TWO CONCEPTUAL MODELS FOR FACILITATING LEARNERS' TRANSITIONS TO NEW POST-SCHOOL LEARNING CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces two conceptual models for facilitating transitions to new post-school learning contexts. The theoretical perspectives generated by critical discourse theory (CDT) underpin the first model, the 'New Learning Framework' whereas the perspectives stemming from constructivism and cross-cultural communication theory underpin the second model, the 'Model for Transition Practices'.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

CDT contributes three main insights to clarify issues in relation to new post-school learning contexts. First, by visualising pedagogical practices and outcomes as discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1995), CDT highlights the role played by discourses in learning contexts. Luke (1999, p.67) argues that if the primacy of discourse is acknowledged, then mastery of discourse can be seen to constitute a principal educational process and outcome. This view highlights the importance of the role of discourses in lifelong learning. Edwards (2005) argues that discourses of lifelong learning could both reflect and help to frame a practice-based understanding of polycontextuality and relationality, but also that such a notion of learning can be better understood through being situated within such discourses.

The processes of facilitating effective transitions into new learning contexts, with these insights, can be visualised as the processes of becoming familiar with a context's mainstream discourses. This focus not only makes more explicit mainstream discourses, it also prioritises the processes by which students learn to engage and master them.

Secondly, the application of CDT reveals the role of cultural diversity and the presence of literacies, or multiliteracies in the new learning context (Cope & Kalzantis, 2000; New London Group, 1996). If the learning context is perceived as a culture, then student engagement can be viewed as becoming literate in this culture. This insight makes more transparent the crucial nature of the interrelationships between students' cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1999) and institutional or mainstream literacies, as well as this relationship's consequences for transition. Edwards (2005 citing Eraut, 2004) notes that involved is a transfer of knowledge that entails the interrelated stages of:

> The extraction of potential relevant knowledge from the context(s) of its acquisition and its previous use; understanding the new situation – a process that depends on informal social learning; recognising what knowledge and skills are relevant; transforming them to fit the new situation; and integrating them with other knowledge and skills in order to think/act/communicate in the new situation.

Thirdly, CDT focuses attention on the discursive practices that can operate as power relationships in constructing and maintaining dominance and inequality in the university context (Fairclough, 1995). This understanding is critical in settings where the power imbalances between institutional/mainstream practices and new learners can affect engagement, providing consequences for transition (Cox, 2003). Edwards (2005 cited in Thorpe et al. 2005, p.3) acknowledges the complexity involved when he notes that 'however delicately treated or even disguised', pedagogy implies inequality both in expertise and in contexts.

## THE DEFICIT-DISCOURSE SHIFT

The application of CDT and the re-conceptualisation of the processes of transition can be encapsulated in a theoretical shift: the deficit-discourse shift (Lawrence, 2004). The shift draws on the primacy of discourses and literacies in a learning context. It characterises new learning contexts as dynamic cultures embodying a multiplicity of subcultures, each with its own discourses/literacies. Transition can be depicted as a journey of gaining familiarity, and ultimately mastery, of these discourses and literacies. Lankshear et al., (1997) contend that to feel comfortable in and perform with

competence within a culture means becoming literate in that culture – becoming familiar with the multiplicity of new discourses in the culture. To Thorpe, Miller and Edwards (2005), pedagogy is the expertise enabling non-discourse speakers to participate within the discourse and become increasingly confident speakers and writers within it. Thorpe et al. (2005) contend that a key aspect of this approach is that it does not adopt a deficit model of the learner. Instead it recognises learners as experienced meaning makers within their own discourse communities, 'with the highly developed skills adults possess for meaning making through inter-subjectivity – the sharing of frames of reference through which utterances make sense and develop the discourse taking place' (p.4).

THE 'NEW LEARNING FRAMEWORK'

The deficit-discourse shift can be illustrated in a conceptual model, the 'New Learning Framework' (see Figure 1). The framework characterises the new learning context as a dynamic culture embodying a multiplicity of mainstream, and often implicit, discourses, literacies and practices. A new learner's transition is visualised, then, as the processes of being familiar with, engaging, mastering and, ultimately, demonstrating these literacies and discourses. As the framework is essentially process-orientated it is applicable to a range of cultures and sub-cultural contexts.

