

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS: HOW DO THEY SEE THEMSELVES AS LEARNERS?

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Abstract

This study examines how Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) student's see themselves as learner's in an Australian Technical and Further Education (TAFE) setting. Examination is made of the importance of individualism and collectivism in their perception of themselves as learners. The importance of metacognitive approaches is also examined from a sociocultural perspective. Results suggest that CALD students do use collectivist approaches to learning. They apply previously used metacognitive approaches to problem solve in learning situations, but are not sure how useful these approaches are.

The current study investigates how Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) diploma level students see themselves as learners. Specifically, the study investigates CALD students' use of metacognition in an Australian education setting and the influence of individualism or collectivism on learning.

Individualism/collectivism

Hornik and Tupchiy (2006) have used a model of individualism/collectivism that has vertical and horizontal categories. The horizontal collectivist is a group member, but is not subordinate to the group. On the other hand the vertical collectivist is part of the group and subordinate to the group. The horizontal individualist is interested in individuality and not comparing with others, while vertical individualists compare themselves with others (Hornik & Tupchiy, 2006). This model of individualism and collectivism has been used in the current study.

Metacognition and language

Wertsch (2008) contends that metacognitive processing is influenced by socio-cultural factors. The socio-cultural view suggests that social and cultural context could impact on a student's learning. The process of other regulation to self regulation needs cultural tools such as language. Mediation by an experienced other/s using cultural tools such as language is at first external, but transfers to being an internally driven self regulator inner speech system (Braten, 1991).

Ramburuth and Tani (2009) have pointed out the difficulties second language learners might have in picking up the pragmatics, or nuance, of meaning in cultural references and professional jargon (p.185). Pragmatics can be described as the potential to make inferences about the utterances made between speaker and receiver (Harley, 1998). Lundberg (2002) has described successful bicultural transfer as involving the capacity to transfer the potential to make inferences about meaning across cultural and linguistic barriers.

Rationale for Rasch analysis

Rasch analysis has been used to assess the Likert scale questionnaires used in this study. The measurement of data in this way provides information above the rank ordering of responses. Bond and Fox (2007) show how this type of count does not qualify as a real measurement of responses to items. Where a device asks for responses to items on a Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) merely counting the number circled does not warrant measurement (102). Bond and Fox have shown that the actual additive structure of the assessment tool cannot be clearly shown by just counting responses.

Results and Discussion

The results of the PWPS, the PLSQ, were combined and a “thick” construct, named the Preferred Approach to Study scale was developed. The bubble chart below shows the location of the items in relation to the latent variable, and error estimate is shown by the size of the bubble (Bond & Fox, 2007) and the Rasch analysis of the Preferred Approach to Study scale.

