PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS, PATHWAYS AND ANDRAGOGIES: ISSUES IN EVALUATING AND REDESIGNING THE POSTCOMPULSORY TEACHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

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ABSTRACT
Drawing on criticality, critical theory and the humanist tradition in education, the authors explicate several issues in evaluating and redesigning the postcompulsory teacher education professional experience at USQ. The challenge rests with developing partnerships, pathways and andragogies that simultaneously fulfil stakeholder expectations and promote lifelong learning for all participants.

INTRODUCTION
Lifelong learning can be conceptualised as applying as much to institutions and communities of practice as to individuals. The facilitation of individual students as lifelong learners depends on the effective alignment of learner, academic and organisational commitment to learning as the co-construction of knowledge and to drawing on participants’ respective lifeworlds.

This is certainly the case with the authors’ current efforts to redesign postcompulsory teacher education at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in Australia. Incorporating professional, adult and vocational education into a further education and training focus requires the application of our colleagues’ and our lived experiences as people, learners and teachers to serious questions about curriculum, andragogy and assessment. This is especially the case if the programs are truly to serve students’ multiple interests and to enhance their prospects as lifelong learners.

With this in mind, the authors focus specifically in this paper upon the professional experience (PE) elements within the Bachelor of Education (Further Education and Training) (BEFT). This teacher education program is designed for individuals with trade or professional certification seeking to tread the path towards teaching in high schools and/or teaching in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The paper explores a number of issues surrounding the redesigning of the PE component within the BEFT. This journey is grounded in the authors’ conceptual resources based on their own experiences as lifelong learners (Arden, Danaher & Tyler, 2005). In particular, an evaluative perspective is taken of the manner in which PE is conceptualised and enacted within the BEFT.

What is argued is that criticality (Barnett, 1997), critical theory (Habermas, 1996) and the humanist tradition in education (Dewey, 1916) provide a potentially rich conceptual framework for the PE evaluation. The challenge rests with articulating these concepts in an evaluative capacity that informs the points of leverage within the current PE, in order to enhance lifelong learning for participants in the BEFT.

This undertaking sees each author evaluating the PE through the lens to which s/he personally aligns. These lenses provide the initial springboard for articulating the questions mooted above as well as an important interrogatory and evaluative strategy for assessing the potential utility of the answers that the authors develop in response
to those questions. The first author uses the lens of criticality, the second, critical
theory and the third, the humanist tradition. The conclusion of the paper reflects upon
the implications of the evaluation in relation to the promotion of lifelong learning
partnerships, pathways and andragogies.

CRITICALITY AND THE BEFT PE AT USQ
To emphasise the importance of interrogating the PE within the above-mentioned
program through the lens of criticality, we turn to Ronald Barnett’s (1997) quotation:
“A durable self can only be sustained...through critical self-reflection and authentic –
and, thereby, critical – action” (p. 63). Beginning teachers and indeed continuing
teachers need to be durable, especially whilst working in the messy world of teaching.
Durability comes, according to Barnett, from being able to develop and deploy critical
abilities. In discussing critical thinking, Barnett identifies three levels. The first level
is the concept of critical thinking as a set of cognitive skills used in problem-solving.
The second level is critical thought. These are the debates and interchanges embedded
within the critical thinking discipline itself. This is the cultural practice of an
academic tradition that is implicit. The third level is that of critical thinking as a
critique or metacriticism, an interdisciplinary examination involving a conscious
reflection upon the theories of the world that are presented as normal or right. This
examines underlying power relationships. Thus critical thinking is more than
reasoning skills; it is ‘criticality’, as it translocates itself within the domains of reason,
self and the world. For Barnett, the major concern is the academic community’s
weighted focus on criticality as critical thinking, with the domains of self and the
world experiencing lighter attention. For the purposes of examining the PE within the
BEFT, it is criticality in terms of these three domains that is of interest.

It would be fair to suggest that part of being a lifelong learner is having the capacity
to sustain and endure. Tyler (2005) illustrates how he used criticality to sustain his
practice within both the community and human services and the teaching profession.
This sustainability was achieved through repeated acts of critical reflection and
reflexivity. Barnett (1997) would describe this reflexivity as critical action. Being
practised by self in the domain of the world, critical action moves beyond passive
acceptance and taken for grantedness. In Tyler’s case, this action prompted personal
transformation. For the beginning teacher, critical action for personal and social
transformation would be the emphasis. In relation to PE, it is critical action that
confronts real life dilemmas.

