Staying in a certain state of mind: becoming and being a freelance adult educator in Singapore

Peter Rushbrook
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University

Annie Karmel
Helen Bound
Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore

Over recent years Singapore has developed a strong adult and vocational education system based on those of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Its Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector makes use of competency-based training in the form of Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQs) which are delivered in mainly small private providers by learning facilitators qualified through a range of WSQ-based training programs. Most facilitators are mature-age and second-career people drawn from diverse career backgrounds and employed on a casual and part-time rather than ongoing basis. They identify themselves as 'freelancers' in the training market place and compete vigorously for the work opportunities available. In the paper we argue that continued workplace success is premised on a strong sense of professional identity and its management through a process of 'shapeshifting' according to the diverse requirements of the adult

education industry. We explore this idea through revisiting three of our projects examining Singaporean CET educators and ask of our data a new question: 'How do individuals "become" and "be" Singaporean adult education freelancers?' We draw our insights from interviews with freelancers, Singapore's political and economic context and a range of literature drawn principally from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective.

Keywords: *Adult education, vocational education, workplace learning, professional identity, Singapore education*

Introduction

> It is not just about getting the work; it is about staying in a certain state of mind. It is about, I think, having a high level of personal mastery and being able to just weather through, whatever the world holds.
>
> (Debra, adult educator for sixteen years)

Debra is an experienced Singaporean adult educator, but like the majority of her colleagues she is part of a contingent and self-labelled 'freelancer' workforce that facilitates learning in the country's mostly private adult Continuing Education and Training (CET) sector providers. Her capacity to gain ongoing but impermanent work is shaped unpredictably by forces she can and cannot control. While she has a hold on how she learns new skills and gains new knowledge, mostly informally and in workplaces, via carefully cultivated friends and networks, and occasional formal programs, she must compete in the open market for work against rather than with her colleagues. While some providers remain a steady source of income, though rarely high, others come and go, and there is the pressure of developing new opportunities. To achieve her deft weaving through the system she has developed a strong sense of self, a deep sense of resilience, a capacity to be a permanent learner, as well as excellent time management and business planning and self-marketing skills. And then there is the delicate dance of balancing home and work, for engaging in the life of the freelancer easily blurs these boundaries (Campbell Clark, 2000).

But, and again like many of her fellow 'trainers', she chooses to be a freelancer for the work flexibility and freedom it offers. The same high perceptions and management of a malleable self cannot be claimed by many of her less experienced colleagues, which give her a market advantage against some, but not all. In the end it is a social Darwinian world of winners and losers, the fit and the not-so-fit. Unlike the world of permanent or ongoing work, where employees are relatively more stable, can predict the near future and have many learning needs met by a stable set of peers and enterprise-based training, Debra must be a 'shapeshifter', constantly adapting and reinventing or 'rebranding' herself to take advantage of or create new opportunities (Karmel, Bound & Rushbrook, 2014)

Debra is representative of many of her colleagues who may vary in profile according to the usual demographics of age, gender, experience, educational background, and so on. But to survive in the CET sector means a shared commitment to her impressive portfolio of entrepreneurial and professional workplace and life skills. Without them freelancers fail to thrive and many drop out to seek other careers. We claim that to survive as a freelancer in the Singaporean adult education market requires – even demands - this strong sense of professional identity.

We explore and develop the pivotal role of identity in freelancer workplace engagement through bringing together a range of themes and theories developed over three research projects (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2014; Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013; Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013). We do this by asking a new question of our data: 'How do individuals "become" and "be" Singaporean adult education freelancers?' In addressing this we draw from sixty eight interviews, including freelancers and ongoing facilitators, spread across the projects. The interviewees were selected using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling (Lankshear & Knobel: 148-149) and analysed through a 'categorical analysis' approach (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996), which also has much in common with Strauss and Corbin's 'constant comparison' approach (1990). The interviews were first transcribed and then analysed iteratively according to emerging and ever-consolidating themes until 'data saturation' affirmed the strongest (Sarantakos, 2001: 202-205). Observation through research notes and

document analysis was also used. Interview transcript analysis was conducted through NVivo and other paper-based approaches.