Figure 1: New Learning Framework (adapted from Lawrence 2004)
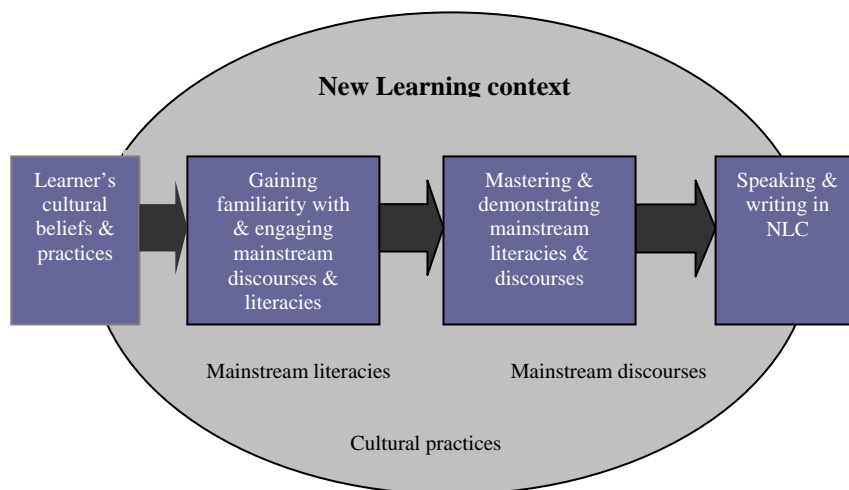

Higher Education Learning Contexts

The framework is applicable to higher education (HE) learning contexts (see Figure 2). As Bartholomae (1985, p.134) suggests:

> Every time a student sits down to write for us he or she has to invent the university for the occasion - invent the university, that is, or a branch of it…The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community.

Figure 2: The New Learning Framework applied to HE (Lawrence 2005)
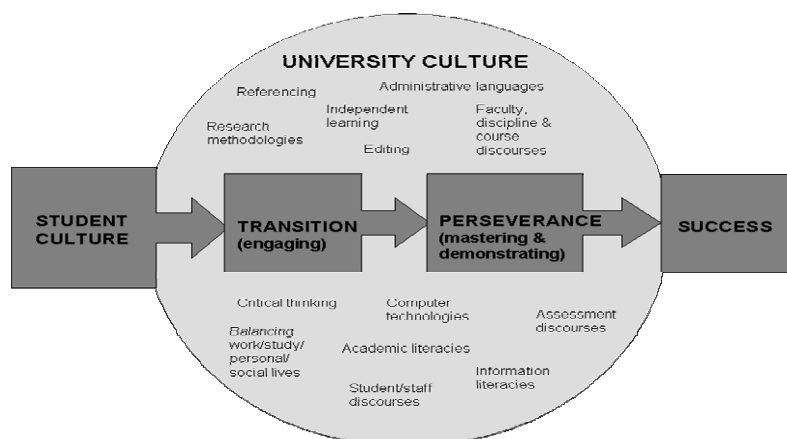
Among the first, and most critical, of the discourses/literacies students need to engage and demonstrate are their first semester subjects or courses – each of which encompasses specific cultural knowledge and practices. Each subject, for example, has its specific prerequisites and/or assumed entry knowledge; subject matter (content or process orientated, text-bound, oral or computer-mediated); language (jargon/formulas/technical language); texts (study packages, lecture notes, PowerPoint notes, Web CT documents, CD Rom); cultural practices (ways of dressing and showing respect – Professor, first names); attendance (lectures, tutorials, practical sessions, clinical sessions, external/internal/online); behaviours (rule-governed/flexible, compulsory/optional attendance, consultation times, electronic discussion groups); class participation (passive, interactive, experiential); rules (about extensions, participation, resubmissions, appeals); theoretical assumptions (scientific/sociological); research methodologies (positivist/interpretive/critical, quantitative/qualitative); ways of thinking (recall, reflective, analytical or critical, surface or deep); referencing systems (APA, Harvard, MLA); ways of writing (essays/reports/journals/orals); structure (particularly in relation to assessment); tone and style (word choice, active/passive voice, third/second/first person, sentence structure, paragraph structure); formatting (left/right justified, font, type, spacing, margins); and assessment (formative/summative, individual/ group, exams/assignments/clinicals/practicals/orals).

