

**THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF EDUCATION IN NEW
ZEALAND: SUCCESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES**

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CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION ON THE EFFICIENCY LEVELS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Dr Malcolm Abbott, AIS St Helens, New Zealand
Professor Hristos Doucouliagos (Deakin University, Australia)

If competition pressures institutions to achieve higher levels of efficiency then it would be expected that education institutions that are most exposed to international competition would be expected to achieve greater levels of technical and scale efficiency.

The purpose of the paper is to first use Data Envelopment Analysis to determine the individual level of efficiency achieved by a group of tertiary institutions, and then quantify the degree to which the divergence in efficiency levels is due to the various institutions' exposure to international education markets. Exposure to international markets can not just mean that educational institutions generate export income for a country but can also enable these institutions to make more efficient use of their resources for domestic purposes as well.

CURRICULUM DESIGN IN LAW AND INTERNATIONALISATION: A STUDENT CENTRED APPROACH!

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This paper addresses the interest shown by many law schools in Australia towards designing a curriculum, which accounts for the internationalisation of their discipline. In fact, the International Legal Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) of the Attorney-General's Department of the Australian Government has produced a report addressing such issues for Australian Law Schools. This paper uses a student centred approach to the internationalisation of the law curriculum and engages with the literature on this area and some of the recommendations of the report by the ILSAC. The student centred approach in this paper is informed by a large survey of students, as well as the authors own work as an advocate for internationalising the curriculum at the Griffith Law School, Brisbane Australia.

All students, according to the empirical work done for this work, show an interest in internationalising their experience of legal education. The approaches taken by law schools vary between deep and surface approaches to teaching. In the former case, law schools might encourage overseas internships and continue to develop the range of them available to all students in all areas of practice. In the later instance, students are given options to complete subjects that apply to transnational issues. This paper will examine the range of deeper approaches available to law schools within the context of recommendations developed by ILSAC.

The paper also argues, that a student centred approach reveals that an incremental approach is important for internationalising a curriculum. This is especially important for Law Schools that are yet to experience diversity in the student population. An incremental approach might mean that an intercultural skills programme might be as much as some students can cope with in the first two years of their studies. Students experiences of their internships in fourth year might then have more meaning for them. The arguments relating to incremental approach offer views that are yet to be developed in the literature in relation to internationalising curriculum.

EDUCATION EXPORT FROM NEW ZEALAND TO BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY

M A Rashid, Head, Department of Information and Computer Technology, Massey University,
Auckland Campus

Ershad Ali, Lecturer, International Business Studies, AIS St. Helens

Internationalisation of education is the key to globalisation of knowledge for development of human societies with equal opportunities. The gap between the developed and the developing societies in terms of knowledge and technological know-how can be minimised by opening the door of education at every level by the advanced societies for the not-so-advanced nations. This paper investigates the opportunities created by globalisation of education for countries like Bangladesh: with a traditional aspiration to educational excellence of educational excellence and yet unable to provide adequate facilities due to resource constraints.

CHINESE AND AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS' CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Penny Bassett, Lecturer in Management
Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne

Students studying an interpersonal and organisational negotiation subject in Melbourne and in Tianjin, China, were asked to analyse a cross-cultural case study. The case study is on conflict between a Japanese supervisor and a Canadian exchange teacher (Turek 1996). Students' cultural perceptions have been compared based on Hofstede's (1980) four value dimensions of individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity. There are clear differences between the two groups of students, for example, the Chinese students believe the supervisor has the 'absolute right to decide everything', whereas Australian students express an opposing view. This qualitative study demonstrates the differences in cultural perceptions between the two groups and provides the basis for further research in the area.

References

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: MANAGING OVERSEAS DELIVERY OF NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES

Chelsea Blickem, Nick Shackleford
Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland

New Zealand tertiary institutions (TEIs) are becoming increasingly active in the delivery of their programmes offshore. A Ministry of Education Stocktake in 2001 revealed that seventeen TEIs were delivering a total of sixty three programmes offshore, compared to only six programmes in 1997. Offshore delivery can offer special opportunities but can also raise significant challenges for institutions, particularly with regard to programme quality assurance. This paper presents a case study of one institution's experience of transporting and delivering an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme to Beijing and explores the cultural and operational challenges that faced the project. A framework based on the Beijing experience will be offered which institutions could use as a model for decision-making when considering the off-shore delivery of their programmes.

