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Abstract

Within work-integrated learning (WIL), partner communities and organisations are increasingly seen as co-educators, but not often as collaborators of research inquiry (Hammersley, 2012; 2015). This paper reflects on the research methods employed to engage partner organisations in the co-creation of curriculum to support international WIL activities in a way that recognises the valuable expertise, knowledge and skills of international community partners. In particular, it focuses on the specific role of reflection as a research method that enabled participants from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds to critically and collectively explore the co-creation process. This paper shares the different ways reflection was used to recognise multiple knowledges and enable all participants to freely and creatively map and share their personal and collective experiences as co-researchers.

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Reflective practice as a research method for co-creating curriculum with international partner organisations

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Within work-integrated learning (WIL), partner communities and organisations are increasingly seen as co-educators, but not often as collaborators of research inquiry (Hammersley, 2012; 2015). This paper reflects on the research methods employed to engage partner organisations in the co-creation of curriculum to support international WIL activities in a way that recognises the valuable expertise, knowledge and skills of international community partners. In particular, it focuses on the specific role of reflection as a research method that enabled participants from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds to critically and collectively explore the co-creation process. This paper shares the different ways reflection was used to recognise multiple knowledges and enable all participants to freely and creatively map and share their personal and collective experiences as co-researchers.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, co-creation, reflection, reflective practice, partner engagement, research methods

Researchers are increasingly engaging with partner communities and organisations involved in work-integrated learning (WIL) programs in a range of ways. Such engagement is often for the purpose of establishing research related student projects but is also taking place with partners as research participants engaged in understanding partner perspectives of program outcomes (Lloyd et al., 2015; Lloyd et al., 2017; Harris, Jones, & Coutts, 2010); employer needs (Hutchison, McPherson, Zurita, & Ruskin, 2018); and the dynamics of partner-supervisor relationships (Rowe, Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto, 2012). Rarely however, are partner organisations included as collaborators of research inquiry (Hammersley, 2012; 2015).

For a period of two years a group of researchers from Macquarie University worked collaboratively with ten international community based organisations from seven different countries to produce a range of modules, each with lesson plans, supporting videos, activities and other materials. This curriculum is available on a dedicated website (Classroom of Many Cultures, 2017). Of particular significance and uniqueness to this project was the development and dissemination of the co-creation methodology (see Bilous et al, 2018). The community partners, in this case, became co-researchers and part of a research team that worked together to co-create curriculum resources. The approach was based on reciprocity, respect and co-constructed ways of knowing and doing (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008), and informed by an emerging group of community based service learning (CBSL) researchers (Crabtree, 2008; Hammersley, 2015; Reardon, 1998; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, 2009; Stoecker, Loving, Reddy, & Bollig 2010; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008) who draw on postcolonial, feminist and participatory based methodologies to both engage with, and critically reflect on, their research

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practice in ways that challenge the binaries between campus and community, researcher and researched, and research and practice.

This paper shares the research methods employed to engage university staff and community partner organisations as a research team, where ongoing critical reflexivity of the self and co-creation process was central. It begins with an overview of reflection as a research method, and follows with examples of how this method worked in practice with international community based partners across diverse cultural contexts, offering approaches to engaging with partner organisations involved in WIL related research that prioritise an ethics of reciprocity, and focus on respect and co-constructed ways of knowing.

REFLECTION AS RESEARCH METHOD IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Reflection is a broad term that encompasses a range of concepts such as reflective practice (Schon, 1983), reflexivity (Taylor & White, 2000) and critical reflection (Morley 2008; Fook 2011). Reflective practice has been widely adopted in learning through participation and WIL (Coulson, Harvey, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway, 2010), where learners need to “engage, bridge and negotiate... challenges across the learning environments of their classroom and host organisation and interact and learn with their teachers and host supervisors” (Harvey et al., 2012, p.109). To date however, the focus of reflective practice in WIL has been mainly on students as reflective learners and the different ways reflective practice can be taught and learnt (Coulson & Harvey 2013; Coulson, Harvey, Winchester-Seeto & Mackaway, 2010; Harvey, Coulson, Mackaway, & Winchester-Seeto, 2010). The assumption underlying this focus is that the deeper the reflective practice, the deeper the student learning and the better the learning outcomes (Nelson Laird, Seifert, Pascarella, Mayhew, & Blaich, 2014; Harvey et al., 2012).

