USING PATH MODELS TO EXPLORE THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN PROMOTING AND UNDERMINING LEARNING

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This workshop brings together two very useful ideas (a theory and a method) for exploring the role of identity in learning. Education is full of identity-based theories, but Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which has historically focused on inter-group conflict, collective action and social change, has only recently been used to systematically explore educational contexts (Mavor, Platow and Bizumic, 2017). Social identities do not just refer to typical broad categories, such as race, gender, age, religion, but ANY basis for a collective self-definition, and so also includes a single classroom, a school, a year level, a cohort, a peer group, the football team, the academic discipline of study (especially in higher education) and so on. Within social identity theory all of these elements MAY be the basis for psychological group formation and the associated phenomena such as group norms and collective self-definition. Social identity theory has been explored using a wide variety of methods from tightly controlled experiments, to correlational survey designs, to qualitative studies, so the theory is methodologically open.

Over the last decade, the workshop leader Mavor (with colleagues) has engaged in a line of research in higher education, particularly exploring the role of identification with the academic discipline on deep and surface learning, procrastination, self-handicapping, peer norms, evaluation of teaching, and engagement with assessment feedback. It has been convenient to explore this research using correlational path modelling methods, which are very useful for modelling more complex associations between variables. Path models were originally described by Sewell Wright in 1921 and 1934 and have been a very useful way of understanding more complex regression models.

In the workshop we will explore the core methods of path modelling as a process for exploring meaning in complex tables of correlations, and why it is a technique that can add new insights beyond simple correlation and regression analyses. The workshop does not assume familiarity with the method but at least some familiarity with the concept of correlation. By exploring a series of analyses based on our research over the last decade, the idea is to explore the method in an interesting context for educational researchers. As we explore the path models and interpret them, we will also explore the meaning of several specific social identities in educational contexts and explore how these impact on several variables related to learning and the educational experience.

BIO

Ken Mavor is both an expert in social identity theory and in research methods and statistics. He has worked in several key centres for social identity theory throughout his career (University of Queensland, Australian National University, University of St Andrews) and has published with central figures in the field. He has also taught methods and statistics for over 30 years, and path modelling and factor analysis are two of his favourite topics to teach.

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