

Editorial

Red is the new black: Fashion trends in education

We are delighted to report that with this issue IIER is celebrating an historic moment: it is the first time we have published three issues in one year. You might ask: Is this a sign of evolutionary progress or simply a fashion trend? Inspired by this event, I explore the issue of ‘fashion trends’ in education – after a brief stop to watch the Melbourne Cup and a reminder that ‘fashion trend’ is typically applied to clothing fashion. Perhaps it would be instructive to look first to the meaning of fashion in that context?

The *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* notes that ‘fashion’ simply means established custom or conventional usage (Hoad, 1996). According to *The Australian’s* fashion writer, Catherine Caines (2009), the colour red is “the top shade” this season, evidenced by global “red carpet moments featuring red” (p.18). But there is more: the current fashion trend in clothing may have beneficial effects; Caines asserts that a recent study found that “athletes who wear red have a better chance of winning”, but she concedes that “the theory may as yet be untested” (2009, p.18). At this point Caines reverts to the tried and tested measure: some celebrities have parted with their classic ‘little black dress’ in favour of red coloured clothes. Thus, scientific testing is not necessary to convince a fashion-conscious populace of the validity of the notion that ‘red is the new black’ in autumn 2009.

Could it be that the link between fashion and science in education is just as tenuous? Slavin (1989) has been known to criticise educational change as nothing more than following fashion trends (in clothing). Whereas terms such as ‘old fashioned’, ‘last season’, ‘unstylish’ or simply ‘unfashionable’ are used blatantly in discussions of clothing fashion (Kalogeropoulos, 2009; Kriege, 2009), education critics are more circumspect. New educational trends are termed ‘educational reform’ or ‘innovation’ (Stevens, 2004). Nevertheless, recent ‘retro trends’ in education exemplified by the ‘back-to-basics’ (Donnelly, 2008) and ‘phonics’ (Ferrari, 2009) movements in Australian school education imply that ‘whole-language strategies of teaching English’ and OBE (outcomes-based education) are definitely less fashionable at present. But are they also less effective? Rigorous testing of fashionable educational ideas that are translated into various educational practices and programs is not possible according to Slavin (2008), who makes the following disturbing claim:

The practice of education today is at much the same pre-scientific point as medicine was a hundred years ago. We have much knowledge in education, and educators do occasionally pay attention to it, as physicians did in 1907. ... As a result important decisions about educational programs are likely to be made based on slick marketing, misleading demonstrations, word of mouth, tradition and politics. (p.2)

We agree with Slavin (1989, 2008), and contend that whereas education trends change less frequently than clothing fashion, the ones in vogue at any time are likely to fall out of

fashion after a while as new or 'retro' trends are declared as the current 'innovative educational practice' and are disseminated from person to person or through policy initiatives. No wonder that Nicols (2009) remarks, rather cynically: "Just as a pendulum drives a clock, educators know that, given enough time, the opposing form of any trend will tick their way" (p.1).

A current fashionable trend in Australia and the western world is the proclaimed innovation of teacher education recruitment. Whereas in the past one could not conceive of students commencing university without first meeting stringent entry criteria, today it is 'fashionable' to encourage school leavers with low or non-existent tertiary entrance ranking (TER) results to enter university and embark on a career in teaching. Alternative entry to various teacher education programs has resulted in a substantial increase in students entering teacher education at several Western Australian universities in the past three years (see Dobozy, 2008).

How are these innovative initiatives explained to the education profession and the general populace? Well, a key argument is that it is a response to the looming teacher shortage. Another explanation of the value of an alternative pathway entry scheme to teacher education (TE) is that it is actively aiding non-traditional students, such as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to enter higher education (Gale, 2009). These reasons are credible enough. However, we would argue, that the success of these schemes should not be measured by the number of students entering the various TE; they should be based on the quality and quantity of alternative pathway entry students who *graduate* from TE programs in the coming years. Sadly, too many first-year teacher education students are not making it to second year let alone their third and fourth year of study. Instead they become part of what is commonly referred to as the 'attrition rate' in higher education (Messinis, Sheehan, & Miholicic, 2008).