Theoretically we are positioned from a sociocultural perspective. We consider learning highly contextual and situated through the mediation of individual or collective reflexive human activity in environments shaped by material objects, space and socially, politically and economically derived ideas and practices. Within this set of assumptions, neither individual nor social learning is privileged, with learning as a process of ongoing participation rather than the achievement of an end 'product'. We acknowledge the fundamental uncertainty, messiness and complexity of our research environment, but seek nevertheless to draw insights of value for researchers and practitioners alike (Hager, Lee & Reich, 2012; Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuck, 2011; Malloch, et al, 2011: 23-27).

The paper unravels and analyses the process of becoming and being a Singaporean adult educator freelancer through five sub-headings based on the above three projects. First, we consider the broader Singaporean context within which freelancers conduct their daily lives and engage with lifelong learning. Second, we assess the framing of freelance work within the discourses of 'contingent' and 'precarious' labour literature in order to sharpen our ideas about how freelancers are positioned in the labour market. Third, we unpack a little further our reading of identity formation and 'becoming' and 'being' in workplace contexts. Fourth and fifth, we re-interrogate the interview and other material to map how freelancers 'become' and 'be' through previous work experience, formal training as adult educators and ongoing workplace practice. The paper concludes with a discussion that brings these themes together.

The Singaporean context and lifelong learning

Debra lives in dynamic Singapore, one of the leading 'Asian Tigers' of the 'Asian Century'. Singapore's rapid economic and social development was no accident but an authentic rags-to-riches story driven from the mid-1960s though the charismatic leadership of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party (PAP), which has held office since independence in 1965 (Lee, 2009a). With a total population of around five million on an island no larger than greater Melbourne or Sydney and without any natural resources, apart from its people, its

global positioning as one of the world's wealthiest and per capita best educated states is indeed a remarkably successful 'from third world to first' narrative (Lee, 2009b). Celebrated and some claim reinvented as 'The Singapore story' – part reality and part myth – the national story is told as a pragmatic, meritocratic and technocratic representation of Singapore's 'can do' reputation deeply embedded in the national psyche (Tan, 2011). Singapore was quick to embrace the winds of globalisation and radical free market neoliberalism and swiftly combine it with its collective approach to governmentality (Choi, 2011). With this seemingly contradictory – but pragmatic – approach it has been able to generate huge national and, for some, individual wealth while providing extensive redistributive mechanisms for the less advantaged, not through paid welfare but rather a raft of incentives, schemes and education and training initiatives (Lee, 2009a, 2009b). This tension between economic radicalism and conservative government authoritarianism has recently been referred to as 'The Singapore paradox' (Amaldas, 2009: 985), and often sits restlessly with its people (Tan, 2011).

It is within this broader political context that a specific reading of 'lifelong learning' has emerged. It was perhaps inevitable, given that human capital was Singapore's only real economic resource, that lifelong learning would assume a vocational hue. Former Prime Minister Goh captured this well at a 1998 National Day rally: 'We will have to evolve a comprehensive national lifelong learning system that continually retrains our workforce, and encourages every individual to learn all the time as a matter of necessity' (Goh, in Kumar, 2006: 501). This contrasts strongly with other international lifelong learning iterations emphasising broader humanist rather than economically-oriented goals (Faure, 1972, Delors, 1996).

Though discussed since the mid-1980s, lifelong learning did not assume prominence in national policy until the early New Millennium following a regional economic crisis and the SARS outbreak, which destabilised employment and skills formation for many workers. It was time for transitioning the economy from manufacturing to the knowledge economy. In 2003 the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) was created to manage the new training demanded and lifelong learning dramatically became 'adult education', though in other parts of the world it would be called 'vocational education'. Nested within the WDA

and the broader CET sector there were developed Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQs), which framed skills development as a series a Competency Based Training (CBT) programs, not unlike those of Australia, New Zealand or Great Britain (Willmott and Karmel, 2011; Anderson, Brown and Rushbrook, 2004). A high compliance regime was considered necessary because of the inexperience of its mainly private-for-profit providers. Curriculum construction and its facilitation with learners were subsequently tightly regulated and managed (Willmott and Karmel, 2011: 20-22: 52-55). It is within this environment that Debra and her colleagues work as freelancers, though many also operate in the relatively deregulated and often better paid non-WSQ training market.

