expertise in the discipline and knowledge about how to best help students understand the subject being taught, the teacher constructs what is called ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ (Shulman 1987). Scholarship of teaching and learning is an even broader concept, including sharing experience and advancing the knowledge of teaching and learning in a way that can be peer reviewed (Trigwell and Shale 2004). This conceptual change represents a shift in emphasis from action to interaction, from individual to collective, from internal to external, and from an intuitive to a scholarly approach. The shift has partly influenced assessment practices, to rely not only on trial lectures and student course evaluations, but also on teaching portfolios including documented and reflected teaching experience, course syllabuses, teaching materials, testimonials from peers and employers and teaching philosophy (Seldin, Elizabeth Miller, and Seldin 2010).

Educational proficiency as an Analytical Tool

In order to emphasize a potential expansion of the notion of teaching skills, evident in the use of concepts similar to teaching expertise and scholarship of teaching and learning, we have chosen to use educational proficiency. The term ‘education’ points towards both teacher activity and student learning; further, it may include external activities related to instruction, such as management of educational programmes and scholarly interaction on educational issues within and outside the institution. Proficiency, in turn, allows a wider notion than skills, including for example knowledge and professional judgment.

We use these distinctions, conceptions and dimensions of educational proficiency found in the literature to make it possible to identify aspects articulated by the reviewers. To conclude, the aim is to analyse not what educational proficiency is or if reviewers articulate the ‘correct’ or specific aspects. Rather, we strive for a nuanced approach to what meaning is ascribed to educational proficiency in this specific evaluation practice. Thus, the analyses may illuminate conceptions of educational proficiency that both transcend and override the conceptualizations presented here.

As stated, a point of departure is the perception of educational proficiency as an aspect of academic scholarship. Additionally, we anticipate that aspects such as the teaching–research nexus, pedagogical content knowledge and supervision of doctorates may be manifested in the review letters.

Through opening the black box in the hiring of full professors this research will develop knowledge of articulations about a blind spot in the black box, that is, educational proficiency in peer review. Consequently, we will make a contribution to two strands of research: teaching skills in higher education and the evaluative practice of peer review in the hiring of academics.

Research design

Teaching is inherently located within disciplines or multidisciplinary knowledge areas, and the teaching–research nexus is intrinsically omnipresent in higher education (Elken
and Wollscheid 2016). However, in most research of evaluation in recruitment, little distinction is made between academic subfields. Based on research on academic cultures and their relation to the nature of discipline, as well as their influence on academic work (e.g. Becher 1989; Becher and Trowler 2001) we assume that the conception of educational proficiency may vary. Despite the evolution towards more coherent policy, disciplines still influence academic work albeit to a lesser degree (Trowler, Saunders, and Bamber 2012). The idea of varying conceptions of educational proficiency is further supported by research on peer review in different contexts, such as research grants, staff selection, promotion processes, etc., where it has been demonstrated that discipline affiliation influences the outcome (Nilsson 2009). Our research design enables analyses of tendencies of this sort.

**Data Collection**

The corpus comprises RLs from all (17) appointments to full-time professorships posted during 2012 at the University. This resulted in RLs from 41 peer reviewers external to the University: 20 affiliated at Swedish universities and 21 at foreign universities. Thus our data involve the comprehension and value of educational proficiency from researchers representing a wide range of institutions within and outside the national context.

Customarily, two reviewers were appointed, although in seven cases there were three. In three cases, the first two parts of the evaluations (description of applicants and identification of core groups) were co-written, while the final ranking was written individually. Consequently, our data corpus contains 41 RLs (sources), corresponding to 510 pages in total, concerning 109 applicants. All reviewers were assigned to evaluate both research and educational proficiency. Eight of them had the additional assignment to devote extra care to the assessment of educational proficiency. No special instructions or training are required. The number of cases, RLs, and applicants distributes as follows (Table 1).

Half of the RLs originate from the domain of Humanities and Social sciences (HS) domain; the rest are spread evenly between the domains of Medicine and Pharmacy (MP) and Science and Technology (ST). The MP domain has the lowest number of applicants per case, and uses checklists in their assessments.

**Data analysis**

First, variables such as number of pages written, affiliation of the reviewers, object of review, disciplinary domain and faculty were coded allowing analyses across cases.

This was followed by a cursory reading and the coding in NVivo 10. The codes are based on our empirical data and informed by different conceptualizations of educational proficiency as expressed in the literature. The coding made it possible to identify not only

<table>
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<th>Appointment cases</th>
<th>Review letters</th>
<th>Applicants</th>
<th>Applicants case mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences (HS)</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicine and Pharmacy (MP)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and Technology (ST)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>109</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Three cases include partly co-written letters.
each reviewer’s scope of articulations, but also the scope of articulations in total. Presentations of quantitative findings were built on the former. The latter indicates the strength of articulation, and is commented upon when relevant.

Based on the codes, themes representing different aspects of educational proficiency were constructed (see Braun and Clarke 2006). The rationale was to develop themes based on articulations reflecting distinct aspects of educational proficiency, regardless of their frequency, including articulations stressing one or more missing aspect. Throughout the coding process, attention was paid to what is articulated as educational proficiency, how often it is articulated and in what way it is articulated – it was a matter of discerning both the comprehension and the valuation of educational proficiency. The analysis of our third research question involved exploring the review letter as a whole, as well as in depth-analyses of the final assessment and ranking of candidates.

**Findings**

The aim of the present study is directed towards the meaning-making and value of educational proficiency in the evaluation of academic scholarship in recruitment. These high stake evaluation practises are crucial to investigate because of their significance for the formation of the future academy, the disciplines and the career of individual academics.

**Educational proficiency in peer review in the hiring of professors**

Ten qualitatively different themes were identified, seven pointing to the content of educational proficiency (Teaching; PhD supervision; Management of education; Development of education; Commissions of trust; Scholarly interaction; Service), one to the ability to reflect on teaching (Teaching philosophy) and two to credentials (Teacher training; Testimonials and recognition). Many reviewers articulate several aspects included in numerous themes, albeit often shortly.

Two of the themes refer to teaching and situations in which teachers may directly influence student learning. Because, of the special significance of PhD supervision for the professoriate we have made a distinction between teaching in general and PhD supervision. In order to show the richness of the teaching theme we have developed subthemes of its key elements.

*Teaching* is a comprehensive theme, mentioned by all reviewers, referring to different situations in which teachers directly may influence student learning. It refers to a wide range of elements concerning: the extent of teaching experiences in general terms (scope), the up-to-datedness of teaching experiences (temporality) experiences of teaching at different levels (depth), variety related to the extent of courses, disciplines and subjects taught (breadth), teaching experiences relevant to the actual position (relevance), teaching at different universities, sometimes foreign (mobility) as well as knowledge of languages (language skills), planning/initiation of teaching (planning/initiation), shifting methods like seminars, lectures, problem-based learning (instructional forms), supervision at first and second cycle (supervision), integration of teaching and research (teaching–research nexus) and examination of courses (examination). Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned element is scope, relatively closely followed by depth, breadth and temporality. Roughly half of the reviewers reflect on relevance, mobility and supervision. Planning,
examination and instructional forms are referred to less often. Further, language skills and teaching–research nexus are rarely noticed by the reviewers.

**PhD supervision** has the character of a boundary object and is interchangeably articulated as an aspect of education, research or management expertise. In general, focus is on number of doctoral students supervised and successful graduating as well as experience as main supervisor: ‘NN has been main supervisor to 11 successful PhD candidates and assistant supervisor to 15 / … / an extensive and successful experience as PhD supervisor’ (RL2).

Two themes refer to the overall formation of education and interaction among colleagues near-by, and thus activities beyond direct teaching-learning situations. **Management of education** (e.g. having programme or course responsibility or being director of studies), is articulated almost exclusively in terms of execution, lacking explicit valuations of the activity. Common articulations are ‘NN / … / was responsible for the study programme’ (RL11). **Development of education** of courses, programmes and projects are mentioned rather frequently, however quite unspecified. The addition of discipline in this regard reflects relevance: ‘NN has developed more than 20 courses, primarily in [discipline]’ (RL2).

Three themes have in common a focus on activities comprising communication with actors outside the institutions of affiliation. **Commissions of trust** includes service on PhD examination committees, as faculty opponent, and in membership of programme evaluation committees. Most articulations refer to national PhD examinations, a few in other countries. Very few mention the role as opponent or evaluator of an education programme. **Scholarly interaction** comprises interaction among peers regarding issues related to higher education development, e.g. through hosting of academic conferences, participation with conference presentations on teaching as well as publications of teaching materials, articles and books on higher education. A slightly more elaborated statement reads: ‘NN’s publications already demonstrate educational proficiency. Many of NN’s studies have been used as teaching materials’ (RL8). **Service** points to public outreach in forms of dissemination of popular science, participation in policy work and in media. This is another boundary object, more seldom conceived as a part of educational proficiency.

**Teacher training** comprises occasional workshops, seminars and regular courses. Mostly this theme is mentioned in a routine fashion, without bearing on the outcome. Quite often, we also found a compensatory thinking, such as ‘… it does not fulfil the ten weeks’ [sic!] requirement. NN has published papers with pedagogical reflections that may make up for this’ (RL2). **Testimonials and recognition** includes recognition of applicants’ teaching. Examples are student course evaluations, letters of recommendation and awards. Dimensions articulated in this theme are often perceived as evidence of good performance: ‘NN has received very positive feedback for NN’s [subject] courses which shows that NN is committed to teaching’ (RL15). Supervised students receiving an award for their achievements are also considered a token of educational proficiency.

**Teaching philosophy** is expected to be reflected upon in a teaching portfolio. The reviewers’ articulations include explicit valuations albeit short and unelaborated, like ‘NN’s teaching statement is detailed and thoughtful’ (RL31) or ‘NN’s outline of the structure and aims of teaching submitted in the application is convincing and demonstrates
NN’s engagement’ (RL11). However, the articulations do not display in what way the philosophy is thoughtful or how it is manifested in the candidate’s teaching.

The distribution of themes over reviewers and disciplinary domains

The distribution of themes over reviewers and their variation by disciplinary domain is specified in Figure 2. The dominance of Teaching, PhD supervision and Teacher training is striking. They are mentioned by nearly all reviewers and frequently in relation to every applicant. Scholarly interaction and Development of education are also quite frequently mentioned. About half refer to Management of education, Teaching philosophy and Testimonials and recognition. Service and Commissions of trusts are the least articulated themes. While the subthemes of teaching seem to be at the core of the notion of educational proficiency, the other themes appear more peripheral, but still mentioned by 20% to 60% of the reviewers.

Most HS reviewers mention relatively few themes, while MP and ST refer to more themes. There are also differences regarding the cohesiveness and frequency of articulations. The most conspicuous difference is the comparatively large share among ST reviewers who raise Teaching philosophy and Testimonials and recognition. Regarding Development of education, all domains differ from each other, with MP having the highest share, ST in the middle and HS the lowest. Additionally, Service is more reflected by reviewers within the domain of MP and least mentioned by ST reviewers.

There are small differences between Swedish and foreign reviewers, although foreign reviewers articulate aspects closer to the act of Teaching, student Testimonies and Commissions of trust to a somewhat higher degree. Further, the eight reviewers with the

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** Share of reviewers articulating the main themes by disciplinary domain (N = 41).
assignment to specifically evaluate the applicants’ educational proficiency in addition to research proficiency articulate to larger extent different aspects in all areas but PhD supervision. Further, all of the special assignment reviewers mention Teacher training, while this is articulated by 80% of the others.

The valuation of educational proficiency in the hiring of professors

The reviewers ascribe value to educational proficiency in several ways: by the mere mentioning of various aspects; by explicitly articulating a value judgment about an aspect; by comparing the value of an aspect of educational proficiency with another, or with other aspects of academic scholarship.

