concludes with recommendations for raising this low level of competence in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Altogether, this is a bumper issue with nine articles and six book reviews. I hope you enjoy reading them, and rethinking approaches and concepts. Have a good year, and happy reading of this first issue for the 49th volume!

Roger Harris
Editor

Conceptualising adult and continuing education practice:
towards a framework for research

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Adult and continuing education practitioners are the core group of staff that enable the lifelong learning enterprise. However, there are few studies that look into the domain of practice of these practitioners, which is shaped by the organisation and its wider external milieux. Research on this topic naturally calls for the elucidation of practitioners' values and practice-related orientations that have structuring properties on practice. This paper argues that the theorising of practice must pay attention to the issue of 'duality of structure' for the values of practice. It also suggests drawing from a range of theories to help establish the practice-to-milieu connection. Theories may also assist in bridging the abstract-to-reality gap when translating from values to actions. Whilst theories can offer explicative potential for practice, their use is facilitated only through availability of analytical frameworks to organise the practice of teaching adults and program planning into a logical

series of components and processes. In this connection, a teaching practice model and a program planning practice model, based on systems theory, are proposed to guide future research.

Introduction

The literature on adult and continuing education (ACE in this paper) is replete with studies about learners, programs, policies and various types of theoretical propositions. Surprisingly, there are few studies that focus their attention on ACE practitioners. This category of workers in ACE (who carry functional titles such as tutor, coordinator or program leader), has a major responsibility in planning programs and may have a minor role in teaching. In most university departments, the academic study of ACE is separate from the continuing education unit, essentially meaning a separation of the academic study of ACE from its field of practice. This separation has led to the diversion of research interest away from fundamental questions connected with front-line practice into subject matters such as: the learner, the provision of learning and the wider implications of learning in society. The research focus on learners and their needs is consistent with the learner-centred disciplinary discourse of ACE generated by academics, and may serve to perpetuate it. The preference for researching learners over teachers and program planners also reflects the distance between 'theory' and 'practice' as academic researchers try to construct a corpus of knowledge for the field inhabited by their practice-oriented peers, the ACE practitioners.

This paper argues that ACE practice is a legitimate research topic, in view of developments in the parallel field of teacher and teaching research in education, and the challenges faced by program planning when responding to forces of the market and government policy. It surveys the literature to conceptualise ACE practice into four major research themes, wherein practitioners' thinking emerges as the

main area of interest. Research in this direction leads to the study of practitioners' values and practice-related orientations, which produces some descriptive profiles of practice. These profiles would require explanation by theories to help understand the nature of practice as a product and driver of change, and to connect subjective practice to its external milieux at both organisational level and the macro-level environment of society, culture, economy and politics. Finally, two separate models of teaching and program planning for ACE are proposed from synthesis of previous studies in these areas.

Researching practice

The marginalisation of practice as a research topic in ACE is a serious consideration when compared with school education, where teacher-initiated action research has gained considerable popularity in recent years. In carrying out action research, teachers were encouraged to become reflective practitioners who could assume the role of agents for change by evaluating the outcome of their own actions in the classroom. Much of the impetus driving action research has come from school improvement initiatives and the effort is believed to promote professionalisation of teachers.

In comparison, the ACE practitioner's role does not equate with that of the classroom teacher, as the former mainly engages in program planning and often directs part-time staff to deliver the content, whereas classroom teachers perform the teaching themselves. The closest equivalent to the ACE practitioner's role in school education is a curriculum officer, although in ACE, it naturally comes with additional administrative and entrepreneurial responsibilities and may not involve as much curriculum development work as their mainstream counterpart. ACE practitioners do not have the status of professionals as teachers do, and may or may not belong to any professional ACE association which by itself may also not enjoy widespread public recognition. There is no doubt that the ambiguous

role of ACE practitioners and the lack of recognition for them as a profession has made this occupational group a less attractive subject for study. Reliance on ACE practitioners to carry out action research type of inquiry will require overcoming their lesser inclination towards research. This regrettable state is largely caused by ACE practitioners' preoccupation with managing educational provision that has skewed their attention significantly.