To pass the subject, students need to become literate in: engage, master and demonstrate the subject's discourses and cultural practices. Their subject discourses/literacies are not the only discourses/literacies that students need to engage and master if they are to persevere however. The HE context can be seen to encompass multiple discourses/literacies. Each subject, discipline area, section, faculty, group of students and staff group, for example, has its own discourses/literacies. These include administrative discourses; academic and/or tertiary literacies; academic numeracy; research discourses/paradigms; computer systems; communication and information technologies; library and database literacies; faculty, department, discipline and subject discourses; learning and teaching environments; student discourses (school leaver, mature-age, international, on-campus, external, online); and learning styles (independent and self-directed learning styles):

> I found learning to use computers, the web, and referencing, technical jargon (anatomy and physiology), academic writing, medical calculations and maths so overwhelming that I wanted to leave. It wasn't helped that I had to get along with many younger students and get used to different methods of learning and teaching. (Nursing student)[1]

Their academic transition is not the only transition students need to make. Students also need to acknowledge the crucial role of their social and personal transitions – the study/work/family/life discourses – which are often critical in terms of transition (McInnis, 2003; Tinto, 1993). These discourses include interpersonal and financial literacies (as university study becomes more expensive in many countries and as greater numbers of students are engaged in paid work) time and stress management practices as well as the accommodation of a range of 'life's demands', for example the need to engage and to learn to balance work, social and personal demands. A mature age psychology student explains the difficulties that may be involved:

> I haven't got the support that I thought that I had. So that made studying a lot more difficult. It comes down to the nitty gritty of how much work that you need to put in and how much sacrifice you need to make in your personal life. Others around me didn't comprehend that I was going to be so involved and have so little time for them.

Workplace Learning Contexts
The framework is also relevant to new workplace learning contexts. Thorpe et al., (2005) confirm, for instance, that pedagogy is explicit in the formal training that might be given around technically complex job roles, both on and off the job. Thorpe et al. (2005, p.3) argue that:

> Workplaces may at first sight appear pedagogy free, but, as Unwin et al. suggest, 'the extent to which workplaces exhibit the formal trappings of the traditional educational institution can certainly be surprising', in a reference to artefacts that codify knowledge and act as boundary objects between practices.

In a new or unfamiliar workplace learning contexts, such languages and practices may include organisational literacies, business planning and budgeting practices, culture building, performance appraisal and management systems, employment conditions, mental models, leadership practices and human resources practices like code of conduct protocols, promotion and professional development and training practices. As well, like HE, there are also the more informal discourses explicit in the new

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[1] The qualitative data included in this paper was generated in my doctorate: *University journeys: alternative entry students and their means of succeeding in an unfamiliar university culture*.

workplace. Unwin et al. (2005) identify for example strong relationships of association between individual learning opportunities, work organisation and company performance. They argue that, in Britain, the current emphasis on employee involvement (EI) as a strategy for increasing performance is assumed to foster learning and plays a strong role (Handel & Levine cited in Unwin et al., 2005).

Inter-cultural Contexts
Inter-cultural transitions encompass the identification of the cultural practices and understandings present in the new inter-cultural learning contexts. These cultural beliefs and practices include practices and languages which are explicit but also those which may be taken-for-granted, implicit, unconscious and hidden. They may include:
- Verbal behaviours: direct/indirect ways of talking, implicit/explicit language practices, language expectations, role expectations, face considerations, appropriate (rather than taboo) topics of conversation, colloquialisms, and idioms;
- Nonverbal behaviours: kinesics (body language, facial expression, eye contact, posture, gestures), proxemics (use of personal space), paralanguage (the ways we speak, including accent, pace, pause, pitch, volume etc); chronemics (use of time), use of silence, and haptics (touch);
- Naming, greeting, work, wellness/sickness and grieving practices etc;
- Cultural rituals, in relation to celebration days, birth, marriage, death etc;
- Daily practices in relation to food (the ways we prepare, cook and eat), clothes, living environments, etc;
- Communication practices, for example turn-taking in conversations, teamwork and group participation:
- Religious and spiritual practices;
- Myths, stories and heritage;
- Approaches to conflict: according to Hall (2005, p.229) these approaches include avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising and collaborating;
- Value orientations: according to Ferraro (2002), value orientations are 'those things found in all cultures that are expected or hoped for; they involve embedded assumptions about what is right or wrong, good or bad; and they involve a set of standards by which behaviour is evaluated' (p.25). Ferraro bases his view of value differences on the use of ideal types, or broad sets of logically opposite traits that can be used to compare different cultures. Ferraro's value orientations include individualism-collectivism; doing-being; equality-hierarchy; youth-age; tough-tender; precise-loose time; direct-indirect; competition-cooperation; and structure-flexibility control-constraint;
- Worldviews: Hall (2005) maintains that world views are abstract notions about the way the world is. 'Often worldviews operate at an unconscious level, so that we are not even aware that other ways of seeing the world are either possible or legitimate' (p.31). To Hall worldviews conceptualise differences in ascription/achievement; good/evil; mastery/adaptive; and social lubricant/information;