Valuation through inclusion or exclusion

The basic way of ascribing value is directly related to the articulations of educational proficiency. As reported, the themes of Teaching, especially scope, breadth, and depth, alongside PhD supervision can be considered the core of educational proficiency in the hiring of professors. However, it bears noting that in the category of Teaching, elements at the centre of instruction, i.e. planning, instructional forms and examination as well as teaching–research nexus and language skills especially relevant in academia, are omitted by about 60% to 90% of the reviewers. Teacher training is valued in the sense that it is often mentioned. The rest of the themes are more peripheral.

Yet another manner to discern importance is to pinpoint aspects that are of such dignity that reviewers specifically point out applicants lacking or being deficient in experience of them. Teacher training, PhD supervision and Teaching within relevant areas are most often referred to in this way, showing their major importance to educational proficiency in the process of hiring full professors.

Explicitly ascribed values

Explicitly ascribed value judgements are relatively few. Regarding Teaching and its key elements, the valuation is mostly expressed in quantitative terms like ‘little’ or ‘extensive’ experience or ‘many years’ of teaching. It appears as experience is seen as evidence of quality. This rationale seems applicable to all elements in teaching, and many of the other themes. In focus is the activity and not its outcome.

Explicit valuations are almost always short, like ‘detailed and thoughtful’, ‘very nice’, ‘unique’ and ‘excellent’. There are exceptions and the following quote illustrates how massive experience of supervision is explained by favourable features of the candidate’s philosophy of supervision.

In addition, NN supervised 49 (!) MSc projects. NN’s extensive experience is tightly coupled to a very clear and structured philosophy of supervision. (RL 36)

Teaching philosophy is explicitly assigned value more often and with more elaboration:

NN’s outline of the structure and aims of teaching submitted in the application is convincing and demonstrates NN’s engagement. (RL11)
But still, the articulations do not display how the philosophy is manifested in the candidate’s teaching. A rather uncommon but interesting statement reads: ‘NN’s teaching philosophy is Scandinavian standards’ (RL32) which probably means good enough.

Testimonials and recognition typically speak to the worth of applicants’ performances and are perceived as evidence of quality:

… in a supplied attestation the director of studies at the department of [subject] in [town] writes: ‘NN’s teaching is also very appreciated by the students, as evident by student course evaluations carried out after each course’ (RL41)

Awards, received by applicants and their doctoral students, are also considered a token of educational proficiency.

**Valuations assigned through comparisons**

The context of academic scholarship here refers to research and educational proficiency as the two required criteria of eligibility, with research proficiency as the prime watershed for the reviewers. Educational proficiency becomes decisive in the final ranking in one case (RL2) due to marginal differences in research proficiency; in another case, educational proficiency is taken into account in identifying the top group (RL38). Moreover, no one was considered ineligible on account of insufficient educational qualifications alone. Primarily and as expected, research profile, disciplinary knowledge and publication patterns and scope are significant when deciding on the core group or making the final ranking. Interesting is also the textual space; except for six reviewers all devoted more attention to research proficiency than educational proficiency, and two hardly mentioned the latter. Compared to research proficiency, writings about educational proficiency are both shorter and less nuanced.

In cases where educational proficiency is decisive, reviewers argue that ‘a much stronger track record than NN in teaching at advanced levels’, ‘a much more substantial experience from course development and teaching at the PhD. level’ as well as the production of ‘published text-books’ separate the two leading candidates from the third. Further, to separate the first from the second ranked candidate the ‘most important’ aspect is ‘expertise in PhD supervision’ where the highest ranked candidate has a record that ‘clearly outpaces’ the second. *PhD supervision* is also the only theme that is decisive in the final decision and is as such assigned a higher value than other aspects of educational proficiency.

Deficient documentation is commented upon by six reviewers, although, it does not influence the final outcome; most of these candidates are elevated to the top group. Three reviewers, in a co-written part, state:

The assessment of education/teaching is not possible to do properly, based on documents available but we assume that NN also meet the qualifications in this respect. (RL3-5)

This candidate is placed as number three in the final ranking; educational proficiency is thus downplayed as an eligibility criterion.

Further, impressive qualifications regarding teaching do not compensate for scarce research proficiency or a mismatch in research profile, although such a procedure is allowed according to the assessment criteria in the announcement for thirteen cases: ‘… / the assessment criteria will be weighed in such a way that an applicant who is
considered much more competent in terms of teaching than one who is somewhat more competent academically will be ranked higher than the latter’ (Announcement, MP).

Discussion and concluding remarks

We have addressed several aspects of general interest regarding the meaning-making and valuation of educational proficiency in high stakes situations of recruitment, especially of full professors. First-hand material has provided a unique opportunity to explore the hiring process at a research intensive university with educational programmes within a broad range of scientific domains and professions. Further, the system studied here is hierarchical, based on the assessment of merits. Hence, the study is particularly pertinent to other HEIs with the same academic profile and system for appointment. At the same time, the global affiliation of reviewers implies that the findings not only reflects a nationally regulated practice, but the norms and values of the international scientific community and academic practice (see Polanyi 1962).

A restricted notion of educational proficiency

In one way, educational proficiency stands out as a rich notion comprising a wide range of themes, including credentials and with values assigned to elements through inclusion/exclusion, explicit statements and comparisons. Some reviewers treat educational proficiency as an area where the overall university missions of education, research and service may intersect (teaching–research nexus, dissemination of popular texts, etc.). This can be related to Boyer’s (1990) integrated concept of scholarship.

However, foremost educational proficiency appears as a restricted notion, encompassing primarily the mere experience of Teaching and PhD supervision, and the mandatory Teacher training. Internal individual teacher action in classrooms is at the fore, while external collegial interaction within or outside the institution is less often articulated. Striking is the minor value ascribed to teaching–research nexus, language skills and service as well as planning, teaching methods and examination. This could be due to a certain capacity being taken for granted, as with skills in English and Swedish. Yet, in this specific practice of assessment, educational proficiency emerges as a restricted notion.

The assigned value of educational proficiency lies mainly in the fact that applicants have done something, i.e. on the activity and not its outcome. Mostly, teaching activity, rather than student learning or the relationship between them, is stressed. Teacher experience is taken as a sign of quality, not further elaborated. The underlying presumption, however not argued for, could be either that practice makes perfect, or that teaching is not repeatedly assigned to a person without significant skills.

Overall, valuations are short, lacking in precision, and links between statements and values are rarely explicated (see Gunnarsdotter Grönberg 2003). Further, reviewers’ reflections are retrospective (stating former experiences) rather than prospective (judgment on performance-to-come) which may favour more experienced applicants, at the expense of more promising ones. This might benefit academia, since assessment of past performance can be made with higher accuracy, but is detrimental if professors who have passed their glory days are hired.
In this study, educational proficiency has similarities with the notion of teaching skills and to a limited extent with teaching excellence or ‘the reflective practitioner’ (Schön 1983). There are no distinct examples of reviewers focusing on teaching expertise (Kreber 2002) or scholarly teaching (Kern et al. 2015). Nor do we find articulations related to issues of ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ or exposition to peer review through interaction and publications (Shulman 1993). Most striking, and similar to the trend towards quantification in assessments of research proficiency, is the tendency to assess and value quantity rather than quality. Additionally, the manifestation of educational proficiency does not fully encompass what is usually included in teaching skills.

Despite tendencies of variances the deepest impression conveyed are the similarities across disciplines and different reviewers, and educational proficiency as a restricted notion of scholarship. The principal meaning ascribed to educational proficiency is by far the act and experience of teaching with the highest value assigned to doctoral supervision. Wider notions are downplayed both in the review of educational proficiency and relative to the valuation of research skills in critical and decisive phases in the review process. As expected, educational proficiency is no game changer in the context of academic scholarship regarding professors (cf. Subbaye and Vithal 2017).

A scholarly gated community and peer review as expert evaluation

Numerous studies have demonstrated how new institutional settings have transformed the relationship between the state, the academic profession, and higher education institutions. Many argue that academics have been sidelined, but they overlook the reinforced role of peer review: ‘… the academic profession has been reconfigured rather than cast aside’ (Musselin 2013, 1165). Academia remains a scholarly gated community with peers at the centre of high-stake activities. The gate-keeping function of peer review, the specific academic form of expert evaluation, is built on trust in peers and the legitimacy of the review.

Traditionally, peer review has been differently approached in research and education. Reviewers are rarely formally prepared, but they are informally trained regarding research from doctoral education and onward. Research is internationally recognized and evaluated, and disciplinarily anchored in known past and present work. Educational proficiency has been regarded as a locally embedded private and to institutions internal matter, often considered a generic competence. Thus, in the peer review process, research and education proficiencies are differently inscribed disciplinarily, spatially and temporarily. Scholars are still more experienced, skilled and confident in assessing research quality and in identifying internationally recognized criteria and indicators, even though studies point to problems also in research evaluation (Lamont and Mallard 2005).

As we conclude the reviewers primarily serve as gatekeepers of disciplinary research and not the education thereof. Furthermore, they uphold research and education as distinct rather than integrated aspects of academic scholarship.

Some studies perceive peer review as a defective form of evaluation, often lacking in validity and reliability (see Kostoff 2004), shortcomings we also identified. Others have issues with trusting peers as experts of evaluating both research and education, and ask for demystified and more standardized forms of evaluation. Reviewers with the additional assignment to devote extra care to the assessment of educational proficiency articulate
more elements of educational proficiency, but their valuations still emphasize quantity over quality, and research over educational proficiency.

The formalization of the review process and the assignment of specialist reviewers for distinct aspects of the academic scholarship may assist, but may also jeopardize peer review as an expert evaluation (see Elken and Wollscheid 2016). While elaborated criteria might elucidate the values sought for, simplification with too specific criteria and indicators might lead to an instrumental practice. Specially trained reviewers (used by some universities) may be better equipped to evaluate educational proficiency, especially if they themselves exhibit a reflected practice and have insights in educational research, but if they cannot assess research proficiency as well, the integration of scholarship will be endangered (Krause 2009).

The challenge is how to develop an informed evaluation practice. The expert evaluation made by academically competent peers with professional judgement is pivotal when assessing complex phenomena. Due to the disciplinary codified knowledge within a field, the rapid increase of various forms of peer review, the (un)availability of qualified reviewers and the time issue there has to be and will always be tacit and (to non-experts) hidden aspects of expert evaluation.

As guardians, peers mediate messages conveyed in guidelines and applications and evaluate information in sources used. As such, reviewers serve as filter, participating in the formation of academic scholarship and academia itself. Through standardization, the information and the process will be more easily identifiable. Simultaneously, the impact of the experts and the professional judgement, vital when assessing complex phenomena, may be reduced. An expert evaluation is not expected to evoke the same formalization as regular evaluations; rather, the focus is on the outcome and the supporting arguments. Further, the way educational proficiency is downplayed in the context of academic scholarship might be a sign of an immature practice and peers qualified primarily to review research. Thus, arguments that the limitations of details and reasoning is due to peer review being an expert evaluation, is contradicted by the more elaborated reasoning on research proficiency.