A critical disposition is used to bolster this position of criticality. Barnett (1997)
suggests that critical spirit is the essence of the critical person. It is beyond the
technique of critical thinking, “It is about the kinds of people, of persons, that we are
trying in higher education to bring about” (p. 87). For Barnett, the person with critical
spirit utilises the three domains of reason, self and the world to analyse seriously and
comprehend the real world. For Oxman-Michelli (1992), it is about independence of
mind, open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for
others. For Paul (1992), it is “rational passion” (p. 282), a drive to get to the bottom of
things in a clear, accurate and fair-minded manner.

Using Barnett’s (1997) lens of criticality in relation to PE shapes student engagement
with partnerships, pathways and andragogies to enable them to come to know their
teaching world and to understand their self as a constituent of that world. Further, it
increases the likelihood that their manner of engagement will be personally and socially transformative as they move to effect changes that go beyond the instrumental status quo.

With the above in mind we can ask a series of evaluative questions, which at present can be answered only speculatively but which align with exploring criticality with the PE:

- To what degree does the PE provide opportunities to exercise critical thinking?
- To what degree does the PE prompt critical self-reflection and engagement in critical action?
- In what way are students encouraged to question current practices within learning institutions?
- How might students go about effecting change and how might they know whether such change is appropriate?
- In what ways does the PE engender critical spirit in students?

For the PE, the answers to these questions lie at the interface among student teachers, their teaching world and their manner of engaging reason. These answers dwell, for example, in places like:

- The learning institution’s manner of engagement with the PE and beginning teachers
- The beginning teacher’s self-reflection and reflexivity
- The relationship between the mentor and the beginning teacher
- The mentor’s (and the institution’s) criticality
- The institution’s willingness to embrace lifelong learning which enhances criticality
- The provision of opportunities to engage in discursive discussion around teaching practice.

It is in these (and other) places where the metal of the PE in the BEFT is tested in relation to its alignment with criticality. The future direction of the authors’ focus is clear. It is to these sites of testing this metal, where we should seek empirical evidence as a basis for critical understanding.

CRITICAL THEORY AND THE BEFT PE AT USQ

While critical theory encompasses a vast intellectual field, the focus here is on the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’s (1996) distinction among three types of human cognitive interests: technical, practical and emancipatory. This framework has been deployed for analysis here for three reasons: it resonates with the authors’ shared commitment to critical theory; it identifies factors that simultaneously promote and restrict the possibilities of human action in the set of practices associated with the PE in the BEFT at USQ; and it provides a useful lens for evaluating the PE’s implications for the facilitation of lifelong learning partnerships, pathways and andragogies.

Habermas’s (1996) identification of these three cognitive interests has been explained as follows:

- [T]echnical cognitive interest relates to the use of knowledge in exercising predictive control over objectivised processes, over natural processes and
work, to produce the goods that sustain life and society….This is the prime interest of the manager of the educational process.

- **Practical cognitive interest** relates to the use of knowledge in making meaning, and for the preservation and expansion of mutual understanding required for practical consensual action….Teachers and learners operate together in this area of interest.

Table 1 below synthesises these interests and interest groups by linking them with their respective inquiry modes and evaluation methodology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive/evaluative interest</th>
<th>technical</th>
<th>practical</th>
<th>emancipatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative interest group</td>
<td>management</td>
<td>teachers and students</td>
<td>learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry mode</td>
<td>empirical-analytical</td>
<td>historical-hermeneutic</td>
<td>social-critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation methodology</td>
<td>quantitative</td>
<td>qualitative-interpretative</td>
<td>self-reflective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Relationship of cognitive and evaluative human interest to mode and method of evaluation (adapted from Nouwens, Harreveld, Luck & Danaher, 2005, p. 145)

While the focus of the application of Habermas’s (1996) three interests by Nouwens, Harreveld, Luck and Danaher (2005) was the evaluation of university teaching and learning, the model portrayed in Table 1 is useful also in analysing the PE’s effectiveness in providing meaningful and potentially transformative experiences for BEFT students, as well as its potential contribution to their lifelong learning. On the one hand, the three interests can be seen as complementary and interdependent: the perspectives of management, teachers and learners (in this case, student teachers and their students) are equally important and must be in alignment for the PE to be successful. On the other hand, the differences among inquiry modes and evaluation methodologies signify potential disjunctions among the interests and the interest groups that could render the PE a site of uneasy tensions among competing priorities. Thus critical theory, encapsulated in Habermas’s three interests, highlights prospective alignments and misalignments between systemic and individual aspirations and modes of operation (which recall Habermas’s [1987] distinction between ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’) that must be included in any evaluation of the PE’s goals and effectiveness.