The new learning framework thus provides a means of identifying and making explicit the practices and languages present in a new inter-cultural learning context. It also reveals the complexities and nuances of inter-cultural engagement. The first is the recognition that the same act may have different meanings in different cultures. For example, 'flesh coloured' stockings/ bandaids/makeup, etc signifies different colours in different cultures. There are differences in the most basic and personal of our acts and practices: whether to blow our noses or sniff whilst in public; eat with chop sticks, knives and forks, or spoons; use hands, water or paper when toileting; express pain openly or stoically, or employ direct or indirect eye contact in conversation.

THE MODEL FOR TRANSITION PRACTICES
The conceptualisation of transition embodied in the shift and the framework assists new learners to identify the (often less explicit) discourses and literacies in a diversity of new learning contexts, including new HE, workplace and inter-cultural contexts. This is an important first step in helping new learners raise their awareness of the context's mainstream discourses and literacies. It also alerts new learners to the importance of engaging and mastering mainstream literacies.

However the shift and the framework, in themselves, do not provide recipes for actively empowering learners. They don't encompass, for example, practical strategies that new learners can use to assist them to engage and master these, often unfamiliar, discourses and literacies. A second model, 'The Model for Transition Practices' presents three practical, dynamic strategies that can assist learners to

make an effective transition. The three practices, which all stem from the application of theoretical perspectives, include reflective, socio-cultural and critical practice.

Reflective Practice

The notion of reflective practice, as it is understood in this paper, emerges from both educational (Boud & Walker, 1990; Schön, 1987) and sociological (Giddens, 1996) literature. Reflective practice gives emphasis to new learners' capacities to observe, to watch and listen to the cultural practices occurring at the site. HE learners, for example, verify the efficacy of observation through the following comments:

> I watched what a few others were doing, thinking, yea, that's a lot more sensible than what I'm doing. (Business student)
> I basically asked a lot questions. I talked to other people I knew out here and I also just listened and just basically figured it out. (Psychology student)

The power of observation and reflection in both inter-cultural and workplace contexts were illustrated at the *Transformations Conference* held at the Australian National University (*Transformations: Culture and the Environment in Human Development* 2005). In an analysis of the conference presentations Lawrence (2007), for example, cites a paper by Beaumont (p.54), which discussed the value of spiritual reflection in relation to inclusivity in workplace contexts. Chiswell (p.60), meanwhile, advocated the use of reflection in three areas: to help young Mexican Australians engage in an exploration of their own sense of cultural identity; to help her reflect on her experience of presenting her research; and to assist conference participants to engage in a mini exploration of their own sense of cultural identity through their reflections on her research video. Fialdo (p.67) noted the power of reflection when she described how an enquiring, self-reflective process committed to organisational transformation informed the Workforce Diversity Strategy at the University of Western Australia.

The understanding of reflective practice also encompasses the concepts of 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action' (Schön, 1987) as well as 'reflection before action' (Boud & Walker, 1990). Through these processes of reflection, learners continually reshape their approaches and develop 'wisdom' or 'artistry' in their practice. Reflection before action, for example, is a pro-active tool for simultaneously improving communication and providing insight into priorities prior to reaction, focusing on the person's attitude to experience rather than on the experience itself (Boud & Walker, 1990). While making the transition to a HE context an education student reflected that:

> Each semester, I further refined my method of attack to succeed in my studies. I analysed what my weak points were and worked on them to improve. Overall, I discovered that the transition is a continual on-going process throughout the degree on a daily basis. Each new subject requires some level of transition from the previous subject, and each year makes you stretch just that bit further than the previous year, and so the growing pains never stop.