The most important internal barrier for valuing educational proficiency seems to be the perception about teaching vis-à-vis research (Graham 2015). Obviously, there is a gap between espoused values in policy and values used in practice. After two decades of international promotion of a wider notion of scholarship, it has not manifested itself in the high-stake situation of hiring full professors. The gateway to the chair is mainly through research, without paying attention to sometimes even mandatory aspects of educational proficiency and the eligibility requirements in the review process. Of course, a professorship involves very specialized work and the appointment of the professorship coheres with more than demonstrated educational proficiency. Nonetheless, these letters produce a discourse on academic scholarship suggesting faculty members to qualify themselves primarily in research and supervision. This in turn, might lead to an uninformed and under-developed teaching profession. Thus, in some respects peer review is no guarantee of quality. For teaching to become integrated and valued in the scientific community and evaluated with the same intellectual rigour there must be changes in the university culture, even for a professorship, in the conceptualization of academic scholarship, education and the practices of evaluation, and in the qualifications of peer reviewers.
It is necessary to further explore the meaning-making of academic scholarship, preferable both education and research. We have identified indicators of differences referring to disciplinary domains, reviewers’ affiliation and assignments, but more extensive cases are called for, scrutinizing the entire process of recruitment, including complete cases from notification to hiring. Special attention should be paid to the object of evaluation, what counts as evidence and criteria of merits and its value, the influence of disciplines, and reviewers as well as the management of the process of assessment and its outcome.

There are major on-going shifts in the hiring of academics in many universities worldwide, including short-term contracts and fewer tenure positions as well as empowerment of management at the expense of peers (Fumasoli, Goastellec, and Kehm 2015). Thus, recruitment and reward system need to be further studied in relation to shifting contexts. The aim would be to more fully explore the manifestation of educational proficiency in high-stake instances and its consequences, preferably through comparative approaches including both qualitative and quantitative data. Such comparative studies may well involve trials and further development of the set of themes developed here.

The hiring of academics is part of the formation of academia and the life of professionals. Through our study of the gateway to the professoriate the blind spot has continued its journey out of the black box.

Notes

1. Equivalent to distinguished or chaired professor.
2. Similar and related terms in the international literature are teaching skills, teaching expertise or scholarship of teaching and learning. The term “educational proficiency” is used in order to allow an expansion of these terms.
3. Assessment reports of applicants, written by external peers. Other synonyms are external expert reports or external referee reports.

Disclosure statement

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‘When it comes to what employers are looking for, I don’t think I’m it for a lot of them’: class and capitals in, and after, higher education

Barbara Merrill, Fergal Finnegan, Jerry O’Neill & Scott Revers

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‘When it comes to what employers are looking for, I don’t think I’m it for a lot of them’: class and capitals in, and after, higher education*

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ABSTRACT

Much research on adults in higher education has focused on issues of access and participation. As a result little is known about what happens to working-class students after leaving university even though employability is high on the agenda HE research on this topic in relation to such students is sparse. This research focuses on the voices of working-class students and their aspirations in relation to employability. Using two student narratives this paper draws on the findings of two countries, England and Ireland, from a six-country European project on employability of non-traditional students using biographical research methods. Their stories reveal an awareness of class inequalities in the labour market in relation to cultural, economic and social capital and issues of locality, gender and age. The stories also indicate a sense of precarity in their lifecourse in a society which has become highly reflexive and fluid (Alheit, P., and B. Dausien. 2002. “The ‘Double Face’ of Lifelong Learning: Two Analytical Perspectives on a ‘Silent Revolution’.” Studies in the Education of Adults 34 (1): 3–23).

KEYWORDS

Non-traditional students; employability; class inequalities; biographicity; higher education

Introduction

This article draws on the findings on class inequalities in and after HE in two countries, Ireland and England, from a six country (UK, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden) European research project entitled Enhancing the employability of non-traditional students in HE’ (EMPLOY). The key aim and objectives of the project are to understand employability from the student and graduate perspective. By non-traditional we mean students and graduates who are from communities and groups who are under-represented in university and often also face obstacles in the job market. This includes a diverse range of groups such as mature students, working-class students, students from ethnic minorities and students with disabilities. The specific focus of this article is on working-class students and graduates and issues of class inequalities in relation to employability based on biographical interviews with non-traditional participants.

We begin by locating the research in a socio-economic, political and policy context and move to a critical discussion of employability, followed by an outline of our theoretical and methodological framework. Our research indicates that despite significant continuities in working-class experience and structures there is clear evidence that class experience and expectations are changing in relation to education. The narratives of two students (Sharon, from England, and David, from Ireland) have been

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*This quote from Paul was selected during the full cohort analysis as a title for the piece as it usefully summarises the experience of many participants in the labour market after graduation.

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selected as they illustrate many of the key findings of our research in relation to the nature of class inequalities, HE and employability. In particular, we will through these stories, draw on and adapt the concepts of Bourdieu to look at how class and capitals affect transitions after graduation in a society which is highly reflexive and fluid, as well as increasingly unequal and precarious.

‘Mass’ education and class inequality in HE

Higher education institutions across Europe have been transformed as a result of economic and socio-political changes, the reconfiguration of state/university relationships, globalisation and increasingly through marketisation. Perhaps the most obvious effect of these varied but interlinked changes has been the remarkable global expansion of HE over a generation and Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2011) note that the number of HE students doubled between 1990s and 2000s. The same dramatic patterns are discernible across the EMPLOY network countries. In Ireland in 1980 there were 20,000 undergraduates in HEIs and in 2014 there were over 170,000 (Fleming, Loxley, and Finnegan 2017) while in the UK there were 68,150 undergraduates rising to 350,000 in 2011.

This has opened up opportunities for widening participation and access for groups who never previously entered HE (Scott 2001; Osborne 2003; Fleming, Loxley, and Finnegan 2017). As Osborne notes:

To a greater or lesser degree massification is economically-driven; struggles for social justice have intentionally led to certain gains for historically excluded groups, though the resultant changes in HE practices are differentially distributed according to institutional history, tradition and form. (2003, 17)

We have seen progress in terms of gender equality, a large rise in the number of adult students and in some countries a significant growth in the participation of students with disabilities. There has also been an increase in working-class participation while in some countries elite social class participation has reached the point of ‘saturation’ (Shavit et al. 2007) which has created some space for working-class students (Clancy 2015).

This has made HE more vibrant and diverse and the significance of these processes should not be underplayed. However, widening participation initiatives in recent decades have had uneven success in addressing educational inequalities (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Shavit et al. 2007; Attewell and Newman 2010). While greater numbers of working-class people are attending HE than ever before there is evidence of persistent inequality in participation rates (Attewell and Newman 2010) and in ‘educational careers’ and destinations (Burke 2014) as well as sharpening inequalities more widely (Sayer 2015). This brings us to a foundational argument for this article. The evidence indicates that the morphology of class inequality has changed and we need to pay more attention to ‘branching points’ and final destinations in educational careers than before; the issue is no longer solely about access but rather access to what? This new(ish) situation therefore requires a double focus – on the absolute participation rates of different social groups and classes as well as the extent to which wealthy and middle-class students predominate in prestigious institutions, disciplines and courses and are accruing the credentials which are highly valued in work and society. This necessitates research that takes the ‘long view’ and which can explore trajectories into, through and out of HE into the labour market.

Putting employability into context

The term employability has long featured in HR literature and management studies but in recent years has become primarily associated with education. It has become a policy ‘keyword’ – that is a ‘significant, binding word’ (Williams 1988, 15) that discloses a great deal about how we view education and society. In the UK ‘enhancing employability’ through education is well-established in policy discourse while in Ireland it came to the fore in the period of crisis and austerity which followed the financial crisis. Employability is also a central concern of the EU, and named as a key goal of the
It is now being directly aligned to widening participation as explained in a recent EU report:

Widening participation does not stop at providing access to students from underrepresented groups … but has to include measures ensuring that such students complete their studies and have a successful transition to the labour market. (Eurydice 2014, 62)

It is argued increased access to education can simultaneously enhance the store of ‘human capital’ and overcome barriers to inequality. This is not so much a change but rather an elaboration of existing HE policy at an EU and national level. As the report cited above makes clear it is crucial to ‘modernise’ HE and make it more ‘responsive’ to society’s needs. That access should entail access into work after university is unobjectionable, even necessary. Certainly, there are good social and economic reasons to demand that HE should become more responsive to wider society but we need to pay close attention to precisely how this is envisaged. Not least because this policy ‘keyword’ is often deployed in sociologically naive fashion wedded to ‘a way of reasoning that seems to have no structural roots, no social locations and no origin’ (Fejes 2010, 91). Tighter integration of HE with the labour market (Morley 2001) is understood mainly in terms ensuring that graduates meet the needs of employers in relation to skills, knowledge and dispositions and as an issue of individual competence and performance rather than a complex personal, institutional and social responsibility.

Such an individualistic and decontextualized way of thinking about employability has been fused with a human capital approach to access in widening participation initiatives. It is believed that acquiring a degree will facilitate upward mobility. In, and after HE, it is implied, adult working-class students will enter onto a level playing field with their middle-class counterparts. There is a dearth of empirical, qualitative research which explores what happens to non-traditional students after university but the available evidence indicates that this is not the case (Tomlinson 2012; Burke 2014) and there is little proof that widening participation on its own leads to equality in the labour market or society (Burke 2014; Tomlinson and Holmes 2017). In fact, it appears massification and economic conditions means that graduates are often underemployed or even unemployed (Brown and Hesketh 2004; Tomlinson 2008; Burke 2014; Tholen 2014).

Beside which we know there has been significant restructuring of the labour market linked to the technological and political transformations that have defined neoliberal globalisation. Cumulatively these changes have resulted in new forms of flexible and precarious labour in many working-class and some middle-class jobs (Standing 2009). This has led some thinkers to speculate that stable careers identities, which are vital for a sense of belonging and being valued in society, have been undermined (Sennett 1998). Of course this is a very broad set of social processes but we think access, widening participation and employability can only be properly analysed when we are cognisant of rising inequality, increased competition, social precarity and occupational uncertainty.

Theoretical framework: class, capitals and social space

Critiques of dominant understanding of employability such as Tomlinson (2008) and Kalfa and Taksa (2015) have turned to a ‘social positioning perspective’ which adopts a more relational and historical approach. We want to build on this using the work of Bourdieu (1984, 1986a) and especially his concept of social space as structured by the possession of various form of capitals (cultural, economic, symbolic and social) alongside the notion of habitus. To fully explain the trajectories of people through classed social space – in the educational field and the labour market – we think these concepts used relationally and reflexively alongside each other remain invaluable to understand class inequality and education. Our theoretical framework focuses on the work of Bourdieu. We are aware that other scholars have used his work in similar research contexts such as Diane Reay and Beverly Skeggs and have discussed their approaches elsewhere (Finnegan, Merrill, and Thunborg 2014; Finnegan and Merrill 2017).
According to Bourdieu the social world is ‘accumulated history’ (1986b, 46) in which class is defined by ownership over capital; this ‘in its various forms is a set of pre-emptive rights over the future’ (Bourdieu 2000, 225). Bourdieu links this to the formation of our dispositions and sense of the world, what he terms ‘habitus’, to the volume and composition of capitals at our disposal. Habitus is partially defined by ‘a sense of one’s place’ (Bourdieu 1990, 131) in relation to others and the wider social space. Bourdieu stresses the situated, embodied and practical nature of both conscious and subconscious social action.

Bourdieu does not envisage social space as unitary and undifferentiated rather he claims it is divided into various fields and each field has its own specific logic of practice with its own stakes and rewards (1984). Bourdieu also maintains that the boundaries and practices which constitute a field get redefined through struggle over time. Fields are therefore dynamic. He is particularly interested in how dispositions relate to a given field (1984, 2000): to use one of Bourdieu’s favoured similes the relationship between habitus and field can be likened respectively to one’s feel for the game and the game itself (2000, 151). A field is also defined by how the various forms of capital are employed within that field. By examining how well a given habitus functions in response to the demands of a given field and the sort of capitals that are required to succeed in a specific field, Bourdieu believes, we can begin to properly understand how the dynamics underpinning the choices, preferences and strategies of social actors in a specific field of practice reflect and mediate the divisions which define social relations as whole.