A further way of understanding these potential alignments and misalignments is to consider the account of another suite of postcompulsory teacher education programs at a different Queensland university (Harreveld, Danaher & Kenny, 2002). There the authors argued that three key mechanisms were crucial to establishing the programs as a lifelong learning community: language; culture; and power (pp. 205-206). Each mechanism was considered indispensable in its own right – for example, the importance of student teachers in the PE learning to move competently and confidently across multiple discourses associated with the various sites of school,
Technical and Further Education institute, other Registered Training Organisation and
university. Yet the intersection of the three mechanisms was equally vital: when that
intersection functioned appropriately, the student teachers emerged as empowered and
empowering practitioners, yet when it was out of alignment they were at risk of
disempowerment and ‘failure’.

In combination, Habermas’s (1996) three interests and these three mechanisms
present a timely and focused means of interrogating the BEFT PE at USQ as
simultaneously meeting multiple needs and facilitating rather than restricting PE
participants as lifelong learners. The authors recognise that the significant constraints
of funding and timing, and the greater institutional power of managers, create a
potential for managerial and technical interests to prevail. Yet they are committed to
ensuring that the PE also creates spaces for the identification and enactment of
practical and hopefully of emancipatory interests, partly by means of exploring and
where necessary and appropriate subverting the complex links among language,
culture and power. This commitment derives from a view of the student teachers
using the PE to engage in critical reflection to challenge existing understandings and
create new ones, rather than as passively following the instructions of their
supervising teachers and trainers and their university lecturers. Herein lies the greatest
potential of the PE for mobilising the prospective partnerships, pathways and
andragogies necessary for lifelong learning to flourish.

THE HUMANIST TRADITION AND THE BEFT PE AT USQ

The interrogation of the ‘practicum’ or teaching placement within the beginning
teacher education program at USQ through a Deweyian, humanist lens lends itself
particularly well to an evaluation of the extent to which current andragogies and
practices foster partnerships which in turn help learners forge pathways that serve to
enrich their lives through ongoing learning. It was Dewey, after all, who wrote in
1916 (pre-dating more recently promoted policies of ‘recurrent education’ and
‘lifelong learning’) that “the inclination to learn from life itself and to make the
conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product
of schooling” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 180); and it was Dewey who
advocated for a type of teaching that considers the direct relationship between
knowledge and activity – the “organic connection between education and personal
experience” that “amid all uncertainties” provides “one permanent frame of
reference” (1938, p. 25). Dewey’s proposition that education is growth and
development, human experience the foundation platform of learning and shared,
social or conjoint activity its realisation (Bowen & Hobson, 1987, pp. 167-168, 197),
along with his suggestion that scholarship or mastered subject matter that is not
grounded in the learner’s own experience may actually serve to impede effective
learning, provide the author as evaluator of the teaching field placement – or
practicum – with a strong conceptual framework that employs lifelong learning
partnerships, pathways and andragogies as its terms of reference.

What, then, are andragogies that facilitate lifelong learning, and what do they look
like in practice? Few vocational teacher educators would argue against the
appropriateness of experiential and experimental approaches that aim to foster the
development of beginning teachers as self-directed adult learners and reflective
practitioners through programs that support the learner to make connections between
theory and practice and to engage in ongoing processes of critical enquiry. Indeed,
these are the theoretical perspectives that underpin the current program at USQ. The critical issue for the evaluator, however, having confirmed the alignment of program philosophy through an examination of the curriculum and program documentation, becomes the extent to which the program and institutional structures, enacted andragogies and practices align with the rhetoric to achieve these desired outcomes.

