An Education 'Jigsaw': Some Highlights and Reflections on the Special International Roundtable on the International Journal of Multidisciplinary Comparative Studies IJMCS Conference, 4-6 September 2014

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I view educational activities and their related theoretical frameworks as jigsaw puzzle pieces. The education 'jigsaw' gets bigger and bigger because teaching and learning are lifelong activities, and neither teachers nor learners will ever be able to complete it—Gertrude Shotte.

This roundtable review is a special one because it is based on the 1st Annual International Journal of Multidisciplinary Comparative Studies (IJMCS) Conference. The papers presented analysed education issues from a variety of perspectives in different fields of study. The conference was indeed a relevant forum for discussing cross-disciplinary and comparative studies. Obviously, three days are inadequate to fully debate and understand the various complex challenges and issues that educators and all those involved in educational activities currently face. However, they provided an appropriate platform from which to launch follow-up discussions. Conference Chair, Dr Gordon Ade-Ojo, in his Forward makes reference to "the beginning of a cross-disciplinary journey in *IJMCS'* own little context" (authors' italics) (Ade-Ojo, 2014). From our overall analysis of the papers delivered, it is reasonable to conclude that many 'big ideas' came out of that 'little context'. This paper proffers some highlights and reflections on the papers that the delegates presented.

We begin by looking at the title of this paper—*An Education Jigsaw'*. This is quite appropriate because all the papers presented were either 'jigsaw pieces' that fitted neatly or parts of an educational set that is inextricably related to the 'jigsaw pieces'. Here are some links are perceived by the authors:

- Students at the heart of learning—student centeredness.

- People centeredness—narratives—people think that stories are shaped by people, but it is the other way round.

- Metacognition and inhibition as domains of executive functioning—linked to the principles of constructivism.

- Sensory motor integration—the need to add a chair rather than take away one (reverse musical chairs)—linked to student and people centeredness—linked to positive behaviours, which should be part of the curriculum—linked to student and people centeredness.

- The plight of indigenous languages at the expense of more dominant languages, globalization and the knowledge economy—linked to student and people centeredness.

- Integrating spiritual dimensions into nursing education—linked to student and people centeredness—linked to constructivism—linked to positive behaviours.

- Epistemology and technology are two friends—'Scratch'—linked to motivation and self-esteem—linked to constructivism—linked to student centeredness.

- Heautagogy, a self-determined learning approach—linked to positive behavior—linked to people and student centeredness—linked to constructivism.

The above selection is but a flavour of how the different presentations are links via selected educational concepts and practices. As shown above, an overarching theme that permeated the discussions, was 'student and people centeredness'. This theme came through clearly in deliberations on how cultural, linguistic, behavioural and educational differences can be handled in a positive way. Discussions pointed to the need to value ethnic and language diversity by including these subject areas in language policies and curriculum proposals. A principle concern was about what happens to educational and national development when a native language is dismissed or even side-lined by educational actors. This concern was deemed a serious one since it can lead to the disappearance of 'small native languages' in light of increasing levels of globalisation and internationalisation. Even more worrying is the general lack of acceptance for the value of indigenous knowledge and the nationalisation of all things cultural (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2013). In a similar vein, there was a call for a multicultural-oriented curriculum with integrative cross-cultural themes and dimensions. This was seen as one way to challenge prejudices and to accept and value differences, which suggests that schools and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should become multicultural organisations.

The attention given to the spiritual dimensions of nursing education proved to be rather edifying. It was generally accepted that the spiritual dimension is key, if the curriculum is geared towards boosting a holistic understanding of human behavior. This was considered a necessary basis for providing a more integrated and professional programme that adequately deals with the diversity of worldviews with regard to the promotion of education and health for all.

Other presentations, from a constructivist perspective, suggested linking the views of students as active thinkers and builders of knowledge to areas such as media, art, digital interventions that aid learning in technology-enabled environments (Wood and Ponsford, 2014; Kim, Kozan, Kim and Koehler, 2013). A discussion of the educational theories that support this view offered much insight. Instructivism and constructivism were shown to be inseparable because they share different positions on the pedagogical continuum; and both are capable of enhancing students' learning and overall development, which includes identity construction (Mckenna and Laylock, 2004; Porcaro, 2011). Against this backdrop, the role of educators as mediators, not only in understanding how disabilities affect personal self-efficacy, but also in accepting that SN students can be helped to become positive contributors to their individual communities, was highlighted. To this end, the need for the construction of 'new', suitable pedagogies via training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was considered an imperative. Training was seen as particularly vital for dealing with learners who have Special Needs (SN).

It would be remiss of us the authors, if we did not mention the invaluable contributions of the keynote speakers—Professor David Turner, University of South Wales and Professor Jim Johnson, Point Loma Nazarene University, United States of America (USA). Indelibly written on participants' minds, are the truths about 'comparative knowledge' and the wisdom of not putting a pen in students' non-dominant hand'.

Based on the participants' comments and on the authors' own conference experiences, the authors deem it proper to conclude that the 2014 IJMCS Conference was an educational success. The presentations have captured the true spirit of comparative, multi-disciplinary studies, in that, they were not only were made by researchers with a variety of worldviews, from many continents, but were also demonstrations of plural paradigms via research lenses. Herein lies their 'authority' to address educational possibilities and realities. They therefore can be considered akin to an 'educational jigsaw' for the papers came together as 'jigsaw pieces', where 'the whole was greater than the sum of its parts' (Facweb, 2014). IJMCS now represents another catalyst for multidisciplinary educational debates from local, national, regional and international perspectives.

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