Tracing movement through differentiated and boundaried social space over time allows us to understand class experience, how it shapes identity and how social inequality gets reproduced. The dominated sections of society, who Bourdieu largely, but not exclusively, identifies as the working-class, have less capital at their disposal than members of dominant classes and have this dispossession naturalised through early socialisation. This is confirmed and reinforced by limited upward movement through social space and restricted access to socially valued positions in specific fields of practice. As a consequence the ‘position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions he [sic] occupies in the different fields’ (1984, 724).

For Bourdieu the immanent logic of the social world is usually reproductive and he assumes a high degree of social stability in class structures. It is important for our discussion though to note that Bourdieu does recognise that this can be transformed through the use of individual and collective agency:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133)

Such agency always involves the past, present and future so that agency has to be understood within both contexts and time. It has been defined thus:

The imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears and desires for the future. (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 971)

This is, we believe, a relatively undeveloped idea in his work. We want therefore to draw on other research – which is quite distinct from Bourdieu and make the argument that this capacity for agency on a biographical level is widespread and increasingly necessary to cope with the challenges of ‘reflexive modernity’ (Alheit and Dausien 2002). Alheit and Dausien (2002) coined the term biographicality to theorise this as:

a self-willed, ‘autopoietic’ accomplishment on the part of active subjects, in which they reflexively ‘organise’ their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions. (Alheit and Dausien 2002, 17)

How, and to what extent, people can draw on their biographical stock of knowledge needs to be kept in view. Focusing on transitions between fields through relational social analysis of reproduction
alongside this theory of reflexive agency allows us to properly analyse the interplay of structure and agency and make sense of working-class experience in and after HE.

**Methodological approach**

Biographical narrative approaches are a popular research method within European adult education research (West et al. 2007) and reflects more broadly a ‘biographical turn’ within the social sciences (Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf 2000). Its popularity lies in its adoption of a humanistic approach which places participants central to the research process and ‘offers rich insights into the dynamic interplay of individuals and history, inner and outer worlds’ (Merrill and West 2009, 1).

Feminists contributed to this method by advocating for a democratic relationship between researcher and researched (Reinharz 1992). Oakley (1981) emphasises that interviews should be like a conversation, whereby the researchers’ self is present. Importantly biographical research has illuminated the everyday lives of the marginalised and oppressed. For Jane Thompson, a radical adult education feminist, telling stories are:

> a way of exercising critical consciousness and of producing knowledge from the inside about gender, class and education, deriving from personal, particular and shared experience. Not in the pursuit of ultimate truth but in the search for greater, more nuanced, understanding. (2000, 6)

Feminist biographical approaches also highlight the interaction between the personal and political and public and private lives. Individual biographies reveal that personal experiences at the micro level are often shared ones of gender, class and ethnicity at the macro level. So, although a life history is an individual story it is always located within a social, historical and political context (Bertaux 1981) and biographical accounts reveal the collective experiences of class and gender and the interaction between structure and agency (Plummer 2001; Merrill 2007).

In this research, the Irish team conducted biographical interviews with 30 non-traditional students and graduates and as there was a longitudinal dimension based its findings on 46 interviews (18 of the 30 were working-class). The UK team carried out 40 interviews with 30 undergraduate and 10 graduate students all of whom were working-class. Ten of the undergraduate students were interviewed for a second time after they had completed their degree. In the first instance, we used occupational history for mature students and family occupational background for students who went straight from school into university to identify people who came from working-class backgrounds (routine and manual occupations in NE Sec/CSO Ireland categories). The biographical interviews supplemented this with rich insights into the other dimensions of class (cultural capital, educational history, community experiences etc.).

Each national team analysed data using open coding to identify general findings with a particular focus on the effect of class long-term outcomes for graduates. Following this the teams met for joint analysis of themes which built on earlier shared comparative work on working-class experience of HE (Finnegan and Merrill 2017). In the joint discussions, we illustrated themes through case studies, sought general patterns, looked for sub-cohorts and for ‘outliers’.

The presentation of findings from this process can be presented either by a themed approach or through individual case studies which also highlight shared experiences and themes across the whole sample (Rustin 2000; Merrill and West 2009). We chose the latter and identified two stories as individual case studies which are particularly useful for illuminating the complex patterns of continuities and changes in class experience that we want to illustrate here. As Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) stress, such individual stories ‘retain more of the “noise” of real life than many other types of research’. This approach is rooted in the tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology and studies by Thomas and Znaniecki (1958) and Clifford Shaw’s (1966) study of Stanley in *Jack Roller. Further, from a Bourdieusian perspective we are especially interested in finding ways to describe how class inequality operates over time – how it sediments in life stories and institutions – and how this is then responded to by agents in dynamic and changing fields.
Research findings

Before we turn to our two case studies we want to give an overview of the key findings and say a little more about what we mean when we speak of continuities and changes in class experience.

The data indicates the significance of processes of detraditionalisation in relation to work, education, communities and intimate relationships and the importance of the biographical agency in everyday life. Detraditionalisation has opened up new pathways through work and life and biographical projects which do not follow predictable patterns. This the research suggests, along with other cultural and political changes, has loosened but not eviscerated collective notions of class identity.

Detraditionalisation has also changed the role of education in society, especially non-compulsory education and training. Education becomes, or at least is perceived as having the potential, to provide important resources for coping with multiple transitions of the modern life course. It is noteworthy that broken and truncated educational stories and the impossibility of attending university earlier in life was raised by many mature working-class students. This accumulated history of denial and restricted access followed by ‘massification’ in a rapidly changing and complex society, explains, we think, why HE was so highly valued by most students and graduates. It was described as a space of opportunity, development and upward mobility. The belief that HE changes lives and offers significant developmental opportunities was very common amongst working-class students. This was also repeatedly linked to a desire to find ‘good work’, typically described in terms of secure conditions, vis-à-vis income and contract, but also stimulation and a ‘fit’ with interests and passions. What comes out of the students and graduates accounts very clearly is the desire for what might be termed the expansion of reflexive agency whilst retaining a sense of biographical coherence. In particular students and graduates hope a degree will enhance their power to choose and shape a career that fits their interests and aspirations.

But as we argued earlier our and other research suggests there are new branching points and forms of differentiation in HE which effect these outcomes (in discipline, institution, postgraduate qualification). Besides which we know class inequality has sharpened and is also being modified by precaritisation. So it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the students and graduates we spoke to told us stories of managing unexpected dilemmas and contradictions which flow from these changes in the structuring of social space. To explore some of the changes and continuities in class experience in a reflexive era we outline the narratives of two students: Sharon, from England and David, from Ireland.

Sharon

Sharon is 37 years old and studied law and is the first person in her family to go to university. She went to a state school but left at 15 without qualifications. Her family background was an unhappy and troubled one. Sharon was put in foster care at the age of 12 after her father murdered her mother and was imprisoned. At the age of 16 she had to leave her foster home and ended up living in accommodation for the homeless. She became pregnant and lived on benefits looking after her child until the age of 20. She then had a range of jobs and was always successful at job interviews. She finally ended up working in the prison service prompted in part by wider personal and family experiences. She began to think about returning to education as she wanted a more fulfilling job so Sharon took an access to higher education course before going to university.

Sharon chose her university because:

it’s in the top five and it’s very close to my house … I looked at the newspapers and X is the best especially for Law and I know that solicitors can be quite picky about which university you’ve been to, to whether they employ you or not. So, I thought I have to go to X and nowhere else really.

When she heard that she had been accepted she was:
Over the moon … It was brilliant. It was the best thing ever. I was just so happy that I got into X because I didn’t want to go anywhere else. I just felt so grateful. I was like ‘oh my god I can’t believe I’ve got into the top five universities from coming from nothing’.

Choosing law and the desire to become a solicitor stemmed from her life experiences of dealing with solicitors following her mother’s death and later obtaining a divorce from her partner. Although Sharon enjoyed being at X she struggled with her studies, not helped by having to take paid work for financial reasons. Consequently, she missed many seminars and lectures. It was partly because she felt that the access course had not prepared her sufficiently for essay writing and seminars but it also related to class issues. She was aware that many of the younger students had attended private schools and used language differently to her. She didn’t always understand what they were talking about and this made her feel ‘even more unconfident about being a solicitor’. Sharon lacked the cultural capital of her fellow middle-class students. She is also dyslexic and had disability support. At times Sharon said she wanted ‘to get out of here’ as her marks were low and lacked peer support as she was a mature student amongst young, middle-class undergraduates. In Bourdieu’s terms she felt ‘like a fish out of water’. She reflected on her sense of disorientation in her first year of study and noted that ‘traditional students seem to be trained at birth to write essays and sit exams and they know exactly how to do it where we were running around like headless chickens’.

I think until after the first year I didn’t really know what we were supposed to be doing in seminars. I know you are supposed to answer the questions but in the first week I didn’t answer any questions because I was like ‘Are we supposed to do that?’ … I was ‘What are they talking about?’ because I just didn’t know.

Law students have to find their own work placements but these are unpaid – something Sharon could not afford. She managed to obtain a placement at a high court through a lawyer she had met previously. She was aware of the importance of possessing social capital in the law profession in obtaining employment so she took an agentic step to attend a social event for solicitors:

Last year I went to a Law Society dinner. It wasn’t part of the application process – it was kind of discovering more about us but then from that they did invite me to apply to them. I think because it’s informal but formal but there are employees who have been with the company quite a while so you can talk to them. And because it’s dinner, it’s not an interview setting you can ask them any questions you want to, you can get tips. It does actually help.

Although she went to one event she did not join because of the expense. To become a solicitor, graduates have to take a Legal Practice Course (LPC) after their degree but this was too expensive for Sharon.

Life has been difficult for her since finishing. A good mark in final exams is also important and Sharon did not obtain this, putting her at a disadvantage in the labour market. She witnessed younger middle-class students walking into a job because of their connections:

Some of the students I’ve spoken to, their parents are partners in solicitors so obviously they’re going to walk into a job. Definitely down the barrister’s route it’s about what private school you’ve been to. I think money definitely because if you haven’t got the money you’re just not going to the bar. It costs too much money – £18,000 and £12,000 for solicitors and then books. I think it’s more who you know as well as what university you’re from.

However, she left university determined to obtain some type of (lower status) job in the legal field and started applying for jobs but is confined to the local area. Overall, despite the difficulties experienced at university she remained positive at the end of her studies about having chosen X rather than the other local university because she is aware of the hierarchical inequalities in the HE system. She feels that law firms are not interested in students with a degree from there. She raised this issue again in her second interview which took place six months after graduating. Sharon explained that ‘I got really ill in my last year … and I failed the first two exams but then I got a bit better and I passed all the others’. Sharon was ‘devastated’ by the low degree classification she obtained and initially felt ‘I didn’t really think there was any point in having it’. The Exam Board took the decision to allow her to re-take the Trusts module as this is required to become a solicitor. She described this
stage in the following way: ‘I am kind of in limbo because my exam is in May so I can’t do anything … until I have passed Trusts’. However, she used her agency and quickly obtained a job as a PA at a solicitors’ to help her accrue some experience of the field.

Although the low grade at degree level put her at a disadvantage in the labour market she believes that the reputation of X University was crucial in achieving the PA job:

Putting X on my CV got me the job because the first thing they said in the interview was ‘X – that’s a very good university. How did you get in there? What did you do?’ And that basically got me the job.

She continued that when she met the other solicitors at the firm they asked:

What university did you go to? And whenever you say X they gave an exclamation of surprise … ‘Okay’. It’s as if you are in a different light all of a sudden. Because they had all been educated at Eton, and Oxford, Cambridge so they felt I fitted in because I’m from X. If I had told them I had been to Y (the other university in the city) I’d have been cut out.

Her story reveals the exclusivity of the law profession in relation to class, habitus and capitals.

Sharon’s aim is to become a coroner but realises that she is in a precarious situation financially as the training costs are expensive. To help her finance her law training she has turned to gambling as a survival mechanism to pay her bills.