The dearth of research on practice, apart from having an obvious effect of creating a knowledge gap, has additionally called into question the merit of doing such research inquiry. This raises the question of whether understanding the practitioner is equally as important as understanding the learner. In the real world of program planning, practitioners are responsible for managing a myriad of details and variables that can influence planning and they are assumed to mediate between the needs of various stakeholders. In this regard, practitioners answer not only to learners but also to the organisation where they work and to society at large. Thus, in the discharge of their duties, practitioners have to navigate between the needs of these different stakeholders and to negotiate multiple and at times conflicting interests. Program planning, as the most important aspect of ACE practice, is definitely a more contentious activity than teaching and should not be viewed as just employing simple technical rationale in its process. In conceptualising planning theory in ACE, Sork (2000) has called for simultaneous attention to be paid to the social-political environment and ethical dimensions apart from the technical skills and knowledge required in planning. This representative move by North American ACE researchers to infuse 'power' into program planning theory represents a break from the technicist model of practice prevalent up to the late 1980s. Replacing this outmoded model is the conception that in program planning, practitioners enter into social relations involving negotiation of interests and power interplay. Successful program launch implies not only success made in the steps of assessing needs, finding

resources, deciding on content, doing marketing and conducting evaluation. It also includes many aspects of the strategies used to canvass support for the program and to eliminate opposition (Mabry & Wilson 2001). In order to be responsive to the ever-changing needs of learners and the dictates of funding agencies, it is now realised that program planning should open up to a variety of external factors such as government policies, requirements set by professional bodies and market forces. This latter in particular has aroused extensive discussion on how practitioners will need to conduct their practice in an ethical manner.

Market-driven programs have been viewed by some as antithetical to the philosophy of adult education and, as such, are a source of internal conflict when the personal beliefs of practitioners clash with those of the organisation or their clients (Kerka 1996). As a result, addressing this conflict through the formulation of ethical guidelines for practice is considered a priority (Gordon & Sork 2001). With the advent of government supported use of lifelong learning as a concept to replace ACE, government policies and regulations have increasingly impinged upon practice. The policy influence is often exerted indirectly through the organisation where the practitioner works, which can provide the opportunity for studying acceptance, resistance and redefinition of change to the practice setting (Belzer 2001).

These developments underscore the importance of studying practice and lend support to its status as a research topic in ACE. Adopting Weiland's (2000) categorisation of inquiries in adult education, research on practice can be considered for primary inclusion under philosophy and management (leadership and administration) with a secondary inclusion under sociology. This view is reflective somehow of the difference in research traditions in adult education between North America and Europe, where psychology and management

sciences are the main underpinning disciplines for the former, whilst sociology serves to inform research in the latter.

Conceptualising practice from the literature

A survey of the literature on ACE practice published from the 1990s has identified four main research themes. The bulk of these contributions come from North American research which highlights efforts connected to the on-going process of professionalisation and the need to formulate ethical guidelines of practice. Other studies look from within the organisation for processes and strategies employed by practitioners to negotiate power and interests with stakeholders when planning programs. A third research theme involves analysing practice as being based on a system of values held by practitioners, the elucidation of which can promote reflection and create possibilities for change. This research theme is complemented by a fourth stream – philosophical and sociological theorisations of practice as a form of social relation occurring in organisations and embedded within particular historical-societal contexts. Research of this nature, as informed by critical theory and philosophical pluralism, can allow for broader issues of the economy, politics and social transformation to be connected with practice and professionalisation. Issues within these four identified research themes of ACE practice are summarised below.

Professionalisation and ethics

The professionalisation of adult education progressed rapidly in North America during the 1950s when academics who were engaged in teaching adult education in universities took the serious step of creating their own discipline. This move by the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) led to the founding of adult education as a specific academic field. By the end of the 1960s, the field was characterised by a theoretical consensus consisting of technical rationality and a focus on the affective self-fulfilment

of learners. This theoretical consensus represents what Podeschi (2000: 618) calls a 'behaviorist-humanist merger' and is exemplified by Knowles' theory of andragogy. Contributing to the move towards professionalisation are three elements: knowledge base, graduate programs and professional associations (Imel, Brockett & James 2000: 629).

A knowledge base constitutes theories of adult learning and practice. Its generation is determined by what counts as knowledge and how this is produced. Until now, academics have been the main producers of knowledge about the field, which raises questions about the inclusiveness and validity of their knowledge claims. Graduate programs can contribute to professionalisation through their ability to foster a professional identity of adult education by way of legitimising the field as an academic discipline. As such, it is a focal point for scholarship in perpetuating production of the knowledge base. It also serves as the channel for practitioners to improve their knowledge and skills of practice. However, the value of graduate study is limited by the ways in which field-based practitioners view the merit of such forms of training in comparison with those provided by associations of personnel development and training.