Presenters:

Chelsea Blickem has recently been appointed as Academic Advisor within the Academic Development Unit at Unitec. In this role, Chelsea co-ordinates and contributes to the ongoing development of teaching and learning and has a particular interest in the development of institutional EAL(English as an Additional Language) support strategies. Until April 2003, Chelsea was a key member of the School of Languages at Unitec and was closely involved in the delivery of the Certificate in Intensive English (CIE) programme in Beijing, P.R.China.

Nick Shackleford is the Head of the School of Languages at Unitec a position he has held since 1991. He has led the rapid development of the English language and international languages programme at Unitec and is closely involved with the establishing relationships with partner institutions offshore and with New programmes for international students, both in New Zealand and offshore.

ENHANCING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING IN STUDY ABROAD

Andrew D. Cohen, University of Minnesota

This presentation will report on findings of federally-funded, longitudinal research to assess the impact of three new guidebooks for study abroad students, program professionals, and language instructors. The guidebooks take a theoretically-grounded and integrated strategies-based approach to language and culture learning in the pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry contexts. Session participants will receive an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the study and the research design, as well as a report on the research findings.

The study of the *Students' Guide* investigated the following: Do students use the strategies in the guide, and if so, how, in which contexts, and how frequently? How effective is the guide in the development of language skills and culture learning? Eighty-six university students studying abroad in Spanish- and French-speaking countries during either Spring or Fall 2003 participated in the study. Half of the students received a copy of the *Students' Guide*, participated in a pre-departure orientation to the guide, and submitted bi-weekly electronic journals. Both the experimental and the control groups completed pre-post surveys of their language and culture strategy use, their intercultural development, and their language contact, as well as a written measure of communicative language achievement.

The study of the *Program Professionals' Guide* looked at the following: How do program professionals use the guidebook, what are their reactions to using it, and does it provide them with new insights? The sample consisted of eight U.S.-based study abroad advisors, one faculty member accompanying students abroad, and five on-site directors (fourteen total), each of whom received the *Program Professionals' Guide* and an orientation. They agreed to use the guidebook materials during Fall 2003 or Spring 2004, in pre-departure, on-site, or re-entry activities with students. They also agreed to submit electronic journals and an exit questionnaire.

The study of the *Instructors' Guide* included the following questions: How do language instructors use the guide, and does it provide them with new insights? How do they use materials from the guide with students who may not study abroad? Four language instructors (three Spanish, one French) were given the *Instructors' Guide* and an orientation. During Fall 2003 they each developed a curriculum that incorporated the guidebook materials into the teaching of a language class during Spring 2004. They agreed to provide feedback to the researchers each month while they were teaching, participate in focus groups, complete an exit questionnaire, and take part in an exit interview.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT ISSUES FOR STUDENTS FROM A NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND

Jo de Lisle and Dorothy Cleary
Waikato Institute of Technology

This collaborative paper explores the English language support issues for NESB (Non English Speaking Background) students raised by the diversity of cultures and language backgrounds in a New Zealand tertiary institute. Ways of managing some of those issues are also described by the two presenters.

The first presenter, Jo de Lisle, outlines the English language support issues raised in a case study carried out on students and staff in the Department of Information Technology in 2002. This part of the paper also describes initial reactions from staff and students to a new initiative of running English language support concurrently with mainstream programmes.

The second presenter, Dorothy Cleary, examines the concurrent English language support classes from a practical operational viewpoint. The educational issues of running classes of this type are explored. There is an analysis of the needs of the students in terms of English language issues and the development of tertiary study skills.

2003 has seen interest in English language support of this type by other departments in the institute. This paper examines issues of communication and education associated with the introduction of English language support for NESB students, as an on-going, concurrent element of mainstream tertiary courses.

WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS BRING TO THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE; WHAT LESSONS ARE THERE FOR EDUCATORS?

Ms Marilyn Dorman and Dr Lorelle Burton
The University of Southern Queensland

Field/s:

- Teaching styles
- Learning styles
- Learning context of international students in the community

In higher education, with expectations that learners will be self-directed, independent, yet willing to work cooperatively with fellow learners they might never see, there are significant challenges both for students and for their teachers. There may be different learning styles and preferences to accommodate, gender and age variables, as well as different modes of study: face-to-face, external (distance) or online study, as well as various versions of those three.