Socio-cultural practice

Socio-cultural practice stems from both constructivist approaches and cross-cultural communication theory (CCT). Constructivism, developed from the Piagetian individual development paradigm, accommodates the Vygotskian paradigm of cognitive development within a social setting (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003). Its application to new learning contexts raises awareness about how the social setting and context influence the individual cognitive process, and thus meaningful learning, and suggests that new learning contexts can be viewed as communities of learners (Plourde & Alawiye, 2003). From this perspective, learning can be seen to take place in a social setting, occurring through peer interactions, learner ownership and learning experiences that are authentic for students (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003). Constructivism emphasises the roles played by students' social and academic interactions as well as the roles of the social setting, culture and peer relationships in learning and the consequences both provide for transition. Wenger (2005 cited in Crossan 2005) accommodates this understanding when discussing the *horizontality* of learning occurring, for example, in communities of practice. Wenger notes that in educational contexts learning is traditionally viewed as a vertical process that involves a locus of control over the learning environment residing with the teaching/ training staff. This, Wenger argues, is giving way to a more horizontal view, a process involving negotiation among learning partners (cited in Crossan 2005).

Research from a constructivist perspective also documents the benefits of the learning relationships when learners learn from, or through, others (Duncan et al., 2004; Wenger 1998). Edwards (2005) reflects that, under the sign of lifelong learning, the workplace, home and community are all held to be domains of learning, within which there are specific sites:

> In this sense, there are learning contexts distributed across the social order and embedded in social practices. That this is the case has become perhaps most apparent in the development of distributed, blended and online learning through the use of information and communication technologies and the use of the Internet as a site and resource for learning.

Such relationships incorporate one-to-one (parent – child); one-to-many (teacher to learners); and many-to-many (learning in peer groups, or networks). Duncan et al., (2005) highlight the value of these relationships, which they call authentic learning sites. They include, 'potentially, much of what is recognised in formally prescribed learning opportunities but they also include much that is not prescribed such as home, peer group, and personal relations, accidents, career and other aspirations, and even sleep'.

Socio-cultural practice also emerges from cross-cultural communication theory (CCT). Commentators argue, for example, that becoming familiar with a new HE context constitutes a cross-cultural process (Dearn, 1996; Eijkman, 2002). Kirkpatrick and Mulligan (2002, p. 75) contend:

> Tertiary educators are increasingly coming to recognise that, even for local students and regardless of ethnic background, the transition from high school to tertiary education is still a 'cross-cultural experience', with the potential for substantial problems.

CCT is usually applied to international or English-as-a-second language learners adjusting to an unfamiliar host culture or context (Bandura, 1986; Ferraro, 2002; Hofstede, 1997). CCT contends that, in order to reap maximum benefits from an unfamiliar context, learners need to establish interpersonal relations and communicate effectively with mainstream students and staff. Integral to these learning processes is an individual's self-efficacy, the belief that he or she can successfully perform social behaviours in academic and everyday situations (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's (1986) social learning model is utilised as the basis of a cross-cultural communication program, *ExcelL: Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership Program* (Mak et al., 1998). *ExcelL* enables learners who have recently arrived to be competent and effective in dealing with members of the host context. *ExcelL's* significance is twofold. It not only emphasises the role of socio-cultural competencies in helping new learners adjust to an unfamiliar context, it also prioritises specific socio-cultural competencies: those of seeking help and information, participating in a group, making social contact, seeking and offering feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing requests.

A major thread woven through *Transformations Conference* presentations, for example, was the pivotal role played by the competency of accessing sources of help and information with papers prioritising its benefits and/or using the conference to announce sources of support being developed. Cunningham (p.63), for example, discussed a resource location tool, *My Language*, which enables new and emerging communities to access web based services and information sources. Cooke (p.62) emphasised the importance of seeking help and information in relation to the judicial environment while Mosford and Trudinger (p.79) outlined the value of two community projects conducted by Fairfield City Council.

Presentations also discuss the role of group participation and making social contact in helping people from both diverse and mainstream cultures become more familiar with 'other' cultures. The competencies' use facilitates the development of mentors, networks, learning communities, friendship groups, and increased access to resources/sources of help. The *Transformations Conference* itself demonstrated the power and efficacy of these twin socio-cultural practices: as a collaborative process (between FECCA, ANU, UNESCO, ALGA, PIA, ACT government, AMES, Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Centrelink, Centre for Culture and Health, UNSW, Diversity Health Institute, National Archives of Australia, NPS, SBS, UTS, QUT, and the World Conference Of Religions For Peace); as a context for lobbying and public relations (witness the presence of Coalition politicians and the media strand); and as an opportunity to network and build collaborations.