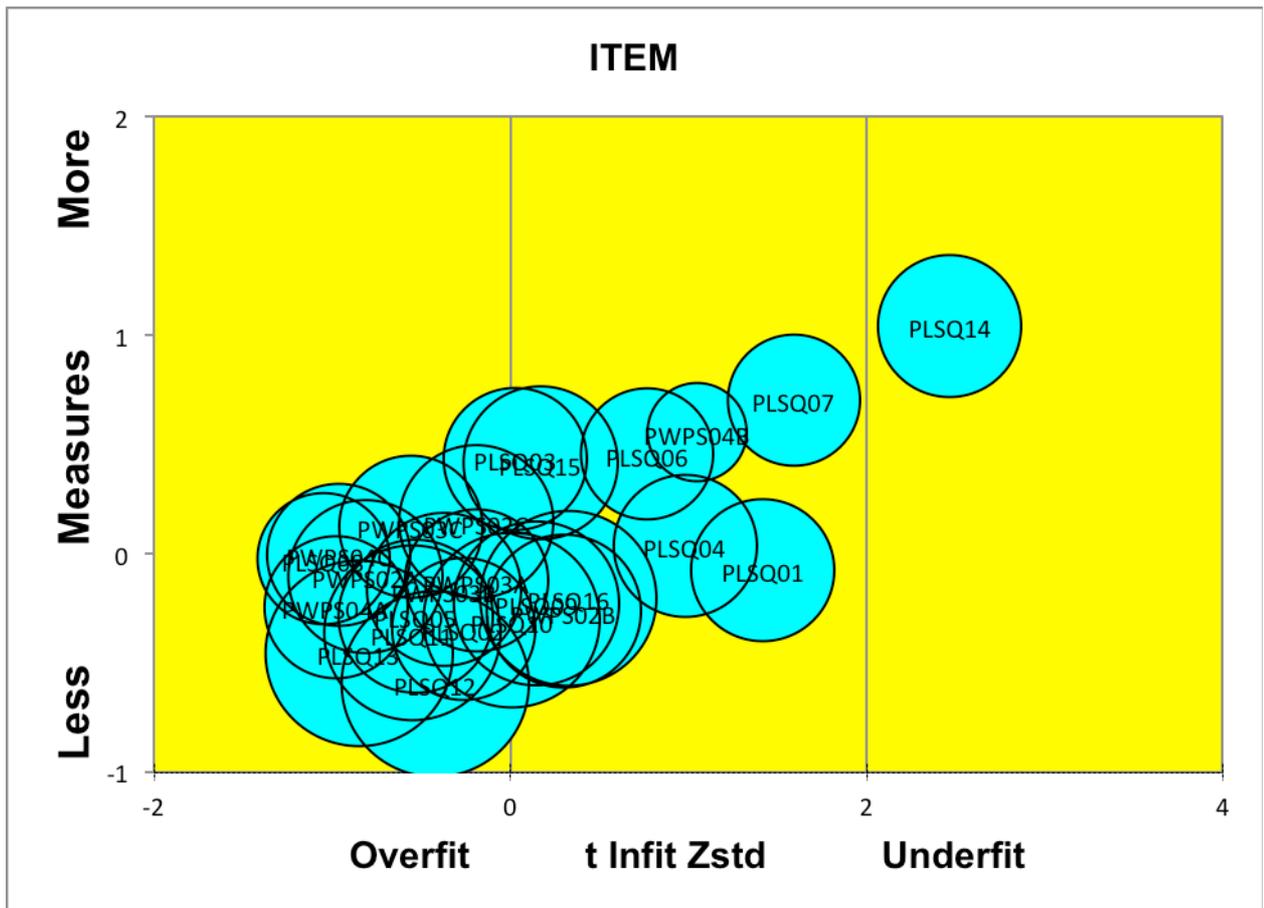


Figure 1. Preferred Approach to Study scale bubble chart - showing infit and difficulty level of every item.

Figure 1 shows the most difficult item to endorse was item PLSQ14 “*I hate disagreeing with others in the group*”, it is also the only item to show underfit. This item is not working consistently with the other items in the Preferred Approach to Study scale respondents are endorsing this item in unpredictable ways. It does not appear that the item relates to the preferred study approach of the participants.

The Preferred Approach to Study Item Map (Figure 2) shows the measure of how CALD students perceive their learning style and problem- solving approaches in an Australian educational context. The right side of the vertical line shows each participants’ level of endorsement and the left displays the relative position of the items in the logit scale. The Preferred Approach to Study scale (Figure 2) follows.

The Preferred Approach to Study scale shows that items from the PWPS questionnaire show the same pattern of responses for the “practical” and “interpersonal” problem-solving items. The most easily endorsed items are, “*How useful do you think the strategy is*”, this is followed by, “*How often would you use the strategy*”, and then the item, “*How easy do you think the strategy is to apply*”. Whereas the “study” items show a different pattern of response, where the most easily endorsed item is “*How often would you use the strategy*” followed by “*How easy do you think the strategy is to apply*”, and the most difficult to endorse being “*How useful do you think the strategy is*”.

The pattern of responses to the Preferred Approach to Study scale suggest that participants were collectivist, but they also endorsed individualist items related to doing well in their studies. Participants were also not able to endorse the usefulness of their preferred approach to problem-solving in an Australian study setting, while they were able to endorse the usefulness of interpersonal and practical problem-solving approaches in an Australian educational setting.

Conclusion

Hatano and Wertsch (2001) have noted that culture assists an individual in “learning and in the development of mind” (p.78), but also that an individual may choose not to participate in all aspects of their culture. The results of the current study shows that all the items are working together to measure the underlying construct. A significant finding from this study is that these students were not able to endorse the usefulness of their preferred problem-solving approach in a study situation in an Australian educational context. The results suggests that while able to cope with practical and interpersonal problem-solving in Australia, these students did not perceive themselves as being able to apply previously used problem-solving approaches in a study context. As Hatano and Wertsch have noted above, the cultural/contextual issues that are related to individual development need to be considered. The CALD students who participated in this study have shown that when they enter a culturally different education system to what they might be used to they are potential not able to endorse the transfer of previously used problem-solving approaches to a new educational setting. These findings are likely to have implications for CALD students studying in Australia and should be of interest to educators developing learning programs for these students.

Limitations

The replication of this study with a variety of CALD students within different educational institutions would be important to see if the results are replicated.

References

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Preferred learning style questionnaire

This questionnaire asks you to rate the way you like to learn things.

Please imagine you are in a new learning situation before starting to answer the questions. You have been asked by the teacher to cooperate with a group of fellow students on a project.

Please keep the situation stated above in mind when answering the questions.

Circle 1 (most agree) to 4 (least agree).

Questions:

		Strongly agree			Strongly disagree
1	I like to do class work by myself.	1	2	3	4
2	When I am successful in my learning it is because of my efforts.	1	2	3	4
3	I enjoy doing tasks differently from other people.	1	2	3	4
4	I like my privacy when studying.	1	2	3	4
5	When people in the group do better than me I need to work harder.	1	2	3	4
6	Competition between classmates is good for the group	1	2	3	4
7	It is important to me to be the top of the group.	1	2	3	4
8	Competition makes me work harder.	1	2	3	4
9	am proud when members of my class get good results.	1	2	3	4
10	Harmony is very important when you are learning.	1	2	3	4
11	I like to share things with my classmates.	1	2	3	4
12	When doing a group activity I assist others as much as reasonably possible.	1	2	3	4
13	I think the group needs come first.	1	2	3	4
14	I hate disagreeing with others in the group.	1	2	3	4
15	I think I should consider group needs over mine.	1	2	3	4
16	I should consult with the group before doing a task.	1	2	3	4

Thank you very much for your time

Adapted form Hornilk & Tupchiy (2007)