With increasing numbers of overseas students enrolling in Australian schools and higher education institutions, educators are faced with further challenges in ensuring that course content, delivery and assessment items provide equitable access and learning opportunities for students.

Recent Australian government statistics show an 11% increase in international student enrolments between 2002 and 2003, bringing the total number of international student enrolments in Australia to an estimated 303,324. While most of those international students come from Asia, there are increasing numbers from Africa and the Middle East, North America, and Europe. Bearing in mind that some international students travel to Australia to study, while others remain in their home country and study either online or by distance, or with tutor-supported resource materials, it is timely to review how educators might address such diversity from course development through to delivery and assessment. How is student diversity reflected in the organisations' policies, values and mission statements, and in their resourcing and support provision? These issues will be discussed in the context of an Australian university where approximately one fifth of the enrolment is comprised of international students.

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EDUCATION/LEARNING RESISTANCE IN THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE CLASSROOM AT THE JAPANESE UNIVERSITY

Arturo Escandon
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This paper explores the phenomenon of education/learning resistance in the foreign-language classroom at one major Japanese university, particularly in the form of students' disruptive behaviour. 239 students from three different faculties were surveyed to assess their perception of their own disruptive behaviour and how generalised the phenomenon is in their classrooms with the purpose of determining causes and possible solutions, especially at the pedagogical and curricular levels. The results confirm that *resistance* is widespread and suggest that: (a) it is required to resocialise students to enable them to cope better with constructivist approaches to learning, on which contemporary ideas and practice on foreign-language teaching/learning are widely based, (b) instructivist approaches to teaching and mass education (e.g., large classes, deficient teacher-student ratios) seem not longer adequate in Japan's post-industrial context and should be re-evaluated as well as a curriculum that overvalues mandatory attendance rather than learning and academic output, (c) long-term reform efforts should reconsider the university's role within the education system, and (d) there is a large segment of the student population whose academic achievement is being abducted by their peers' disruptive behaviour and by teachers' attempt to counter resistance. That segment should be better taken care of.

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EMPOWERMENT IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATION FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE LEARNING AT TERTIARY LEVEL FOR DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS

Patrick A. Fuss and Vaughan Bidois
AIS St Helens, Auckland

This paper explores the expectations of the learning process that educators have of students at tertiary level in New Zealand. The literature review takes a brief look at the passive learning styles in New Zealand high schools and in the Asian school systems. It also explores the frameworks of Freire regarding empowerment in education as well as Bloom's learning outcomes which stipulate that passive students should change their way of thinking and learning. This involves increasing their understanding of the theory, concepts, models and perspectives related to their study area. It also involves making choices, taking control and expressing themselves coherently and logically. It entails conveying original ideas and developing arguments through the integration and synthesis of the relevant body of existing knowledge.

STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Dr Carol Griffiths, Auckland Institute of Studies

Abstract

This study investigated the strategies used by international students in the process of developing the language skills needed in order to study their chosen subjects in English. The project involved students in a stage two class studying at a tertiary institution in Auckland, New Zealand, who were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their strategies for skills development. The results of the analysis of the questionnaire data were compared with the students' end of course scores. Individual students were also interviewed in order to gain a qualitative perspective regarding strategy use and how this might relate to success in terms of final scores for the course. The findings of this study will be presented during this session, and recommendations made regarding implications for the teaching/learning situation.

A FEASIBILITY STUDY OF NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITIES DEVELOPING OFFSHORE FOUNDATION PROGRAMMES IN SHENYANG, CHINA

Li Li, MBA Student
AIS St Helens, New Zealand

Abstract

Even though offshore education involvement is just at a beginning for New Zealand universities (most offshore programmes commenced in 2000/01), and the number of students enrolled offshore was not considerable (estimated only 2,200 in 2001), the author believes that developing offshore foundation programmes is a good opportunity and a bright direction for New Zealand universities to export education in the future.