Freelancer employment: contingent or precarious?

Our interest in researching Singaporean freelance adult educators generated further interest in the global phenomenon of increased workplace casualisation and the rise of an extensive literature in the field. We decided to explore this literature in order to further clarify the positioning of freelancers in the adult education workforce. It was our perception that the widely used labels 'contingent' and 'precarious' workers accounted theoretically and practically for the positioning of Singapore adult education freelancers. We considered, however, that they were in many ways opposite and discursively loaded concepts, depending on the value placed on 'contingent' work as a desirable labour form and 'precarious' work as 'at risk' employment in an age of flexible capitalism. For example, there is the assumption that contingent workers are able easily to navigate the getting and keeping of work to their own advantage through the development of social and mobility capital networks, the management of work-life balance and its unpredictable permeability, a capacity to maintain current workplace skill and knowledge capabilities, competently pursue meaningful, creative and self-fulfilling work, and possess the aptitude to earn a comfortable income and maintain a self-selected lifestyle. This, then, is the 'boundaryless worker' sanctioned by the new economics of global capitalism and advocated through the economics, human resources and careers literature (Forrier, Sels & Stynen, 2009; Kalleberg, 2000). Feldman defines the contingent worker 'as work that is: (1) not permanently associated with any one employer. (2) Consists of less than

thirty-five hours a week with any one employer or client. (3) Is limited in duration either by contract or by the duration of a specific task or project' (Feldman, 2006: 30). We similarly defined impermanent work as project or short-term based over less than twelve months.

The discourse of the 'precarious' worker, however, implies the opposite of the boundaryless worker. Originating within the radical social sciences literature and supported by global labour organisations and social movements, precarious work suggests that the fundamental relationship between worker and employee is one of rupture, exploitation and disadvantage. Brophy, for example, offers a definition of precarious work by omission and explanation, referring to 'a range of labour conditions that escape the traditionally understood Fordist relationship to labour: a job for life, dependable benefits, steady work rhythms, union protection, a fairly clear separation between work and free time, a social safety net if all else failed, and so on' (Brophy, 2006: 621). A number of studies emphasise the potential for precarious workers, whether professional, craft or unskilled, to be denied access to workplace conditions considered an entitlement or right to previous generations (Cavanagh, 2010; Fenwick, 2012, Kong, 2011; McKeown, 2005; Hudson, 2001)

Given there appears to be a case to separate the discursive application of contingent and precarious work in research settings, we made the choice to adopt the use of the term 'contingent' worker for this paper. This is not to endorse the underlying discourse but to acknowledge that Singaporean freelancers who manage to find meaningful work meet the contingent work criteria (Rushbrook, Bound, Evans & Waite, 2014).

Becoming and being: our reading of identity and work

Learning how to 'become', and embodying what to 'be', are processes that freelance adult educators negotiate as they try to attract and maintain paid work. Here learning or *becoming* is identity building work that develops a way of *being* for freelance adult educators to draw on as an internal compass as well as a reference point for dealing with the challenges inherent in their work.

An understanding of learning as an often invisible and constant process involving abstract and tacit knowledge moves away from the

'competence theoretical approach' where learning is transmitting the competences of adult educators largely through formal training (Maier-Gutheil & Hof, 2011; Robson et al., 2004; Gee et al, 1996). The critique warns against removing 'competences' from their contexts and practice. Thinking and doing cannot be separated, and the individual cannot be held distinct from the environments in which they operate (Engestrom, 1999; Sawchuk, 2003; Gherardi & Niccolini, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Fenwick, 2004). In this approach learning and identity are relational, dynamic and provisional - practice based rather than acquisitional (T. J. Fenwick, 2004; T. Fenwick, 2000).

The nature of freelance work as an adult educator is posited to be individualistic and disconnected from organisational culture and practices; yet, much workplace learning literature emphasizes the role of the work environment and colleagues as key factors for becoming a particular type of worker. Here the literature points to the importance of experience, interaction, and reflection for learning across diverse work related tasks. These are not mutually exclusive, involving an interplay between them all, and may exist across informal, non-formal, and formal professional development activities.

