

Response to critique of questionnaire

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- The first observation that should be made concerns not the critique itself, but the circumstances and the context of the critique. It is curious that someone at York University, Canada, would be motivated to write a critical commentary on the questionnaire used in this review. We are unaware of whether the author of it came to be invited to provide such a critique, but it is certainly worthy of note that it is written by someone within the same academic unit, in the same University as Professor Celia Haig-Brown, York University, Toronto, Canada. It is significant that Haig-Brown provided a glowing testimonial of the Te Kotahitanga programme. This testimony was appended to the Te Kotahitanga Phase 3 Draft Report, but subsequently deleted from the final published version. We are not convinced that Murphy is a disinterested commentator; rather, we suspect she has some sort of relationship, unstated, with the Te Kotahitanga project. If this is so, it should have been acknowledged. If there is a failure to disclose, this does raise fundamental concerns about the ideological assumptions shaping the critique.
- The logical structure of many of the statements in the critique is alarming for its invalidity. Taken together, the many logical flaws raise serious questions about the coherence of the critique. The statement: "Most educational research tests would agree..." invites two observations:
 - o That most texts agree does not make that which is agreed to true; a majority can be and sometimes is mistaken;
 - o 'Most' entails that some do not, yet no reason is given for preferring the veracity of most over the rest.This concern is reinforced by the publication dates of the cited literature. Of the four books cited, one is dated 1988 and three 1993. This seems to be rather dated literature and overlooks 15 years of development in thinking about questionnaires and surveys.
- It is by no means clear that "in survey research, the desire is to eliminate competing explanations". We simply do not know what motivates researchers to undertake surveys, but we do know that, for some researchers, all that is being sought is a description of what people think and not why they think as they do. Political opinion polls are an example of this.
- What is the source of the four survey design principles? This should be stated in the critique.
- While it may be possible to "design questions so that they mean relatively similar things to the survey participants" for some things, it may not be possible for others. For example, in relation to Murphy's example, the use of the term 'rarely': if one asked elderly people how often they had sex

over their lifetime, it is unlikely that 'once a week' would be rated as 'rarely' but more likely would be considered 'very regularly'. A young person might have a quite different perception of what constituted 'rarely' over their lifetime so far. Another example would be pain. How does the word 'pain' have similarity of meaning for different respondents, let alone degrees of pain?

- The logical inference of the following statement is assailable: "... in most questionnaire design, it would be highly unusual to find a box listing who must complete which questions at the top of a survey. More typical would be statements positioned strategically throughout the document indicating which participants should complete a group of questions." 'Most' allows for some surveys which do possess the characteristic, legitimately; 'more typical' allows for the atypical and does not make it wrong. Why is the most/typical preferred over rest/atypical as the epistemic norm of inquiry? Furthermore, the audience for the questionnaire was not a random sample of ordinary members of the public. They were highly educated professionals who had already been exposed to the discourses around TK and were experienced respondents to questionnaires. The instruction as to which questions to answer would be perfectly clear to this audience, and for data tabulated in the report, cross-checks were made to ensure that only the responses of those who should have answered a question were included.
- We did not detect any feeling among participants to the effect that they found the questionnaire, or individual questions, hard to follow or unclear. The questionnaire was discussed with a group of representatives of the 12 schools before being issued, and there was no negative response from them either, nor did any of them seek advice from PPTA National Office or the reviewer during the survey period as to how particular questions should be interpreted.
- The critique questions the request in Q.17 that respondents rate the 'professional credibility' of personnel. This criticism reflects the acontextual and acultural location of the comment. Murphy says: "I am not sure how participants would have interpreted the question." She may not be, but her ignorance cannot be the basis of an inference that the participants had a similar difficulty of interpretation.
- The criticism of Q.10a that "There is the additional problem that there are three separate ideas in the item prompt ... a separate item should exist for each of the thematic" is problematic. The sentences, and the ideas they express, cannot be taken in isolation, for this is to reduce a whole to its parts with a loss of holistic meaning. Sentences get their meaning by virtue of their place in larger bodies of text. Such is the holism of meaning, so sentences and their ideas cannot be taken in isolation as individual elements but only as a whole. At Q.15(b), respondents e.g. R0221 quoted in the report, appear to have made the link between 'transparent' and 'rigorous' perfectly well and seen them as a coherent package with a holistic meaning.

- The statement “Design questions so that they are worded simply” fails to recognise that simple things cannot always be worded simply, and complex things rarely. To reduce complex human affairs to simple words is likely to do an injustice to their description and explanation. As Aristotle noted, we can only be as precise as the subject matter allows.
- With regard to criticism of the phrasing of certain questions, it should be noted that the statistical data in part 3 of the review was appropriately complemented by the qualitative data provided. The extensive written responses supplied by many teachers suggests that teachers were perfectly well able to interpret complex questions, and to separate the components within propositions.
- Still less does this invalidate the whole review, which should be seen as a total document rather than a series of unrelated components. The data in section 3 should be seen as one component of the review, not as generating the review as is implied by Sharon Murphy. For example, elements of the data in Section 3 support comments quoted elsewhere from Nash 2003 and 2005.
- Murphy writes: “I have not looked at the relationship of the questionnaire to the report which generated it.” This admission reveals perhaps the most damning failure. Question design is logically linked to the object of the question, as much as to the semantic content and structure of the question. Failure to examine the relationship leads to a distorted comment.
- Logical impropriety again appears with the statement: “... inferences based on these questions would be affected by the possibility that participants misinterpreted what the question was asking”. A possibility is not an empirical actuality so it is not logically possible that these questions **would** be affected, only **could** be affected. At best, if participants actually misinterpreted, all that can be inferred is that the questions might have been affected. ‘Would’ entails causality and ‘possibility’ simply does not have any causal power to affect questions.
- As indicated above, the application of propositional and symbolic logic confirms that the premises are deeply flawed. The critique’s conclusion, therefore, does not logically follow.
- The appearance of this critique of the questionnaire soon after publication is symptomatic of a defensive response to critique. We know who did the critique, but we do not know who, if anybody, asked her to do the critique nor why. Professor Russell Bishop’s public statement that he welcomed any review of the programme was a more useful response to the review.