Transfer of Learning and the Cultural Matrix: The Interrelationship of Culture, Beliefs, and Learning

by

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Abstract

This study, conducted in an international college in Thailand, aimed to understand the transfer of learning from an undergraduate academic literacy programme to the disciplines. In so doing, it adopted a cultural matrix to investigate the interrelationship among students’ perceptions of transfer of learning, their personal beliefs about knowledge, knowing and learning, and their secondary school backgrounds. A three-part questionnaire, supplemented by purposive semi-structured interviews, was used to collect data from all consenting students from the final course in a four-trimester programme. The first part of the questionnaire employed the Epistemic Beliefs Inventory (EBI) in gauging students’ beliefs about knowing and learning, the second part comprised the Measure of Academic Literacy (MALT), which measure students’ perceptions of transfer of learning from the academic literacy programme to the disciplines, and the third part of the questionnaire surveyed students’ demographic details, specifically with regard to their secondary school context. Data were then analysed to establish the interrelationship between these data sets. Open-ended questions to the MALT section of the questionnaire were analysed, and, in order to illustrate and further understand the data analysis from the questionnaire, trained interviewers conducted semi-structured interviews.

Initial, factorial analysis of the EBI indicated a factor structure that differed from that of the US origins of the instrument, suggesting a relationship between culture and beliefs. While analysis indicated a significant low-moderate relationship between students’ beliefs about knowledge and learning and the transfer of learning, no such association was detected between the beliefs and students’ secondary school background. The students’ multicultural backgrounds, coupled with ambivalent beliefs, may provide an explanation for this. The findings, thus, give partial support for the application of the cultural matrix to transfer of learning.

The study makes an original contribution by applying the cultural matrix to learning in a previously unexplored way. In so doing, it aims to generate a general theory of transfer of learning while fostering a culturally pluralistic understanding of learners’ beliefs about knowledge and learning and the implications for such transfer. It also advocates an approach that supplements existing classroom-specific pedagogical methods with school-wide cultural management initiatives in order to better effect transfer of learning.
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I am especially grateful to my wife, Orie, who has shared much of this journey with me over the years, and to my sons, Joshua and Nathan, both born after I had embarked, and who will finally come to know a time when Daddy is not “studying.”
Related Works

Peer-reviewed articles in international journals:


Although these works have all been formative in this study, and are referred to herein, they have not been included in the text in any substantial manner.
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