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Editorial for LRP 1(2)

Pushing boundaries, taking risks

Learning: Research and Practice is the newest fledging journal of the National Institute of Education, Singapore. March 2015 was the launch of our first issue and at least two years was spent in preparing for it. Although some questioned the need for another journal, we are glad for the many positive responses to the journal. We were also reassured when we interacted with other journal editors and learned about the struggles of starting a journal. Every journal, even the top ranked ones, started with taking a risk, a leap of faith.

Risk is the exposure to the “possibility of loss” or “other adverse circumstances” (Oxford University Press, 2015). To take risk is to take a chance, to do something when the outcome is not certain. Starting this journal was risky as we exposed ourselves to the possibility of no manuscripts, no readership, no contribution to theory and practice, and no learning. We could have spent the effort and resources on other endeavours.

Serendipitously, risk is inherent in learning. In school, a student’s preparedness to attempt to answer a question when the result is uncertain is an example of risk that students take (Atkins et al., 1991). Some authors term this intellectual risk-taking, and is different from other forms of risk-taking behaviour such as gambling and sky-diving (Beghetto, 2009). This form of risk-taking has been associated with helping students form their academic identity and result in learning gains (Clifford, 1991; Streitmatter, 1997). Clifford (1991) reviewed theories of risk-taking and concluded that it is “a necessary means of maximizing human motivation and cognitive development” (p. 272). Though there will be some anxiety involved with the uncertainty of success and acceptance, risk-taking has been found to be helpful in solving differences in ideas, reaching consensus, and in thinking and making informed decisions (Gaissmaier & Gigerenzer, 2008; Schlottmann & Wilkening, 2011). In that sense, by making an active choice toward one’s personal growth when taking risk, it can elevate the learner’s potential for high achievement and strong leadership.

Starting *Learning* involves risk. In the editorial of our first issue, we highlighted how we have not understood enough about learning and it is our desire to push the knowledge frontier of learning through this journal. With rapid information flow, different cultural contexts etc., there is the ever-increasing expansion of knowledge. What will learning look like as we approach the midpoint of the 21st century or the next century? For instance, with the focus on lifelong learning in this 21st century, learning is no longer the business of K-12 education or those in higher education institutions. Retirees, professionals, leaders, parents, the unemployed, practically everyone from all walks of life can engage in learning. What would learning be for these different groups of people?

Furthermore, what is learning for the various ages, different disciplines, disparate systems, and in formal and informal environments? It is important and relevant to expand our knowledge boundaries to such diverse contexts. We believe that there is

more to discover about learning. The boundaries of learning are not fixed. There is room for a wide diversity of learning approaches and practices and scope to explore the many layers, dimensions, and expanses of learning and instruction.

To address the earlier question of why this journal, we share this analogy of two boats, a big cruise-liner, and a ruddy sailboat. The cruise-liner has prestige and stability. For passengers on this ship, it is a wondrous feeling to be entitled to this luxury. When thunderstorms come, hardly a jolt is felt by passengers on-board. The ruddy sailboat on the other hand, is unknown and rocky. It is just one of several boats in the big ocean. When there is a storm, passengers immediately have to get their hands dirty, bail the water out, and help to ensure the boat stays afloat.

At the same time, these two boats afford different risks. The cruiseship while seemingly stable has its risks especially with the large number of passengers. The Titanic is an unfortunate example of the big cruise-liner. It hit an iceberg in the Atlantic ocean and five of its compartments ruptured. The large ship sank and the lack of lifeboats and safety emergency procedures caused many lives to be lost.

The smaller sailboat is obviously risky. It has a higher chance of sinking. Yet, it is compact and agile, and can withstand tough weather conditions with a skilful sailor and technology. Mary Kingsley (1862-1900), a British explorer, travelled the Ogowé river in Gabon, Africa, in a canoe. She is credited with discovering several species of fish (three were named after her), as well as demystifying the values and traditions of African societies. Although not in a sailboat but a canoe, Mary Kingsley is an example of the possibilities of sailing on the smaller sailboat.

Guess which boat represents our journal?

Learning is that ruddy sailboat. We may not have the prestige (i.e., SSCI index) of other journals and the long history of many past articles. We are also unknown and require many helping hands. But, we do have the dexterity, nimbleness, and the ambition of many a sailboat out to discover new territories and boundaries. Like Mary Kingsley canoeing through the Ogowé river, while there is risk, there is also the possibility of discovering new knowledges, of understanding hidden insights of learning.

The journal is run by a team of capable and committed associate editors and the editorial advisory board comprises a committee of very established and well-known academics in the field of learning. We have been reaching out to academics at a variety of learning-related conferences and workshops. We are also making in-roads to encourage submissions from doctoral candidates internationally. As a budding journal, we create the story of our success without being burdened by past practices. We will be able to withstand the tough storms of the publishing world with discerning editors, reviewers and readers.

Providing a Safe Environment for Risk-taking

Risk-taking can be threatening. Learners do not usually take risks if they do not feel emotionally safe in the environment. Students who are performance-oriented tend to avoid risk-taking in their learning if they do not receive social affirmation (Ames & Archer 1988). For these students, teachers might need to emphasize learning rather than getting right answers, affirm risk-taking, and provide a safe environment where students are not put down.