Sharon, despite the set back with her degree grade, remains resilient and determined to succeed in a field which she realises is highly middle-class and elitist. She was aware, like other students we interviewed, of the advantage of having social, cultural and economic capital and a particular habitus, as well as a degree from an elite university. This for her was particularly evident in a traditional subject area and her experience of resulting professional opportunities. Sharon, however, was also good at being agentic to overcome these barriers and inequalities. She responded strategically to her circumstances by making choices to circumvent the barriers she experienced. She recognised the advantages gained by being at an elite university and calculated that institutional reputation would carry weight. In contrast, she observed that friends who had successfully completed their degrees at other less well-recognised universities were now failing to find a position. She also cultivated relationships with other students while at university, building on the social and cultural capital she had accrued in this environment, recognising that this could serve her in the future.

**David**

David is in his forties, a family man with two children, who did an Arts and Humanities degree as a mature student and went on to do a postgraduate teaching qualification.

In an early interview, David describes leaving school as a crucial turning point in his life. Being edged out of school at 16 was very disempowering and associates it with losing some control over his life. He thinks he left school too early; his father and mother had very little formal education and because of this his parents ‘didn’t really know how to support me’.

Beside this the school as an institution ‘was pretty dire looking back’. The fact he came from a disadvantaged community which had a reputation for being ‘rough’, was mentioned by teachers to David a number of times

Going there, there was certain discrimination because of where you were from. I was from a poorer area. We didn’t have an influence in the community; we didn’t even have the opportunity to have an influence in the community […] You were just lucky to be there. You were on short order. […] I was a kid who always conformed. I didn’t cause any trouble. I was the quiet kid, who tried to fit in and make as many friends as possible but you’re still targeted. There is no getting under the radar.

So, David’s educational trajectory was shaped by both an unresponsive and classed institution and his family’s lack of cultural capital. There is a peer group element in this as well as he had been an ‘ok’ student and had consciously distanced himself from a group of friends who were ‘messers’ but at the beginning of secondary school in his mid-teens he became more interested
in sports and girls. When he failed important exams at 15 he was ‘devastated’ but still hoped he could turn it around. However, because of his results, he was moved into a ‘mickey mouse’ vocational stream within the school which operated according to a different timetable to mainstream classes. The school’s limited, and limiting, expectations of the students on this course were made abundantly clear to them and they spent much of their time messing around with a stripped-down car. David says he became cheekier as a result. He recounts an incident when he realised abundantly clear to them and they spent much of their time messing around with a stripped-down car. David says he became cheekier as a result. He recounts an incident when he realised

David tells me this experience at school really bothered him subsequently.

He put school behind him and after a couple of jobs where he felt ‘like a square peg in a round hole’ he started driving a taxi. He worked at this for over twenty years. Talking to people in his care made him cognisant of the difference education can make. After the industry was deregulated it became more competitive. He became increasingly dissatisfied as he was not spending enough time with his family and driving was becoming more dangerous.

His love of films eventually led him to do a script writing course and later gave him the confidence to sign up for an access course. This and other coincidences and changes in educational policy led him to enrol on an access course.

Realising that he was in fact – despite the judgement of staff at his school – a capable learner was described by David as a slow and tentative process which happened after he got into university. When I met David first he told me how much he liked it. HE was the exact inverse of school; he said it is a place where ‘anything goes’ and then remarked ‘its poles apart. The majority of lecturers are approachable, not aloof, I love the place’. The experience of university was seen as transformative because it provided him with an opportunity to prove previous formal educational evaluations wrong and this set the basis for a greater sense of self-worth. He said ‘I am the new me. I am somebody else now. I don’t associate myself with Ytown, that background […] I would call that a deprived background, deprived of education and knowledge, deprived of capability and opportunities’.

One of the interesting aspects of David’s story is the way education and a changed learner identity is linked to the possibility of a deeper biographical transformation-what David called the ‘new me’. David associates education with recognition and resources for agency and the extent to which these ideas of change and transformation rely on him seeing himself as a capable learner. A series of previously fixed and unwanted designations – early school leaver, from Ytown etc. – become provisional and contingent once he went to university. He kept working as a taxi driver but as a student he proves he has the ‘ability’ to be something else – this is why he says ‘I am not just passing the assignments and the exams they are giving me I am doing well’. Despite the fact that like a lot of working-class students he was overworked right through his degree course the change in routine creates the perception that the future is unwritten. In positing an ‘unfinished’ learning story David subjects his own past to scrutiny. By reflecting on his learning story David subjects his own past to scrutiny and attending university has encouraged him to ask ‘what if?’ he had support and opportunities earlier in his life.

He successfully worked his way through a degree and then a teaching postgraduate degree. Becoming a teacher appealed to him from quite early on in his degree – it would be family-friendly, secure, satisfying and allow him to give ‘something back’ to people and draw on his love of learning. After graduating he immediately started looking for teaching jobs, first locally and then across a much wider area. He found work subbing (temporary teaching hours which cover for core staff
who are on leave or ill) and actively built his CV. David approached this in his characteristically focussed and optimistic way and paid for supplementary courses from his own pocket, did extracurricular work and cultivated social networks. He developed an in-depth knowledge of how to approach interviews. When nothing secure became available in his second year he decided, very reluctantly, to teach abroad. This put pressure on his family life and he came back the following year determined to find something closer to home. This was difficult because austerity policies in Ireland following the economic crises led to a hiring freeze. The emergence of private colleges offering educational qualifications also made things highly competitive.

David did find a position but was in a very insecure and nerve-wracking situation where he was highly reliant on the assessment of management of his performance. When he ran into difficulty with a course which he was asked to take on but felt unprepared to do, it was exhausting and anxiety inducing. He focussed sharply on trying to do well overall and most of his work, especially with vulnerable students, was successful. But when he applied for a permanent job for this role he was in he did not get it. He moved on and is currently teaching in a school where he has no security and has to commute several hours a day.

The long ordeal after university, five years of precarity as a teacher have been wearing: ‘I have done everything I can’ to ‘be, try and make myself invaluable’ ‘trying to fecking please everybody’. He is quite clear about the heavy emotional cost of these circumstances for himself and his family. He says he feels his age is a disadvantage and blames himself for some of his choices (going to the UK and taking on the course which did not work out). Although David is highly agentic, well qualified and committed to teaching he says he may not get the job he hopes for reflecting that while he will always be ‘on the squad but may not be on the team’.

**Discussion**

We think Sharon and David’s stories illustrate what was also evident across the research: that the morphology of class inequality, especially in terms of access to education, has changed. Class cannot be tidily traced just through lines of continuity in manual occupations or wholesale exclusion from HE. De-traditionalisation and the massification of education has opened up new pathways in education, self-understanding and even identity. Obtaining a degree for Sharon and David, like many others, has affected their sense of self, confidence and aspects of their habitus. Just as importantly, acquiring credentials had changed the composition and volume of cultural capital at their disposal. These are significant biographical changes and is clearly linked to the structure of HE as a field.

But does this significantly alter their position in social space overall? Here the research findings are less clear: across the research cohorts there is a great deal of movement – often into professional occupations but frequently in conditions which are not secure in various ways. This was the experience of the majority of Irish graduates. For example, Sharon and David’s trajectories, at least in the pared down terms of standard class taxonomies based on occupation such as NS SEGs, are upwardly social mobile, but both of them have encountered significant barriers in moving through social space and are in quite ambivalent situations. David’s degree and postgraduate qualification gave him an enhanced sense of agency, of moving away from a prescribed ‘social fate’ but also notably a diminution of income and security. Sharon recognises she will never have the same social, economic and cultural capitals of her middle-class counterparts but at the same time recognises that she has changed and ‘grown’ as a result of studying at an elite university. Moving into education and onto new career paths has involved risky transitions and their final destinations are still uncertain. Significantly, they, and most of the other interviewees, feel it is their personal responsibility to bear the cost and burden of making these transitions.

If we explore why access to HE does not result in more linear movement we can discern the impact of both new and persistent forms of socio-economic inequalities. What is new is precaritisation across non-elite groups (Standing 2009) – leading to a lack of occupational security, lower than expected
income, a privatisation and individualisation of the costs of training alongside the fragmentation of professional narratives.

The narratives also indicate a shift in the value of various forms of cultural capital (embodied and non-embodied) and the continuing and increasing importance of social and economic capital. Across the two research cohorts we can see evidence of devaluation of basic degrees and the differentiation of higher education disciplines and pathways. Brown, Lauder, and Ashton (2011) argue that the global expansion of HE in a period also characterised by neoliberal globalisation has fiercely intensified competition for graduate jobs. There has been a rapid restructuring of occupational and educational fields and the value of formal cultural capital in the form of HE degrees has decreased. In these circumstances Field points out: ‘Education in adult life becomes both a resource for individuals seeking to promote their employability and mobility, and at the same time a cause of further uncertainty and risk’. (2006, 1).

When a basic degree loses value our research indicates other resources – including wealth alongside social and specific forms of cultural capital, especially embodied cultural capital – come into to play in securing good graduate jobs. In Bourdieu’s terms the availability and volume of capitals accumulated over time in making the transition into graduate work is very marked. In this way old inequalities – which shape early biographical choices and trajectories related to wealth as well as social and cultural capital, continue to affect labour market outcomes in later life.

David and Sharon are passionate learners who worked hard at university. They are thoughtful and reflexive and highly agentic in pursuit of clear life goals. Like many of the participants in our research they are also keenly aware of what employers are looking for: they have learnt the rules of the game and the tricks of the trade in making applications and interviews. Yet they still encountered real difficulties in finding the type of position they want. The conclusion we draw from this is that biographicality is a very real phenomenon but it is sharply constrained by structural limits and objective possibilities. In highly competitive, and/or open parts of the labour market small differences can have a significant impact (time out of paid work for internships, expensive postgraduate qualifications, modes of self-presentation and embodiment, developing extensive professional social networks). Here accumulated class advantage is crucial in having that ‘little bit extra’. This concurs with research in the UK which has discovered the trend of underemployment of working-class graduates and suggests that it may also be taking longer for such graduates to find a secure position (Tomlinson 2008).

On that basis, we can say that class boundaries and cultures are shifting, and the field of HE is being reconfigured, but without significantly altering the basic structure of class inequality. We conclude from this that access to capitals over generations continues to affect social trajectories in highly differential ways. These findings point to the depth and historically sedimented nature of these inequalities and the limits of widening access to a specific field without significant change in the structure and dynamics of social space as a whole. Specifically, the research points to the limited autonomy of HE as a field and the importance of social structures linked to employment and the division of labour in the circulation and conversion of capitals.

Yet as we noted earlier there is an assumption, in policy but also more widely, that once working-class students enter university inequalities disappear. While attending HE brings benefits the full extent of these risks becomes clear when one explores what happens after university especially in a period characterised by increased precarity and competition in the labour market. The unwarranted belief that expanding access will tackle inequality has been supplemented by the equally unproven claim that orientating educational policy in HE towards employability will achieve the same goals. Placing this in a broader frame what this research points towards is that the promises and possibilities of reflexive modernity in social democracies has been largely undermined through the rise of financialised neoliberalism. Consequently, although projects of self-realisation in and through HE have become more common amongst working-class people (Reay 2003; Finnegan and Merrill 2017) for many, including Sharon and David, the outcomes of taking this path are far from certain.
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References


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<td>Educational upgrading, career advancement, and social inequality development from a life-course perspective in Germany (2019)</td>
<td>Research in Social Stratification and Mobility (article from Elsevier)</td>
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Educational upgrading, career advancement, and social inequality development from a life-course perspective in Germany

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Abstract: This article employs data from the adult cohort of the German National Educational Panel Study (NEPS) to investigate the extent to which upgrading of educational credentials over the life course influences the social stratification of labour market outcomes. We argue that credentials upgrading should be an important predictor of both inter- and intragenerational mobility, especially in Germany where occupational and educational attainment are tightly linked. Indeed, we show that career progression in Germany is dependent upon re-enrolment into formal education and that the change in occupational status are hierarchically distributed across types and levels of educational upgrades. While much more persons of disadvantaged social background are at risk of upgrading, persons of advantaged backgrounds are both slightly more likely to upgrade and to upgrade to qualifications leading to the highest expected premiums. Despite these differences, educational upgrading does not alter the overall level of social stratification in occupational status attainment.