While reflection is most often used to facilitate student learning it can be a useful method in a range of WIL contexts and for different types of learners. Reflection has been used as a method for researching process and experience, in ways that recognise the assumptions, frameworks and patterns of thought and behaviour that shape thinking and action (Schön 1983; Rarieya 2005; Harvey et al., 2012; Harvey et al., 2017). This is useful because using the appropriate methods in the right contexts can elicit deeper and more complex understandings and allow for the complexity, fluidity and messy nature of the co-creation experience to emerge (Bilous et al., 2018). Reflection in its many forms has the potential to be used as a method both in the development of curriculum and for participatory research, enabling the voices of the WIL partners to be heard and privileged in their many forms. For the project described in this paper, there was therefore a deliberate focus on methods that facilitated reflective practice as a fundamental way to co-construct knowledge across multiple languages, cultures, backgrounds and experiences.

In this project reflective practice and associated techniques were extremely useful when applied to the collaborative co-creation of curriculum. Harvey et al. (2016) explore alternative, diverse, and flexible ways of engaging with reflective practice and point to the value that scaffolding innovative and creative approaches to practising and documenting reflection can bring to the learning experience. The variety of modes for reflection range from visual (drawing, photography), performative (dance) to auditory (songs, poems, story-telling). This diversity of mode enables learners, students, teachers, researchers, practitioners alike, to benefit from being aware of their process as they practice, adapt and improvise as necessary, thereby enacting “reflection-in-action” (Schön 1983). Many of these modes were utilised in different stages of the Classroom of Many Cultures project to enable us to make sense and meaning of the experiences and concepts that our Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) partners

wished to share and contribute to a co-created curriculum. The following section describes some of the many methods trialled, some successful, some not, of using reflection as research method.

REFLECTION IN ACTION

International partner organisations involved in the Classroom of Many Cultures came from different cultures and a wide variety of professional backgrounds; law, youth and social work, environmental sustainability, Indigenous rights and community development. They also came with very different understandings as to what co-creation might mean; some had no idea and others had been 'co-creating' in their workplaces for many years. While the Macquarie University-based team had some experience in teaching reflective practice to students as part of the preparation for work-integrated learning placements (Harvey et al., 2016), using reflective practice as a research method for developing WIL curriculum was quite new to the team and a range of approaches were trialled throughout the two year project. The scaffolding of reflective practice needed a range of different media to suit the different ways participants engaged in reflective practice (Harvey et al., 2016). It was also necessary to embrace our partners' different conceptualisations and approaches to reflection as method and as a result, both structured and unstructured reflection were integrated into the formal co-creation of curriculum workshops and at key informal moments throughout the project, serving a number of different purposes that are described below.

Team Building Activities

Pravah, one of the youth-focused partner organisations based in Delhi, uses 'refl-action' as an important learning process, where "reflection must precede and succeed action" (Patel, Venkateswaran, Prakash & Shekhar, 2013, p.100). Acknowledging their experience in working with diverse groups of young people, they were asked to facilitate a session in which the participants, strangers to each other, might be brought together to form a co-creation team. At the first three-day workshop in Sydney, they introduced the 'Toxic River', an activity that is now used in the preparation of all Macquarie University students going on an international placement activity. The details of this activity can be found on the project's dedicated website, although the format is not unique. In this case a team of people need to overcome a range of individual challenges (for example being blindfolded, having their arms tied, not being able to speak) in order to cross a 'toxic river'. More important than the game's rules, of course, is the process of critically reflecting on the team's success (or failure) to complete the activity. The group is asked to reflect on three key themes; setting the agenda, taking people along and doing it the right(s) way. Comments from both unit convenors and students involved in the Classroom of Many Cultures project indicate how this activity contributes to team building and cohesion.

This activity was great in terms of setting the scene and getting everyone into a good frame of mind for the collaboration that was to follow. One thing that was really striking was how much laughter there was, and what a great spirit the game was played in. (Macquarie academic staff member)

I loved how we analysed and discussed the group dynamics in the end. I thought it was a very good reflection of teamwork in real life. Someone talked about the idea of competition and I thought it was very interesting to see how intrinsically competitive we were - how the teams were competing to cross the river even though the activity was never declared a competition. This also related to our discussion about how sometimes leaders can be too focused on an aim or goal, resulting in the less vocal individuals to be neglected. (Macquarie student)

The highlight moments in my journey were the games initiated by partners in Sydney and Sabah, which besides being a source of great entertainment, made me realise that doing things together is much more fun, much richer, and impactful, than doing them one-sided. Those games also showed me how much we all humans have in common, regardless of our histories, cultures or special abilities. (Macquarie unit convenor)

As the first session of a three day workshop, this activity was vital in setting the spirit, not only of the workshop in Sydney, but the much longer co-creation process. Team building games like this were played by participants at workshops held in both Sydney and Sabah (Malaysia). They had a significant role in building rapport between participants but also established an environment which encouraged the ongoing reflection on the co-creation content. Many of the games are available on the project website but of particular significance were those that required participants to reflect on their own personal role in contributing to a particular project.