For academics, this risk-taking is seen in the work that we do, the projects that we embark on, the intellectual risks. Casanave (2010) highlights that even doctoral students writing their dissertations are wary of taking risks. Together with their advisors, the fear of going against convention in a politicalized academic world is a major obstacle. Wintrol and Jerinic (2013) disclose that academics “have been known to postpone exciting lines of inquiry that draw on multiple disciplines if they feel they will have a difficult time finding avenues for publication” (p.48).

On this note, *Learning* strives to mitigate the risk potential authors take in publishing with us, and intends to support the knowledge building process. As a journal, we are open to contributions of all kinds related to learning. We are keen to explore new contexts of learning, to question the conventional, to relook old paradigms of instruction, and even to shift perspectives of knowing. We aim to review manuscripts for coherence of arguments and quality of research, rather than language. In other words, the ideas matter foremost, although we advise non-native English speaking authors to send their manuscripts for proof reading to improve the clarity of the message.

Additionally, we will ensure a reasonable turnaround time for manuscripts to be reviewed, and facilitate quick publishing of accepted manuscripts in online format. For manuscripts that might not fit into the theme of our journal, we will inform you promptly. We also provide a platform such as the commentary section whereby academics can comment on one another’s ideas. We also take effort to invite eminent scholars to review the manuscripts which provides authors useful feedback for their paper.

Pushing Boundaries: Articles in the Second Issue

In this second issue, on board with us are five papers that exemplify risk-taking in various ways. These articles tread on unfamiliar grounds to expand what is already known in the field of learning.

The first article by Erberle, Stegmann and Fischer is an ideal case of risk-taking. Their use of social network analysis (SNA) to assess legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice goes beyond its conventional use in describing formal and informal networks in educational settings. This methodology allows the research to produce causal relations between social structures and a newcomer’s movement towards central participation. By exploring the use of a new methodology to study communities, rather than the traditional case study approaches to studying communities, knowledge about participation in communities can be expanded from specifics to generalisation. SNA as a methodology is also enriched as it used beyond participation patterns and knowledge networks.

Next, Loibl and Rummel extend one of the lines of inquiry from issue 1, productive failure, to a new dimension of learning - students' self-assessment. The study conceptualizes that students who do not have an understanding of the subject content, lack the skills to judge their limited knowledge, often assessing their personal knowledge competency inaccurately. Moreover, they tend to apply poor strategies to help them learn the subject content. This is known as the double curse of incompetence. Productive failure activities could help students to identify their knowledge gaps and help students assess their knowledge understanding more accurately. This paper shares findings of a quasi-experiment comparing productive failure with traditional direct instruction. Using productive failure is an experiment in risk-taking by itself and this study embodies the risk-taking inherent in learning.

The subsequent articles represent empirical studies about learning in often-neglected groups of learners - parents, school leaders and teachers. Very often, learning is perceived to be the domain of K-12 but the following articles demonstrate learning in action at all ages and levels.

The article by Pang and Go is a good reminder that learning is not confined to students only. Parents play an important role in students' learning, and hence by focusing on the learning of different groups of parents, their learning can be better supported, and they can become better parents. Using a phenomenographic approach, the study examined the viewpoints of parents of secondary school students who attended an in-school parent education programme. The study explored the parents' learning experiences and revealed two different levels of parent reflections. In particular, critical reflection was highlighted as crucial in helping parents change their practices. By exploring the learning of this less examined group of stakeholders, the study throws new light into parents' learning which could lead to better parent education programmes.

Huang and Kapur explore the use of analogical reasoning to learn a bottom-up perspective regarding innovation diffusion for school leaders. Using four case studies involving two school leaders each, the study found that giving "less" degrees of structural and surface similarity between the source and target in an analogue may bring about "more" effective learning for leaders with less prior knowledge. This exploratory study has the potential to delve deeper into the learning mechanisms in analogies, especially for mature learners and learners with differing prior knowledge. The findings could also offer alternative strategies for school leaders' professional development.

As information is shared more rapidly in this technological age, new ideas for teaching and learning are exchanged more easily across geographical and cultural borders. The article by Zhang and Laurillard is an example of learning tools and practices being shared across cultural boundaries. It documents how a Chinese teacher was challenged to think beyond learning outcomes when using a UK-originated digital tool to plan an English Language course and share it with his colleagues. This paper exemplifies how learning takes place for the teacher when he had to deal with the unfamiliarity of dealing

with greater amounts and kinds of pedagogical details uncommon in the context which the teacher had come from.

The aforementioned articles in this issue continue to challenge the conventional notions of learning from methodological perspectives to the types of learner and contexts. While we are grateful for the risk-challenging submissions, we are mindful of the need to encourage more such submissions.

In the upcoming issues, besides continuing to publish theoretical and empirical papers about learning, we will also feature commentaries of papers already published in our journal so as to start a conversation about the issues that matter in learning. We also would like to invite our readers and authors to continue sending your manuscripts and/or commentaries to us as we set off in our *Learning* voyage to push the boundaries of knowledge. The borders of learning are limitless and we look forward to what is to come!

Sign off:

Jennifer Yeo, Elizabeth Koh and David Hung

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