Academic associations in ACE exist to provide opportunities for the personal development of their members, and to represent a unifying voice for the profession. However, these associations generally lack a strong focus, as members come from different contexts of practice and the associations have largely been unable to influence government policy. Other weaknesses and threats include *ad hoc* participation by members, social inactivity and the drift towards elitism. Further effort towards achieving professionalisation is hampered by academics' inability to bridge the gap between orthodox conceptions of practice and real-world practice. There are also objections to the imposition of standards of practice through certification and regulatory measures, as these tend to impose further barriers on ACE practitioners who

are working outside the mainstream. Imel, Brockett and James (2000: 629) contend that ACE practice does not fit the traditional notion of professionalisation in other professions. Hence, the notion of a 'weak professionalisation' has been floated by Tobias (2003) as the course to take for future professionalisation. This approach is characterised by three features: (a) common identity based on undertaking similar activity; (b) membership in a loose organisation for expression of shared purpose; and (c) voluntary participation in training that is not linked to licensure for practice.

Closely connected with professionalisation is the development of ethical guidelines for practice. This need has arisen because practitioners work in an environment where ethical problems could surface and which would require making difficult decisions to resolve those dilemmas. Lawler (2000) stresses that part of the responsibility for personal development of practitioners is to engage with ethical issues arising from practice. She sees this as a three-step process of defining the nature of ethical problems, identifying ethical problems at work, and engaging in ethical decision-making to resolve the dilemma. In order to prepare for this, practitioners must have an understanding of their own values and of the values of other stakeholders so that decision-making based on meeting the maximum possible of ethical obligations to all parties can be obtained. Studies in North America suggest that practitioners strongly support developing a code of ethics but only for the purpose of guidance and not for strict enforcement (Gordon & Sork 2001).

Negotiations of power and interests

Adult education practice, in particular program planning, is now recognised to be more than a normative process, and as one that takes place in a social setting involving power relations and interests. The practitioner's role is to negotiate multiple interests of stakeholders where power differences are often present. Yang, Cervero, Valentine and Benson (1998) choose to study this using a quantitative method

to reveal a pattern of power and planning behaviours which are classified into seven influence tactics (reasoning, consulting, appealing, networking, bargaining, pressuring and counteracting). Successful planning therefore hinges on the match between understanding the planning situation and the influencing strategies employed. This finding is further extended by the qualitative study of Mabry and Wilson (2001) who found that the use of strategies also depends on how the practitioner perceives the power that stakeholders have. In other words, how planning tactics were chosen would depend on how much involvement the practitioner wanted from the stakeholders. There are ethical implications arising from this strategy selection as undemocratic and covert planning practices will be questioned. Another line of research that tackles practitioners' engagement with power differences is to examine how their practice can be changed by policy, and vice versa. Belzer (2001) explores how the policy reform of adult basic education, linked to welfare reform, has acted to change practice, and how practice may actually redefine policy intents in a 'bottom-up' fashion.

Practitioners' thinking

Teacher thinking in adult education is studied with reference to the model used in school education. For this purpose, Clark and Peterson's (1986) model of teacher thoughts and actions has been alluded to but is considered an inadequate model because it does not reflect the totality of orientations related to practice (Campbell 1999). A systematic model called 'Personal Pedagogical System' has been proposed by Taylor, Dirkx and Pratt (2001) and consists of core beliefs, foundational knowledge and an informal theory of teaching. This model can help educators of adults to understand their personal approaches to teaching, to realise meanings that they attach to certain actions and decisions, and to compare their personal values held with the manifested actions (espoused theory versus theory-in-use). Campbell (1999) considers it essential to understand the values and

practice-related orientations of practitioners in order to influence change. The connectivity between values, thought processes and the organisational context of practice has been highlighted by Nesbitt (1998). This has led to further theorising that situates the values of practice within social structures, and that defines change within a conception of structure-agency relations under structuration theory (Dirkx, Kushner & Shusarski 2000).