The socio-cultural practices of providing (negative) feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing requests are 'risky' in that there is a potential for offence, however these competencies are essential if Learners are to master and demonstrate unfamiliar literacies and discourses. *Transformations Conference* (2005) presentations demonstrated that the use of these practices in both inter-cultural and workplace contexts:

- Encourage cultural diversity: Calma (p.57) discussed the difficulties Arab and Muslim Australians have in voicing their anxieties in the climate of fear and uncertainty experienced post-2001;
- Foster sustainability and protect area management: Cater and Dyer (p.58) stressed the value of Navarino Island communities raising their concerns about the rate/extent of tourism management;

- Bridge gaps between cultural diversity, community engagement, organisational/professional health cultures and policy development: Chalmers (p.59) argued against the trend towards mainstreaming marginal, often disenfranchised communities;
- Facilitate moves towards self-determination: Zagala (p.92) described Vanuatu Islanders resistance to foreign ownership of land and the heated negotiations that ensue between custodial land right claimants; and
- Overcome barriers to workforce participation by skilled migrants: Weeraratne (p.91) highlighted the ongoing systemic discrimination experienced by overseas qualified professionals and skilled CLDB migrants in the Australian labour market).

Other *Transformations Conference* presentations were conceived with the objective of providing negative feedback/expressing disagreement with national, local or community practices. Dawson's (p.64) presentation on SBS television provided constructive feedback about SBS's current/future directions while Beattie (p.54) questioned the censorship, and potential marginalisation, of queer couples in mainstream television in a discussion stimulated by ABC's *Playschool*. A theme of the C*onference* itself was the expression of disagreement with the negative labelling of diversity, of 'saying no' to discrimination, intolerance, ignorance and indifference in a plethora of contexts.

An essential feature of the socio-cultural practices is just that: they are socially and culturally appropriate or fine-tuned to the particular context, literacy or discourse being engaged. The specific verbal and nonverbal means of asking for help or refusing a request differs in different contexts, cultures, discipline, and workplaces. For example, in terms of verbal communication, learners need to consider the appropriate words to use: whether to ask directly or indirectly or include explanations or reasons or not. In a HE context a nursing student notes:

> It's not a good idea to just walk in and say "Look this is crap". You can't bulldoze your way rough: you have to be tactful about it…"Look, I agree with this, but I think I've been hard done by with this bit for this reason".

When making social contact, some topics are 'taboo' in some contexts but acceptable in others (for example, in many contexts it would be considered 'rude' to discuss personal information on first acquaintance). In terms of nonverbal communication learners need to think about body language— whether their nonverbal behaviours like posture, eye contact, tone of voice, pace, volume and pitch, how close they stand, etc, are appropriate to the situation and to the task.

The use of the competencies is also more complex than it first appears, dependent on the capital and belief systems and understandings each learner embodies and brings to the new context. Seeking help, for instance, may not be 'culturally' valued (in individualist self-reliant cultures), or an indication of weakness or a lack of confidence in others. Some learners may feel they do not have the right to ask, or equate help as 'remedial', or perceive it as a sign of 'sucking up', or 'uncool. This is reflected in the HE context:

> I don't feel confident enough to speak to my tutor about the essay question because they might think I am stupid or something. (Psychology student)
> When I went to school it [asking for help] was a sign that you weren't coping or you weren't achieving. If you asked for help it wasn't looked on as a very good situation. (Nursing student)

Transformations Conference (2005) presenters also acknowledged the reticence/reluctance of some communities to request help or access sources of support. Allenby (p.52) argued 'Australian arts/multicultural organisations must encourage cultural dialogues with an (Australian/Palestinian) community which has lost faith in the processes of (multi) cultural community support, and provide assurance that their voice is not being silenced'. The use of refusing a request, expressing disagreement and offering negative feedback can also be problematic, dependent on culturally appropriate strategies and on being finetuned to the particular context engaged. Khan (p.71) outlined the use of development processes to work with disadvantaged groups to overcome exclusion from community life and services. Lawrence (p.74) documented the difficulties of giving (negative) feedback to a high status lecturer in a HE context.

Critical practice
Critical practice encompasses twin capacities: people's capabilities for a self-awareness of their own belief systems and cultural practices (critical self-awareness) and their awareness of power configurations impacting on the processes of transition/retention (critical discourse awareness). This awareness includes students' capabilities for language critique including 'their capacities for reflexive analysis of the educational process itself' (Fairclough, 1995, p.1).

