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Capacity-Building for Western Expatriate Nurses and Australian Early Career Researchers

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Abstract

This paper distils lessons for conceptualising capacity-building from two locations of professional learning: for western expatriate nurses in the Middle East; and Australian early career researchers. The paper presents a comparative, exploratory case study, with the two sites of professional development as contextualised cases. One major finding was the diversity, complexity and politicised character of the professional development opportunities and experiences provided for the two groups of participants. The other finding was the dynamism and fluidity of the capacity-building approaches and outcomes demonstrated by both groups of professional learners. Furthermore, capacity-building emerges as a potential lynchpin for integrating formal and informal learning in professional workplaces, thereby rendering such learning more effective and sustainable.

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1. Introduction

Debate abounds about the character of adult and continuing education for professional workers in contemporary institutions (see for example Fenwick, 2013; Holst, 2010). In particular, the link between capacity-building and professional learning requires ongoing scholarly attention (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). This paper contributes to that focus by addressing the following research question: What are the key elements of the two sites of continuing professional development, and what do they mean for understanding capacity-building's contributions to that development?

The purpose of the study on which the paper reports is to distil lessons for conceptualizing capacity-building from two locations of professional learning: for western expatriate nurses working in the Middle East; and early career researchers in an Australian university. This is on the assumption that the provision of effective continuing professional development is neither easy nor uncontested. The onus is on providers to present evidence of effectiveness for their professional communities (Petzold & Komer-Bitensky, 2010).

Against that backdrop, the paper presents a comparative, exploratory case study, with the two sites of professional development as contextualised cases. The broader study integrates multiple forms of data gathering (which the paper synthesises), including documentary analysis, guided discussions with selected participants, and the authors' critical reflections on their own and their colleagues' experiences of professional learning and the impact of such experiences on their capacity-building outcomes.

One major finding of the case study presented here was the diversity, complexity and politicised character of the professional development opportunities and experiences provided for the Middle East western expatriate nurses and the Australian early career researchers. The second major finding was the dynamism and fluidity of the capacity-building approaches and outcomes demonstrated by both groups of professional learners.

The significance of the study's findings lies in identifying the challenges, opportunities, limitations and successes associated with capacity-building strategies and their influence on the outcomes of professional development for the two groups of professionals. More specifically, capacity-building emerges as a potential lynchpin for integrating formal and informal learning in professional workplaces, thereby rendering such learning more effective and sustainable.

The paper consists of the following four sections:

- Literature review, conceptual framework and research design
- Selected findings
- Concluding implications for professional learning and capacity-building.

2. Literature Review, Conceptual Framework and Research Design

The scholarly field of adult and continuing education continues to expand exponentially (see for example Foley & Kaiser, 2013; Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Lawrence, 2012; LeNoue, Hall, & Eighmy, 2011). That expansion is evident geographically, with studies referring variously to Eastern Africa (Openjuru, 2011), Hong Kong (Chan, 2010) and the Nordic countries (Wahlgren & Geiger, 2011). That expansion is evident also in terms of professions, with research being reported about higher education (Kasworm, 2012), police work (Donavant, 2009) and teaching (Beavers, 2009). Similar diversity attends the foci of that research, ranging from the knowledge society (Kasworm, 2011) to student persistence (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011) to vulnerable adults

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