This research has done the following issues: (a) identified the advantages of developing offshore foundation programmes for New Zealand universities; (b) described Shenyang market environment; (c) identified and analysed the target customers – Shenyang’s post-secondary students; (d) quantified the size of market demand from Shenyang’s post-secondary students for New Zealand universities’ foundation programmes; (e) analysed the opportunities for New Zealand universities to develop offshore education in Shenyang; (f) analysed the business risks relating to New Zealand universities developing offshore foundation programmes in Shenyang, China; (g) analysed the competitive environment of New Zealand universities facing at offshore education market; (h) selected joint-venturing as the right entry mode for New Zealand universities to enter the Shenyang education market.

Finally, this research gave some recommendations to support successfully implementing offshore foundation programmes in Shenyang.

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION; THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

Dawn Manley MA (Hons)
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Abstract

This paper will outline a brief coverage of the recent literature on cross-cultural communication (CCC) and will attempt to define/describe CCC, verbal and non-verbal CCC as it is experienced among students and staff within the University of Waikato Language Institute (UWLI), Auckland Centre. Throughout there will be vignettes from international students and teachers, which illustrate the barriers, difficulties, successes, challenges and opportunities to cross-cultural learning within an Academic English programme. The various pathways, in which students enter the Language Institute, their expectations, goals, progress and eventual outcomes, in relation to their preparedness for degree and post degree study within a New Zealand University, will be described. This account will be based on my work as a teacher, here in New Zealand and Beijing China, in Academic English, and as an IELTS teacher and examiner.

The international student population within the UWLI, while predominantly Chinese, includes students from Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand and Russia. During the Language Institute's intensive three-month level 7 Academic English language course, students acquire the academic skills of research, referencing, and citation, as well as practising their language and study skills in pair, small group and class discussion. The emphasis is on listening, reading, writing and speaking which is assessed at regular intervals by tests, a research essay, report writing and culminating in the last week, with an oral presentation, based on a chosen research topic.

Students are encouraged to become aware of cross-cultural differences in classroom behaviour and learning styles, along with the educational expectations in educational outcomes of independent learning, critical thinking, paraphrasing and referencing. Cross-cultural learning occurs also outside the classroom and includes a field trip, visits to local industries and cultural events, the local Library and District Court. These activities introduce students to the bicultural and multicultural diversity of New Zealand's population, its art, music, and sport, as well as the industrial, tourist, commercial and international trade that is currently taking place.

Success within the Academic course gives the student a choice to apply for entry into a degree programme within the University of Waikato Management School, Arts and Social Sciences, Engineering, and Commerce. Feedback of the difficulties they then face within the University, the challenges and opportunities are also described.

Dawn Manley MA (Hons), Post Grad.DipLTA, Language Teacher, IELTS Teacher and Examiner

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING AND ANALYSING THE ETHICS PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES IN THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Anca Muresan, PhD Candidate, AUT, Auckland

There are many cases and examples when ethical aspects and concerns are raised in educational institutions, especially when an international climate is present. This paper intends to approach this sensitive matter, to try to clarify the origin of the conflict between different actors in the educational process. We will evaluate and analyse the role of perception in ethical behaviour, presenting different ethical philosophies, values differences and how the values can be conducive to ethical conflict. Also, we will present the influence that culture has on the ethics perceptions of the actors in the educational process. This paper intends to bring into attention ethical questions and problems in the international educational institutions and ways of dealing with them.

ASIAN FEE-PAYING STUDENTS AND NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION WHOSE INTEREST DOES 'EXPORT EDUCATION' SERVE?

David Pang, PhD Candidate, School of Education
University of Auckland

'Foreign fee-paying students are now an established part of the New Zealand education scene' (Ministry of Education, 2001, *Foreign Fee Paying Students in New Zealand: Trends – A statistical overview*, p.1). In numerical terms, there is a critical mass of Asian fee-paying students in schools and campuses. Despite the fact that they are the main contributors to the \$2 billion dollar export education industry, their presence has, in recent times, been regarded with what could be described as 'desire and derision'.

This paper is a preliminary analysis of the construction of the profile of Asian fee-paying students in New Zealand. It will identify factors that constrain, shape, and support international education as New Zealand responds to the challenges of educating students from Asia. It suggests that the contradictory accounts of their sojourn in New Zealand are strong indications that their needs have been 'overlooked and under-served'.

This paper highlights the fact that acknowledging the Asian dimension of the New Zealand's international education sector is not the same as addressing the students' needs and concerns. And it concludes that all stakeholders have both the reason, obligation and opportunity to work collaboratively and respond proactively with specific policies and programmes.