The following three ‘Deweyian’ perspectives on vocational andragogy can inform development of some specific evaluative questions. Usher (1987) argues that the starting point for curriculum development for adult educators needs to be those theories which guide and inhere in practice – and in particular practice problems rather than practice per se. Chappell (2003) argues that the key guiding principle for vocational teacher education is not tied to any particular educational theory but adopts “…a more pragmatic position’ in which ‘constructive alignment’ (Biggs, 1999) or appropriateness to different purposes and settings (Cullen et al 2002) has become the key guiding principle” (p. 4) and he highlights “the importance of ‘praxis that is the connection of learning with real life situations’ (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993)” (p. 8). Finally Eraut (2002) promotes “mutual enhancement through integrated learning”, where the more “formal knowledge” gained through study towards a qualification is used to “enhance the quality of ongoing informal learning in the workplace” through the presentation of concepts and ideas that can be used by the learner to guide “deep, critical and systematic thinking about work-based practices and experiences” (cited in Lindell & Stengstrom, 2004, p. 4). These perspectives place the practicum – as situated, workplace learning – at the central or focal point of curriculum development, emphasise the ‘enacted curriculum’ rather than the curriculum as a planned program of ‘subject matter and scholarship’ and most importantly challenge curriculum developers to make the link between institution-based and work-based learning for “mutual enhancement”. It is how we – as curriculum developers and educators – make this all-important link and support our learners to do the same that becomes our “practice problem” (Usher, 1987), the answer to which lies in our ability to foster lifelong learning partnerships.

Dewey’s belief that it is “shared, social or conjoint activity” that is the realisation of learning (Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 197) supports the notion of lifelong learning partnerships as the key to facilitating the development of beginning teachers as lifelong learners, as well as the importance of examining the extent to which our teaching placement structures and practices foster, nurture and make use of learning partnerships to promote lifelong learning. From this perspective, the teaching placement arrangement, as a partnership among the student teacher, his or her mentor teacher and the university, becomes the central focus of the program in terms of enabling the development of the student teacher as a reflective practitioner and lifelong learner, as it serves as the scaffolding that bridges the gap between institution-based and work-based learning (between theory and practice), providing the opportunity for guided experiential and experimental learning. To what extent and how well the institution and program structures, processes and practices firstly recognise the importance of these partnerships to the success of the learner’s pathway through the program and secondly facilitate or impede opportunities for ‘mutual enhancement’ (in the sense that each partner serves to benefit from the arrangement as an opportunity for her or his own lifelong learning) becomes a critical question, as does the extent to which opportunities are provided for partners to participate in learning communities that can serve to enrich further their learning experience.
CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS, PATHWAYS AND ANDRAGOGIES

Several metaphors can be deployed to underscore the significance of the professional experience component of any professional qualification: that component is the ‘litmus test’ for both the learner’s competence and the qualification’s credibility; it is the ‘engine room’ of the qualification ‘where the rubber hits the road’ in terms of whether the learner, equipped with the qualification’s outcomes, can ‘make it’ in ‘the real world’.

The significance highlighted by these metaphors helps to justify the authors’ focus on the PE component of the BEFT as encapsulating many of the issues faced in redeveloping the postcompulsory teacher education programs at USQ. That significance also explains the utilisation of three broadly complementary but distinctive conceptual resources – criticality (Barnett, 1997), critical theory (Habermas, 1996) and the humanist tradition in education (Dewey, 1916) – in the ongoing project of evaluating the existing incarnation of the PE and of redesigning it in the light of the outcomes of that evaluation.

While lack of space precludes a detailed presentation of the elements of that evaluation, what is clear from the preceding discussion is that, despite the varied cultural traditions and intellectual paradigms from which they derive, criticality, critical theory and the humanist tradition in education have in common a capacity to provide interrogative tools for assessing the PE’s effectiveness in promoting partnerships, pathways and andragogies for genuine and sustainable lifelong learning.

Part of the challenge in facilitating that promotion lies in the sheer complexity of organising the PE so that it enables participants simultaneously to move across the three levels of critical thinking (Barnett, 1997), to fulfil technical, practical and emancipatory cognitive interests (Habermas, 1996) and to explore the experiential and experimental approaches to education that provide the link between theory and practice (Dewey, 1916, 1938). This complexity derives partly from the difficulty of identifying and meeting the many and sometimes competing expectations and interests of the PE’s multiple stakeholders as learning partners. Yet the program’s potential as a vehicle for promoting lifelong learning will not be achieved unless those expectations and interests are engaged.

REFERENCES