Experience includes past work experiences, as well as day-to-day experiences as an adult educator. Here learning is 'open, indeterminate, flexible, and not necessarily an organised process that favours rapid adjustments to changes' (Guimarães, Sancho, & Oliveira, 2006). Intertwined with experience is interaction where co-participation and emergence enmeshes individual and social processes. Learning interactions may occur with peers, mentors, learners, clients and administrative personnel and can involve questioning, listening, observing, discussing, writing and reading amongst other actions. It is through interaction that knowledge is shared and created. Tying these ways of learning together is reflection, which may have the most impact on becoming a freelance adult educator. Boud (2010 in Fenwick 2008) conceives learning as reflection, whereby 'reflection...provides a link between knowing and producing.' The 'reflective practitioner' has become a key signifier in the professional development of adult educators as the notion of learning theory and applying it in predictable ways has become irrelevant (Merriam, 1986; Cervero, 1988; Imel, 1992; Edwards & Usher, 1996; Jõgi & Gross, 2010; Lehman, 2003; Maier-

Gutheil & Hof, 2011; Nittel, 2000; Smilde, 2009, p.84).

Becoming a freelance adult educator may happen largely through experience, interaction, and reflection, but what is it that these workers actually need to 'be'? Here the literature identifies a number of challenges that lead to reactions or a way of being for freelance adult educators. These are: motivational conflicts and reconciliation; diversity and shape-shifting; unpredictability and permanent learning; as well as competition and innovation.

Besides a disjuncture between formally learned concepts and real practice, freelance adult educators may need to reconcile their personal motivations with reality. They can be full of contradictions between desiring both flexibility and stability, as well as wanting to find greater meaning in life and operating in a system of accountability, business, and measurable outcomes (T. J. Fenwick, 2006; T. Fenwick, 2000; Lehman, 2003; Robson et al., 2004).

Freelance adult educators often operate across more than one work environment. This diversity can create a juggling act of competing contracts, demands and expectations, and requires shifting between different roles, clients, and 'languages'. Here understanding the norms of various environments becomes crucial for enabling 'shape-shifting' in order to seamlessly operate across diverse environments. Yet, while being a chameleon of sorts, it remains important to retain a strong sense of self to avoid fragmentation (Edwards & Usher, 1996).

In reaction to the unpredictable nature of freelance training, encompassing an ethos of learning can be crucial. Cornelia et al's work (2011) calls this 'The Permanent Learner' where enjoying the constant need to change, learn and improve reduces the external pressures to adapt constantly and remain up-date (Maier-Gutheil & Hof, 2011). With this mentality every experience can be viewed as a learning opportunity, and the individual can embrace change as an aspect of their professional practice (Taylor et al 2009).

Moving between clients in an unpredictable market also makes it crucial for freelance adult educators to have something that their competitors do not (Edwards & Usher, 1996; T. J. Fenwick, 2004; T. Fenwick, 2008). Fenwick argues that freelance adult educators, particularly those with

multiple employers, need to embody the ability to make new processes and structures of work, constantly bring something new to clients, and capitalise on their uniqueness, so that clients believe they have something special to offer.

In a world of motivational conflicts, diversity, unpredictability and competition it seems that freelance adult educators learn through experience, interaction, and reflection to be a medley of 'reconcilers', 'shape-shifters', 'permanent learners', and 'innovators'. We now turn to our empirical data to gain an understanding of *becoming* and *being* for freelance adult educators.

Becoming an adult educator

 Part of the freelancer workplace identity formation process consists of prior life and work experience brought to the task, formal and informal training and workplace learning. In this section of the paper we reflect on and reinterpret the data gathered in two projects examining CET stakeholders' (including freelancers) perceptions about the construction of quality curriculum and the conduct of quality learning facilitation (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013), and CET stakeholder (including freelancers) perceptions of their journey to adult learning practice (Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013). An assumption is made that the data reported resonates with our project (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2014), which considers only freelancers, as freelancers and ongoing workers alike who wish to work within the WSQ system complete identical curriculum writing and learning facilitation training programs. Demographically, too, they all tend to be mature aged workers with solid career experience behind them. All are eligible for similar government training subsidies and programs are delivered on the same basis for freelancers and ongoing workers alike. A new question, however, is asked of the data: 'How do you "become" an adult educator in Singapore'? The next section deals more exclusively with the process of 'being' a freelance adult educator.