WAYS TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN FEE PAYING STUDENTS IN INTENSIVE BUSINESS PROGRAMMES

Paul Rose B.Comm (Econ)
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1. Foreign fee paying students have learning skills and styles that are comparable to New Zealand educated students.
2. However they differ in one unique respect – if they are Chinese they have been taught to learn in visual pictures (word symbols) and have then had to memorise these by rote.
3. They are used to rote learning as an accepted method of being taught.
4. They are working in a second language in which they are at a fairly low level of understanding of complex information

We therefore need to focus on how best to teach these students in an environment where:

- a. Time (and money) is of the essence, and*
- b. The need to achieve understanding of each subject to a passing grade level is seen as being critical to their personal survival in a highly competitive world job market.*
- c. There is also a need to generate a high level of understanding of the world of business and the twin impacts of globalisation and rapid change on it as they begin their life careers.*

This paper looks at a number of significant ways of improving the learning experience drawn from internationally proven methodologies developed on the basis of accepted learning theories.

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY INTO THE LEARNING STYLES AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN MULTI-CAMPUS DELIVERY

Janet Sayers, Trish Franklin, Caroline Keen
Massey University

Massey University, like other educational institutions in New Zealand, has been affected by the rapid internationalization of tertiary education, and particularly by the influx of students originating from China. This has meant that systems within our institution have had to adapt to cope with the specific needs of the changing profile of our students. This process has been challenging and has meant that teaching methods have had to adapt.

114.242 *Human Resource Development* is a popular fundamental course for students wanting to major in HRD in a BBS. Offered in both extramural and internal modes, it has always had large student numbers (over 450), with the internal class size consistently at around 100 students. The course has a particular philosophy about learning which encourages self-directed learning and reflective practice in a context that attempts to preface learning over assessment (Ramsey, Franklin, Ramsey & Wells, 2002). The rapid internationalization and growth in student class size has meant we have needed to reassess how we try to achieve this outcome which relies a great deal on the students ability to cope with complexity, independence and a higher degree of ambiguity in assessments than they might get in other courses.

This paper begins by reflecting on the adaptations of 114.242 as it has moved to multi-campus delivery where we have attempted to retain consistency in learning outcomes across three campuses located in different cities (Palmerston North, Auckland and Wellington). In addition to responding to this challenge, we have also tried to adapt to the learning styles and preferences of our new international students, while trying to preserve something of our *modus operandi* with our traditional English speaking and New Zealand originating student base, which teaching staff also value and enjoy.

The second part of our paper presents an empirical study designed to help us adapt to the learning styles and requirements of international students (Sevillano & Cage, 2003; Ballard & Clancy, 1997). We embarked on a structured programme to gather information about our students' present and past learning experiences and styles. Data has been gathered from all class participants, and themes identified through content analysis. In particular, we discuss some of the meta-narratives in the learning 'stories' that international students have written and discuss how these 'stories' can both help improve our teaching practice and outcomes for international students.

Introduction to Authors:

The three authors of this paper are involved in delivering a course 114.242 Human Resource Development at Massey University in Palmerston North and at Albany Campus in Auckland. Dr. Janet Sayers and Caroline Keen are part of the Department of Management and International Business in Auckland, and Trish Franklin is the course controller in Palmerston North and has been involved in the delivery of this paper for a number of years. Trish Franklin is also a co-author of the book 'On-the-job learning' which is used a textbook for this course. The research interests of the authors span reflective learning, diversity and service management.

READY OR NOT: THE PREPAREDNESS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR STUDY AT A NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITY

Gillian Skyrme, School of Language Studies
Massey University

Abstract

This presentation draws on preliminary findings of a longitudinal study of Chinese international students in their first semester of study towards a BBS. It looks at the measures students take, or do not take, to prepare themselves for study abroad. In addition it examines how their initial experiences in New Zealand may contribute to their understanding of and ability to cope with the higher education requirements ahead of them. The discussion includes consideration of the place of English Language Centres in relation to initial experiences and preparedness for tertiary study.