Social and political theorisations of practice

It is considered that ACE practice in North America, which has been dominated by technicist and instrumentalist theories, lacks adequate sociological and philosophical theorisations to deepen an understanding of practice. Podeschi (2000: 614–615) attributes the neglect of philosophical study to the rush in achieving professionalisation in the 1950s. Although there has been a stream of subsequent research seeking to elucidate practitioners' values, such studies are decontextualised and so cannot attain social relevance (Apps 1973, Elias & Merriam 1995, Zinn 1991). Quigley (2000) asserts that adult education should reclaim its historical identity of playing a clear social mission through attempts at influencing social policy and helping to build the civil society. This will serve to stop the singular dominance of individualistic ideology and limitations of functional humanism, which are currently directing ACE policy and informing conceptions about practice. Towards this end, a pluralistic philosophical framework that integrates personal beliefs, institutional culture and historical-social forces has been formulated by Podeschi (2000) to help understand the daily dynamics and conflicts of professional practice. Sociological analyses using conflict perspective or critical theory regard practice as a social construct which reinforces certain interests, privileges and status of practitioners. Professionalisation is therefore conceived as a process of struggle and conflict of interests where broader tensions and contradictions of the

organisational meso-level and other macro-level contexts can spill over to create ethical issues for the practitioner (Tobias 2003).

Implications for research practice

The above review of literature accentuates the critical role of the ACE practitioner in enabling the proper functioning of the lifelong learning enterprise. 'Lifelong learning enterprise', as I define it, collectively consists of: the learners (market), the organisations that provide learning opportunities (learning providers), the regulatory agencies of the government and professional bodies (regulators), the laws and policies, social expectations and cultural assumptions about learning (political, social and cultural environments), and the employment market that drives demand for skills acquisition (economic environment). These elements interact with one another, and the various stakeholders' interests, priorities and concerns are negotiated through the process of program planning wherein the practitioner plays the important role of mediator. During this process, power relations played out can create ethical dilemmas for the practitioner when trying to achieve a balance among various competing interests. When practitioners have chosen to adapt their practice in line with government policies, organisational interests and market demand, it would create continuity for the development of ACE from a consensus perspective. Alternatively, when the beliefs of practitioners run into conflict with externally determined goals, it could lead to subversion of those goals and cause the frustration of change. This latter reactionary stance that fits the conflict perspective would put the practitioners' will in resisting change to the test. In sociological terms, the practitioner as agent is pitted against dominating structures (organisation, government, society) for a competition on whose values would predominate in program planning.

The nature of practice and how it consolidates or drives change fall within the classical sociological issue of 'structure-agency

dualism'. To overcome this divide, a third approach following the structuration theory of Giddens (1984) can be invoked. This theory assumes that practitioners' values and the practice-related orientations that underlie their practice are both a given and a construct continually moulded by practice. The practitioners' values are useful for understanding the nature of teaching and program planning practice but do not necessarily offer an explanation of causation. The reason is that although values of practice as a 'structure' would precede 'actions' carried out during teaching and program planning, the said values could nevertheless be reinforced or changed through the transformative potential of human agency. As such, the validity of values would hold only insofar as the actions are continually reproduced across time and space. This qualification of values as a 'structure' is consistent with the 'duality of structure' expounded in Giddens' theory. It should also be noted that research on practitioners' thinking is not concerned with studying the manifested outcomes of practice (actions) but rather with the values and practice-related orientations that have structuring properties on the practitioners' actions carried out in their work context. As Nesbitt (1998: 161) contends of teaching in adult education, 'classroom teaching processes in adult education can be linked with, and influenced by, institutional and social forces ... teachers' pedagogical choices might be affected by both their intentions and certain "frame" factors outside of their control'.

The use of structuration theory to study the values of ACE practice could also bridge the gap between sociological and philosophical discourses on the topic of practice. The contextualist perspective for undertaking philosophy of adult education proposed by Podeschi (2000) aims to situate practice within organisational and cultural frames of reference, but without losing the creative individuality of the practitioner. This opens up potential for actions to be transformational in a similar fashion to structure-agency relationship posited under structuration theory. Structuration theory has also been used to study change in teaching practice for adults (Dirkx, Kushner & Shusarski 2000). Other developments in macro-sociological theories, particularly on the application of social reproduction in education, have also incorporated structuration theory as a form of transformational model in its dialectic of agency and structure (Morrow & Torres 1995). Structuration theory therefore can be used to deepen understanding of change occurring in ACE practice.