1. Introduction

The literature on school-to-work transitions has often treated the end of schooling and the entry into employment as if individuals would leave education and enter the labour market in a single step (i.e. Shavit and Müller 1998, Wolbers 2007, Kogan et al. 2011). However, the
development of life-course research and the increasing availability of longitudinal datasets have underlined the importance of treating school-to-work transitions as a sequence of events characterised by multiple numbers of status activities and status shifts (Brzinsky-Fay and Solga 2016). In other words, the increasing complexity of young adults’ pathways into the labour market challenges the attempt to define job entry as a single and coherent event. Rather, it should be seen as a period in which individuals switch between episodes of schooling and employment before “career maturity” is reached (i.e. Hillmert and Jacob 2003, Hillmert and Jacob 2010, Jacob and Weiss 2010), or combine work and education, postponing the attainment of a qualification (Roksa and Velez, 2010; Weiss and Roksa, 2016).

Still little is known about the dynamics that this creates in the formation process of social inequality. While the literature has extensively documented the importance of education in explaining the association between social origin and individuals’ position in the labour market (Breen and Luijkx, 2004), we know less about the extent to which dynamic processes of educational upgrading influence the level of social stratification (Blossfeld et al 2014). For that reason, this paper explores how credentials upgrading after labour market entry affects the association between social origin and labour market returns. We concentrate on Germany, which is a country with a tight linkage between educational credentials and labour market outcomes.

With this, we add to the literature by combining two strands of research. On the one hand, intergenerational social mobility research has typically been concerned with the mediating role of final educational outcomes in the association between social origin and destination (Breen et al. 2009). On the other hand, life-course oriented research on socially selective re-enrolment into formal education has typically focused on specific transition patterns, for instance from post-secondary to higher education (Jacob and Weiss 2010, Weiss 2013). By bringing together the two perspectives, we argue that inter- and intragenerational mobility should be assessed jointly in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic aspects in the formation of social inequality. This helps to identify if and how social selectivities in educational upgrading have diminishing or reinforcing effects on the overall level of social stratification of labour market outcomes.

As we will argue below, the extent to which educational upgrading processes are able to impact the overall level of social stratification is a function of three fundamental factors: First, the labour market premiums that are attached to educational upgrading from and to different educational levels, second, the distribution of initial educational attainment within social origin
groups (e.g. the distributions of persons at risk of upgrading), and third, the social selectivities in upgrading rates (conditional on being at risk). This article contributes to the literature by providing evidence on all three aspects. We will assess to what extent the cumulative effect of these factors still alters the level of social stratification after labour market entry.

2. The German context

The extent to which education and labour market returns are linked depends on the institutional contexts that exist in different countries (e.g. Müller and Gangl 2003, Scherer 2005). Germany is a prime example of an occupational labour market, where education and training exhibit a high level of vocational specificity. This has several implications that are important with regard to the role of educational upgrading. First, professional skills are largely transmitted in the education and training system, which means that labour market outcomes are highly stratified by formal educational credentials. Second, for that reason, Germany displays a comparatively low level of occupational mobility after initial labour market placement (cf. Mayer et al. 2010). Third, for those cases when occupational changes from a lower-level to a higher-level job occur, it can be expected that they are most likely based on the previous obtainment of a respective higher-level formal credential.

The German educational system can be described as a combination of general schooling and vocational or higher education. A characteristic feature of Germany’s school system is its early between school-tracking in lower secondary education, which channels students into an academic trajectory preparing them for higher education, an intermediate track leading into vocational programmes aimed for salaried employment in clerical occupations, or a lower-level track leading into vocational programmes preparing students for (semi-)skilled manual occupations. Certificates obtained in vocational or higher education are an important requirement to access qualified occupations, while entering the labour market without vocational credentials is connected to clear disadvantages (Müller et al. 1998). The largest majority of German school leavers enter the labour market with secondary vocational training. The predominance of school leavers with vocational training has kept returns to higher education high, whereby the wage distance between school leavers with vocational training and graduates of higher education is larger than the distance between school leavers with and without vocational training (Lauer and Steiner 2000, Hillmert and Jacob 2003).
Due to its tracked secondary school system, Germany has often been conceived of as an educational system where later-life occupational outcomes are to a large extent predetermined by school track allocation in lower secondary education. Since track allocation follows highly socially selective patterns, the tracked school system has been suspected of being a major source of the strong association between social origin and destination. However, this view neglects that the German education and training system offers ample opportunities for educational upgrading after the obtainment of a first educational or vocational certificate (Jacob and Tieben 2009, Weiss 2013). Two patterns can be distinguished. The first pattern comprises of sequential upgrades in the education and training system before people enter the labour market. The second pattern describes persons who are in the labour market already and re-enter the educational system to acquire a higher-level educational or vocational credential. In this context, it is also important to acknowledge that the vocational credentials that can be obtained in the German vocational training system comprise of a large variety of hierarchically ordered degrees, most of which can be obtained at institutions of further education. In short, the German educational and training system offers ample opportunities to upgrade educational or vocational degrees to higher-level credentials.

Following this, we argue that the aforementioned expectation on occupational stability over the life course may change once we take into account that individuals upgrade their levels of educational attainment by re-entering formal education. Due to the close linkage between formal credentials and access to occupations in Germany, educational upgrading should be an important way to improve labour market outcomes substantially. In addition, while the early-tracking German educational system is known to display a high degree of social selectivity in educational participation, educational upgrading processes might have either an attenuating or reinforcing effect on social inequality in educational attainment. Given the tight linkage between educational credentials and labour market outcomes, these upgrading processes might in turn change the level of social stratification of labour market outcomes.

3. Theoretical expectations

3.1. The development of labour market social stratification over the life course.

We start our theoretical considerations with some general expectations about the life-course development of the social stratification of labour market outcomes in a hypothetical situation
without any educational upgrading. Given the social stratification of educational attainment and the strong coupling of credentials and occupations, occupational destinations at labour market entry are highly stratified with respect to social origin. Since career progression and the life-course development of labour market returns can be assumed to be steeper for higher-level occupations than for lower-level occupations (cf. Bönke et al. 2011) it can be expected that the gap in labour market returns between people of privileged and disadvantaged social origin widens even more across the occupational career. Hence, persons of privileged origin would enjoy a *cumulative advantage* in the development of their labour market outcomes (DiPrete and Eirich 2006). This certainly holds true for all labour market outcomes that are subject to any sort of progression over time, such as earnings or even firm-internal career ladders (Doeringer and Piore 1971). However, since – in the absence of formal educational upgrading – job changes after first labour market placement are not very common in the German labour market (cf. Kurz et al. 2006, Mayer et al. 2010), one would not expect to observe pronounced processes of cumulative advantage with regard to any occupation-based outcomes, such as occupational status or social classes. Hence, in contrast to changes in the stratification of earnings, which we would expect to be the result of a combination of cumulative advantage and educational upgrading, one would expect life-course changes in the social stratification of occupational outcomes to be almost exclusively due to upgrading of formal educational credentials.

### 3.2. The influence of educational upgrading on social stratification

There are three key factors through which educational upgrading influences the overall level of social stratification in labour market outcomes.

The first factor relates to the different sizes of the populations from different social groups that are at risk of upgrading. The extent to which educational upgrades are able to alter the distribution of labour market outcomes of a given social group is determined by the number of people belonging to that group that are at risk of educational upgrading. This means that the higher the number of persons of a given social group that has only attained low levels of education, the higher the number of persons that are still able (at risk) to upgrade. Note that the size of that sub-group in the risk set is both a function of the absolute size of the complete social group and the share of group members with low levels of education. Since initial educational attainment is known to be socially stratified in all Western societies (Breen et al 2009), it can be expected that this
factor operates in favour of the socially disadvantaged groups (as long as their overall group sizes are not significantly smaller than those of the socially advantaged groups).

The second factor relates to social differences in the conditional likelihood to upgrade. Changes in the overall level of social stratification of occupational outcomes are also influenced by social differences in the propensity to upgrade educational credentials among those at risk. The *compensatory advantage* mechanism suggests that individuals coming from privileged backgrounds are less affected by prior negative outcomes compared to underprivileged peers (Bernardi 2014). This expectation is based on the assertion of two core arguments. On the one hand, persons from privileged backgrounds possess more resources to accomplish an upward correction of their educational attainments. On the other hand, they also have higher incentives to reach higher levels of occupational outcomes, which can be derived from the arguments related to the motive to avoid social demotion underlying relative-risk aversion theory (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Following this argument, the conditional propensity to upgrade should be higher among persons of privileged compared to underprivileged backgrounds.

However, the propensity to upgrade could also be influenced by selection mechanisms, such as insurance strategies. Insurance strategies apply when persons aim at higher educational credentials but are too risk-averse to enter programmes leading to these credentials directly. Then, the strategy is to obtain less risky lower-level credentials first, which act as a fallback option, before higher-level degrees are pursued. In this case, educational upgrading is part of a longer-term strategy (Büchel and Helberger 1995; Hillmert and Jacob 2003). Insurance strategies should be more common among students of disadvantaged social origin (Hillmert and Jacob 2003), since they tend to be influenced more by risk-aversion (Breen et al. 2014). This mechanism would cause the distribution of disadvantaged persons at risk of upgrading to comprise more of persons who have ambitions for higher-level occupational outcomes. This example makes clear that social selectivities in educational upgrading are also a function of selection processes into initial levels of education.

While the compensatory advantage mechanism works towards enhancing the upgrading rates more among persons from privileged than from underprivileged groups, insurance strategies rather enhance the upgrading behaviour among persons from disadvantaged social groups. So far, however, all existing empirical evidence points towards a pattern which sees the compensatory advantage mechanism dominating the insurance strategy mechanism (Hillmert and Jacob 2010;
Schindler 2015). Hence, it can be expected, that the second factor (conditional propensities to upgrade educational credentials) operates in favour of privileged social groups.

The third factor concerns social differences in the quality of educational upgrading. This relates to both the distances between the initial and the new educational level that people bridge through upgrading and the labour market premiums that are attached to the respective types of upgrading. It might be obvious that the larger the difference between the initial and the new educational level, the larger the premium of the upgrade. As a consequence of the social stratification of initial educational attainment, persons from underprivileged groups might thus have the biggest potential to gain the largest premiums. On the other hand, due to investment and opportunity costs, it can be expected that upgrades that cover short distances between educational degrees are more common than upgrades that bridge large distances. This would mean that upgrades of persons from disadvantages backgrounds should cluster more at lower to medium qualification levels and upgrades of persons from privileged backgrounds more at medium to higher qualification levels. It can also be expected that the quality of upgrading increases as we move upward on the educational hierarchy with high-level educational credentials leading to the highest labour market premium. This should be especially true in Germany where the predominance of school leavers with vocational training has kept returns to higher education high. Hence, it can be expected that the third factor (quality of upgrading) works in favour of the privileged social groups.

Whether, over the life course, the cumulative effect of these three factors\(^1\) leads to an increase or decrease of the level of social stratification of labour market outcomes depends on the weight that each of the three factors possessed. As this cannot be derived analytically, it remains to be clarified empirically, which we will accomplish in the remainder of this paper.