Kelly (2003, p. 3) suggests that critical self-awareness requires a "continued attention to the place from which we speak" whereas Gee (1999) describes it as the need to make visible to ourselves who we are and what we are doing. It incorporates people's capacities for unpacking their own cultural perspectives and belief systems (their socio-cultural capital), as well as their readiness to challenge these and to transform them if the need arises. Alfred (2002, p. 90) maintains:

> …we must acknowledge our own socio-cultural histories, identities, biases, assumptions, and recognize how they influence our worldview and our interaction with members of a diverse community. Such awareness results from intense personal reflection and critical analysis of our work as practitioner or scholar.

Critical discourse awareness differs from critical self-awareness in that it concentrates on the power configurations operating in the context or setting and underscores the role of social/cultural critique of the discourses operating at the educational site (Fairclough 1995). Students provided evidence of the importance of applying critical practice (of both self and discourse) in a HE context:

> I've always worked in jobs where I've told people what to do. Now I'm in a role where I'm being told what to do and that is hard. (Business student)

> I asked for help and was told that "No, I'm not giving you the lecture notes, because I don't know whether you went to lectures or not, and you'll just give them to your little network of friends that didn't go, and that will help them pass the exam". Their idea assumes that not coming to the lectures means you were going down to the pub drinking beer or something…There are implications for a mature-age person with a job. (Arts student)

Transformations Conference presentations provide evidence of the importance of applying critical practice (of both self and discourse) in both inter-cultural and workplace contexts. Lillian Holt, in her address as Conference Patron, referred to these practices as 'to look within' and 'to look without' and invoked Nelson Mandela's challenge 'to change ourselves'. Lillian Holt also maintained that 'to label was to limit'. The Conference Convenor, Professor Galla, evoked a 'conceptual shift' to overturn negative views of diversity, calling for a new paradigm of human development to make the acceptance of difference (diversity) a part of everyone's life, common to humanity. Many presentations called for a redefinition of the way government bodies, and individuals respond to diversity. Laaksonen (p.72) discussed 'cultural rights' in place of 'artificial categorisation' and Lang'at (p.73) advocated the need to address current challenges such as poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, social justice advocacy HIV and AIDs and the preservation of valuable cultural dogmas all pertinent to improving local community living standards.

Dynamic Practices
The three practices are dynamic. The successful use of one of the practices often depends on the use of another and, if implemented together, they can be more effective in assisting learners to make a successful transition and to achieve their learning goals and objectives. For example, observation and reflection are pre-requisites for fine-tuning the socio-cultural competencies to the particular context, HE, workplace or inter-cultural, being engaged. Likewise, the socio-cultural properties of the competencies rely on the new learners' capacities to reflect and provide (appropriate) feedback about the mainstream practices operating in the context. The socio-cultural properties of the practices also depend on learners' capacities to appraise not only their own cultural assumptions and expectations but also the external, and often hidden, assumptions and power configurations impacting in the new learning context. The capacities of learners to challenge and, where it is possible, to transform the unhelpful policies and practices operating in the context also rely on learners' use of the socio-cultural practices of offering feedback, expressing disagreement and refusing a request.

The two models are useful in that they conceptualise the processes involved in making effective transitions to new learning contexts. The first model identifies and makes explicit the specific literacies and practices learners need to engage with if they are to communicate confidently in the new context. The second model provides three practical and dynamic strategies that assist learners to accomplish these transitions. Together, the two models provide learners with a means of transforming their practices, of making successful transitions to new learning contexts.

Lawrence, J 2005, 'Reconceptualising attrition and retention: integrating theoretical, research and student perspectives, *Studies in Learning, Evaluation and Development,* vol. 2, no.3, pp.16-33, http://sleid.cqu.edu.au

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Van Dijk, TA 1995, 'Discourse, semantics and ideology', *Discourse and Society*, vol.6, no.2, pp.243-289

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Simon, B. (1990) *The Search for Enlightenment: The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century*, London, Lawrence and Wishart

Fieldhouse, R. (1991) 'Adult Education and Democracy', *International Journal of University Adult Education*, Vol xxx, No.1, pp 75-82

Smyth, J (1996) 'Developing Socially critical educators', in Boud, D. and Miller, N. (eds), *Working with Experience. Animating Learning*, London and New York, Routledge

Submission

Papers should be submitted in either word or rich text format electronically or by 3.5" floppy disk. The **final date** for the submission of papers is **2nd April 2007**. It will not be possible to include papers submitted after this date in the conference proceedings. Papers should be sent to:

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