Relevance of theory

The study of ACE practitioners' values and practice-related orientations is related to aspects of macro-level analyses, socio-cultural and political. Social, cultural and political theories are useful for explaining the structures (values, rules and institutions) that bind ACE practice. The explicative utility of these theories is evident because the purpose of elucidating practitioners' values of practice is merely limited to generation of descriptive profiles of practice. Social theories can, for example, try to account for why practitioners favour certain assumptions about adult learning and adult development goals as suggested by the values that they profess. Cultural theories can draw from the postmodern discourse of consumption to help explain favoured approaches to the marketing of programs. Political theories can utilise various discourses of politics and power to explain why practitioners hold certain views towards lifelong learning as a public policy. These theories are useful to the extent of supplying plausible explanations but cannot predict subsequent courses of practitioners' action. Thus, an explanation of why practitioners hold certain views on the policy of lifelong learning does not imply that a particular stand or practice strategy will be taken by the practitioner. This 'abstract-to-reality' gap remains within the domain of creative human agency in which understanding it will require a different research epistemology, perhaps one that assumes a micro-sociological perspective.

The success of applying macro-level theories to researching practitioners' thinking would depend on two conditions. First is the need to find relevant theories or their combinations for theorising the structures that define ACE practice. Second, local research on ACE that demonstrates application of these theories would need to be identified in support. On the first task, it would be important to denote not only an eclectic use of theories but also to have sensitivity towards the nature of these structures. For example, in some context, the economic dimension of the market may be more prominent as a defining variable for the structures rather than social, cultural and political dimensions. The second task is complementary to the first as it tries to map previous efforts of theorising in order to offer a temporal and spatial organisation of the structures. As such, lifelong learning structures can be defined by several dimensions: social, cultural, political, economic and so on, each with values that shift across time, but which need to be understood in relation to one another to identify a unifying trend or to locate major directions of change. When researching practitioners' values and practice-related orientations, macro-level theories are complementary to structuration theory for providing a basis for explaining the characteristics of these structures and their relations to the elucidated values and practice-related orientations of practitioners. The explicative potential of these theories is therefore of importance in establishing the 'practice-to-milieu' connection as shown in Figure 1.
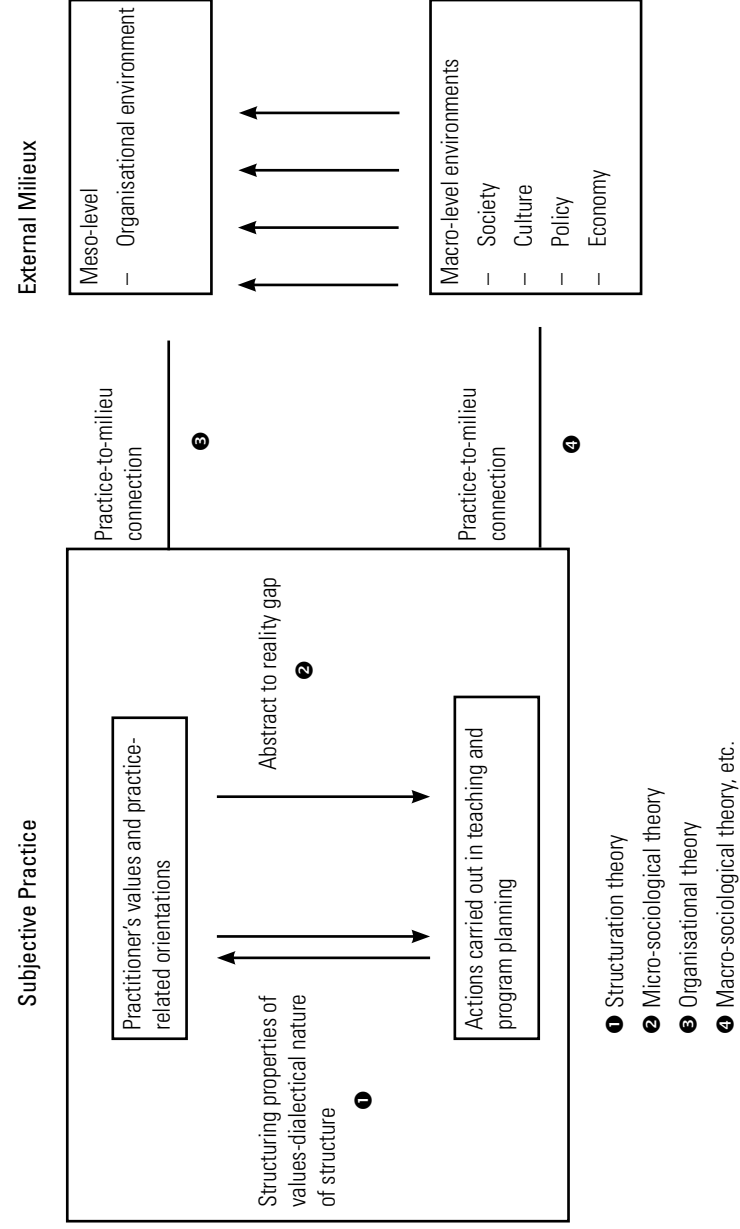

