Critical Realism Reflection Theory in Australia's VET-Trained Volunteer Bilingual Breastfeeding Support Initiate

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Abstract

Aim: The research initiative, a collaborative effort, supports the government's role in these programs through volunteers, which is crucial and underscores the potential benefits of VET programs for immigrants. Globally, breastfeeding rates have plateaued, and Australia and its diverse cultural groups present a unique landscape for the emergence of pluralistic societies. This rich diversity has shaped the shift in breastfeeding rates, characterised by a significant reliance on community-based organisations.

Methodology: Critical realism, as an emergent phenomenon, may be recognised as the 'offspring' of a complex system. It offers a reflective position. Policies aim to have breastfeeding at the forefront of health. As a platform for life-long learning, VET holds immense potential to integrate immigrants into labour markets and empower them, fostering a sense of sustainability and self-reliance.

Findings: This study has been mutually beneficial, highlighting the value of diverse perspectives. In breastfeeding organisation research, applying critical realism theory has proven valuable, offering significant insights and underscoring its relevance in this study.

Conclusion: We have enriched our understanding, particularly in the context of small groups as self-help. The promotion through the Korean web page was public rather than patient.

Introduction

The World Health Organization supports breastfeeding as a health issue, including the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, where the uptake varies globally [1]. Limited work on the "value of human milk as a complex and living issue as its impact on infant growth" is a need [2]. Others have identified composition for newborns, well-being, and maternal health outcomes [3], as human milk makes a well-developed microbiome [4]. Thus, the nutritional activities of calcium, Zinc and Vitamin D fluctuate over time in children [5].

In the United States, migration is an issue that affects breastfeeding rates, and there are calls for medical practitioners' education to increase breastfeeding knowledge [6]. A Canadian study aims to empower women as advocates for breastfeeding through the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative [7].

Breastfeeding is low in many countries, according to Grubesic and Durbin [8], in geographical areas with low breastfeeding rates, where individuals have limited uptake of health care and those with linguistic barriers [9]. Thus, the local level needs public health to change [10]. Undermining infant health is marketing breast milk substitutes globally [11].

The early cessation of breastfeeding needs postpartum education at levels of prior education to increase self-efficacy and improve breastfeeding rates [12]. Others are unsure if suitable education is valuable [13]. Other research suggests that education for breastfeeding across the social and healthcare models is needed [14], for immigrants must balance local breastfeeding and social care in new societies [15].

What is occurring is that low breastfeeding rates are "gaps between high and low-income families that have widened" over decades [16], and this recent study identifies a similar finding in two cities in two states of Australia [17]. Therefore, the NSW Health Department indicates that the "Volunteer organisations are implicated for culturally diverse women for continuing breastfeeding." [18]. Migration can influence early weaning, affecting health [19], indicating the need to recruit women from sociocultural groups to support their communities. We turn to the critical realism philosophical system.

Methodology

The methodology for this article is critical realism. Critical realism is a philosophical system Bhaskar developed as a meta-theory that many others critiqued, modified, and utilised across various disciplines. According to Hager et al., critical realism has implications for researchers [20] as "social structures that have emergent entities, that in advances, with

causal powers persisting, of the individuals involved in their emergence." Therefore, the notion of emergence in Baskar's (1989) argument states that "transcendentalism is a need for the ontology of emergent as properties occur within an open system" and needs understanding as *critical dimensions* (sic) [21].

Observers need critical dimensions from their history and epistemology [21], as acting in their world are the "structures and situational factors or constraints that also have a history that is emergence" [21]. Researcher Jeanette Lancaster states, "Emergent phenomena may be 'offspring' of a system, which itself may be complex" [22]. Others understanding emergence can recognise whole properties compared to their parts [23-25].

Therefore, emergence has been in many disciplines, as the study by de Haan [23] aims to bring coherence to future research by consolidating emergence as "mechanisms are context-specific to explain a phenomenon by outlining 'how' it follows from specific conditions." Moreover, the ontological and epistemological senses "are blurred when dealing with phenomena as there are [system] levels as lower levels that position causations, whereas emergent behaviour occurs at higher [system] levels."[23]. Thus, notions of conjugate is an emergent phenomenon and behaviour that can be discussed on equal footing [23], as the idea of 'conjugate' is the consolidation of emergence, which can be relationships to be "combined with the reflection of the observer that is relative to the system that leads to the formulation of the consolidation of emergence" [23].

As critical realism seems suitable for this study, the learning-in-practice perspective of Hager [26] emergence "grows out of continuous and non-linear interactions, with properties not predictable from a knowledge of preceding structures [and] where the practice as a complex web." Eraut states the practice of reflection [27] in two areas: the process is the "action of turning (back) or fixing our thoughts on some subject, and this is mediation, deep or serious considerations as epiphanies." Thus, reflection has both continuous and non-linear interactions as learning-in-practice.