4. Data and methods

4.1. Data and variables

\(^1\) A further complication might arise from a fourth factor, namely socially heterogenous effects of educational upgrading, when the returns of upgrading differ by social background. Following the literature on social mobility, this should be the case for lower levels of education and less so for upgrades at higher levels of education (cf. Breen and Luijkx 2004). Overall, however, we expect heterogenous effects to play a minor role vis-à-vis the three key factors described above.
The paper draws on data from Starting Cohort 6 of the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS, version 6.0.1), which provides rich retrospective life-course information from a random sample of adults in Germany. Individual career trajectories were reconstructed starting from the first significant job (which is operationalized as the first employment episode longer than twelve months and 20 hours weekly working time) until the last employment episode. Careers refer to the whole period in the labour market, thus including gaps (non-employment episodes such as unemployment, parental leave, and other gap episodes), and are reconstructed on a monthly basis. After listwise deletion, our working data set contains information on 10,779 individuals and 2,360,341 monthly spells.

Our key dependent variable is the International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI, Ganzeboom et al. 1992), which was derived from the 1988 version of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88). The scale ranges from 16 for occupations with the lowest to 90 for those with the highest socioeconomic status. Information on ISEI are recoded on a monthly basis for each employment episode. Using ISEI as an indicator of labour market outcomes means that any intra-individual change in its value implies a change of the occupation. One advantage of ISEI is that it can be considered as a continuous measure of occupational status, so that any increase should indicate an improvement in occupational status. On the other hand, one should note that by relying on ISEI we do not capture any within-job variation of labour market outcomes, such as earnings progression.

Our key independent variable is social class of origin, measured through a three-fold collapse of the EGP schema. It differentiates among the salariat (EGP I and II), the intermediate (EGP IIIa, IV, and V) and the working (EGP IIIb, VI, and VII) classes.

Our key mediating variable is educational attainment, which we measure as a combination of school leaving certificates and vocational degrees. The school leaving certificates comprise of the three levels of the German school system: Basic (*Hauptschule*), Intermediate (*Mittlere Reife*) and Abitur (*Hochschulreife*). The vocational categories comprise of: no vocational degree, vocational training (VOC1), higher-level post-secondary vocational training (VOC2), and higher

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2 We should point out that our analyses also imply the assumption that ISEI can be considered as measured on an interval scale, e.g. that an increase from 60 to 65 is comparable to an increase from 16 to 21. While we consider this as a reasonable assumption in the context of our analyses, we acknowledge that this can be challenged (cf. Sorensen 1979).
education (HE). By combining school leaving certificates and vocational degrees, we end up with ten different categories in our variable of educational attainment (note that higher education can only be combined with Abitur). Educational attainment is recoded on a monthly basis.

We consider as educational upgrading any upward change in the level of education irrespective of whether the person exited the labour market in order to obtain the credential or obtained it in further education programs that took place alongside the job.

In our analyses, we also control for a number of important variables in order to avoid confounding influences. However, the way in which we control for these variables differs by the type of analysis. To avoid confounding cohort effects, we conduct all our descriptive analyses separately by birth cohort. We distinguish three birth cohorts: 1944-1954, 1955-1964, 1965-1975. When estimating returns to upgrading (section 5.1) we control for age, age squared, gender, birth cohort, career, career squared, parental education (three categories: low, medium, high), social class of origin, and area of birth (East Germany, West Germany, abroad). When estimating the development of the gap in average ISEI between social classes (section 5.3), we control for wave, area of birth, and we interact career with both cohort and gender.

4.2. Analytical strategies

In order to estimate the average gains in ISEI associated with educational upgrading, our modelling strategy follows a difference-in-differences logic combined with a matching procedure. Our aim is to estimate the returns to upgrading by comparing the development of average ISEI over a constant time interval between people who do and do not upgrade their educational credential, who otherwise share similar characteristics. Unfortunately, the data has its limitations regarding the measurement of observable characteristics that account for selection into upgrading. Hence, it is likely that our results are somewhat overestimating the returns to upgrading, which is why they cannot be interpreted as causal estimates.

We estimate the average ISEI change for upgraders by running separate models for each initial level of education, which means that each model contains individuals who hold the same educational credential at the beginning of their employment career. In each model, persons who never upgraded their credential constitute the control group. In order to create common support for our estimates, we restrict the set of initial ISEI values in the control group to be identical to the set of initial ISEI values in the treatment group (upgraders). Persons in the control group might
enter the data set multiple times but with different sequences in their employment careers: For each person in the treatment group we consider the elapsed time since labour market entry up until they have obtained their upgraded credential. For persons from the control group who share identical initial ISEI values, we consider the ISEI value after the same amount of elapsed time. Since each single person from the control group can serve as matching partner for several persons from the treatment group with different observation periods, people from the control group enter the data several times. In order to match on the elapsed time, we use intervals of 6 months up to the 60th month. We also create an additional data entry in the control group with an interval that equals the average duration of interruption among those in the treated group that show an interruption longer than 5 years (which is a marginal group). In other words, we employ a one-to-many matching procedure: each person from the treatment group are matched with all persons in the control group that share identical initial ISEI and the same elapsed time. When estimating the average ISEI gains, we employ an OLS regression based on the following model (separately for each initial level of education):

\[ I_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 U_t + \beta_2 I_{t-1} + \beta_3 T_t + \beta_4 C \]  

where each observation has two data entries (at t and t-1) for both ISEI and education. I denotes ISEI, Ut is a set of dummy variables indicating the credential at time t, Tt is the elapsed time between t-1 and t, and C is a vector of the control variables described above.

We employ random effects growth curve models in order to estimate social inequality development over individuals’ working life. Career progression is estimated within ten 30-month intervals. The piecewise technique has the advantage to analyse career progression without requiring a predefined functional form. Models include the ten splines, social class, cohort, gender, dummies for waves, area of birth and education, and a linear specification for age at labour market entry. The also include interaction terms between the splines and each of the latter variables. In order to have rather similar career lengths for all individuals, we right-censored individuals’ careers at 300 months (25 years).

5. Analyses
In the following analyses, we proceed in three steps. First, we give an overview of the prevalence of educational upgrading and analyse to what extent upgrading is generally associated with changes in ISEI levels. Second, we describe the levels of social selectivity in the distribution of persons at risk of upgrading and the prevalence and quality of educational upgrading. Third, and finally, our main analysis is devoted to changes of social inequality in labour market outcomes across the life course. We analyse to what extent these changes are due to socially selective educational upgrading. In order to control for cohort differences, descriptive analyses are provided separately by cohort.

5.1. Educational upgrading in Germany and average ISEI gains

Table 1 displays the distribution of initial education at labour market entry and educational upgrading rates within categories of initial education, comprising all birth cohorts (the general patterns do not differ substantially between cohorts, cf. Table A1 in the Appendix). The second column shows the distribution of initial levels of education. It can clearly be seen that most persons enter the labour market with a vocational credential. The most important categories are Basic+VOC1, Intermediate+VOC1, and Higher Education.

The remaining columns display upgrading rates within each category of initial education. It can be seen that persons who decide to attain a higher-level qualification after a first period in the labour market are not a marginal group. In total, about 17 percent of the persons who entered the labour market engaged in educational upgrading. Three main patterns of upgrading can be observed. First, educational upgrading is more likely if the initial credential is only a general school certificate but not a vocational degree (see rows referring to Basic, Intermediate, Abitur). This is in particularly true for persons who enter the labour market with an Abitur. Here we observe quite large upgrading rates to higher education. Only 44 percent of those entering the labour market with the Abitur (5 percent of the whole population) did not upgrade to higher levels of education; while, 36 percent upgraded to higher education. Note however, that our coding rules for a significant job (at least one year duration and 20 hours weekly working time) might classify persons who are bridging the waiting time for a study place in higher education with a low-skilled job as having
entered the labour market. This has to be taken into account when considering the ISEI gains through upgrading in this particular group – which, however, is a rather marginal category. Second, upgrading is also very common from vocational training to higher-level post-secondary vocational training – irrespective of the school certificate. This category comprises Master craftsman training, which is a common trajectory in German vocational training and prepares craftmen for leading a craft enterprise independently. Third, upgrading to a higher education degree is common among persons holding an Abitur – irrespective of the level of their vocational degree.

Figure 1 displays the development of average ISEI over the life course among upgraders and non-upgraders by types of qualification at labour market entry for persons born between 1965 and 1975. The patterns are quite similar for the other cohorts, which can be found in the appendix (Figure A1). In line with our general expectation, occupational upward mobility in Germany occurs almost exclusively in the group of individuals that upgrade their educational degrees. In contrast, the career growth for non-upgraders is rather flat, indicating occupational stability over the life course. This result is in line with previous research describing the German employment system as being stratified along educational qualifications.

Table 2 presents results from the models estimating average ISEI gains through upgrading. Coefficients refer to the average predicted increase in ISEI that results from moving from a lower to a higher qualification, holding constant initial ISEI and education, labour market experience, cohort, gender, and the duration of labour market interruption. Initial qualifications held at labour market entry and their average ISEI levels are indicated in the last row of Table 2, while the qualification of destination is reported in the first column. Models are run separately for each initial qualification. Educational mobility can be clustered into three groups: first, individuals who upgrade by attaining a higher-level general qualification; second, individuals who upgrade by attaining either a vocational qualification or a higher-order vocational qualification (including a university degree); third, individuals who upgrade by attaining both general as well as vocational qualifications. Some of these results must be interpreted with caution, given the rather small sample size in some cells. Due to the close nexus between qualifications and occupations, we expected that labour market premiums in the German context are largely determined by the
combination of the level of general education and the type and level of specialized training attained by students. It is the combination of general and specialized training that gives access to the large variety of occupations. To clarify the interpretation of results, we provide an example: on average persons that enter the labour market with a basic school leaving certificate have an ISEI of 25 points with a standard deviation of 11 points. If these persons attain a secondary vocational qualification, their average ISEI increases by 5 points.

Our results support the view of the German labour market as being highly stratified along educational qualifications. As shown in the last row of Table 2, the average ISEI increases with levels and types of initial general and vocational training substantially. Furthermore, occupational mobility is to a large extent associated with the combination of general and vocational qualifications. In order to progress through the occupational ladder, both general and vocational skills need to be upgraded simultaneously. Upgrading only one or the other reduces substantially the opportunities of occupational advancement. This is in line with previous literature showing how vocational training opportunities in Germany can be grouped hierarchically into segments according to the level of general education and occupations (Baethge and Wolter 2015).

Upgrading from the lowest school-leaving certificate, which should lead to occupational opportunities in the unskilled job market, to a secondary vocational qualification is associated with a rather limited occupational advancement. This result could be explained by the substantial contraction of this segment of the labour market (Schneider and Tieben 2011). A small ISEI increase is also observed when individuals attain a secondary vocational qualification from an intermediate school-leaving certificate. However, persons with this level of general education have, on average, a comparatively high ISEI at labour market entry. Also, upgrading from secondary vocational to post-secondary vocational training is only connected to small ISEI increases. A plausible explanation is that this type of upgrade typically comprises upgrades through Master craftsman training, which do not lead to changes in ISEI since job titles remain the same. In short, at the lowest extreme of the educational distribution attaining a secondary vocational qualification leads to similar occupational opportunities as upgrading to higher levels of general education, which is in contrast with the long-standing evidence describing vocational training in Germany as being the only entry ticket to all segments of the labour market (i.e. Shavit and Müller 1998). On the other hand, the highest ISEI change is associated with attaining a university degree, which outdistances all other qualifications, as we hypothesized.
As a sensitivity check, we replicated this analysis using an ISEI outcome variable that considers the ISEI score 12 months after having attained the new qualification. With this, we take into account that some persons upgrade their credentials while they are still in their initial job and might transfer to a higher-level job with some delay after obtaining the new educational degree. However, this does not influence the findings (cf. Table A2 in the Appendix).