Education and training for work as an adult educator requires at a minimum participation in an entry level learning facilitation course, the 'Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment' (ACTA), introduced to the WDA in 2005 (Willmott & Karmel, 2011). Modules include adult learning principles, Competency Based Training and

assessment, and basic curriculum design. Assessment for satisfactory completion includes written assignments, practical performances in simulated environments, oral questioning and desktop reviews. There is no workplace learning or assessment component (Institute for Adult Learning ACTA brochure, 2012).

Most ACTA graduates who wish to continue and build their skills and reputations within the CET sector, particularly if working with WSQs, also complete a more advanced course, the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education (DACE), introduced in 2010 (Willmott and Karmel, 2011). The DACE program, in addition to 'value-adding' ACTA, allows specialisation in a number of streams, including curriculum writing, e-learning and assessment, among others. It will be mandatory from 2015 to have a DACE curriculum graduate in all WSQ training providers. Further additions to the program include a detailed capstone project and an integrated practicum (Institute for Adult Learning DACE brochure, 2012). Our research (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013) drew mainly from DACE learners and graduates, though all had completed the ACTA program, even though not a DACE prerequisite.

Our third project (Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013) data consists of 18 interviews from Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013, and 20 from Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013 (10 collected over 2010-2012 and 10 from 2012-2013). We approached analysing the data through the lenses of curriculum purpose and curriculum intent. Through reflection on the former we concluded that the underpinning purpose or philosophical intent of delivering the ACTA and DACE courses was mediated through a CBT approach designed 'to create a more effective workforce to increase national prosperity and producing a workforce capable of meeting international competition' (Cornford, 1999:93; Doll, 1993; Billett, 2003). This is in line with PM Goh's purpose for the lifelong learning trajectory of Singaporeans. We read the idea of curriculum 'intent' as how the curriculum is interpreted and represented in delivery practice with learners. We drew in particular on the ideas of Schwartz (2006) who differentiates between 'curriculum users' and 'curriculum receivers'. This suggests that learning facilitators actively mediate and model curriculum content and purpose when working with learners, as indeed do learners themselves. This was a major insight into the perceptions revealed by our interviewees in their experience of

becoming adult educators through the ACTA and DACE programs.

From our data we discovered that most ACTA and DACE facilitators and learners – and eventually graduates - adopted a 'compliant' or pragmatic approach to the making and facilitation of curriculum, reflecting both the curriculum experienced and the modes through which it was delivered (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013). By this we mean that in practice graduates adapted to working and responding within Singapore's tightly managed WSQ and CBT environment. Curriculum, for example, is defined in instrumentalist and technocratic ways and ATOs enforce rigid standards of facilitation that demand compliance to set delivery strategies. Given the national skilling thrust there is a clear market orientation: curriculum is expressed as a series of practical and measurable outcomes underwritten by the requirements of paid work. For most interviewees this was a normalised and unproblematised process and shaped perceptions of what was meant by 'quality' curriculum (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013).

We did, however, see examples of resistance to this regime of compliance. This we labelled the 'interpretivist' approach (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2014; Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013). For some, curriculum was considered a flexible, dynamic and engaging map of learning possibilities. In this approach facilitation privileges the agential relationship between learner and facilitator. It was, though, heavily nuanced by a lack of learner and facilitator exposure to the types of pedagogies and knowledge that inform this approach. We understand this deficit is being addressed in subsequent reviews of the ACTA and DACE courses.

We observed this more open approach emerge in particular through our project examining the reflexive journey of adult educators from 'novice to expert', particularly in the second and most recently interviewed cohort (n=10), which we concluded may indicate a maturing of the CET sector and recently introduced programs to afford great flexibility in interpreting content and approach (Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013). The DACE learners were drawn from a range of occupational areas, including education, hospitality, engineering, retail and commerce. They used this deep career experience to review critically their DACE learning experience. Important, too, was the cooperative

support of peers both within the DACE course and workplaces to further develop their interpretive ideas. Finally, they also noted that it was only possible to adopt an interpretive stance with the support of learning provider management (Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013).