Figure 1:   Explicative utility of theories in adult and continuing education practice research

Proposed models of practice

The theorising of subjective micro-level ACE practice can be achieved by locating it within the meso-level organisation that is itself situated within specific social-cultural-economic-political milieux of the macro-context. In this connection, relevant theories as explained above could be enlisted to explain various facets of the 'practice-to-milieu' connection. Since there could be a range of theories from various disciplines rather than one single meta-theory that would offer plausible explanations for the elucidated values of practitioners and their practice-related orientations, a way of organising the components contributing to a practice model and the relations amongst the components must first be formulated. For this purpose, the model should be able to accommodate different perspectives within one integrated framework. Such a framework should be dynamic and open to change from the external environment. A theoretical framework is useful because complex relationships and interactions can be depicted, and on the basis of these decisions about what explanatory theories to draw from can then be made.

A model based on systems theory would be able to meet the above-stated criteria. It has been applied by Ballantine (2001) to break down parts of the institution of education so that appropriate theories can be matched and used to explain those parts of the education system which are of interest. The systems model contains a five-step process starting from the 'organisation' that includes both the structure and processes inside it. The 'organisation' is in interaction with the 'environment' through 'input' that it receives and 'output' that comes out of it. Adaptation to the changes and demands in the environment occurs through a constant process of 'feedback'. The systems model has been described by Olson (1978, cited in Ballantine 2001: 17–18) in the following manner:

> It is not a particular kind of social organization. It is an analytical model that can be applied to any instance of the process of social organization, from families to nation … Nor is [it] a substantive theory – though it is sometimes spoken of as a theory in sociological literature. This model is a highly general, content-free conceptual framework within which any number of different substantive theories of social organization can be constructed.

Two models are required to depict separately about a system of teaching practice, and another one on program planning practice that takes place within the organisational context.
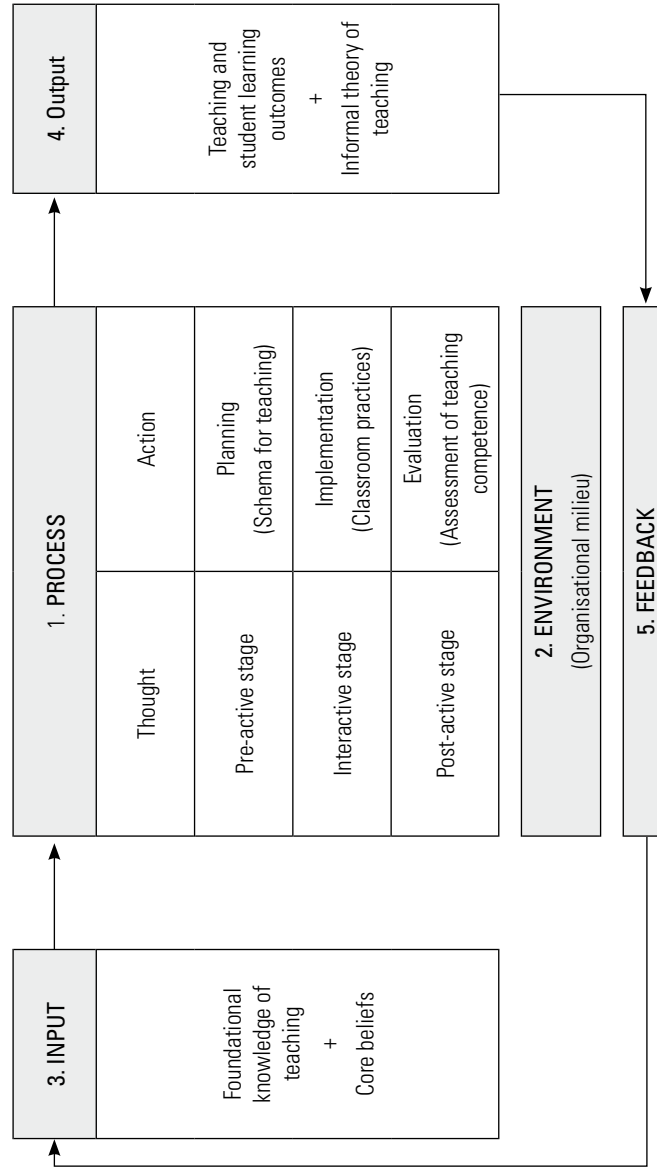
Figure 2: Teaching practice model in adult and continuing education