According to de Haan [23], emergence is the core concept of complexity, which can be the amount of information suitable for a self-described system or level. Clark et al. [28] state that critical realism "does not control, abstract, or simplify complexity rather seeks out and embraces complexity […] to maximise and diversify [research] inquiries." Complexity originates from multiple research disciplines [22,28]. Thus, it is where social sciences state that "complexity is about relations that implicate systems and internal relations [that] as a two-party system produced over time" [5].

Gerrits and Verweij state that critical realism suggests that open systems are in and around other systems [24]. Thus, the questions need elaboration in the following discussion on the aspects of VET. A few organisations divide migrants into language groups, which leads to support for immigrants [29,30]. Against this background, Robertson (2008) notes that VET, in the supplied descriptions, "the *accommodating diversity* (sic) training packages, has a limited underpinning of conceptual foundations" for adult educators [31]. The above studies educate immigrants, yet non-profit organisations with volunteers become RTOs, which is where economic and political positions lead to social initiatives.

With free membership for willing individuals, the *BA* became a Registered Training Organisation in mid-2007, offering the means for volunteer women to gain skills for employment rather than recruitment. Community-based education supports self-help and mutual aid, including sharing experiential knowledge in self-help alternative therapy groups [32]. Sharing knowledge is problem-solving, as connections or emotional attachments in self-help are essential for volunteer motivation and are defined as relying on 'recognition' or 'oneness' with individuals rather than altruism [33,34].

Lifelong Learning

Furthermore, trained women who have volunteered for over two years can receive the Vocational Education and Training Certificate IV. Trainers and assessors must undertake the government's introduction of the Language, Literature and Numeracy VET competency-based unit [35]. The training occurs across Australia as the VET trainers gain knowledge to become experts in the experiential theory of breastfeeding knowledge before training for this specialist volunteer practice [36]. Thus, "Critical realism aims for a non-reductionist analysis that takes account of underlying relations between learning environments, educational knowledge and the interior world of the learner" as a *reflective* emergence position is an internal observer in organisational structures relative to subjective experiences as a volunteer VET adult educator [37]. The creator of the emergence system is linked to interpretive research [25]. The perspective on critical realism is that history and ways of knowing will inform this study [21]. Human action in essential realism is 'embodied, institutional or discursive structures that can be "possessed", rather than exercised or actualised' as positioning [38].

Therefore, "learning should be regarded as a growing capacity to act in flexible, constructive, and innovative ways suited to the demands of ever-changing circumstances" [20]. This review aims to determine how critical realism is for "provisional explanatory" information from structures that may be assumed to be imperfect when aiming for alternative possibilities [38], and this is the focus of educational studies. Taking a human resource perspective [38] argues that human service practice organisations must "gain alignment of artifacts, values, and assumptions that bring in inclusive culture to create policies and practices to support diverse employees." Thus, being proactive means that leaders bring about diversity in discussions and related values at all organisational levels, suggesting a culture that is an artifact needing action [38]. Others argue for a *rehumanising perspective* for VET [39]. Nevertheless, as a volunteer VET adult educator, the philosopher Roy Bhaskar's critical dashes of realism aim at "objects or phenomena needing change or that are to become other objects or phenomena" [38]. This study addresses the factors determining bilingual as bicultural women's VET and the support these factors in their community.

The social initiative that is emergent

Thus, having experienced the seminal work of Northwestern Local Area Health's Breastfeeding Promotion Committee (2010 - 2024) started with a special invitation after colleagues declined. Thus, the result was a pilot *BA* training program for Chinese women from Hong Kong [40]. These qualified women became employed in one central maternal unit, a funded program for bi-lingual women. With colleagues, we also presented a few in-house conferences on our work with bilingual women. A needs analysis is an "unpublished" study identifying the desire for specific languages as clustered sociocultural groups with low breastfeeding rates in the local urban district.

Understanding the significance of migrant breastfeeding

support in an urban space and collaborative partnership means understanding the maternal units and local government initiatives and that the *BA*, as a non-profit organisation, advocates for them. Therefore, by volunteering for this work, the motivation to learn innovatively is to identify ways of knowing.

Motivation to learn includes a philosophical position as experienced by Carl Rogers's need for empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard for others as a volunteer who is respectful, understanding, and open to empathic acknowledgement, as concerns are complex. Exposure to multiple sociocultural language groups can be "a genuine way of being inherent to revelations as congruent" [41]. Australia maintains a larger immigrant population than other industrialised countries [42], leading to many sociocultural groups [43]. Migrant sociocultural clustering by language can result in community isolation, leading to issues surrounding the individual needs of breastfeeding immigrant women.