These reflections also helped establish one of the key principles for the co-creation process, "bringing everyone along on the journey" (Bilous et al., 2018; Classroom of Many Cultures, 2017). In retrospect, this principle was one of the hardest to enable and of course is not as simple as the inclusion of team-building activities. The principle reflects the very different conceptualisations of co-creation that participants had.

The first challenge was sharing the aims of the project and communicating what co-creation might mean. This was difficult, because we each imagined co-creation differently. Some could not imagine it at all. Others understood the concept immediately because it is what they do every day in their organisation...and they helped pull everyone along. (Classroom of Many Cultures, 2017)

Of course this principle is not only about providing team-building activities but also represents the fundamental role of communication, both face-to face and remotely. Equally it was about providing diverse ways in which participants might communicate their views; voices and actions that might otherwise have remained silent, overlooked or invisible (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). In doing so, such activities that sought to promote both group and individual reflection to reduce a sense of hierarchy around knowledge and experience between all participants (i.e., between and amongst partners, academics, professional staff and students) were used.

Using Reflective Practice Methods to Acknowledge the Individual's Context

During the face-to-face workshops held in both Sydney and Sabah, a range of strategies were used to explore different topics. One strategy particularly relevant to the focus of this paper was a participatory drawing method used to explore content for a module that would focus on the theme of 'social justice'. In this workshop, participants were asked how their organisation, in partnership with the community, addressed particular social issues related to their organisational objectives. These included gender, health, land rights, rights of Indigenous peoples, disability and intergenerational trauma. The workshop space had a floor made of blank paper and participants were provided with art materials to freely express their feelings and responses to these issues in both textual and non-textual ways.

Initially there was reticence from some participants but slowly, led by those more confident in their 'artistic' abilities, a very interesting (and large) drawing emerged. This drawing represented the concerns of individuals from each of their distinctive contexts, but also the ways in which these individual concerns were connected. The participants had created a clear map of the issues that needed

to be addressed in the development of an education module. In many cases the process empowered participants to record and then talk about important but difficult and emotional issues, such as child rights for children living on the street in the Philippines and the ongoing impact of intergenerational trauma in Cambodia following the Khmer Rouge regime. Literat (2013, p.84) similarly notes:

the analysis of drawn images, complemented by a subsequent discussion of these drawings in the context of their production, has the potential of revealing a more nuanced depiction of concepts, emotions, and information in an expressive, empowering, and personally relevant manner.

As a method, the participatory drawing gave participants the opportunity to express themselves in alternative ways that did not prioritise or privilege the written or spoken word or the English language. This participatory drawing exercise allowed participants to express their felt sense of issues in a way that respected individual non-textual ways of knowing and communicating. It also gave the project team something concrete that was documented and allowed for ongoing dialogue after the workshop session.

Whether looking at the interconnectedness of social justice issues or sharing stories of workplace culture clashes, we were able to feed off each other and share solutions (or just commiserate). As participants came from varied backgrounds, they definitely had diverse ways of looking at the same issue and were able to articulate those experiences to help create allies across NGOs, and hopefully with our future PACE students. (Partner representative)

The ways in which the partners approached the issues, and the connections that they drew between them, provides, I believe, a good platform from which to work in terms of structuring the module, as well as giving us an awareness of how we might approach the issues that we discussed in a way that will be helpful to students, and also that resists the idea of social justice as being defined by a single story or sectioning off different issues without making clear how they are mutually implicated. (Macquarie academic staff member)

This activity has also been adapted for the Classroom of Many Cultures curriculum and is designed to help students understand their own and partners' conceptions of social justice issues. As students may be encountering these issues for the first time; this collective drawing activity was intended to prepare them to approach the issues sensitively and in a non-colonial way.

Creating Space and Time to Explore Ideas and To Build Relationships

In addition to the more structured workshop, a separate reflection room was set up for participants to reflect on the co-creation process using a range of media including drawing materials, plasticine and a studio space where partners had the opportunity to video record stories and ideas in response to the various module topics. While the studio space was enormously successful, with a total of 45 videos created during the Sydney and Sabah workshops, the unstructured space was less successful. The lack of structured time for reflection in this space and perhaps the absence of clear instructions, meant that it was used by very few of the participants. Learning from this however, a 'graffiti wall' set up in the second workshop in Sabah, hosted by partner organization PACOS Trust, asked participants to respond to particular questions or ideas, as well as providing a more flexible space.