TE students need accurate information about the requirements (time and academic skills) of various TE program if they are to stay on and finish their studies. And once they have been given entry, students from whatever background have a fundamental right to receive study support tailored to their specific needs to ensure that they have a realistic chance to complete their degree, enter the classroom as competent teachers, and build a teaching career. It follows that there is a great need for adequate resourcing and rigorous evaluation of programs that accept alternative entry students (Dobozy, 2008; Slavin, 2008).

Providing opportunities of social mobility for non-traditional higher education students through programs referred to above, is a notable beginning of greater inclusion and equality of educational opportunity, especially as it is a well-established fact that success at school is positively associated with socio-economic background (Gale, 2009; Preston, 2003; Saunders, Naidoo, & Griffiths, 2007). However, to move from fashion trends to evidence-based practices in education requires scientific scholarship. What is needed is not another fashion trend or revolutionary 're-form', but rather long-term strategic planning incorporating a conceptualisation of cultural change in education and commencing with a close scrutiny of educational terminology. The terms used, which are bound to be ambiguous, need to be listed, defined and catalogued, providing the basis for standards in

education similar to those e.g. in medicine, with practices derived as a result of scientific testing, and replicable practices. These cultural changes would rein in fashion and emphasise education evolution.

In keeping with this line of argument, Prime Minister Rudd should, in our view, shift his attempts of reforming Australian education from an 'education revolution' (Rudd, 2008), which, arguably, is perpetuating the fashion trends that have plagued our industry for decades. The time has come to shed the 'fashion label' of education and be taken seriously as a teaching and learning science.

The articles in this issue although eclectic in their themes and approaches, provide the foundation for evidence based practices. In-service and pre-service teachers, school administrators and teacher educators are invited to engage with the themes and issues discussed in this and other editions of our journal and take them as a starting point to scrutinise their epistemological beliefs and day to day practices.

In the first paper Beltman presents an Australian study which examines teacher motivation in the context of a cognitive coaching program. Beltman argues for a holistic approach to professional training and learning initiatives based on situated and multiple contextual indicators as determinants of personal cognitive motivators.

The second paper by Cooper, Walker, Winters, Williams, Askew and Robinson, addresses an interesting case of bullying in nurse education. The study confirms both the frequency of occurrence and nature of bullying behaviours and recommends intervention strategies for educators, nursing agencies and policy makers.

The third paper in this issue offers focus on the middle years of schooling. In the paper Harrison and Prain report a case study of year 8 students' ability to use self-regulation strategies as a factor of school achievement in a low socio-economic regional milieu. The authors discuss implications for improving student performance by increasing focus on learning through individual and peer guidance strategies, and organisation of learning related instruction through co-regulatory processes. Increased self regulatory processes and self efficacy in learning and teaching are both factors relevant in discussions about quality in education.

In the fourth paper, Hemmings and Kay present a survey of Australian higher education teachers reporting on factors which relate to lecturer self efficacy. Two variables are considered as having a significant effect on self efficacy, namely gender and level of qualifications, whereby male lecturers with doctoral degrees showed more efficacy in terms of research, than did their comparative counterparts. This stimulates leadership debates for university managers and administrators.

The fifth paper takes the readership to location in Norway and the case of student experiences of an exclusive psychology professional program. Issues narrated by the students enrolled in the course are discussed in relation to factors which affect satisfaction and learner needs. In most cases and due to the unique constraints of the elite professional

course, students experienced high levels of stress caused by competition and excessive workloads. The implications are related to self determination theory in aspects of autonomy, relatedness and competence.

In the last paper Wilson makes conceptual links between motivational factors to gain entry into medical school, values related to career and approaches to learning. Wilson reports that over and above high achievement scores positive self esteem and intrinsic motivational factors affect success in medical education. The author discusses selection processes and educational entry criteria and suggests that a post hoc validation involving an examination of applicants' performance goal orientation may offer additional indicators of suitability for the medical profession.

All in all we are pleased to be able to again offer a wide range of high quality articles demonstrating the scholarly rigour that our readership has become accustomed to. We hope that the current content will stimulate and inspire as well as nourish further discussion and debate around educational research issues.

Lastly, on behalf of the Editors, the editorial team and our reviewers, we wish you a productive end to the working year, and a safe and joyful festive season.

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