Results

The collaborative negotiated partnership aims to train bilingual South Korean women per the *BA's* VET Certificate IV training model to work within their communities, leading antenatal classes in maternity units and democratic community-based postnatal self-help education. The trainees are permanent residents or Australian citizens with tertiary education from overseas or in Australia through the skilled stream with permanent visas [42]. They may also be secondary applicants granted visas as a spouse or dependent child [43]. Their current area of work is health or caring for family members.

An application for the trainees to the New South Wales *BA* state office resulted in funds from the NSW Health Department for the *BA* with applications. As found in the pilot study, funding is an economic necessity, as family members avoid unpaid labour. Therefore, affiliative socialising experiences make knowledge accessible and exciting to us, as experiential learning in writing has three areas: "expertise, emotions, ideologies and energy" [44], 'is what we can do', and it is 'central to work life as organic learning' brings about ownership of a work area rather than the traditional skill deficit training model."

Assessments

One form of assessment was developing the front cover of just one of the *BA's* language-specific booklets, and the trained women decided on the wording themselves. English: 'Breastfeeding is the start of a baby's healthy life'. After completing each assessment unit and uploading the *BA* training website, we must ask what was learnt before the next assignment, allowing reflection to learn from each other. Each assessment unit consisted of questions to identify knowledge in skills and role-plays that can be used in public speaking to build understanding and develop new knowledge.

Public speaking assessments occurred in the maternal unit, the *BA* site office, and front of interested women, as performing role-play, games, and assessments in front of audiences was included in the training to grow confidence. The training methods and novel assessments help trainees understand what will be required to promote and support breastfeeding within their community. The stepped structure of the VET competency-based units provides structure and a learning process as a "collegial process such as learning, a 'connected way of knowing', is teachers' understanding" [45].

Collaborating with *BA* trainers with more excellent knowledge as the structured VET training assessments often change, we needed help planning for these trainees. Learning theories suggest that there is a relationship between what "learners value [in] tasks and supportive environments that provide feedback, trust, and social inclusion; this leads to building confidence"[27].

It is necessary to avoid using similes and metaphors when working with bilingual women, as they can be confusing [46]. This concept meant we needed to convey clear messages through short sentences, allowing the trainees to respond or use their iPhone dictionaries if necessary. Over time, we became more accustomed to each other's forms of communication, which are common in self-help and democratic, community-based work.

Funding for the *BA* membership and training fees required crucial advocacy from state-branch leaders; therefore, structures can be complex. The *BA* could build its volunteer workforce as a 'strength in diversity' in socio-cultures and languages as it has yet to notice changing populations, and the New South Wales state office has created many bilingual booklets on breastfeeding for immigrants.

After graduation, the women plan presentations for postnatal meetings using technologies such as PowerPoint by adapting the *BA's* essential breastfeeding information to suit their community. Thus, forming the basic structure of their presentations, pre-planned postnatal events as impactful as informal learning events, as they can provide more new knowledge. Discussing how the meeting transpired between some people sharing transportation meant that we all benefitted from working together.

Thus, as human services practice ethics, the *BA* has a Code of Ethics that impacts our practices as "adult learning as social learning is an experiential process as extrinsic and intrinsic values" [47]. Consequently, it can be assumed from the nine years of training and working together that we all are interested in "human lactation has been studied, and one finding suggests maternal protective mental health" [48].

Australia's natural annual population growth of 37.5% includes net overseas migration of 62.5% [49], which has implications for supporting immigrants. The Lancet forecasts that low natural fertility will continue to decline, and migration will increase for populations in many industrialised countries, including Australia [50].

Conclusion

This reflection occurred over nine years until the COVID-19 lockdown. As an emergent internal concept, it is a *bidirectional relationship* [34] between both the *BA* and the maternal unit from our internal relationships, thus, identified as complexity-based on "causality as patterns reoccurring over time"[24]. Thus, examining life involving sociocultural volunteer work and social partnership initiatives, another alternative health unit contacted us to train other women in their language to increase breastfeeding [22].

Training for the VET Certificate IV provided bilingual women with a nationally recognised accreditation that can lead to midwifery study. This work contributed to our ways of knowing "small groups that constitute a field of practice" [51]. It has also increased mutual ties in their communities based on their loyalty to emotional and social relationships [52].

This study contributes to understanding an initiative of bilingual women in a northwest urban area in New South Wales, Australia. Thus, other socially negotiated partnership interventions can benefit from these relationships as migration to Australia increases and bicultural volunteers as the government needs them.

Conflict of interest

No known conflict of interest.

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