At other times throughout the project, reflective practice was enabled through Skype conversations, shared Facebook posts or short stories which were shared on the website. Many of these were used to

guide the running of the second workshop, responding directly to the reflections provided. For example, a number of partners reflected on a desire to lead more of the workshops, which was realised in Sabah where partners in turn took the group through a wide range of reflective practice activities to complete the development of the different curriculum modules. Another partner commented that while they, "...had the different beads ... it would have been good to see the whole picture" and that they "needed to better understand the links" (Partner representative). This observation, and others like it, resulted in a change of focus for future workshops.

One of the more unstructured but definitely meaningful activities was the co-created lunch, suggested by a number of the participants because, "our favourite dishes represent who we are, with all the spices, flavour, and colour of our own culture" (Partner representative). Created from ingredients from the PACOS Trust gardens and local markets, the kitchen was quickly abuzz with activity, chopping, mixing, laughing and the smell of co-creation. The buzz embodied the very principles of curriculum co-creation. We shared the stories behind the recipes, when dishes were eaten, and how they were served. We marvelled at food preparation techniques and pairings of food we had not considered. For example, a Vietnamese participant had never seen chili being smashed before, having always chopped it for Vietnamese dishes. A Malaysian participant was amazed as she saw raw tofu (which she ate regularly) being fried to make a Vietnamese dish. Amazing smells emerged from the kitchen as Indian chicken curry cooked in the pot and mixed with the aroma of Cambodian sour fish soup, fried tofu and pineapple. This mixture of smells, methods, sharing and learning illustrated the synergies and collaboration that drove our work together. We then sat down together to the most amazing array of dishes, surrounded by new friends, colleagues and a shared understanding of what we could create together.

This engaged reflective experience, while potentially viewed as indulgent or unnecessary, became the basis of a second co-creation principle, "making space to be together", the privileging of acts of relating and moments of personal connection (Bilous et al., 2018, p.174).

Co-creation depends upon the intimate interactions, experiences and lives of the participants that exist outside of project concerns. Ideally, opportunities to talk, listen, dance and make music should be included in the scope of collaborative projects as these interactions are opportunities where reciprocity unfolds spontaneously and in the moment, enabling the foundations for deeper collaboration and shared effort.

All formal and informal reflective based research experiences were seen as valuable contributors to co-creating meaning in this context. The collective cooking session is illustrative of a feminist informed approach that privileges spontaneity, relationship building, reciprocity and interactions that exist 'outside' of the pre-defined boundaries of the research project. Such experiences demonstrate how WIL research might engage with community partners differently, in ways that define and practice research in more meaningful ways.

Reflecting on the Journey

Critical to the success of student placements is the development of relationships, which honour cultural values and are both respectful and humble. "In order to go forward, you need to understand where you have been before," said Yoggie Lasambang, Classroom of Many Cultures participant and co-founder of PACOS Trust. This was enabled through a very simple activity used by Indian partner organisations, Restless Development and Pravah. The 'river journey' asked participants to reflect on their lives, recording the most unforgettable moments or biggest turning points that resulted in their

presence. These journeys were then shared with a partner, and then the larger group. Such a simple activity, at the beginning of the second co-creation workshop in Sabah gave participants the opportunity to get to know each other better and to continue on the shared co-creation journey.

Building on this concept, one of the most significant reflective methodological tools used in establishing the co-creation principles became known as the 'co-created river'. For several hours workshop participants worked together to reflect on the co-creation journey. Participants were first asked to record on red and yellow sticky notes their challenges (red) and successes (yellow). These were placed in chronological order on a long piece of paper on the workshop space floor, with participants given the opportunity to read and respond to each other's notes. The exercise made clear that at many times in the project, participants were challenged by the process, yet at other moments, they achieved clarity. The roll of paper was left on the workshop space floor throughout the day, and participants kept returning to add more detail. In fact, the co-created lunch was eaten while sitting around the co-created river. This detail was in the form of written notes but also drawings, and by the end of the day, a 'river' had been created with waterfalls, forks, rapids and calm reflective pools to indicate the challenges and successes that the group members collectively and individually experienced.