The model in Figure 2 is a hybrid model that takes as a central 'process' component the thoughts (pre-active, interactive and post-active stages) and actions in Clark and Peterson's (1986) teacher's thinking model. Borrowed from the personal pedagogical system of Taylor, Dirkx and Pratt (2001) are the ideas of core beliefs (assumptions about adult teaching and learning) and foundational knowledge (knowledge and skills for effective teaching of adults) that form the 'input' whilst an informal theory of teaching (sense of identity and purpose) arises as an 'output'. This new model of teaching practice in ACE assumes that feedback will operate in the system as the student learning outcomes and informal theory of teaching (output) are compared with core beliefs and foundational knowledge (input) leading to changes in thoughts and actions about teaching in a continuously occurring chain of reflection. The model can also be considered as a heuristic for understanding the complex meaning of teaching in the adult educational setting. Although teaching cannot exist in isolation from the teaching institution, in reality, it is generally regarded as an independent activity of the teacher. As the focus for most research studies on teacher thinking is on relatively discrete aspects of thoughts and actions rather than on the whole process of teaching as a social or cultural practice (Campbell 1999), this subjective model would be pertinent to research that adopts a micro-level perspective focusing on the teacher's thoughts and actions. It would be less effective to serve as a model for linking teaching practice to its meso-level environment represented by the teaching institution.
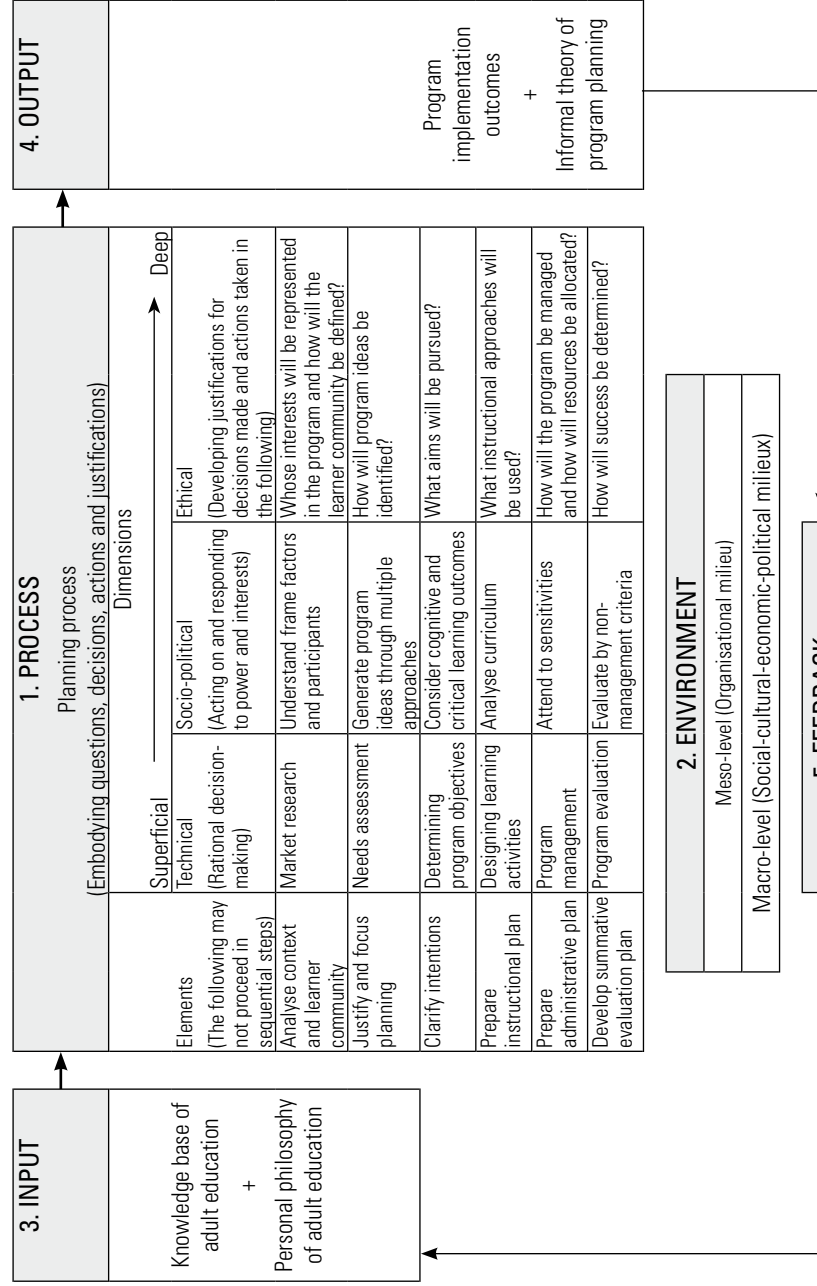
Figure 3 (Program planning practice model in adult and continuing education practice)