Table 2

5.2. Distribution of educational qualification and educational mobility over the life course by social origin

To give an impression of the social stratification of educational attainment at labour market entry, Figure 2 displays the distributions of initial qualifications by cohort. Although slightly decreasing, the distributions show clear patterns of social stratification of educational attainment in all cohorts. This means that, as expected, the potential to upgrade to higher levels of education is more pronounced among disadvantaged social groups.

Figure 2

Figure 3a displays re-enrolment rates by the initial level of education at labour market entry and by social background for the three birth cohorts. We reasoned that social selectivities in educational upgrading rates can be influenced both by processes which operate in favour of privileged social groups (compensatory advantage) and processes that work in favour of underprivileged groups (such as risk averse educational decisions or information deficits about labour market outcomes). As a general pattern we might conclude that – with some exceptions – upgrading rates tend to be highest among persons from privileged social groups. This is in line with observations from previous research that processes of compensatory advantage seem to dominate over such genotypical processes that operate in favour of disadvantaged social groups. In our data, this pattern appears clearest for the youngest cohort and least pronounced in the oldest cohort.

However, the figures only relate to upgrading rates conditional on the initial level of education at labour market entry. For an assessment of influence that these types of upgrading
have on changes in the overall level of social stratification of occupational outcomes, it is necessary to weight these conditional upgrading rates with the share of persons from a given social group that is in the respective category of initial education. For that reason, Figure 3b displays the share of the overall social origin groups that are in the respective upgrading categories (for example, two percent of all persons from the working class engage in educational upgrading from a basic school leaving certificate). A pattern that is common to all birth cohorts is that comparatively higher shares of the privileged social groups are upgrading from higher levels of education while comparatively higher shares of the disadvantaged groups are upgrading from lower levels of education. A similar pattern emerges if the social selectivities in the destinations are considered: persons from privileged social origin tend to upgrade comparatively more often to higher levels of education (cf. Figure A2 in the Appendix). If we take into account that the average increase in ISEI tends to be higher the higher the educational level of the upgrade, these differences, although limited in size, could lead to a slight increase of inequality over the life course.

[Figure 3a and 3b]

5.3. Occupational stratification development and the impact of educational upgrading on differentials in career progression

To analyse the extent to which educational upgrading influences the level of social inequality in occupational placement across the life course, we now assess how the different mechanisms of socially selective upgrading operate cumulatively. We reasoned that the development of social stratification in occupational outcomes is determined by three factors. First, the share of a social group at risk of educational upgrading; second, the position in the educational distribution in which the share of a social group at risk of educational upgrading tends to concentrate; third, the conditional propensity of a social group to upgrade. Following the results shown in the previous sections, we found that the first factor works in favour of the disadvantaged social groups while the second and third factors work in favour of the privileged social groups.

Figure 4 gives a first descriptive overview of the development of average ISEI by social origin. While the average ISEI increases over the career for all social classes, the figure already shows that these increases develop rather parallel. Hence, the descriptive plot already indicates that the level of social stratification in socio-economic status does not change substantially over
the life cycle. Note that in the youngest cohort the figures after 12 years of job experience have to be discarded due to the underrepresentation of persons holding a higher education degree.

[Figure 4]

To analyse this development in a more formal way, we estimate growth curve models that predict social differentials in ISEI development over the career. In order to estimate the extent to which educational upgrading contributes to the development of social inequality, we employ a three-step approach. In Model 1, we estimate the gross association between parental background and career progression (controlling for wave, the interaction between birth cohort and career, and between sex and career). In Model 2, we control for education at labour market entry. In Model 3, we control for the time-varying measure of education. This approach allows estimating the role re-enrolment plays in the formation process of social inequality over the life course. Figure 5 displays the results (the full regression is provided to interested readers upon request).

[Figure 5]

In line with previous research, Model 1 shows a large differential between persons from the working and the salariat classes; however, over the life course initial disparities remain rather stable. Model 2 controls for educational attainment at labour market entry. Most of the gap at labour market entry is indeed explained by initial differences in educational attainment among social groups. This is in line with the long-standing evidence in social stratification literature that educational attainment is a strong mediator of the relationship between social origin and occupational destination (i.e. Breen and Luijkx 2004). Model 3 includes the time-varying measure of educational attainment. Since inequality is rather stable over the life course, there seems to be little to no value in educational upgrading for occupational inequality. We observe, however, a reduction of the differential in the first five years after labour market entry, when re-enrolment is more likely to occur. In short, educational upgrading does not alter the inequality structure in the German labour market, at least with regard to job change.

6. Conclusion and discussion
In this article, we have analysed the extent to which educational upgrading after labour market entry influences the level of social stratification in occupational status in Germany. We expected that educational upgrading in Germany should be the most relevant predictor of occupational advancement, due to the tight linkage between educational credentials and labour market outcomes. Our analyses seem to support this expectation. While we see virtually no improvement in the average occupational status among persons who do not upgrade their educational credential, we do see substantial increases of the average ISEI for upgraders.

The evidence which describes occupational opportunities in Germany as being hierarchically distributed across types of qualification is clearly substantiated by our findings as well. First, we have shown that career advancement in Germany is rather stable, unless individuals decide to upgrade their educational credentials by attaining higher levels of education. Second, we have shown that increases in ISEI associated with educational upgrading are largely dependent upon the combination between general and vocational training, with remarkably higher returns as individuals attain both higher levels of general education and higher order vocational qualifications. In line with previous studies (Lauer and Steiner 2000), we have also found that attaining a university degree, irrespective of the point of departure, is associated with the highest gain. Conversely, we provided evidence for a rather limited pay-off associated with educational upgrading at the lowest extreme of the educational distribution, which might be a sign of the contraction of this segment of the labour market.

In regards to the potential of educational upgrading to influence the level of social stratification in occupational outcomes, we have identified three relevant aspects that can be expected to follow socially selective patterns: the number of persons at risk of upgrading, the upgrading propensities of those at risk, and the quality of educational upgrading. Our results indicate that the first factor operates in favour of persons from disadvantaged social backgrounds, while the latter two factors work in favour of those from privileged social backgrounds. However, in total, these processes do not alter the level of social stratification in occupational outcomes over the occupational life course. Instead, our results seem to confirm the view that the social stratification of initial educational attainment is the key driving force of the social stratification of labour market outcomes. At first glance, this might be unsurprising, since the German labour market is known to follow the “occupational labour market” model (Marsden 1986), which is accompanied by a comparatively low level of job changes once persons have entered the labour
market. Our results still add to the existing literature. First, we have shown that educational upgrading is not actually a marginal phenomenon in the German labour market since 17 percent of labour market entrants engage in some sort of upgrading afterwards. Second, it has been shown that those who do upgrade their educational credentials actually tend to improve their occupational status. Hence, for a substantial part of the labour force educational upgrading can be considered as an important means to advance their career over the life course. Third, we have clarified that – as far as occupational status is concerned – job mobility patterns do not describe any processes of cumulative advantage nor any catch-up processes of the disadvantaged groups over the career cycle. Hence, even though the overall level of job changes is low, we have documented that among those who engage in occupational upgrading there is no social group that particularly benefits from it. This leaves us with the conclusion that any attempts that are directed towards lowering the comparatively high level of social stratification of labour market outcomes are well advised to target the comparatively high level of social stratification at initial educational attainment before people enter the labour market.

In light of these findings, some important remarks might however be in order. First, in our analyses, we have only considered educational upgrading processes that take place after labour market entry. As we have described earlier, it is quite common in the German educational system that individuals upgrade their first educational credentials before they enter the labour market for the first time. Hence, our findings will have to be complemented by analyses of the social selectivities that are associated with these types of upgrades and their consequences for the social stratification in labour market placement. Second, by considering occupational status as our key outcome variable, we have focussed on the specific aspect of job changes. As we have pointed out in the theoretical part, with this we do not cover any sort of labour market outcomes that vary within-jobs. The most obvious outcome would be earnings. It can be expected that concentrating on occupational status conceals effects of educational upgrading on earnings trajectories that actually can cause changes in social stratification over the career cycle. Hence, by looking at such outcomes, the results might be quite different from the conclusions that we draw with respect to occupation-based measures. Unfortunately, our data clearly reaches limits here and looking at wage inequality and the mediating role of educational upgrading remains a fundamental task for further research.
Acknowledgements
This paper uses data from the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS): Starting Cohort Adults, doi:10.5157/NEPS:SC6:6.0.1. From 2008 to 2013, NEPS data was collected as part of the Framework Program for the Promotion of Empirical Educational Research funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). As of 2014, NEPS is carried out by the Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories (LIfBi) at the University of Bamberg in cooperation with a nationwide network.

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7. References


Jacob, M., Weiss, F. (2010). From higher education to work. Patterns of labor market entry in Germany and the US. *Higher Education, 60*(5), 529-542.


Table 1: Distribution of initial level of education and upgrading rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial level</th>
<th>Distribution education at LM entry</th>
<th>Upgrading rates conditional on initial level of education</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Educ.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abitur+VOC2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interm+VOC2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic+VOC2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abitur+VOC1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abitur</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interm+VOC1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic+VOC1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
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</tr>
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Note: VOC2 implies having also VOC1
Table 2: Average gains in ISEI associated with credentials upgrading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial educ. level</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Basic+VOC1</th>
<th>Interm.</th>
<th>Interm.+VOC1</th>
<th>Abitur</th>
<th>Abitur+VOC1</th>
<th>Basic+VOC2</th>
<th>Interm.+VOC2</th>
<th>Abitur+VOC2</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average ISEI (std. deviation)</td>
<td>25 (11)</td>
<td>32 (11)</td>
<td>39 (15)</td>
<td>40 (14)</td>
<td>44 (19)</td>
<td>47 (14)</td>
<td>36 (15)</td>
<td>47 (16)</td>
<td>54 (14)</td>
<td>68 (18)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Abitur+VOC2</th>
<th>Interm.+VOC2</th>
<th>Basic+VOC2</th>
<th>Abitur+VOC1</th>
<th>Basic+VOC1</th>
<th>Interm.+VOC1</th>
<th>Abitur+VOC2</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abitur</td>
<td>14 (13)</td>
<td>17 (6)</td>
<td>11 (30)</td>
<td>7 (46)</td>
<td>7 (123)</td>
<td>6 (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interm.+VOC2</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>17 (31)</td>
<td>12 (45)</td>
<td>7 (505)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic+VOC2</td>
<td>2 (15)</td>
<td>9 (341)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abitur+VOC1</td>
<td>9 (6)</td>
<td>14 (25)</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>4 (83)</td>
<td>4 (112)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abitur</td>
<td>13 (18)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interm.+VOC1</td>
<td>12 (19)</td>
<td>7 (61)</td>
<td>4 (158)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>7 (12)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic+VOC1</td>
<td>5 (137)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: in parenthesis the number of upgraders. Models net of gender, cohort, EGP, parental education, initial ISEI, career and career squared.
Figure 1: Development of average ISEI over the career cycle, by upgrading status
Figure 2: Distribution of educational attainment at labour market entry, by birth cohort
Figure 3a: Educational upgrading rates by initial level of education and social origin (upgrading from)
Figure 3b: Distribution of educational upgrading over initial level of education, by social origin (upgrading from)
Figure 4: Development of average ISEI over the career cycle, by social origin
**Figure 5:** Random effects growth curve models of ISEI, coefficients of social origin

Note: Models include ten splines, interaction terms between splines and social class, cohorts, and gender, dummies for waves, area of birth and education, and a linear specification for age at labour market entry. Individuals’ careers are right-censored at 300 months (25 years).