JAPANESE ESL STUDENTS' SELF-EVALUATIONS OF PROGRESS IN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND ATTRIBUTIONS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN ENGLISH LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Koh Tanaka, Language and Culture Programmes, AIS St Helens

The objective of this study is to investigate Japanese students' self-evaluations of progress in English proficiency in two different learning environments, in their home country (Japan) and an English-speaking country (New Zealand), and their attributions (i.e., perceived reasons) of success or failure in English learning. The qualitative data collected by the semi-structured interviews with 29 Japanese students who had studied at private language schools in New Zealand over a period of 12 weeks were used for the analysis. The attribution theory (e.g., Weiner, 1979) indicates that people's attributions of success or failure in a task (e.g., learning a foreign/second language) bring about specific emotions and expectations that influence future performance and achievement. In other words, learners' attributions of success or failure in language learning would be a key factor in producing their beliefs about language learning (e.g., the best ways of learning a language, perception of self as a language learner). Japanese usually account for the great proportion of overseas students at language schools in English-speaking countries. Thus, this study will provide ESL teachers and language school administrators with valuable information on what Japanese students think about language learning and how they evaluate the study-abroad environment in New Zealand.

USING PORTFOLIOS TO ASSESS THE WRITING OF NON-NATIVE SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Mark Wolfersberger, BYU

Recent research has found many advantages to using portfolios to assess the writing of non-native speaking international students. As more of the advantages of writing portfolios are uncovered, portfolios are becoming more widely used as an assessment tool for measuring writing. A portfolio is a much more complex assessment tool than a timed essay, so the challenge of creating a writing portfolio assessment system (WPAS) can be overwhelming, especially in a multi-level intensive English program.

This paper will outline the process of establishing a WPAS, provide an example of an established WPAS from a multi-level intensive English program, and provide references to the most helpful resources for creating a WPAS.

When outlining the process, the presenter will cover 5 main areas: 1) determining the portfolio contents, 2) creating a rubric, 3) establishing and maintaining a benchmark portfolio file, 4) training the portfolio raters, and 5) evaluating, maintaining, and updating the portfolio assessment system.

The WPAS example will be presented in tandem with the outline of the process of establishing a WPAS. After each of the five steps in the process, appropriate examples and materials from an intensive English program will be shared to demonstrate the challenges encountered and results produced from each step in the process. The goal of this part of the presentation is to help attendees avoid pitfalls in the creation process and have a clear vision of the target outcomes.

The resource reference list provided at the end of the presentation will list the most informative journal articles and writing portfolio resources. These resources will help each attendee customize their WPAS to a particular English program.

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CONTEXTUALIZING THE LEARNING STYLES ANALYSIS OF ADULT ESL LEARNERS

Rebecca A. Wolfersberger

This study examines the effect of assessing the learning styles of adult ESL learners in the specific context of the ESL classroom. Currently used learning styles assessment instruments often ask learners to rate their agreement or disagreement with generalized statements about their learning preferences. In this study, a unit of contextualized activities was developed and used as the basis for surveying ESL learners on their learning styles preferences in the four specific contexts of Memorizing, Problem Solving, Creating, and Following Instructions.

The data in this study was obtained by comparing the results of the unit of contextualized activities and surveys with Reid's Perceptual Learning Styles Preference survey, which was developed specifically for ESL learners.

One group of 52 subjects in the study completed Reid's survey twice over a period of two weeks to obtain test-retest reliability correlations for this study ($r=.648$). Another group of 67 subjects completed Reid's survey and then the unit of contextualized activities and surveys. Pearson Product-Moment correlations were calculated to compare the learning style profile results produced by each subject on the two types of surveys. Correlations for Reid's survey and each of the four contexts of the contextualized unit, Memorizing ($r=.357$), Problem Solving ($r=.413$), Creating ($r=.485$), and Following Instructions ($r=.375$), were low, showing that there was a difference between the results produced by both instruments. Tallies were also made of category changes occurring across the three possible learning styles categories of major, minor, or negligible preference for each group of subjects. In the non-contextualized group, subjects changed learning style preference categories 32% of the time, while the contextualized subjects changed 68% of the time. Furthermore, the subjects in the contextualized group were 900 times more likely than the non-contextualized subjects to change their learning style preference two categories. It was determined from these results that context does effect learning styles self-report assessment outcomes and can produce different profile results for ESL learners.

Test-retest correlation results were also calculated for the contextualized surveys ($r=.666$) and showed similar overall reliability to that of Reid's survey ($r=.648$). However, some contexts and learning styles constructs resulted in higher or lower correlations between the two groups.