3. INPUT

Knowledge base of adult education

+

Personal philosophy of adult education

1. PROCESS

Planning process

(Embodying questions, decisions, actions and justifications)

Dimensions (Superficial → Deep)

Elements (The following may not proceed in sequential steps)	Technical (Rational decision-making)	Socio-political (Acting on and responding to power and interests)	Ethical (Developing justifications for decisions made and actions taken in the following)
Analyse context and learner community	Market research	Understand frame factors and participants	Whose interests will be represented in the program and how will the learner community be defined?
Justify and focus planning	Needs assessment	Generate program ideas through multiple approaches	How will program ideas be identified?
Clarify intentions	Determining program objectives	Consider cognitive and critical learning outcomes	What aims will be pursued?
Prepare instructional plan	Designing learning activities	Analyse curriculum	What instructional approaches will be used?
Prepare administrative plan	Program management	Attend to sensitivities	How will the program be managed and how will resources be allocated?
Develop summative evaluation plan	Program evaluation	Evaluate by non-management criteria	How will success be determined?

4. OUTPUT

Program implementation outcomes

+

Informal theory of program planning

2. ENVIRONMENT

Meso-level (Organisational milieu)

Macro-level (Social-cultural-economic-political milieux)

5. FEEDBACK

Figure 3   Program planning practice model in adult and continuing education practice

In comparison with teaching practice, program planning practice would require a model that places more emphasis on the influence exerted by the organisational environment and other external milieux. The model shown in Figure 3 has incorporated dimensions of socio-political and ethical concerns to counteract criticisms about singularity of focus on the technical dimension when conducting program planning. It draws from the planning framework of Sork (2000) with further borrowing from the interactive planning model of Cafarella (1994) to define the tasks involved in the different steps of the planning process for each of the three dimensions. For the 'input' component of this model, the 'foundational knowledge' in the teaching practice model is replaced by a 'knowledge base of adult education', which would include core concepts such as: andragogy, models of participation and motivation in adult learning, perspective transformation, program planning, learning projects and self-directed learning (Long 1991). On the other hand, 'core belief' is replaced by a 'personal philosophy of adult education' as elaborated by Elias and Merriam (1995). The 'output' component is defined in terms of 'program implementation outcomes' and 'informal theory of program planning'. As the central process of program planning is continuous with the organisational environment and other external variables, such underlying subjective incorporation by practitioners of meso- and macro-level influences would ensure a regularity of feedback working in the system. This would also facilitate the theorising of practice by any relevant organisational or sociological theories to bridge the 'practice-to-milieu' gap.

Conclusion

The two models proposed in this paper aim to provide practical frameworks for guiding future research on teaching and program planning practices in ACE. Based on a synthesis of studies on teacher's thinking and models of teaching in ACE, the components contributing to a model for describing teaching practice have been

identified. The positioning of these components in relation to one another is proposed primarily as an analytical scheme following that of a generic systems model. Formulated in close relation to this teaching practice model is the program planning practice model, which takes the subjective thoughts and actions of practitioners not as isolated processes but opened to external influences of the organisation and its external environment. In both models, central to the research process, however, is the elucidation of practitioners' values and their practice-related orientations. As these have structuring properties on practice and are at the same time subject to forces of human agency by the practitioners, structuration theory can be invoked to help understand the dialectical nature of ACE practice. At the same time, a complement of meso-level organisational theory and macro-level sociological theories can be enlisted to help explain the 'practice-to-milieu' connection. While the current approach to conceptualising ACE practice would need further evaluation on the soundness of its assumptions and formulations, it could nevertheless serve to stimulate discussion about ACE practice leading possibly to more research on this topic.

Acknowledgement

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