'Becoming' an adult educator, then, through this brief overview of two larger projects (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013; Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013), is both a shared and sometimes fraught process. All are mature workers, often leaving a former profession or role because of economic downturn or entering a new 'age and stage' phase of their lives (Bound, Rushbrook & Sivalingam, 2013; Rushbrook, Bound and Sivalingam, 2013). All, at least those who engage with WSQs and the WDA, enter one or two curriculum making and learning and facilitation programs to be certified as 'competent' to deliver WSQ-based programs. This journey generates options of either complying with the adult education regulatory environment or resisting to create new creative 'interpretivist' approaches within learning environments. However, unless these receive the support of managers and employers, they remain difficult to implement.

Being a freelance adult educator

Our data (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2014, n=30) suggest that it can be beneficial for a freelance adult educator to encompass certain dispositions and skills as a way of *being* that can help them negotiate their occupation. The dispositions identified are being: passionate, anchored, resilient, and a permanent learner, which can help minimise fragmentation and provide a central driving force for professional ethics and actions. Building on these dispositions are skills such as planning, continual networking, positioning, shape-shifting, and innovation. The data indicates that there is significant interplay between these dispositions and skills. The form and degree that this 'embodiment' takes shape, however, is negotiated with the environments (markets, systems, organisations) that provide a context for the individual to interpret what it means to *be* a freelance adult educator in Singapore.

Overall, our freelance trainers seem to be well placed in terms of having developed the dispositions that will help them operate effectively. This is important as Grusec and Goodnow (1994) argue that the extent to which learning takes place is dependent on an individual's

disposition. All of the interviewees talked about being passionate, using it for slightly different purposes depending on the challenges they faced within the systems they worked. This implies that 'passion' as a mantra for freelance trainers is well established as the difficulties they face necessitate it. In terms of being anchored to avoid fragmentation, experience, reflection, and professional necessity are crucial. In the private market it is necessary to know who you are, which is related to the skill of positioning and the nature of the market. Most adult educators go through a time of figuring this out by negotiating their internal motivations, past experiences, and work opportunities. Closely related to being anchored is being resilient. This disposition is largely affected by personal doubts and uncertainties about credibility and how work is allocated. Being anchored and resilient seemed particularly low for people who had entered freelance training after being made redundant. Being a permanent learner, however, was reasonably strong across the board, which is likely a response to unpredictability and also related to the centrality of 'learning' for this occupation. The effort of turning 'everything as a learning experience' into transformational actions, however, was less evident, largely due to time and/or a lack of support and motivation for truly reflective practice.

We now turn to focus on the skills that can help a freelance adult educator *be* someone who attracts and maintains work. Planning skills are very important for a freelance adult educator to have. Before deciding to try freelancing as an adult educator there are a number of elements that need to be considered so that a measured decision can be made. Planning skills were found to include a strategy prior to exiting permanent employment, financial planning, planning your client approach, flexibility and juggling, as well as schedule management. The possession and refinement of planning skills seems to be related to both experience in previous careers, as well as experience negotiating (both internally and professionally) as a freelance trainer. The extent to which one *is* a good planner has ramifications, not only for ones confidence in the decision to freelance, but also for their reputation and the ability to attract and retain clients.

Freelance adult educators know that networks are crucial for getting work. Those with small networks, high chances of direct competition, and few proactive strategies are in a much weaker position compared

to their peers with higher power networks. Although formal platforms and social media exist for networking purposes, their functional usage seems to be limited. The lack of a collaborative culture among most adult educators, and the difficulty some freelancers have in 'proving' themselves, makes it difficult for more inclusive networks to exist. *Being* a part of a network fundamentally impacts the type and amount of work a freelance adult educator can get.

Some freelance adult educators are comfortable with seeing themselves and running themselves as a business. Beyond planning skills, this involves the ability to position products and services for certain markets, without which gaining clients will be difficult. The implications for having poor positioning skills are felt mostly at the individual level as it makes it hard to know how and where to compete with credibility. On top of this, professional development becomes more difficult without understanding how you are, or want to be, positioned in the market.