This river drawing was analysed by the team many weeks later, and used to understand the co-creation process from diverse viewpoints. Within this river it was possible to see and understand key moments. There was a whirlpool of sticky notes, which indicated the time in which a social media site was introduced. Partners were polite about the site over email but very few of them engaged with it in any real way. The river moved into a tranquil lake, indicating the first time in Sydney when the partners were brought together. Even in this tranquil lake, however, there were submerged rocks, indications by some partners that they were feeling paralysed or unsure about what was expected of them. At another place the river diverged, some sections with piranhas (unclear expectations), stagnant pools (loss of motivation) and rocks (of confusion). In this same place, however, there was also a bridge, representing the introduction of a facebook page, which enabled participants to bridge the rocky waters. Eventually the river emptied into another lake with sun, boats, seashells and fish, indicating the time in Sabah, where the development of the curriculum modules continued and participants bonded over dancing, swimming, preparing meals, and were blessed by the ancestor spirits of the Kadazan Dusun Indigenous peoples.

These visual metaphors offered a depth of reflection that was not possible through writing or speech. The process enabled an additional opportunity for partners to provide genuine and honest critical feedback on the co-creation process in a way that was uniquely facilitative of anonymous and collective expression – discouraging uneven power dynamics that can pervade critical feedback exercises. It was clear that research requiring more reflective responses could be better facilitated by employing creative non-textual methods and ways of knowing and doing, particularly in large cross-cultural research collaborations.

Importantly, the river exercise also enabled expression over time. Partners were given time to reflect, contribute, edit, build on other participant comments or drawings and therefore encouraged "active conceptualization and contemplation" (Literat, 2013, p.88). Over the course of the day, the river occupied the workshop space as it grew. The length of time to reflect and contribute enabled partners who previously may not have realised they had a contribution to make towards the methodology, to view and build on what other partners had provided. The ability to contribute, view other's contributions and then to contribute again, provided a detailed depiction of the strong and weak elements of the co-creation process over time – a depth not otherwise achievable through other methods

such as interviews or group discussion given their linguistic demands, the instantaneous nature of responses and potential politics around providing critical feedback face-to-face.

It must be noted that data analysis and interpretative challenges do pervade more participatory and non-textual ways of data collection and co-creation. Literat (2013, p.94) for example, warns against a culturally neutral analysis and that “it is vital to keep in mind the fact that participant-generated drawings are always a product of an individual’s particular cultural background”. The possibility for misrepresentation and over-interpretation is reduced by drawing on a combination of other research methods to triangulate findings.

It was our own participation in, and then analysis of this drawing that enabled us to identify and describe the three principles of co-creation: Acknowledging the individual's context; making space to be together; and bringing everyone along on the journey. These are detailed in the website (Classroom of Many Cultures 2017), research papers (Bilous et al., 2018, Hammersley, Lloyd, & Bilous, 2018) and project report (Downey et al., 2018). The river drawing is also an artefact that has found a home in the Macquarie University's art collection, having been displayed in the exhibition “In the Field” (2016), that focused on fieldwork processes from which new ideas and discoveries emerge. The inclusion of the 'co-created river' was a formal acknowledgement by the university that reflective practice, and participatory drawing in particular, is viewed as a valued research method.

CONCLUSION

This paper has contributed to the small, but growing body of research which acknowledges the importance of focusing on the role of partner communities and organisations as collaborators of research inquiry (Hammersley, 2012; 2015; 2017; Lloyd et al., 2017). Of particular significance and uniqueness to this project was partner participation in co-formulating the methods used as well as the resulting knowledge produced. Alternative, diverse, and flexible ways of engaging with reflective practice through a range of reflection as research method techniques have been explored. The activities documented in this paper demonstrate how moving beyond written forms of reflective practice through participatory drawing and the power of visual research methods can enable reflective practice in a collaborative and cross-cultural context. In particular it demonstrates how these reflective activities are an effective research method for working with international community based partners across diverse cultural contexts, in ways that prioritise an ethics of reciprocity, and focus on respect and co-constructed ways of knowing. This project also enabled us to embrace our partners’ different conceptualisations and approaches to reflection as method, taking us from the more familiar “reflection-in-action” (Schön 1983) to new and exciting approaches such as Pravah’s 'refl-action' (Patel et al., 2013, p.100) which provides an alternative framework to collaboratively develop and conduct ethically appropriate projects with international community partners.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL. In response to these changes, the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning in 2018.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "*an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum*". Examples of such practice includes work placements, work-terms, internships, practicum, cooperative education (Co-op), fieldwork, work-related projects/competitions, service learning, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, applied projects, simulations (including virtual WIL), etc. WIL shares similar aims and underpinning theories of learning as the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training, however, each of these fields are seen as separate fields.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data. And a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Best practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or is situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.



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