Pedagogies and Learning in Cooperative and Symbolic Communities of Practice: Implications for and from the Education of Australian Show People

Beverley Moriarty*, P. A. Danaher# and Geoff Danaher^

*Faculty of Education and Creative Arts, Central Queensland University
#Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland
^Division of Teaching and Learning Services, Central Queensland University

Paper presented at the 2nd international pedagogies and learning conference, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, 18 September 2005
Overview of Presentation

• Overview of research
• Cooperative communities and show people
• Symbolic communities and show people
• Discussion of possible implications
Overview of Research

• Research into education for Traveller communities at CQU since 1992

• Focus on travelling show and circus communities within Australia
Overview of Research (Continued)

- Occupational show Travellers – have set runs

- Interviews with children, parents, teachers, educational officials

- 2000 establishment of Queensland School for Travelling Show Children
Overview of Research (Continued)

• Circus community – don’t have set runs

• Interviews with performers, children
Overview of Research (Continued)

- Other possible travelling communities:
  - Armed forces
  - Itinerant workers (e.g., fruit pickers)
  - Lifestyle Travellers (‘Grey Nomads’, ‘Boaties’)
Overview of Research (Continued)

- Research team has different backgrounds, locations (institutional and geographical), theoretical perspectives

- Maintain a cooperative community and generative approach to the research
Overview of Research (Continued)

• International links

• Educational Traveller communities in:
  - Ireland (Gypsy Travellers)
  - Netherlands (bargee families)
  - Venezuela (carnivals)
  - Nigeria (nomadic pastoralists)
Cooperative Communities
(Johnson & Johnson, 1998)

Positive interdependence:
- Sharing of mutual goals and resources, rewards and identity
- Complementary roles
Cooperative Communities (Continued)

Individual accountability:

• Logical and transparent connection with positive interdependence

• Individual responsibility for roles that are essential for the group to succeed
Cooperative Communities (Continued)

Promotion of one another’s success:
• Giving assistance and encouragement to one another
Cooperative Communities (Continued)

Interpersonal and small group skills:
• Trust building
• Conflict management
• Communication
• Leadership
• Decision-making
Cooperative Communities (Continued)

Groupprocessing (or reflection):

• How well are the mutual goals being achieved?
• How effective are the group processes?
Symbolic Communities

- Cohen’s (1985) depiction of communities as symbolic constructions
- “…community… hinges crucially on consciousness”, which is “encapsulated in perception of its boundaries, boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people in interaction” (Cohen, 1985, p. 13)
Symbolic Communities (Continued)

- “In the face of this variability, the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through manipulation of its symbols” (Cohen, 1985, p.15)
- “Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of ‘fact’” (Cohen, 1985, p.98)
Symbolic Communities (Continued)

- Three key elements underpin symbolic communities:
  - community
  - boundary
  - symbolism

- “People construct communities symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a reference of their identity” (Cohen, 1985, p. 118)
Symbolic Communities (Continued)

- Australians show people use multiple symbols to celebrate their show identities and also to express important individual differences among themselves.
- Showpeople use symbols to negotiate their interactions with local people by emphasising their interdependence while downplaying negative stereotypes.
Symbolic Communities (Continued)

- Educationally, the showpeople’s use of symbols represents their making sense of their lives, both informal schooling and in the informal learning of the ‘hidden curriculum’

- Understanding the meanings attached by the showpeople to various symbols helps to make explicit how they construct and potentially reconstruct the boundaries between them and local people and the boundaries within the show circuits, and hence the kinds of educational opportunities desired for their children
Symbolic Communities (Continued)

- Showpeople’s active involvement in particular symbols of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children:
  - logo
  - uniform
  - song

- The meaning-making that local people who tour the school classrooms derive from these and other symbols
Possible Implications

• Pedagogies and learning require considerable reflexivity, commitment and sometimes political activism if they are genuinely to contribute to the fulfilment and transformation of their intended beneficiaries.

• The meanings that have emerged from the microscope of the show people’s reflexive self-examination have highlighted the transformative power of their cooperative and symbolic communities of practice.
References


Thank you for participating!

• Woof!