Shape shifting skills determine the ease with which a freelance trainer can navigate the diversity they come across. The extent to which one *is* a shape shifter determines the ability of a freelancer to link a product to client needs and deliver it appropriately. This is largely 'behind the scenes work where a coherent image is presented to a client with little evidence of the chameleon work being performed. Here the challenge is understanding a diverse array of environments and clients, which successful freelance adult educators can do through tapping on their past experiences and networks.

The skill and drive to innovate are an important aspect of professional gratification for more experienced freelance trainers, particularly in the private market. *Being* an innovator also points out the crucial relationship between development and delivery for more responsive products. Freelancers operating within the nationally regulated system, however, have a much more limited identification with innovation as their success lies in covering learning materials and learners passing assessment.

While the individual freelance adult educator is most directly affected by the embodiment of these dispositions and skills in terms of getting work and gaining professional satisfaction, there are also implications for their clients and Singapore's workforce development agenda. Although

a great deal of agency is apparent for many freelance adult educators, the environments that clients/providers create indicate what they are expected to *be*. This means that the work environments, although diverse, can enhance the freelancer's contribution or limit it, make understanding needs easier, or more difficult, and encourage sharing, collaboration, and innovation or a guarded and isolated working culture. At a systemic level, also, a free market seems more able to encourage responsiveness and professionalism, while a system that focuses on standardisation expects a certain level of competency, but does not encourage or reward those who strive for more.

Conclusion

In Singapore change happens quickly. This is evident in the stories told here of changes to curriculum in the formal training for WSQ adult educators, moving from a compliant approach to encouraging a more interpretivist approach. The pragmatist approach to policy and focus on the individual as an economic unit in Singapore brings with it tensions typical of many national policy agendas but more sharply focused here. Key tensions are evident in the drive for increased productivity and innovation, yet old tools for achieving this intent get in the way of its realisation. Systemic requirements for standardisation encourage acceptance of norms, a non-questioning mindset, at odds with the drive for innovation. Yet when we look below the surface of the policy environment, there *is* evidence to be found of those who question, those who choose pathways other than the WSQ approach which in its current form leaves limited room for individual adult educators to practice in innovative ways; there are also stories of those who find the liminal spaces, the cracks and fissures in a rigid system to develop innovative practices. As the first study (Karmel, Bound and Rushbrook, 2014) indicates, the free market here seems to better appreciate and even demand adult educators to become and be highly professional.

Becoming and being a freelance Adult Educator in Singapore in some ways is little different from experiences in other countries: you need to have established networks before you make the leap from ongoing employment; you need to be clear how you will position yourself; you need to have a financial plan in place, to be able to plan well and above all to be comfortable with 'shape shifting', yet know your true

core and being true to that. All of these are what we can refer to as a 'state of mind', but it is much more than that. The process is dynamic and dialectical in nature. What is unique to Singapore is of course the context in which adult educators work and thus the ways in which this context mediates being and becoming. The Singapore pragmatic 'can-do' approach is mitigated in part by a Confucian mind-set, deference to authority and a fear of risk. It is tensions such as these that have contributed to some indicating that Singapore is at a cross-roads in its striving to be not just world-class but first amongst First World nations in the provision of CET. Yet historical artefacts such as a Confucian mind-set and stringent implementation and application of quality control mechanisms pose particular challenges for policy makers, providers and adult educators alike.

Our research begs deep questions: What *is* a professional adult educator? Do current or will future markets provide the conditions for these 'professionals' to thrive? And, does the policy environment, likewise enable 'professional' adult educators to thrive to 'be' and become their best? These are the challenges Debra and her freelancer colleagues face daily as they negotiate their way through their professional lives and workplaces.

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About the Authors

__Dr Peter Rushbrook__ is a Senior Lecturer at RMIT University, Melbourne, and a former Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore. He has wide experience as an academic, adult educator and consultant. He is well published in the field.

__Ms Annie Karmel__ is a Research Officer at the Institute for Adult Learning, Singapore and has wide experience as a researcher in the field of adult and vocational education.

__Dr Helen Bound__ is Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Adult Education, Singapore and Head of the Centre for Work and Learning. She has a background in education, academia and the union movement and is widely published in the field.

Contact Details

Peter Rushbrook
Bundoora West Campus
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University

Email: peter.rushbrook@rmit.edu.au